

# **AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S LAST WAR, 1914-1918**

*(ÖSTERREICH-UNGARNS LETZTER KRIEG, 1914-1918)*

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## **I. Plans and Deployment for the Fall of 1915**

### ***A. The situation of the Central Powers at the end of August***

#### **1. Plan for a new offensive against Serbia; completion of the alliance with Bulgaria**

At the end of Volume II we described how in summer 1915 the rear of the allied units advancing victoriously against Russia was covered against the new Italian enemy. In two bloody battles of the Isonzo and numerous actions in the mountains the defenders administered a decisive check to the attackers, despite their considerable numerical superiority and fresh equipment.

In France, the Entente had sought in vain to break through the firm German front at Arras and La Bassée. On 7 July the military representatives of Great Britain, Italy, Russia, Belgium and Serbia met under the chairmanship of French War Minister Millerand; the subject was how to bring relief to the hard-pressed Russians.<sup>1</sup> The first result was quite modest - there were numerous actions both great and small around the Ypres salient, in the Argonne, and in the Vosges. The Entente were not the only attackers in this fighting, because the Germans launched occasional counter-thrusts, which at least were successful in depriving the enemy of rest.

Although some of these actions were of only local importance, the Chief of the German General Staff, GdI Erich von Falkenhayn, was understandably concerned about very dark storm clouds which were gathering behind the lines. While the Germans were sending one division after another to the Russian theater of operations, the English War Minister Marshal Kitchener was gradually building up his "New Armies" on French soil. These units consisted of volunteers, since the British cabinet could not yet muster the courage to introduce universal conscription. However, legislation of 7 July introduced universal obligation to work, so a military draft was only a step away. Meanwhile the British and French were calling on hundreds of thousands of colored troops from their Dominions and colonies to fight the

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1 Kuhl, "Der Weltkrieg 1914/18" (Berlin, 1929), Vol. I, pp. 268 ff.

Germans .

And so the balance of forces on the French front continued to shift. In May there were still 1,900,000 Germans against 2,450,000 Entente troops; in July there were no more than 1,800,000 Germans facing 2,830,000 of the enemy. As September approached, the German General Staff could no longer be in doubt that the enemy intended to use this larger force, which was also receiving better technical equipment, to strike a new blow in search of a decision. In fact, Joffre intended to assemble almost 70 divisions in two mighty forces; one would attack in Flanders north of Arras, the other in Champagne east of Reims. The pressure of these two great pincers was supposed to smash the arc of the German front where it extended to the southwest.

The threatening danger in France had caused Falkenhayn ever greater concern as the summer went on. However, it didn't discourage him from his intentions. Besides carrying on the campaign in Russia, he had plans for another theater far removed from the western front; it now seemed possible that he could finally fulfill his intention of opening the land route to Constantinople and the threatened Dardanelles!

#### The connection to Constantinople

The Turks had managed to hold off the British and French troops in difficult fighting that dragged on for many weeks after the landing at the end of April. The invaders had only been able to hold a small piece of territory on the extreme southern tip of the Gallipoli peninsula. Moreover, the victorious advance of the Central Powers in Galicia had put an end to the menace posed in the spring by the deployment of a Russian expeditionary corps at Odessa, which had been intended for Constantinople; this corps had to be quickly sent in installments to the battlefields of the Russian Southwest Front. On 6 August the Entente forces had attempted a second major landing at Gallipoli; it led to a three-week battle at Anaforta, in which the Ottomans won a complete defensive victory under the leadership of the Prussian GdK and Turkish Marshal Liman von Sanders. Nevertheless, the situation on the Dardanelles remained critical enough. As previously, the lack of military supplies caused the Turks the greatest concern; the Central Powers could solve this problem if they only had a way to send the supplies.

In November 1914, Falkenhayn had hoped to win a secure land route for the shipment of ammunition and military equipment from central Europe to Constantinople by occupying the northeast

corner of Serbia. Since Bulgaria had agreed to allow the transit of supplies from this point, such an operation would have solved the problem. Moreover, it would have severed the route from Salonika through Prahovo to the lower Danube which the Entente could use, with the tacit permission of Romania, for sending material to Russia. Even for some time after the armies of FZM Potiorek had evacuated Serbia, the German Chief of Staff continued to promote this idea. GO Freiherr von Conrad, on the other hand, always held that communication with Bulgaria and Turkey could only be gained by the complete overthrow of Serbia.

In April, therefore, concrete plans were developed for a new offensive against Serbia. Their implementation, however, hinged not only on the cooperation of Bulgaria, but also on the commitment of 100,000 Turkish troops. When it became impossible to count on Turkish support after the initial landing of the Entente units at the Dardanelles, the plans again had to be shelved. Whether they would have succeeded anyway is more than questionable, because of the continuing hesitation of Bulgaria, the break with Italy, and the military situation in the northeast.

In the following weeks, as the allied armies pushed ahead toward Lemberg, hope became stronger that Romania, which hitherto had stubbornly refused to permit the transit of military equipment to Turkey, might change its position. The Germans even believed that the cession of southern Bukovina to Romania would not be too great a price to achieve this goal. It appears that the ruling circles at Berlin won over the Hungarian Minister President Count Tisza for such a solution; although he decidedly refused to part with any Hungarian territory, Tisza was not completely adverse to concessions at the cost of Austria.<sup>2</sup> The German emissary Erzberger was also active in promoting this solution in Vienna and Budapest. Foreign Minister Baron Burian, however, finally decided that territorial concessions to Romania would be considered only if that country decided to actively participate in the war at the side of the Central Powers. In the days before the recovery of Lemberg, Burian made an offer in this sense to the Romanian Minister President Jonel Bratianu, and gave him a month to reply. Bratianu, however, once more refused to allow the transport of ammunition and didn't reply to Burian's other offer. In these same weeks, the Romanian leader

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2 Burian, "Drei Jahre aus der Zeit meiner Amtsführung im Kriege" (Berlin, 1923), pp. 54 ff. Tisza, "Briefe 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1928), Vol. I, pp. 250 ff. Erzberger, "Erlebnisse im Weltkrieg" (Stuttgart, 1920), pp. 104 ff.

was making very ambitious demands from the Entente as the price of his entry into the war on their side; although he was perhaps only trying to stall for time, the Entente agreed to honor his requests if he promised to enter the war in five weeks. Bratianu, however, felt that the moment had still not arrived to decide in favor of either of the warring coalitions.<sup>3</sup>

#### Bulgaria moves closer to the Central Powers

Four weeks after Gorlice, the Bulgarians recognized that the hour had come to place themselves on the side of the Central Powers. As was to be expected, however, they wouldn't take this step until they had received wide-ranging promises and assurances. They coveted not only the territory of Macedonia as far as the Kacanik area,<sup>4</sup> but also Serbian territory east of the lower Morava and east of the watershed between the two branches which flow together to create that river. If Romania or Greece took the side of the Entente, Bulgaria also wanted to recover the lands lost to these two states at the Treaty of Bucharest (1913). The Bulgarians wanted the Central Powers to guarantee their possession of all their lands, new or old, by a 15-year treaty of alliance; given the kaleidoscopic changes caused by Balkan conflicts, this was a particularly wide-ranging desire. Finally, Bulgaria also made its intervention against the Entente contingent on the immediate cession by Turkey of Adrianople and a stretch of territory along the Maritza River. Negotiations between Sofia and Constantinople had already begun under German mediation.

Falkenhayn, who laid such great emphasis on winning over Bulgaria, was willing to entertain all these demands. The intervention of Bulgaria would ensure a successful offensive against Serbia and deliver Turkey from its dire need. It might even bring about a result which the allied general staffs were seeking in vain during the summer campaign against Russia. Neither the recovery of Lemberg nor the conquest of Warsaw and

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3 "Das Zaristische Russland im Weltkreige" (Berlin, 1927), pp. 200 ff.

4 The southeastern part of this Macedonian territory had also been promised to the Bulgarians as "uncontested" in the treaty they signed on 13 March 1912 with the Serbs regarding the partition of then-Turkish lands in Europe. A decision about the northwestern, "disputed" zone was deferred at the time pending arbitration by the Tsar. See Friedjung, "Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus 1884-1914" (Berlin, 1922), Vol. III, pp. 176 ff.

Brest-Litovsk had been sufficient to break the will of the Tsar's Empire. Perhaps the government at St Petersburg would lose its belief in a successful conclusion to the war if they witnessed a successful campaign by the Central Powers in the Balkans, which would destroy the Russians' hope that their allies would soon open a maritime line of supplies into the Black Sea, as well as their ambition of restoring the cross of the Orthodox Church upon Hagia Sophia.<sup>5</sup>

Although GO Conrad recognized the importance of the Dardanelles, he had mixed feelings about the latest developments. Particularly, from the point of view of the Aus-Hung. military leadership the need to settle with Serbia by a new campaign was not very pressing. Although the negative political and military fallout after the catastrophe of Arangjelovac in December 1914 had been heavy, FZM Potiorek's campaign had also broken the back of the Serbian Army. The Serbs and their Montenegrin allies, beset by many problems, had remained inactive for many months without setting foot on the soil of Austria-Hungary. Despite all urging from their allies, particularly from Russia, they had stayed in their homeland and along its borders. Since the start of the year, this development had allowed the k.u.k. high command to pull one division after another from its Balkan forces. The war in the Carpathians had been waged to a considerable extent by some of these units. Two of the best corps which initially confronted the Italians (XV and XVI) also came from the Balkans, and in the following months they were followed by other troops. During tense moments in the summer campaign in Russia the allies had once again taken advantage of the situation on the Serbian border. The three German divisions which had been sent to the southeast as replacements for the two "Bosnian" corps after the intervention of Italy were soon available again to serve against Russia. Only one German battalion stayed behind to deceive the enemy, for which purpose it was in motion through all portions of the border area. At the end of July the Sava-Danube front had been practically denuded of mobile troops. At the end of August the commander of the Balkan forces, GdK von Tersztyanszky, had only a thin screen of troops along the rivers; behind them were just two Landsturm

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5 Falkenhayn, "Die Oberste Heeresleitung in ihren wichtigsten Entscheidungen (Berlin, 1929), p. 136. For the attitude of the Western Entente powers toward Russia regarding the question of Constantinople, see Adamov, "Die Europäischen Mächte und die Türkei während des Weltkrieges" (German translation, Dresden 1930), Vol. I, pp. 138 ff. and Vol. II, pp. 83 ff.

brigades, being formed from some of the security troops, and these units were also responsible for guarding fortifications scattered over a wide area. The situation was no better in the sector of GdI von Sarkotic, the commanding general in BHD; he was starting to create several units fit for field service out of his 40,000 militia men.

The specific distribution of troops in the Balkans at the end of August was as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- . Tersztyanszky's Armeegruppe
  - . Rayon Banat had 13  $\frac{3}{4}$  bns, 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  sqdns and 13  $\frac{1}{2}$  batteries; this included a brigade of 6 Lst bns which was forming under GM Mrazek
  - . Rayon Syrmien had 29 bns, 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  sqdns and 17 batteries; this included 205 Lst Bde (5 bns,  $\frac{1}{4}$  sqdn) and 206 Lst Bde (of the same size)
  - . The Peterwardein fortifications had 5 bns, 1 sqdn and 14 batteries, the Titel fortifications had 1 bn and 1 battery
  - . The Danube flotilla consisted of 7 monitors and 2 patrol boats.
- . Bosnia-Herzegovina-Dalmatia Command
  - . The Drina security forces consisted of 33 bns, 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  sqdns and 12 batteries; they included two mobile units which were just starting to form - GM Streith's Group on the lower river and 53 ID on the upper river
  - . The fortifications opposite Montenegro (mainly Avtovac, Bileca, Trebinje and Cattaro) housed 40,681 riflemen and 712 guns (including those under 47 ID)
  - . There were 6,252 riflemen and 8 guns on coast defense.

The fact that the Serbs had remained inactive all this time was of course welcome to the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff. He even believed it might be possible to come to a political accommodation with the Kingdom south of the Sava. Conrad returned to this idea in the days leading up to the conclusion of the alliance with Bulgaria, although without any effect. Therefore he had to exercise self-control under constant pressure from his Reich-German colleague, who wanted him to assist - actually to concur - with his project. Conrad wasn't inclined to fall upon an enemy that had already been rendered harmless while in the northeast Lemberg still lay just behind the front, and while on the Isonzo it was a miracle that Borojevic's Army was able to prevent an enemy with a numerical superiority of 3:1 or 4:1 from breaking into the heart of the Monarchy. In any event, if Falkenhayn's plans for the Balkans

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6 In the original, this information is part of Beilage 1.

were implemented it would be impossible for Conrad to carry out his much-desired counter-attack against Italy in the year 1915.

#### Military negotiations with Bulgaria

Besides these military considerations, the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff was motivated by a strong mistrust of his new ally, based on his memory of Bulgaria's politics during the recent crises in the Balkans. He emphatically rejected the proposal for a 15-year alliance. He also objected to giving eastern Serbia to Bulgaria, because this action would make the economic viability of the remainder of the country questionable and threaten important interests of the Danube Monarchy. Conrad was especially displeased by the fact that Germany was taking total control over the Balkan questions which were of such great importance for Austria-Hungary, even though since 1908 it had been the government at Vienna which had been trying to woo Bulgaria despite the objections of Berlin.<sup>7</sup>

Conrad received a depressing confirmation of his apprehensions during the first negotiations at Pless at the end of July, which involved Falkenhayn and the Bulgarian military plenipotentiary Col. Gantshev. The latter immediately made the military intervention of Bulgaria conditional on the appointment of a German general to command the allied units deployed against Serbia. Conrad had thought it was self-evident that this post should have gone to an Aus-Hung. army commander, but he had to agree to the appointment of GFM von Mackensen. A month later, just before the treaty was signed, the Bulgarian representative had a further demand: the military convention should explicitly state that Mackensen was following the orders of the German (not the Aus-Hung.) high command.<sup>8</sup> Conrad declared that Austria-Hungary couldn't accept this new degradation. A solution was found through the mediation of General Cramon - the matter was left unmentioned in the military convention, while a secret arrangement was made between Teschen and Pless, under which they would prepare Mackensen's orders together but have them issued through the Aus-Hung. high command.<sup>9</sup> These events left a deep

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7 See the numerous documents which appear in Bittner and Uebersberger's "Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914" (Vienna, 1930)

8 Cramon, "Unser österreichisch-ungarischer Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg" (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Berlin, 1922), pp. 31 ff.

9 "Thus", says Cramon, "it seemed that this ticklish point had been resolved. However, there were new difficulties a few

impression on Conrad, and would always color his relations with his German colleague.

Meanwhile the Entente was trying to still win Bulgaria over at the eleventh hour. Naturally this could be achieved only at the cost of Serbia, which was holding Macedonia, the land which Bulgaria wanted. "However, the Serbian government resisted this idea as long as possible with all their strength. They told their allies that they would give up all of Serbia to Austria rather than make such a shameful sacrifice. In an attempt to bring the Kingdom to an accommodation at the last minute, on 17 August the representatives of the Great Powers at Nish solemnly promised the Serbs that as compensation for giving up Macedonia they would receive Bosnia, Herzegovina, south Dalmatia, Sylvania and the Bacska. Russia, England and France, against the will of Italy, also declared they would promote the union of the Croats to Serbia, if it was the wish of the latter group."<sup>10</sup> For better or worse, the Skupshina (the Serbian parliament) had already decided in a secret session in mid-August that they would agree to give Macedonian territory to Bulgaria if they could thus win that country's adherence to the Entente.

#### Bulgaria's settlement with the Central Powers

The Bulgarians, however, was no longer heeding either these temptations or the exhortations of Russia that they shouldn't break up the Slavic-Orthodox community. On 6 September they settled with the Central Powers. The principal instrument was a diplomatic treaty that included a defensive alliance for only 5 (rather than 15) years; there was also a secret supplementary agreement and a military convention. In the secret supplement the Central Powers guaranteed to Bulgaria all the Serbian territory it had requested, plus its claims on Romania and

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days later. Conrad wrote to Falkenhayn that he wanted Mackensen to receive his first order from the AOK at Teschen. Falkenhayn replied that the first order to Mackensen must come directly from the German OHL, since he was a German general; had he been an Austrian, Falkenhayn opined, in that case only the k.u.k. high command would have had this right. Conrad finally agreed, and on 18 September Falkenhayn reported to Teschen that two days earlier Mackensen had been personally ordered [to his new command] by the German Emperor "as was essential according to the German interpretation."

10 Glaise-Horstenau, "Die Katastrophe - Die Zertrümmerung Österreich-Ungarns und das Werden der Nachfolgestaaten" (Vienna, 1929), pp. 48 ff.

Greece in the event of war with those countries. Their gains would include eastern Serbia. The German government had agreed to the Bulgarian demand for the latter territory as soon as they made it. Burian decided to go along, which was consistent with the opinions of his friend Tisza. The Hungarian prime minister had opposed the annexation of large tracts of Serbia by Austria-Hungary, but otherwise emphatically favored any reduction to Serb power; unlike Conrad, Tisza believed that the future would best be assured by keeping Serbia as small and poor as possible. Finally, the Bulgarians were guaranteed a loan of 200 million francs in four monthly installments.

The military convention obliged Austria-Hungary and Germany to each send six divisions against Serbia; Bulgaria would send four, but each of its divisions was organized with three brigades. The goal of these forces was "to strike the Serbian Army" wherever they stood and "to open and secure a land route between Hungary and Bulgaria as soon as possible." Another Bulgarian division would at once enter Macedonia from southern Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were supposed to mobilize in five days after they signed the treaty; they were to attack Serbia thirty days later (five days after the Central Powers). Bulgaria pledged to maintain neutrality with Romania and Greece as long as those two states stayed neutral; on the other hand, the two Central Powers promised to treat any state which attacked Bulgaria as their own enemy. Further points in the convention governed Germany's cooperation in securing Bulgarian security on the coasts of the Black and Aegean Seas, and the eventual cooperation of Turkish troops in military operations involving Bulgaria.

On the same day (6 September) an agreement was concluded between Sofia and Constantinople which addressed the Bulgarian demands for territorial compensation from Turkey.

## **2. Military measures against Russia**

While the Central Powers were making arrangements with Bulgaria, their armies were driving the Russians to the western edge of the Pripyat marshes. Kovno fell on 17 August, Brest-Litovsk on the 26<sup>th</sup>. For Falkenhayn the war in the east had thus accomplished most of what he wanted. The Russian army of millions had been cut to the quick, had lost enormous numbers of troops and equipment, and had been driven far back toward the interior of its empire. All signs indicated that it would at least be a long time before the Russians would recover the ability for large-scale offensive operations. The leader of the

German war effort hadn't expected to gain anything more. From his viewpoint it was only logical that on 3 August he was already telling Conrad that the offensive should end as soon as it reached the line Brest Litovsk-Grodno. The Balkans were ripe for new efforts!

The Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff didn't completely reject this conclusion. However, he still hoped that after reaching the line indicated by Falkenhayn it would be possible to push deeper into Russia by wide-ranging envelopment maneuvers. Conrad gave up this hope a week later. His remaining concern was the security of Lemberg, which lay just two days' march distant from the Russian positions. This concern played a major role in the development of a plan in the lively mind of the Aus-Hung. leader in the next few days. If it was no longer possible to inflict a decisive defeat on the Russians west of Brest-Litovsk, they were still falling back in response to pressure in this area. The result was that the massive Russian armies were moving apart; the southern part of their forces was vulnerable in the area around Kovel. It should be possible to fall upon their open, hardly defended flank and to push toward the southeast. This would be the best way to remove any threat to Lemberg. Plans developed for an offensive at the same time by GdK von Böhm-Ermolli were of course welcomed.

In the preceding volume, it was already related how Falkenhayn initially raised several objections to the plan of his Aus-Hung., colleague, but finally concurred on 18 August. In these same days, GFM von Hindenburg and G.Lt Ludendorff had gotten their way regarding their plan to strike the flank of the Russian masses as they fell back through Vilna and Minsk. However, the German Chief of Staff hadn't agreed to Conrad's suggestion that Hindenburg's armies should be reinforced by troops from the Brest-Litovsk area. Falkenhayn wrote on 26 August that although these troops "wouldn't immediately release their grip on the enemy's throat", they would eventually be sent to the lower Danube.

Two days later (on 28 August), Falkenhayn issued new orders for the German portion of the front against Russia. Hindenburg's Army Group was instructed to continue the operations already initiated north of the upper Narew and east of the middle Niemen until they had inflicted the maximum possible damage on the enemy. At the same time, the General Field Marshal was already supposed to be building a long-term defensive position, which would stretch from the confluence of the Narewka and Narew to the Baltic Sea (at either the Gulf of Riga or Libau).

Hindenburg was also warned that in the near future he might have to give up ten to twelve divisions for other fronts.

The Army Groups of Mackensen and Prince Leopold of Bavaria would continue to operate under earlier instructions of the German OHL. Their main body would stop advancing into the swampy area after penetrating somewhat east of the line Ratno-Kobrin-Szereszowo; only small mixed detachments would continue to follow the enemy along the available roads. A long-term defensive position would be built between the Ucherka-Bug and the Narewka-Narew confluences.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Austro-Hungarian plans

Meanwhile the capture of Kovel on 24 August created the basis for Conrad's planned attack against the Russian southern armies. Time was all the more pressing because there were many signs that the Russians who remained east of Vladimir-Volinsky were marching off. With complete confidence, the k.u.k. high command on 25 August ordered their Armies to begin the attack on the 27<sup>th</sup> with the units they had in position. The northern wing, initially identical to FZM von Puhallo's 1<sup>st</sup> Army, would advance from Kovel and Vladimir-Volinsky to Luck; this would outflank the enemy troops on the upper Bug and the Zlota Lipa from the north. At the same time the inner wings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and South Armies would break through the Russians in east Galicia on the heights south of the Krasne-Brody railroad, and drive them from the province. The ultimate goal was the Zbrucz and the line Ostrog-Luniniec.

At the same time, the AOK was preparing to send six divisions to the Balkan theater as required by the military convention concluded with Bulgaria. The units available for this purpose were those which had been released from Mackensen's Army Group. Under instructions issued on 28 August, the VIII Corps (37 Hon ID and 106 Lst ID) was taken from 4<sup>th</sup> Army and stationed at Ivangorod, ready to be transported to the southeast. XVII Corps (11 ID and 41 Hon ID) was ordered to Cholm along with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Polish Brigades; they would arrive on 3 September. Then they would either be sent toward 1<sup>st</sup> Army at Kovel or (without the

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11 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", pp. 113 ff. Cramon, pp. 25 ff. Kuhl., pp. 242 ff. Ludendorff, "Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1919 and 1920), p. 129. Foerster, "Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg" (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Berlin 1925), Vol. I, pp. 61 ff. "Kritik des Weltkrieges von einem Generalstäbler" (Leipzig, 1920), pp. 149 ff.

Poles) would take the railroad to the Balkans. VI Corps (12 ID and 39 Hon ID) left the Bug Army, after receiving special recognition from GFM Mackensen; they marched toward Cholm, following XVII Corps. However, the intentions of the high command underwent several changes in the next few days. 37 Hon ID would go to 7<sup>th</sup> Army to relieve the Inner Austrian 6 ID, which in turn would move to the Isonzo to defend its home area. 106 Lst ID was also intended for the Italian front. Here they would replace the 57 and 59 ID - both of which were familiar with the Balkans and specially equipped - would shift from the Isonzo to Sylvania. XVII Corps was ordered to move 41 Hon ID to Lublin and 11 ID to Rawa Russka; the two divisions of VI Corps were also sent to the latter area. These four units (11 and 12 ID, 39 and 41 Hon ID) were supposed to go to the Balkans, but fate ordained otherwise.

Hermann Stegemann wrote:<sup>12</sup>

"Thus the campaign which originated in Conrad's thinking with the breakthrough at Gorlice took a new operational turn and reached truly tragic heights in the last days of August 1915. The fighting shifted from burning Brest-Litovsk back to the wings, and brought all the German and Aus-Hung. forces into motion. It filled the wide military stage from the mouth of the Dvina to the source of the Bug with a series of strategically linked battles, which were finally ended to avoid entering the vast area in which Napoleon's star had once set over burning Moscow."

At the same time, the war was also returning to the area where it had begun - the Balkan peninsula. On the bloody chessboard of the World War the Central Powers had prepared a major new blow by winning over Bulgaria. The great question was whether the Entente would be able to parry with a significant counter-move. It was already obvious that such a counter-thrust could come from only one area: Salonika and the Greek territory along the lower Vardar. Germany did everything possible to support the position of King Constantine, who was pro-German and wished to maintain neutrality. The Entente, however, had secured an equally important supporter, the Prime Minister Venizelos. The significance of the area where once the famous Via Egnatia had led from the Thessalian plains into the mountains began to be recognized by all parties.

### ***B. Order of battle of the allied and enemy armies on the Aus-Hung. fronts for the fall actions of 1915***

For the northeastern theater, units are shown as of 1 September, for the Balkans as of 6 October,

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12 Stegemann, "Geschichte des Krieges", Vol. III (Stuttgart, 1919), p. 363

for the southwest front as of 15 October, and for the fleet as of 30 September. As in preceding orders of battle, information about non-Austrian units below the divisional level has been added to the original text for this translation.

A. Russian theater of operations

**ARCHDUKE JOSEPH FERDINAND'S ARMY GROUP**

Commander = GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand  
Chief of Staff = Col Ritter von Paic

**4<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand  
Chief of Staff = Col Ritter von Paic

- . 4<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Berndt)<sup>13</sup> = 640 foot, 2750 horse, 16 guns
  - . 18 Cav Bde (Col Weisz von Schleussenburg) = DR 9 (4), UR 1 (4)
  - . 21 Cav Bde (GM Graf Marenzi) = DR 15 (4), UR 13 (4)
  - . Cav Rifle Bn 4; Horse Arty Bn 11 (3)
- . 7<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Ritter von Micewski) = 850 foot, 2750 horse, 16 guns
  - . 11 Cav Bde (GM von Mold) = DR 10 (6), UR 2 (6)
  - . 20 Cav Bde (GM von Le Gay) = DR 12 (5), UR 3 (5)
  - . Cav Rifle Regt 7; Horse Arty Bn 1 (4)

XIV Corps<sup>14</sup>

Strength = 31 bns, 7 sqdns, 23 batteries, 5 tech comps; 20,049 foot, 553 horse, 92 guns

Commander = GdI Roth

Chief of Staff = Col Göttlicher

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> ID (FML Edler von Sellner) = 6433 foot, 165 horse, 23 guns
  - . 3 Inf Bde (GM Klein) = IR 40 (3), BH IR 4 (2); FJB 4
  - . 4 Inf Bde (GM Prusenowsky) = IR 89 (3), 90 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 3, 1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5
  - . 2 FA Bde (Col Edler von Rosenzweig) = FKR 29 (4), I Bn/FHR 10 (2)
  - . 4 Comp/SB 10
- . 3<sup>rd</sup> ID (FML Edler von Horsetzky) = 6257 foot, 119 horse, 45 guns
  - . 5 Inf Bde (GM Richard Müller) = IR 59 (3), 21 (2 - attached from 10 ID)
  - . 15 Inf Bde (Col von Vitorelli) = IR 14 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 6

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13 After 2 September, the 4 and 7 CD made up GM Berndt's Cavalry Corps.

14 Until 7 September, the XIV Corps, X Corps and GM Berndt's Cav Corps made up GdI Roth's Group.

- . 3 FA Bde (Col Edler von Zwiedinek) = FKR 42 (5), II Bn/FHR 14 (2), 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy FH Bn 14
- . 1 Comp/SB 14
- . 21 LW ID (GM Podhajsky) = 7359 foot, 269 horse, 24 guns
  - . 41 LW Inf Bde (GM Keki) = LW IR 6 (3), 7 (2)
  - . 42 LW Inf Bde (Col Hansmann) = LW IR 8 (2), 28 (3)
  - . k.k. Lst Inf Bn 54
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & Res Sqdns/DR 14
  - . 21 FA Bde (Col Vollgruber) = FKR 23 (4), FK Bn 21 (2), FH Bn 21 (2)
  - . 2 Comp/SB 1
- . Corps troops = 3 Comp/PB 3, 1 Comp/PB 9

## X Corps

Strength = 22 bns, 7 sqdns, 20 batties, 1 tech comp; 17,443 foot, 600 horse, 98 guns

Commander = FML Martiny

Chief of Staff = GM von Kralowetz

- . 24<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Urbarz) = 8140 foot, 336 horse, 47 guns
  - . 47 Inf Bde (GM Ritter von Unschuld) = IR 9 (2), 45 (2)
  - . 48 Inf Bde (Col Korzer) = IR 10 (2 ½), 77 (2)
  - . LW IR 30 (2 - attached from 26 LW ID)
  - . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/UR 6, 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 3, 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5
  - . 24 FA Bde (Col Uherek) = FKR 30 (5), 3 & 4 Batties/FHR 10, 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy How Bn 10
- . 62<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Tunk) = 9303 foot, 140 horse, 35 guns
  - . 121 Inf Bde (Col Edler von Merten) = LW IR 16 (3), k.k. Lst IR 13 (3)
  - . 123 Inf Bde (GM Schaible) = Bns IV/8, IV/49; Comb Feld Jaeger Regt (3 ½ - from FJB 31, BH FJB 1, and their March units)
  - . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/DR 11, Res Sqdn/UR 13
  - . 62 FA Bde (Col Hönig) = III Bn/FKR 2 (2), II Bn/FKR 20 (3); 9 cm Cannon Bn Budapest III (2)
  - . 2 Comp/SB 2
- . Corps troops (124 horse, 16 guns) = Res Sqdn/UR 3; 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy How Bn 6; Heavy How Batties 41 & 42 (the batties from How Bn 6 and Batty 41 attached from VI Corps)

## IX Corps

Strength = 21 bns, 6 sqdns, 23 batties, 3 tech comps; 17,200 foot, 837 horse, 101 guns

Commander = FML Kralicek

Chief of Staff = Col von Krammer

- . 10 ID<sup>15</sup> (FML Edler von Mecenseffy) = 9700 foot, 477 horse, 45 guns
  - . 19 Inf Bde (GM von Iwanski) = IR 62 (3), 82 (3) (Both regiments had joined from XII Corps)
  - . 20 Inf Bde (GM Reymann) = IR 18 (2), 98 (2); FJB 2, 12
  - . Div Cavalry = 8 Sqdn/HR 2; 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 2
  - . 10 FA Bde (Col Blaha) = FKR 25 (7), I Bn/FHR 9 (2)
  - . 4 Comp/SB 9
- . 26 LW ID (FML Lischka) = 7500 foot, 239 horse, 38 guns
  - . 51 LW Inf Bde (Col Ritter von Zygladowicz) = LW IR 11 (2), 12 (2)
  - . 52 LW Inf Bde (Col Scholze) = LW IR 9 (2), 10 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 2
  - . 26 FA Bde (GM von Heimerich) = FKR 26 (4), FK Bn 26 (2), FH Bn 26 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 9
- . Corps troops (121 horse, 18 guns) = Res Sqdn/DR 1; 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy How Bn 9; Heavy How Batties 4, 12, 20, 46 (# 12 and 20 were attached from VI Corps); 4 Comp/PB 4

Army troops = 4 Comp/SB 8, 5 Comp/SB; two Lst Sapper Dets; 1 Comp/PB 2, 1 Comp/PB 3, 5 Comp/PB 5, 5 Comp/PB 9, 1 Comp/PB 10. Flieger Comps 10, 13

TOTALS for 4<sup>th</sup> Army = 76 ½ bns, 58 sqdns, 73 batties, 18 tech comps, 2 flieg comps; 56,182 foot, 6380 horse, 316 guns

### 1<sup>st</sup> Army

Commander = FZM von Puhallo

Chief of Staff = GM Edler von Kochanowski

- . 13<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM von Szekely) = 8054 foot, 260 horse, 54 guns
  - . 25 LW Inf Bde (Col Richter) = LW IR 1 (2), 24 (2)
  - . 26 LW Inf Bde (GM Riml) = LW IR 14 (2), 25 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 5
  - . 13 FA Bde (Col Schulhof) = FKR 4 (5), FK Bn 13 (2), FH Bn 13 (2)
  - . 6 Comp/SB 11

Corps Szurmay

Strength = 22 bns, 6 sqdns, 19 batties, 4 ½ tech comps; 18,000 foot, 358 horse, 69 guns

Commander = FML Szurmay

Chief of Staff = Major Röder

- . 7<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Blasius von Dani) = 9800 foot, 200 horse, 34 guns

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15 On 1 September in Army reserve, it joined GdI Roth's Group on 2 September.

- . 14 Inf Bde (GM Baumgartner) = IR 38 (2), 68 (3); FJB 21
- . 71 Inf Bde (Col Plivelic) = IR 37 (2), 79 (3)
- . Div Cavalry = Lst Hussar Bn 10 (3)
- . Col Scheucher's FA Bde = FKR 38 (6), III Bn/FHR 13 (2); Heavy How Batty 19
- . 1 Comp/SB 13
- . 40<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (FML Plank) = 8200 foot, 100 horse, 23 guns
  - . 79 Hon Inf Bde (Col Lengerer) = Hon IR 29 (3), 30 (3)
  - . 80 Hon Inf Bde (GM Haber) = Hon IR 6 (2), 19 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 8
  - . 40 FA Bde (GM von Hellebronth) = HFKR 1 (4), I Bn/FKR 12 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 13
- . Corps troops (58 horse, 12 guns) = 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5; Res Batty/FKR 35; Ma Batty/FKR 36, Comb Ma Batty/HFKR 5, Heavy How Batty 6; 6 Comp/SB 1, 1 Comp/SB 8, ½ 2 comp/PB 3

## Ist Corps

Strength = 28 bns, 4 sqdns, 22 batties, 2 ½ tech comps; 19,480 foot, 320 horse, 96 guns

Commander = GdK Karl Freiherr von Kirchbach

Chief of Staff = Col Demus

- . 9<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Schenk) = 5000 foot, 200 horse, 26 guns
  - . 17 Inf Bde (GM Ritt. von Mossig) = IR 91 (3), 102 (2 ½)
  - . 18 Inf Bde (Col von Loefen) = IR 11 (2), 73 (2 ½)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 Sqdn/DR 14, Res Sqdn/UR 12
  - . 9 FA Bde (Col Baumann) = FKR 24 (5), 10 Batty/FKR 20, I Bn/FHR 8 (2)
- . 46<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM von Czapp) = 14,480 foot, 120 horse, 70 guns
  - . 91 LW Inf Bde (GM von Urbanski) = LW IR 31 (3), 32 (3)
  - . 92 LW Inf Bde (GM Haas) = LW IR 13 (4), 15 (4)
  - . k.k. Lst IR 11 (2), 12 (2)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 4
  - . 46 FA Bde (Col Exner) = FKR 2 (4), FK Bn 46 (3), I Turkey FH Bn (3), Heavy FH Bn 1 (2); Heavy How Batty 5, 12 cm Can Batty 11
  - . 3 Comp/SB 1, 3 Comp/SB 9; ½ 2 Comp/PB 3

## II Corps

Strength = 10 bns, 3 sqdns, 11 batties, 3 tech comps; 10,000 foot, 350 horse, 56 guns

Commander = GdI Johann Freiherr von Kirchbach

Chief of Staff = Col Graf Szeptycki

- . 25<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Poleschensky) = 10,000 foot, 300 horse, 42 guns
  - . 49 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Severus) = IR 84 (4); FJB 10, 17, 25
  - . 50 Inf Bde (Col Hassenteufel) = IR 4 (3)

- . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 5
- . 25 FA Bde (Col Edl. von Filz) = FKR 6 (5), II Bn/FHR 2 (2)
- . 5 Comp/SB 2
- . Corps troops (50 horse, 14 guns) = Res Sqdn/HR 1, II Turkey FH Bn (2), Heavy How Bn 2 (2); 1 Comp/SB 2, 4 Comp/PB 2

Army troops = Flieger Comp 7

TOTALS for 1<sup>st</sup> Army = 69 bns, 15 sqdns, 61 batties, 11 tech comps, 1 flieg comp; 55,534 foot, 1288 horse, 275 guns

**Group Smekal** (in Army Group reserve)

- . 45<sup>th</sup> LW ID (FML Smekal) = 7665 foot, 308 horse, 43 guns
  - . 89 LW Inf Bde (Col Barwik) = LW IR 18 (3), 33 (2)
  - . 90 LW Inf Bde (Col Herzmansky) = LW IR 17 (3), 34 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/DR 9; 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 3
  - . 45 FA Bde (Col Primavesi) = FKR 41 (6), FK Bn 45 (2), FH Bn 45 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 14
- . 4<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schmidt, Edler von Fussina) = 7200 foot, 200 horse, 32 guns
  - . 7 Inf Bde (Col Ritter von Steinitz) = IR 99 (3), IV Bn/3
  - . 8 Inf Bde (GM Ritter von Jemrich) = IR 8 (2), 49 (2)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 5
  - . 4 FA Bde (Col Machaczek) = FKR 5 (5), I Bn/FHR 2 (2)
  - . 6 Comp/SB 2

TOTALS for Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group = 164 ½ bns, 78 sqdns, 151 batties, 31 tech comps, 3 flieg comps; 126,581 foot, 8176 horse, 666 guns

**2<sup>nd</sup> Army**

Commander = GdK von Böhm-Ermolli

Chief of Staff = GM Dr Bardolff

XVIII Corps

Strength = 34 ½ bns, 33 sqdns, 30 batties, 3 tech comps; 26,906 foot, 3585 horse, 123 guns

Commander = FML Czibulka

Chief of Staff = Col Edler von Lunzer

- . 31<sup>st</sup> ID (Freih. von Lütgendorf) = 9225 foot, 320 horse, 30 guns
  - . 61 Inf Bde (GM von Felix) = IR 32 (3), 69 (2 ½)
  - . 62 Inf Bde (Col Heisegg) = IR 44 (3), BH IR 3 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 8
  - . 31 FA Bde (Col Schirza) = FKR 10 (5); 1, 2 & 6 Batties/FHR 4
  - . 4 Comp/SB 4

- . 32<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Willerding) = 10,380 foot, 318 horse, 46 guns
  - . 63 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Obauer) = IR 23 (3), 70 (3)
  - . 64 Inf Bde (GM Graffer) = IR 6 (3), 86 (2 ½)
  - . IR 41 (3) (attached from 43 LW ID)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 8
  - . 32 FA Bde (GM Kreycy) = FKR 11 (5), FK Bn 43 (2), 4 Batty/FKR 31, II Bn/FHR 4 (2)
  - . 3 Comp/SB 4, 5 Comp/PB 10
- . k.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Lst Inf Bde (Col Brauner) = 5031 foot, 59 horse, 21 guns
  - . k.k. Lst IR 1 (2), 2 (2), 22 (1 ½)
  - . Res Sqdn/DR 7
  - . 8 Batty/FKR 16, 8 Batty/FKR 31, 6 Batty/FKR 42, FH Bn 44 (2)
- . k.u. 1<sup>st</sup> Lst Huss Bde (Col Csecsi-Nagy) = 500 foot, 760 horse, 6 guns
  - . Lst Huss Regts 1 (4), 2 (4)
  - . A foot hussar detachment
  - . 7 Batty/FKR 16
- . 1<sup>st</sup> CD<sup>16</sup> (GM Chev. de Ruiz) = 1320 foot, 2128 horse, 12 guns
  - . 6 Cav Bde (GM von Mouillard) = HR 7 (4), 14 (6)
  - . 7 Cav Bde (Col Edl. von Pollet) = HR 4 (6), 12 (4)
  - . Cav Rifle Regt 1 (6), Res Sqdn/HR 5
  - . Horse Arty Bn 7 (4)
- . Corps troops (8 guns) = Heavy How Batties 40, 44

## IV Corps

Strength = 24 bns, 5 sqdns, 12 batties, 3 tech comps; 20,200 foot, 550 horse, 59 guns

Commander = FML Schmidt von Georgenegg

Chief of Staff = Col Edler von Merizzi

- . 27<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Kosak) = 11,900 foot, 205 horse, 34 guns
  - . 53 Inf Bde (Col Lederer) = IR 25 (3), 34 (3); FJB 29
  - . 54 Inf Bde (Col von Watterich) = IR 67 (3), 85 (2)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 15
  - . 27 FA Bde (Col Steinhauser) = FKR 16 (5), II Bn/FHR 6 (2)
  - . 2 Comp/SB 8
- . 51<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (FML von Kornhaber) = 8300 foot, 250 horse, 21 guns
  - . 200 Hon Inf Bde (GM Tanarky) = Hon IR 301 (3), 302 (3)
  - . 201 Hon Inf Bde (Col Sirchich) = Hon IR 300 (3), 305 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Res Sqdns/Hon HR 4
  - . 8 Batty/FKR 25, 8 Batty/FKR 35; 6 & 7 Batties/Hon FKR 1
- . Corps troops (95 horse, 4 guns) = 3 Sqdn/Hon HR 8; Heavy FH

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16 On 2 September the 1<sup>st</sup> CD transferred to Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group.

Batty 39; 5 Comp/PB 4

#### XIX Corps

Strength = 13 bns, 3 sqdns, 9 batties, 2 tech comps; 11,000 foot, 300 horse, 36 guns

Commander = FML Trollmann

Chief of Staff = Col Grünne

- . 29<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Kroupa)
  - . 57 Inf Bde (GM Wöllner) = IR 42 (3), 92 (3)
  - . 58 Inf Bde (Col Langendorf) = IR 74 (3), 94 (4)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 2
  - . 7 FA Bde (GM Soppe) = FKR 27 (5), 5 Batty/FKR 21, II Bn/FHR 9 (2)
- . Corps troops (50 horse, 4 guns) = Comb Sqdn/HR 2; 4 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 4; 3 Comp/PB 9

#### V Corps

Strength = 49 bns, 11 sqdns, 33 batties, 4 tech comps; 36,800 foot, 870 horse, 160 guns

Commander = FML Goglia

Chief of Staff = Col Freiherr von Catinelli

- . 33<sup>rd</sup> ID (FML Hordt) = 9000 foot, 160 horse, 37 guns
  - . 65 Inf Bde (GM Freih. von Dürfeld) = IR 19 (4), 26 (3)
  - . 66 Inf Bde (Gm Mihaljevic) = IR 12 (3), 83 (3 ½)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 5
  - . 33 FA Bde (Col Kaufmann) = FKR 15 (5), II Bn/FHR 5 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 5
- . 34<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Birkenhain) = 7700 foot, 320 horse, 32 guns
  - . 67 Inf Bde (GM von Lauingen) = IR 29 (3), 101 (3)
  - . 68 Inf Bde (Col Pfister) = IR 33 (3); FJB 23, 28
  - . Div Cavalry = 4 & 5 Sqdns/HR 12; 2 Res Sqdn/HR 3; 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 8
  - . III Bn/FKR 3 (2), I Bn/FKR 19 (2), II Bn/FHR 7 (2)
  - . 4 Comp/SB 7
- . 14<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Csicseric) = 10,600 foot, 160 horse, 34 guns
  - . 27 Inf Bde (GM Horvath) = IR 71 (3), 72 (3); FJB 11
  - . 28 Inf Bde (Col Alfred von Zeidler) = IR 48 (3), 76 (3); FJB 19
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 5
  - . 14 FA Bde (Col von Ripper) = FKR 14 (5), I Bn/FHR 5 (2)
  - . 2 Comp/SB 9
- . 43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID (GM Ritter von Jordan-Rozwadowski) = 9500 foot, 150 horse, 29 guns
  - . 59 Inf Bde (Col Kosel) = IR 24 (3); LW IR 20 (2 ½) (The Bde's IR 41 was by 32 ID)
  - . 86 LW Inf Bde (Col. Meisel) = LW IR 22 (2 ½), 36 (2 ½)

- . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 1
- . 43 FA Bde (Col Michalek) = FKR 31 (4), FH Bn 43 (2)
- . 5 Comp/SB 6
- . Corps troops (80 horse 28 guns) = Res Sqdn/HR 11; Heavy How  
Bns 4 (3), 5 (2), 8 (2)

Army troops (50 horse, 14 guns) = Res Sqdn/HR 14; Heavy Can  
Batty 6; Heavy How Batties 13, 28; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 8, 12,  
15, 16, 17; 4 Comp/PB 3, 5 Comp/PB 4; Flieger Comps 3, 14  
TOTALS for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army = 120 ½ bns, 53 sqdns, 92 batties, 14 tech  
comps, 2 flieg comps; 94,906 foot, 5355 horse, 392 guns

**GERMAN South Army**

Commander = Bavarian GdI Graf von Bothmer

Chief of Staff = Bavarian Lt Col Hemmer

Corps Marschall

Strength = 32 bns, 5 sqdns, 27 ½ batties, 4 tech comps; 28,600 foot, 500 horse, 118 guns

Commander = Prussian GdK Freiherr Marschall

Chief of Staff = Prussian Col von Dommess

- . 38<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (FML von Csanady) = 8900 foot, 200 horse, 40 guns
  - . 75 Hon Inf Bde (Col Gombos) = Hon IR 21 (3), 22 (3)
  - . 76 Hon Inf Bde (Col Bernatsky) = Hon IR 23 (3), 24 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 2
  - . 38 FA Bde (Col Werz) = 7 Batty/FKR 23, 6 Batty/FKR 26; 3, 4 & 5 Batties/FKR 34; Hon FKR 5 (4); 6 Batty/FHR 12; Heavy How Batty 50
  - . 5 Comp/SB 4
- . 19<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Richard Mayer) = 10,500 foot, 200 horse, 31 guns
  - . 37 Inf Bde (Col Augustin) = IR 35 (1 ½), 75 (3); FJB 5
  - . 38 Inf Bde (GM Steiger) = BH IR 1 (3); FJB 6, 22; LW IR 29 (1 ½)
  - . Div Cavalry = 4 & 6 Sqdns/DR 14
  - . 19 FA Bde (Col Genier) = FKR 22 (5); 8 Batty/FKR 40, II Bn/Mtn AR 8 (2)
  - . 6 Comp/SB 9
- . PRUSSIAN 3<sup>rd</sup> Gd ID (GM von Lindequist) = 9200 foot, 100 horse, 38 guns
  - . Gd Fusilier Regt (3), Lehr IR (3), Gren Regt 9 (3)
  - . 3 Sqdn/Gd Res UR; 3 FA Bde [Gd FAR 5 (4), 6 (4)]
- . Corps troops = 1 Comp/PB 7

Aus-Hung. Corps Hofmann

Strength = 27 bns, 3 sqdns, 15 batties, 3 ½ tech comps; 19,097 foot, 160 horse, 59 guns

Commander = FML Hofmann

Chief of Staff = Col Graf Lamezan

- . 55 ID (GM Fleischmann) = 8300 foot, 25 guns
  - . 129 Inf Bde (Col Matasic) = Comb Hon Ma Regt 1 (3), 2 (3); Major Bondy's LW Bn; Ist Vol Ukraine Bn (2 comps)
  - . 130 Inf Bde (GM Witoszynski) = LW IR 35 (3); major Birthe's Comb k.u.k. Ma Regt (3); II Vol Ukraine Bn (2 comps)
  - . 5 Batty/FKR 28, 4 Batty/Horse Arty Bn 5; 6 & 7 Batties/HFKR 2 (2); 6 Batty/FHR 6, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 2
- . Bolzano's Combined Bde (Col Edler von Bolzano) = 5800 foot, 11 guns
  - . IR 81 (3), 88 (3 ½); a volunteer Ukrainian detachment

- . 7 Batty/FKR 8, 9 Batty/FKR 20, Heavy How Batty 16
- . 131 Inf Bde (GM Blum) = 4997 foot, 11 guns
  - . FJB 32; LW IR 129 (3); Comb Hon Ma Regt 19 (3)
  - . 7 Batty/FKR 31, 7 Batty/FKR 33, 3 How Batty/Mtn AR 14
- . Corps troops (210 horse, 12 guns) = Res Sqdn/UR 8; Rtm. Farkas' Cav Det (2); 5 Batty/FHR 6; Heavy How Batties 36, 38; ½ 1 Comp SB/11, 3 Comp/SB 12, 2 Comp/PB 4, 3 Comp/PB 7

(Independent in the Army)

- . 48 GERMAN Res ID (G.Lt von Oppeln-Bronikowski) = 7500 foot, 100 horse, 34 guns, 26 MW (Minen-werfer) (in 10 bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 5 MW dets and 1 tech comp)
  - . 95 Res Inf Bde (von Puttkamer) = Res IR 221, 222
  - . 96 Res Inf Bde (Stehr) = Res IR 223, 224
  - . Res Jaeger Bn 20, Res Cav Sqdn 48, Res FAR 48
- . 8 Aus-Hung. Lst Sapper Detachments

TOTALS for German South Army = 69 bns, 9 sqdns, 51 ½ batties, 5 MW dets, 16 ½ tech comps, 1 flieg abt.; 55,197 foot, 760 horse, 211 guns, 26 MW

### 7<sup>th</sup> Army

Commander = GdK Freiherr von Pflanzer-Baltin

Chief of Staff = Col Ritter von Zeynek

#### XIII Corps

Strength = 31 bns, 5 sqdns, 18 batties, 4 tech comps; 24,960 foot, 509 horse, 76 guns

Commander = GdI Freiherr von Rhemen

Chief of Staff = Col Csoban

- . 36<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Franz Ritter von Schreitter) = 14,964 foot, 309 horse, 37 guns

- . 9 Inf Bde (Col Trimmel) = IR 13 (2 - from 5<sup>th</sup> ID), 78 (3); k.u.k. Lst Eta Bn IV/14

- . 72 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Luxardo) = IR 13 (2 - from 5<sup>th</sup> ID), 16 (3), 52 (3), 53 (3), 93 (3 - from 5<sup>th</sup> ID)

- . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/HR 2; 1 & 2 Sqdns/Hon HR 10

- . 36 FA Bde (Col Joseph Edler von Müller) = FKR 39 (4); Hon Ma Batty 2; 3 & 4 Batties/FHR 13; 2 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 11; Heavy How Batties 35, 37

- . 2 Comp/SB 13

- . 15<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Stracker) = 9996 foot, 200 horse, 39 guns

- . 30 Inf Bde (GM Leide) = IR 5 (3); k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/23, IV/32

- . Independent - IR 60 (4), 65 (3); a Ma Bn/Hon IR 11

- . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 15

- . 15 FA Bde (Col Latka) = FKR 17 (5), I Bn/FHR 6 (2)

- . 5 Comp/SB 11
- . Corps troops = 5 Comp/PB 3, 4 Comp/PB 15

## Group (Corps) Henriquez

Strength = 10 ½ bns, 22 sqdns, 14 ½ batties, 3 ¼ tech comps;  
12,100 foot, 1960 horse, 69 guns

Commander = FML Ritter von Henriquez

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Stromfeld

- . 8<sup>th</sup> CD (Edler von Lehmann) = 400 foot, 1800 horse, 17 guns
  - . 13 Cav Bde (Col von Fluck) = DR 7 (4), UR 8 (4)
  - . 15 Cav Bde (Col Edler von Dokonal) = DR 2 (4), UR 1 (4);  
half of a March Bn of LW IR 5
  - . Independent - 1 & 2 Sqdns/UR 4; Res Sqdn/DR 5
  - . Cav Rifle Bn 8
  - . 1, 4 & 5 Batties/FKR 3
- . 30<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Kaiser) = 11,700 foot, 160 horse, 52 guns
  - . Bekesi's Lst Inf Bde (Lt Col Bekesi) = IR 17 (2 ½ - from  
6 ID); k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/20, IV/22, I/23
  - . Independent - FJB 18, 27; LW IR 5 (2 - from 22 LW ID)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 1
  - . 30 FA Bde (FML Ströhr) = FKR 9 (5), 3 Batty/FKR 3; 3 & 4  
Batties/FIR 28; I Bn/FHR 1 (2); 12 cm Cannon Batty 19
  - . ¼ of 1 Comp/SB 12
- . Corps troops = ¾ of 1 Comp/SB 12; Ersatz Zug/SB 12, 2 Comp/PB  
7, 2 Comp/PB 9

## Group (Corps) Benigni

Strength = 30 bns, 1 bike comp, 53 sqdns, 30 ½ batties, 2 tech  
comps; 24,800 foot, 7680 horse, 124 guns

Commander = FML Ritter von Benigni

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Max Freiherr von Pitreich

Instead of the divisional commanders, the Chief of Corps  
artillery GM Elmar was controlling both the FA Bdes.

- . Group Brudermann (HQ of 3 Cav Div, FML Ritter von Brudermann)  
= 10,500 foot, 5000 horse, 70 guns
  - . 6<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Edler von Schwer)
    - . 5 Cav Bde (GM Leiter) = DR 8 (3), 11 (4), UR 7 (4);  
Inf Bns II/1, I/7; Russ' Detachment
    - . 10 Cav Bde (GM Adalbert von Kaltenborn) = IR 1 (2),  
7 (2); DR 6 (5)
  - . 3<sup>rd</sup> CD (Brudermann's own)
    - . 10 Cav Bde (Col Ritter von Szivo) = UR 4 (5), HR 1  
(4); k.k. Lst Inf Bn 17
    - . 14 Cav Bde (Col Graf Alberti) - All troops detached  
elsewhere within the corps
    - . 17 Cav Bde (GM Freiherr von Schnehen) = DR 3 (4), HR  
11 (4); Cav Rifle Bn 3; FJB 1, 14

- . Combined FA Bde (GM von Elmar) = Horse Arty Bn 2 (3), 10 (3); 2 Batty/FKR 3, 3 Batty/FKR 19; 1 & 2 Batties/ FKR 28; Hon March Batty 2; 1 Batty/FHR 3; ½ 4 How Batty/Mtn AR 12, 1 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 13
- . 6<sup>th</sup> ID (Fürst Schönburg) = 12,000 foot, 480 horse, 53 guns
  - . Combined Inf Bde (Col Franz Kuhn) = IR 54 (4); Bn IV/97 (from 36 ID); FJB 8, 13
  - . 11 Inf Bde (GM von Stöhr) = Bns IV/96; ½ I Bn/97 (from 36 ID); FJB 16; DR 8 (2); Cav Rifle Bn 6, Hon Cav Rifle Bn 5
  - . 12 Inf Bde (Col Rudolf Müller) - troops split up within the corps
    - . 16 Inf Bde (Col Freiherr von Testa) = BH IR 2 (2); ½ of Bn I/97 (from 36 ID); FJB 7, 9
    - . Independent - IR 66 (3), from 15 ID
    - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/DR 5
    - . 6 FA Bde (Col von Dobner) = Horse Arty Bn 4 (3), 6 (4); 6 Batty/FKR 5, 6 Batty/FKR 10; 4 & 6 Batties/FKR 19; I Bn/FHR 3 (2); 12 cm Can Batty 26; 1 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 11, ½ of 2 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 13; ½ of 15 cm Mortar Batty 5
- . 5<sup>th</sup> Hon CD (Freih. von Apor) = 700 foot, 2200 horse, no guns
  - . 19 Hon Cav Bde (Col von Jony) = HHR 1 (4), 8 (4)
  - . 23 Hon Cav Bde (Col Graf Lubinski) = HHR 6 (4), 7 (4); Bicycle Comp 1
- . 5<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Habermann) - Troops all detached to XIII Corps and to Corps Benigni
  - . Corps troops (1600 foot, 1 gun) = Hon IR 307 (2 - from 202 Hon Inf Bde); ½ 30.5 cm Mortar Batty 14; 4 Comp/SB 12, 4 Comp/PB 9

#### XI Corps

Strength = 32 bns, 8 ½ sqdns, 22 ½ batties, 2 tech comps, 2 flieg comps; 26,800 foot, 840 horse, 106 guns  
 Commander = GdK Edler von Korda

Chief of Staff = Col Edler von Trauttweiller

- . 42<sup>nd</sup> Hon ID (FML Liposcak) = 17,900 foot, 380 horse, 57 guns
  - . 83 Hon Inf Bde (GM Bekic) = HIR 25 (3), 26 (3)
  - . 84 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Petkovic) = HIR 27 (3), 28 (3)
  - . 202 Hon Inf Bde (Col Savoly) = HIR 306 (3), 307 (1); k.u. Lst Eta Bn I/23; 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 3; 7 Batty/FKR 13, 6 Batty/FKR 16; Hon Ma Batty 5; 5 Batty/FHR 4, 5 Batty/FHR 10; ½ Heavy How Batty 12, ½ 15 cm Mortar Batty 5
  - . Independent - Romanian volunteer detachment (3 comps)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3, 4 & 5 Sqdns/Hon HR 10
  - . Artillery = FKR 37 (6); I Bn/FHR 13 (2)
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Bde/Polish Legion (Col Küttner) = 2100 foot, 160 horse, 16 guns
  - . Polish IR 2 (3), 3 (3)
  - . Polish UR 2 (2); one Polish batty; attached Aus-Hung. 9

- cm Cannon Batties 1, 3
- . Lt Col Papp's Bde = 6800 foot, 300 horse, 33 guns
  - . Gendarme Bns 1, 2, 3, 5; k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/5, IV/61, V/17; Ruthene & Romanian volunteer detachments (3 comps)
  - . Lst Huss Bn 3 (2); half a sqdn of Lst Huss Bn 9; a gendarme sqdn
  - . 5 Batty/FKR 18, 9 Batty/FKR 34, a combined batty; 9 cm Can Batties 2, 4, 5; ½ Heavy How Batty 13; ½ 30.5 cm Mortar Batty 14
- . Corps troops = 2 Comp/SB 11, 3 Comp/SB 13; Flieg Comps 1, 11

(Independent under the Army but ordered to join Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group)

- . 10<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Graf Herberstein) = 1100 foot, 2700 horse, no guns
  - . 4 Cav Bde (Col von Horthy) = HR 10 (6), 13 (4)
  - . 8 Cav Bde (GM Viktor von Bauer) = HR 9 (4), UR 12 (3)
  - . Cav Rifle Bn 10

TOTALS for 7<sup>th</sup> Army = 106 ½ bns, 1 bike comp, 105 ½ sqdns, 85 ½ batties, 11 ¼ tech comps, 2 flieg comps; 89,760 foot, 13,689 horse, 375 guns

### Reserves of the high command

#### VI Corps

Strength = 26 bns, 6 sqdns, 16 batties, 3 tech comps; 16,000 foot, 670 horse, 75 guns

Commander = GdI von Arz

Chief of Staff = Col Joseph Huber

- . 12<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Kestranek) = 7900 foot, 250 horse, 40 guns
  - . 23 Inf Bde (Col Latinek) = IR 56 (3), 100 (2)
  - . 24 Inf Bde (GM von Puchalski) = IR 3 (2), 20 (2), 57 (2)
  - . Div Cavalry = 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 4
  - . 12 FA Bde (Col Riedl) = FKR 1 (6), II Bn/FHR 1 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 1
- . 39<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (FML von Hadfy) = 8100 foot, 340 horse, 35 guns
  - . 77 Hon Inf Bde (GM von Molnar) = HIR 9 (3), 11 (3)
  - . 78 Hon Inf Bde (Col Daubner) = HIR 10 (3), 16 (3)
  - . Independent - IR 63 (3), detached from 35 ID
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 15, Res Sqdn/HR 12
  - . 39 FA Bde (Col Loidin) = FKR 18 (4), Hon FKR 3 (4)
  - . 3 Comp SB/5 plus a Lst sapper detachment
- . Corps troops (80 horse) = Res Sqdn/HR 6; a Lst sapper detachmt

#### VIII Corps

Strength = 40 bns, 15 sqdns, 33 ½ batties, 6 tech comps; 20,700 foot, 1270 horse, 123 guns

Commander = FZM von Scheuchenstuel

Chief of Staff = Col Sündermann

- . 37<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Tabajdi) = 7000 foot, 180 horse, 32 guns
  - . 73 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Pillepic) = HIR 13 (2), 18 (3)
  - . 74 Hon Inf Bde (GM Hunke) = HIR 14 (3), 15 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 5
  - . 37 FA Bde (Col Wondre) = FKR 13 (4), Hon FKR 4 (4)
  - . 4 Comp/SB 5
- . 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID (FML Kletter) = 10,100 foot, 480 horse, 62 guns
  - . 60 Inf Bde (Col de Brunfaut) = IR 30 (3), 80 (2); FJB 24
  - . 110 k.k. Lst Inf Bde (GM Maag) = Lst IR 31 (3), 32 (3)
  - . Col Freisinger's Group = k.k. Lst IR 6 (3), 25 (2)
  - . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdns of DR 6, 10 & 12 and of UR 1
  - . 106 FA Bde (Col Edler von Portenschlag) = FKR 32 (6), FK Bn 106 (2), II Bn/FHR 11 (2); 9 cm Can Bns Budapest I (2) & II (2); 9 cm Can Bn Vienna (2); 15 cm Can Batty 7
  - . 2 Comp/SB 4, 1 Comp/PB 4
- . The Polish Legion (FML von Durski)<sup>17</sup> = 3600 foot, 300 horse, 12 guns
  - . 1 Polish Bde = IR 1 (3), 4 (3)
  - . 3 Polish Bde = IR 5 (3), 6 (3)
  - . Polish UR 1 (3); 3 ½ batties, 2 tech comps
- . Corps troops (310 horse, 17 guns) = Res Sqdns of UR 4, 7 and 13; 1, 2 & 3 Sqdns of Tyrol Mntd Rifle Bn; 15 cm Can Batty 7; 3 & 4 Batties/Heavy How Bn 9; 12 cm How Batties 20, 27; 15 cm How Batty 45; 4 Comp/PB 4

#### XVII Corps

Strength = 26 ½ bns, 5 sqdns, 20 batties, 2 tech comps; 17,100 foot, 350 horse, 108 guns

Commander = GdI Kritek

Chief of Staff = Col Edler von Lerch

- . 11<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Grubic) = 10,100 foot, 150 horse, 47 guns
  - . 21 Inf Bde (Col Lewandowski) = IR 15 (4), 55 (4)
  - . 22 Inf Bde (Col Gustav Fischer) = IR 58 (3), 95 (3 ½)
  - . Div Cavalry = 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 1
  - . 11 FA Bde (Col Scholz) = FKR 33 (7), I Bn/FHR 11 (2)
  - . 4 Comp/SB 11
- . 41<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (GM Schamschula) = 7000 foot, 150 horse, 53 guns
  - . 40 Hon Inf Bde (Col Schnetzer) = HIR 12 (3), 32 (3)
  - . 82 Hon Inf Bde (Col Ritter von Sypniewski) = HIR 20 (3), 31 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/Hon HR 4

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<sup>17</sup>The first echelon of the Poles was arriving in the sector of XVII Corps at Cholm; it had been ordered to proceed from there to Kovel to join Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group.

- . 41 FA Bde (Col Capp) = FKR 12 (5), Hon FKR 7 (4)
- . Corps troops (50 horse, 8 guns) = Res Sqdn/DR 15; 15 cm How Batties, 2, 25; 2 Comp/PB 10

TOTALS for the AOK reserves = 92 ½ bns, 26 sqdns, 69 ½ batties, 11 tech comps; 53,800 foot, 2290 horse, 306 guns

### **Garrisons of fortresses and bridgeheads**

- . Cracow (FML Kuk; C/Staff = Lt Col Edler von Haller) = 4000 foot and 12 mobile guns
- k.k. Lst Bns 36, 80; k.k. Lst Ma Bns 5, 6, 8; ¼ of Lst Ma Bn 10; 3 mobile can batties, 30 fort arty comps, 22 fort arty March comps, 37 Lst arty dets, 3 Lst sapper dets
- . Przemysl bridgehead (GM Stowasser) = 835 foot
- ¾ of k.u. Lst Eta Bn 234; ½ of k.u. Lst Eta Bn 502; three Lst arty dets
- . Ivangorod bridgehead (FML Ritter von Gologorski)
- 1 fort arty March comp, 15 Lst arty dets

### **Under command of the German Eastern armies**

Under 9<sup>th</sup> German Army...

(Both divisions had been designated to join Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group)

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> CD (GM Ritter von Ursyn-Pruszyński) = 600 foot, 2400 horse, 12 guns
  - . 3 Cav Bde (GM Freih. von Abele) = HR 6 (6), 16 (6)
  - . 16 Cav Bde (Col Edler von Karapanca) = HR 3 (6), UR 5 (6)
  - . Cav Rifle Bn 2 (6); Horse Arty Bn 5 (3)
- . 9<sup>th</sup> CD (GdK Freih. von Hauer) = 90 foot, 2100 horse, 12 guns
  - . 1 Cav Bde (GM Ostermuth) = DR 4 (5), 13 (5)
  - . 9 Cav Bde (Col Freih. von Sessler) = DR 1 (5), UR 6 (6)
  - . Cav Rifle Bn 9 (8); Horse Arty Bn 9 (3)

Under Woyrsch's Army...

XII Corps

Strength = 36 bns, 6 sqdns, 21 batties, 3 tech comps; 27,149 foot, 820 horse, 108 guns

Commander = GdI von Kövess

Chief of Staff = Col Freiherr Zeidler-Daublebsky von Sterneck

- . 35<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Podhoranszky) = 7427 foot, 300 horse, 48 guns
  - . 69 Inf Bde (Col Simacek) = IR 50 (6)
  - . 70 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Salmon) = IR 51 (7)
  - . Div Cavalry = 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 2
  - . 35 FA Bde (GM Gröschl) = FKR 35 (6), II Bn/FHR 12 (2)

. 16<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Rudolf Krauss) = 16,900 foot, 470 horse, 36 guns  
 (The Division's reserve IR were formed from March bns which hadn't been absorbed by the parent regiments)

- . 31 Inf Bde (FML von Dobler) = IR 2 (4), Res IR 2 (3)
- . 32 Inf Bde (GM Koschatzky) = IR 31 (3), 64 (3)
- . 32 Res Inf Bde (Col Zivanovic) = Res IR 31 (3), 64 (4)
- . Div Cavalry = 3, 4 & 7 Sqdns/HR 2
- . 16 FA Bde (Col Paul) = FKR 36 (5), I Bn/FHR 12 (2)

. Corps troops (2822 foot, 92 horse, 24 guns) = k.k. Lst IR 51 (3); 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 7; Heavy How Bn 12 (3); 12 cm Can Batty 12; 15 cm How Batties 3 & 47; ½ of 3 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Bn 9; 5 & 6 Comps/SB 12; 2 Comp/PB 2; Flieger Comp 5

Under the German Army of the Bug...

(The Division had been designated to join Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group)

. 11<sup>th</sup> Hon CD (FML Graf Bissingen) = 600 foot, 1219 horse, 14 guns

- . 22 Hon Cav Bde (GM Czito) = Hon HR 2 (4), 3 (4)
- . 24 Hon Cav Bde (Col Hegedüs) = Hon HR 5 (4), 9 (4)
- . Hon Cav Rifle Bn 11 (3); Hon Horse Arty Bn 1 (3 ½)

**TOTALS for Aus-Hung. and attached German units under the AOK on the Russian front, as of 1 September =**

598 ½ bns, 1 bike comp, 338 ½ sqdns, 483 batties, 5 MW dets, 53 fort arty comps, 45 Lst arty dets, 89 ¾ tech comps, 8 flieg comps; 454,328 foot, 36,809 horse, 2018 guns, 26 MW

**Reinforcements**

These were German units which beginning on 20 September transferred from the Bug Army to the northern wing of the Aus-Hung. front.

5<sup>th</sup> CD (G.Lt von Heydebreck) = 900 foot, 2100 horse, 12 guns

- . 9 Cav Bde (Rusche) = DR 4 (4), UR 10 (4)
- . 11 Cav Bde (von Wentzky) = CR 1 (4), DR 8 (4)
- . 12 Cav Bde (Freih. von Lepel) = HR 4 (4), HR 6 (4)
- . A combined foot bn; Horse Arty Bn/FAR 5 (3)

**XXIV Reserve Corps**

Strength = 21 bns, 3 sqdns, 25 batties, 2 MW dets, 2 tech comps; about 14,000 foot, 180 horse, 140 guns, 8 MW

Commander = Württemberg GdI von Gerok

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major von Klewitz

. 1<sup>st</sup> ID (G.Lt von Conta) = 8000 foot, 60 horse, 78 guns, 8 MW

- . 1 Inf Bde (von Brauchitsch) = IR 1 (3), 41 (3)
- . 2 Inf Bde (Schönfeld) = IR 3 (3), 43 (3)

- . Div Cavalry = 3 Sqdn/UR 8
- . 1 FA Bde (von Ziglnecki - 14 batties) = FAR 16, 25
- . 22<sup>nd</sup> ID (G.Lt Dieffenbach) = 6000 foot, 120 horse, 62 guns
  - . IR 82 (3), 83 (3), 167 (3)
  - . 1 & 3 Sqdns/CR 6
  - . 22 FA Bde (Grönau - 11 batties) = FAR 11, 47

#### **THE RUSSIAN SOUTHWEST FRONT**

Commander = General Ivanov

Chief of Staff = General Savitch

As of 1 September, the Front had about 400,000 combat troops. During July and August it had sent the following to the Northwest front - XXVIII Corps [60 ID, 3 Rifle Div], V Cauc Corps [2 and 4 Finn RD]; 58, 65, 69, 78 ID; 3 Don Coss Div

8<sup>th</sup> Army (GdK Brussilov)

- . XXXIX Corps
  - . 102 ID - IR Ligov 405, Shchegrov 406, Sarai 407, Kuznets 408
  - . 105 ID - IR Lugan 417, Alexandrov 418, Atkars 419, Serdob 420
- . 4 Rifle Div - Rifle Regts 13, 14, 15, 16
- . XII Corps
  - . 12 ID - IR Azov 45, Dnieper 46, Ukraine 47, Odessa 48
  - . 19 ID - IR Crimea 73, Stavropol 74, Sevastopol 75, Kuban 76
- . VIII Corps
  - . 14 ID - IR Volhynia 53, Minsk 54, Podolia 55, Zhitomir 56
  - . 15 ID - IR Modlin 57, Praga 58, Lublin 59, Zamosc 60
- . XVII Corps
  - . 3 ID - IR Old Ingria 9, New Ingria 10, Pskov 11, Velikiye Luki 12
  - . 35 ID - IR Nezhin 137, Bolkhov 138, Morshansk 139, Sarai 140
- . VII Corps
  - . 13 ID - IR Brest 49, Bialystok 50, Lithuania 51, Vilna 52
  - . 34 ID - IR Simferopol 133, Feodosia 134, Kertch-Enikol 135, Taganrog 136
- . An opolcheniye brigade
- . Velyasev's (V) Cav Corps
  - . 11 CD - DR Riga 11, UR Chuguiev 11, HR Izyum 11, Don Coss Regt 12
  - . Orenburg Coss Div - Composition unknown
- . Rehrberg's Cav Corps
  - . 7 CD - DR Kinburn 7, UR Olviopol 7, HR Belarus 7, Don Coss Regt 11

- . 2 Don independent Coss Bde - Composition unknown
- . (In late October, after the arrival of 2 RD from 9<sup>th</sup> Army, the XL Corps HQ was created to lead 2 and 4 RD)

Temporarily under 8<sup>th</sup> Army (from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army of West Front)

- . Gillenschmidt's (IV) Cav Corps
  - . 3 CD - DR Novorossia 3, UR Smolensk 3, HR Elisavetgard 3, Don Coss Regt 3
  - . 16 CD - HR Chernigov 17, Nezhin 18, UR New Archangel 17, UR Novomirgorod 18
  - . 3 Cauc Coss Div - Ekaterinodar Regt 1, Ossetia Horse Regt, Kizlyar-Greben Regt 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Dagestan Horse Regt
  - . 2 Comb Coss Div - Don Coss Regts 16 and 17; Kuban Line Regt 1, Volga Terek Regt 1
  - . Attached 77 ID - IR Laishev 305, Mokshan 306, Spassk 307, Cheboksary 308
- . Part of XXXI Corps
  - . Main body of 83 ID (exact components unknown)
  - . An opolcheniye brigade

Reinforcements to 8<sup>th</sup> Army in October

- . XXIV Corps (from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army)
  - . 48 ID - IR Ismail 189, Ochakov 190, Largo-Kagul 191, Rymnik 192
  - . 49 ID - IR Sviash 193, Troitsk-Sergiev 194, Orovais 195, Insarsk 196
- . XXX Corps (from 9<sup>th</sup> Army, see below)
- . 82 ID (from 9<sup>th</sup> Army, see below)

11<sup>th</sup> Army (GdI Shcherbatchev)

- . VI Corps
  - . 4 ID - IR Belosersk 13, Olonets 14, Schlusselfurg 15, Ladoga 16
  - . 16 ID - IR Vladimir 61, Suzdal 62, Uglits 63, Kazan 64
- . XVIII Corps
  - . 23 ID - IR Belomorsk 89, Onezhk 90, Dvina 91, Pechersk 92
  - . 37 ID - IR Novocherkask 145, Tsaritsyn 146, Samara 147, Caspian 148
- . XXII Corps
  - . 1 Finnish RD - Finnish Rifle Regts 1, 2, 3, 4
  - . 3 Finnish RD - Finnish Rifle Regts 9, 10, 11, 12
- . An opolcheniye brigade
- . Trans-Amur Cav Div<sup>18</sup> - T.A. Border Watch Regts 3, 4, 5, 6

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18 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Original text show the T.A. Brigade rather than the T.A. Cavalry Division in this location. Russian sources, however, show the Bde as part of the Combined Cav Div

. 1 Kuban Coss Div - Regts Uman 2, Poltava 2, Taman 2 (*i.e.* just three regiments)

9<sup>th</sup> Army (GdI Letschitzky)

(The XXX Corps and 82 ID moved to 8<sup>th</sup> Army by late October)

- . XI Corps
  - . 11 ID - IR Seleguin 41, Yakutsk 42, Okhotsk 43, Kamchatka 44
  - . 32 ID - IR Kursk 125, Rylsk 126, Putivl 127, Stary Oskol 128
- . XXX Corps
  - . 2 RD - Rifle Regts 5, 6, 7, 8
  - . 71 ID - IR New Moscow 281, Alexandria 282, Pavlograd 283, Vengrov 284
  - . 80 ID - IR Drissa 317, Chernoyar 318, Bugumil 319, Chembarsk 320
- . XXXVIII Corps
  - . 1 Trans-Amur Div - T.A. Border Regts 1, 2, 3, 4
  - . 2 Trans-Amur Div - T.A. Border Regts 5, 6; Turkestan Rifle Regts 20, 22
  - . 1 Kuban Plastun Bde - K.P. Bns # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
  - . 2 Kuban Plastun Bde - K.P. Bns # 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
  - . 74 ID - IR Izhora 293, Berezina 294, Svirsk 295, Grazovets 296
  - . 82 ID - IR Tsarev Gurev 321, Soligulitschk 322, Inrievetsk 323, Kliasminsk 324
- . XXXII Corps
  - . 101 ID - IR Kurachev 401, Ust Medvidit 402, Volsk 403, Kamishin 403
  - . 103 ID - IR Novo Khoper 409, Usman 410, Sumy 411, Slavyansk 412
- . Three or four opolcheniye brigades
- . Nachitshevan Khan's (II) Cav Corps
  - . 9 CD - DR Kazan 9, UR Bug 9, HR Kiev 9, Ural Coss Regt 1
  - . 12 CD - DR Starodub 12, UR Belgorod 12, HR Akhtyrk 12, Orenburg Coss Regt 3
  - . Caucasian Native Horse Div - Regts 2<sup>nd</sup> Dagestan, Kabardine Tartar, Chechsk, Circassian, Ingush (or possibly just four of these units)
- . Keller's (III) Cav Corps
  - . 10 CD - DR Novgorod 10, UR Odessa 10, HR Ingria 10, Orenburg Coss Regt 1

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(in 9<sup>th</sup> Army). Since the T.A. Division did come to the front here in September, we are guessing that the reference in 11<sup>th</sup> Army should therefore read "Division", but this is just an educated guess.

- . 1 Don Coss Div - Regts 9, 10, 13, 15
- . Terek Coss Div - Regts Gors-Mozdok 2, Sunzha-Vladikavkaz 2, Volga 2, Kizlyar-Greben 2
- . Combined Cav Div - Tsar's Gd UR, Grodno Gd HR; Trans-Amur Border Regts 1, 2
- . An unidentified combined cavalry brigade

## Front reserves

- . 125 ID (which joined 8<sup>th</sup> Army in late Oct) - IR Bilets 497, Orgiev 498, Olviopol 499, Ingul 500

Units which made up 7<sup>th</sup> Army in November

- . V "Caucasian" Corps (from 10<sup>th</sup> Army)
  - . 2 Finnish RD - Finnish Rifle Regts 5, 6, 7, 8
  - . 4 Finnish RD - Finnish Rifle Regts 13, 14, 15, 16
- . II Corps (from 10<sup>th</sup> Army)
  - . 26 ID - IR Perm 101, Vyatsk 102, Petrozavod 103, Ustchug 104
  - . 43 ID - IR Novo Troitsk 169, Molodetchensk 170, Kobrinsk 171, Lidsk 172
- . XVI Corps (from 4<sup>th</sup> Army)
  - . 41 ID - IR Alexandropol 161, Akhaltsykh 162, Lenkovan-Nasheburg 163, Zakatal 164
  - . 47 ID - IR Bash Kadiklaya 185, Avlanduz 186, Avars 187, Kars 188
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> independent Don Coss Bde (joined from 8<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . One unidentified Cossack Bde from the West Front

B. Balkan theater of operations**ARMY GROUP MACKENSEN**

Commander = Prussian GFM von Mackensen

Chief of Staff = Prussian GM von Seeckt

**Aus-Hung. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army**

Commander = GdI von Kövess

Chief of Staff = GM Konopicky

## Independent formations

- . 62<sup>nd</sup> ID (FML Edler von Kalser) = 15,909 foot, 13 horse, 29 guns
  - . Mobile Fortress Bde [at Rogatica] (Col von Dominic) = Fort Bns 3, 4; Grenz Jaeger Comp 3; k.k. Lst Inf Bn 45; k.u. Lst Eta Bns I/4, III/7, IV/19. ¼ 2<sup>nd</sup> Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4. 6 Batty/FKR 17, 2 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 12; 9 cm Can Batty 9
  - . 9 Lst Eta Bde [at Srebrenica] (Col Edler von Spindler) = ¼ Grenz Jaeger Comp 2; k.u. Lst Eta Bns II/4, III/5, IV/26, I/30, III/31; five 7 cm landing guns
  - . GM Streith's Group (temporarily under 62 ID)
    - . Zvornik Sector (Col Edl. von Hausser) = ¼ Grenz Jaeger Comp 1; k.u. Lst Eta Bns II & III/6, IV/17, I/25; ¼ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 6 Batty/FKR 13
    - . Bijeljina Sector (GM Streith) = ¾ Grenz Jaeger Comp 1; k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/4, II/20, I/28, I/31; ¼ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 6 Batty/FKR 13, 7 Batty/FKR 21; 2 ½ x 15 cm mortar batties
    - . 6 Comp/PB 2, 3 Comp/PB 4
- . FML von Sorsich's Group = 8644 foot, 265 horse, 24 guns
  - . Col von Ybl's Lst Eta Bde = k.u. Lst Eta Bns I/2, I/6, I/9, II/25, IV/29; ½ 1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; mobile 9 cm Can Batties 2 and 8
  - . GM Schiess' Lst Eta Bde = k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/2, III & IV/3, II/5, II/7, II/19, I/28; ¼ 1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 9 cm Can Batties 1, 3, 4, 5
  - . Independent - k.u. Lst Eta Bn IV/27; 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 1; 1 Comp/PB 5

## XIX Corps

Strength = 32 bns, 2 ¼ sqdns, 29 batties, 12 tech comps; 32,309 foot, 242 horse, 110 guns

Commander = FML Trollmann

Chief of Staff = Col Günste

- . 53<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM von Pongracz) = 17,768 foot, 37 horse, 16 guns
  - . 17 Mtn Bde (Col Carpellus) = k.u. Lst IR 19 (3); k.k. Lst Inf Bns 44, 76; ½ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 6 Batty/FKR 18, 8

## Batty/FKR 34

. k.k. 20 Lst Mtn Bde (Col von Farkas) = BH FJB 2; IX Ma Bn/ LW IR 23; k.k. Lst IR 23 (2); k.k. Lt Inf Bn 46;  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 Sqdn/ Lst Huss Bn 4; 2 Comp/Mtn AR 11, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10

. k.k. 21 Lst Mtn Bde (Col Hugo Fischer von See) = BH FJB 3; k.k. Lst IR 27 (3); k.k. Lst Inf Bn 75;  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 1; 1 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 12

. Independent -  $\frac{3}{4}$  2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 1; 6 Batty/FKR 15; 10 & 11 Batties/FKR 19, 7 Batty/FHR 13, 3 How Batty/Mtn AR 12, 3 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 6; Ma Comp/SB 13

. k.k. 205 Lst Inf Bde (GM von Reinöhl) = 4100 foot, 37 horse, 16 guns:

k.k. Lst IR 409 (3), 410 (3);  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Sqdn/DR 14; 1 & 2 Batties/I China FK Bn; 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 9, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 13

. k.k. 206 Lst Inf Bde (Col von Szabo) = 4971 foot, 23 horse, 12 guns:

IV Bn/LW IR 37; Ma Bn/k.k. Lst IR 7; k.k. Lst Inf Bn 35; I & II Bns/k.u. Lst Eta Regt 29;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 2; 7 Batty/FKR 14, 7 Batty/FKR 36, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 9; 8 Comp/SB 8

. GM Karl Schwarz's Lst Inf Bde = 5461 foot, 25 horse, 8 guns:

k.u. Lst Inf Bns I/3, III/5, II & III/6, I & III/12; 5 Batty/FKR 36, 6 Batty/Hon FKR 8; 7 comp/SB 8

. Corps troops (34 guns) = 12 cm Can Batties 3, 20; 15 cm Can Batty 8; 3 Batty/Heavy How Bn 8; 3 Batty/Heavy How Bn 13; Heavy How Batty 49; 24 cm Mortar Batty 3, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 20. 4, 5 & 6 Comps/PB 5; 3, 4 & 5 Comps/PB 8; 4 Comp/PB 9; 1 & 3 Comps/PB 15

## GERMAN XXII Reserve Corps

Strength = 35 bns, 6 sqdns, 42 batties, 8 MW dets, 6 tech comps, 1 flieger det; 28,662 foot, 572 horse, 196 guns, 16 MW

Commander = Prussian GdK Eugene von Falkenhayn

Chief of Staff = Württemberg Major Wöllwarth

. 43<sup>rd</sup> Res ID (GM von Runckel) = 11,132 foot, 132 horse, 36 guns

. 85 Res Inf Bde (von Heynitz) = Res IR 201 (3), 202 (3)

. 86 Res Inf Bde (von Pavel) = Res IR 203 (3), 204 (3)

. Res Jaeger Bn 15, Res Cav Sqdn 43, Res FAR 43 (9)

. One tech comp

. 44<sup>th</sup> Res ID (G.Lt von Dorrer) = 9809 foot, 123 horse, 30 guns

. 87 Res Inf Bde (Schönfeld) = Res IR 205 (3), 206 (3)

. 88 Res Inf Bde (Reuter) = Res IR 207 (3), 208 (3)

. Res Jaeger Bn 16, Res Cav Sqdn 44, Res FAR 44 (9)

. One tech comp

. 26<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> Royal Württemberg) ID (G.Lt Wilhelm Herzog v. Urach) = 7721 foot, 317 horse, 84 guns

. IR 119 (3), 121 (3), 125 (3) [Württemberg # 1, 3, 7]

- . UR 20 (4)
- . 26 FA Bde = FAR 29 (6), 65 (6)
- . Two tech comps
- . Corps troops (46 guns, 16 MW) = GERMAN 3 heavy batties, 8 MW dets, 2 tech comps, 1 flieger det. AUS-HUNG. 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 4, 12 cm Can Batty 6; 15 cm Heavy How Batties 47, 48; four 15 cm mortars; 24 cm Mor Batty 5, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 17

## VIII Corps

Strength = 31 bns, 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  sqdns, 43 batties, 11 tech comps; 35,557 foot, 590 horse, 142 guns

Commander = FZM von Scheuchenstuel

Chief of Staff = Col Sündermann

- . 57<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Heinrich Goiginger) = 13,360 foot, 246 horse, 32 guns
  - . 2 Mtn Bde (Col Panzenböck) = Bns III/8, II/70, II/76, II/101, V/BH 4;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rif Bn; 4 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 5
  - . 6 Mtn Bde (Col von Hellebronth) = Bns I/6, III/38, IV/42, IV/50, IV/81;  $\frac{1}{2}$  1 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rif Bn; 4 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 7
  - . Independent - 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 7 & 8 Batties/FKR 38; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 13
- . 59<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Snjaric) = 12,700 foot, 245 horse, 32 guns
  - . 9 Mtn Bde (G Edler von Hrozny) = Bns IV/12, III/49, III/74, IV/84, IV/87;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 12; 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 7, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11
  - . 18 Mtn Bde (GM Skvor) = Bns III/31, II/60; FJB 3, 15, 26;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rif Bn; 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 4, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 6
- . GM von Haustein's k.u. Lst Inf Bde = 4269 foot, 25 horse, 8 guns:
  - k.u. Lst IR 1 (3), 4 (2);  $\frac{1}{4}$  Sqdn from Lst Huss Bn 1; 5 Batty/Hon FKR 6, 8 Batty/FHR 4; 7 Comp/SB 4; one Lst sapper det
  - . GM Mrazek's k.u. Lst Inf Bde<sup>19</sup> = 5228 foot, 74 horse, 8 guns:
    - k.u. Lst IR 32 (3); k.u. Lst Bns IV/4, III/8, IV/30;  $\frac{1}{2}$  3 Sqdn/DR 14; 5 & 8 Batties/FKR 19, 4 Batty/Horse Arty Bn 1
    - . Corps troops (62 guns) = 10 cm Can Batties 1, 2; 12 cm Can Batties 8, 21; 15 cm Can Batty 1; one 15 cm cannon M.15; 18 cm Can Batties 7, 8, 9; 15 m How Batties 2, 3, 5, 46; 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy How Bn 6; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 1, 5, 11, 12, 14, 15; 1, 3 & 5 Comps/PB 2; 1, 3 & 4 Comps/PB 10

Army troops = Col von Bolla's Cav Regt (6)<sup>20</sup>; Flieg Comps 5, 9,

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19 Mrazek's Bde was in VIII Corps, but at first was supposed to guard the Danube.

15.

TOTALS for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army = 130 ½ bns, 14 ½ sqdns, 127 batties, 8 MW  
dets, 33 tech comps, 4 flieg comps; 121,081 foot, 1800 horse,  
501 guns, 16 MW

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20 Bolla's Regt joined on 10 November but on 20 November it left  
because of a lack of fodder; its strength isn't included in  
the final total for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

**Fortress garrisons** (placed under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army)

Totaled 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns,  $\frac{1}{2}$  sqdn, 132 guns, 3 fort arty dets, 8 Lst arty dets, 2 Lst sapper dets

. Peterwardein (GM Grzywinski) = 3 bns,  $\frac{1}{4}$  sqdn, 128 guns; 3 fort arty dets, 8 Lst arty dets, 1 Lst sapper det

. Bridgehead of Titel-Szlankamen, Felső-Aradi (Col Franz) = 1 comp,  $\frac{1}{4}$  sqdn, 4 guns 1 Lst sapper det

**11<sup>th</sup> German Army**

Commander = GdA von Gallwitz

Chief of Staff = Col Marquard

## III German Corps

Strength = 21 bns, 6 sqdns, 36  $\frac{1}{2}$  batties; 7000 foot, 280 horse, 60 guns

Commander = GdI von Lochow

Chief of Staff = Major Wetzell

. 6<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Herhudt von Rohden) = 7000 foot, 280 horse, 60 guns

. IR 20 (3), 24 (3), 64 (3)

. 4, 5, 6 Sqdns/HR 3; 6 FA Bde (15) = FAR 3, 39

. 25<sup>th</sup> Res ID (GM von Jarotzky) = 7260 foot, 280 horse, 72 guns

. IR 168 (3); Res IR 83 (3), 118 (3)

. Res DR 4 (3); Res FAR 25 (6); attached FAR 13 (9)

. Corps troops (2400 foot, 24 guns) = 3 unidentified bns; 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  batties, 2 flak züge

## IV German Res Corps

Strength = 27 bns, 6 sqdns, 37 batties; 27,385 foot, 699 horse, 145 guns

Commander = G.Lt von Winckler

Chief of Staff = Major Brüggemann

. 11<sup>th</sup> BAVARIAN ID (G.Lt Ritter von Kneussl) = 9598 foot, 200 horse, 56 guns

. IR 3 (2), 22 (3); Res IR 13 (3)

. Savoye's Cav Regt (2); 14 batties (including FAR 21)

. 105<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von der Esch) = 9249 foot, 267 horse, 52 guns

. IR 21 (3), 122 (3), 129 (3)

. 5 & 6 Sqdn/JPR 4; 13 batties (including FAR 209)

. 107<sup>th</sup> ID (Württemberg GM von Moser) = 8538 foot, 232 horse, 32 guns

. Res IR 52 (3), 227 (3), 232 (3)

. Two sqdns (including 3/UR 1); FAR 213 (8)

. Corps troops (5 guns) = 2 batties, 1 flak zug

## X German Res Corps

Strength = 18 bns, 4 sqdns, 41  $\frac{1}{2}$  batties; 18,000 foot, 400 horse, 160 guns

Commander = G.Lt Kosch

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Kundt

- . 103<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM von Estorff) = 9000 foot, 200 horse, 60 guns
  - . IR 32 (3), 71 (3); Res IR 116 (3)
  - . Two sqdns (including 2/JPR 4)
  - . 15 batties (including FAR 205, Mtn Arty Bn 4)
- . 101<sup>st</sup> ID (G.Lt von Kraewel) = 9000 foot, 200 horse, 56 guns
  - . IR 45 (3), 59 (3), 146 (3)
  - . Two sqdns (including 1/DR 10)
  - . FAR 201 (6); 9 batties of mountain artillery
- . Corps troops (44 guns) = 12 ½ batties

Directly under 11<sup>th</sup> Army...

. FML Fülöpp's Aus-Hung. Group - Was still being formed, with 6 ½ Lst Inf bns, ¼ sqdn and 6 batties; as of 1 November the Group had 4881 foot, 42 horse and 22 guns. Units which took part in the offensive were: k.u. Lst Bns I & III/33; k.u. Lst Eta Bns II/2, I/3, VI/8

TOTALS for 11<sup>th</sup> German Army = 72 ½ bns, 16 ½ sqdns, 121 batties<sup>21</sup>; 66,946 foot, 1701 horse, 483 guns

### 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army

Commander = G.Lt K. Boyadiyev

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Asmanov

- . 6<sup>th</sup> "Vidin" ID (Col Popov) = 24 bns, 4 sqdns, 16 batties
  - . 1 Bde [IR 3, 15], 2 Bde [IR 35, 36], 3 Bde [IR 51, 52]
  - . Attached Cav Regt 2
  - . 6 Arty Bde [AR 2, 12]
- . 8<sup>th</sup> "Tundschan" ID (GM Mitov) = 24 bns, 16 batties
  - . 1 Bde [IR 10, 30], 2 Bde [IR 12, 23], 3 Bde [IR 55, 56]
  - . 8 Arty Bde [AR 8, 18]
- . 9<sup>th</sup> "Plevna" ID (GM Neresov) = 24 bns, 12 batties
  - . 1 Bde [IR 4, 17], 2 Bde [IR 33, 34], 3 Bde [IR 57, 58]
  - . 9 Arty Bde [AR 9, 19]
- . 1<sup>st</sup> ID (GM Draganov) = 24 bns, 8 sqdns, 12 batties
  - . 1 Bde [IR 1, 6], 2 Bde [IR 16, 25], 3 Bde [IR 41, 42]
  - . Eight unknown cavalry sqdns (maybe 3 Cavalry Bde?)
  - . 1 Arty Bde [AR 4, 14]

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21 The 121 batties in 11<sup>th</sup> Army included these k.u.k. units: 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 4, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 5, 3 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 6, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 2, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 4, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 6, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 7, 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 10, 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 12, 3 How Batty/Mtn AR 14

- . Col Stoikov's Group (from 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army) = 8 bns, 8 sqdns:
  - . 2 Bde of 7 ID [IR 22, 26]
  - . 1 Cav Bde [Gd CR; CR 1]

TOTALS for 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army (as of mid-October) = 104 bns, 20 sqdns, 56 batties

TOTALS for **Mackensen's Army Group** = 310  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 51  $\frac{1}{2}$  sqdns, 305 batties, 8 MW dets, 33 tech comps, 4 flieg comps; about 300,000 foot, 4780 horse, 1200 guns, 16 MW

### **Reinforcements to Mackensen**

During the course of operations the following were placed under the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army...

- . 10 Mtn Bde (GM von Droffa) - Arrived on 21 October; on 11 November had 6126 foot, 21 horse, 14 guns: Bns I/48, I/62, I/90, II/92, III/BH 1.  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 2. 7 Batty/FKR 14, 7 Batty/FKR 36, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 9. 8 Comp/SB 8
- . GERMAN Alpenkorps (division) (Bavarian G.LT Krafft von Dellmensingen) - Arrived in south Hungary at end of October, joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on 8 November; had 12,200 foot, 95 horse, 36 guns<sup>22</sup>, 18 MW
  - . 1 Bavarian Jaeger Bde (Col Ritter von Tutschek) = (Bav) Jaeger Regt 1 (3) and Leib IR (3)
  - . 2 Jaeger Bde (GM von Below) = Jaeger Regts 2 (3) and 3 (4)
  - . 3 Sqdn/Bav Chevleg Regt 4
  - . FAR 203 (9)

### **TROOPS IN DALMATIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

(Directly under the AOK)

Commander = GdI von Sarkotic

Chief of Staff = Col Minnich

Coast defense (from north edge of Dalmatia to Trsteno) (FML Freih von Wucherer) - 7 bns, 6 batties; in each of the sectors listed there was a coast defense battalion being formed; in the Sebenico Region there was also a mobile battalion as a reserve; each region had 3 batteries; commanders of the sectors kept changing

- . Sebenico Region (Counter-Admiral Zaccaria) = Sectors Zara, Sebenico and Spalato
- . Mostar Region (GM Haala) = Sectors Makarska, Slano and Metkovic

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22 Alpenkorps had 10 batties (40 guns) at end of October, but on 8 November had 9 (36).

Fortress garrisons = 28 ½ bns, 34 mob batties, 60 fort arty comps, 3 tech comps

. Bocche di Cattaro (FML Edl von Weber, also commanding 47 ID in the garrison; chief of staff was Major Schuppich) = 9 ¼ bns, 7 ½ mob batties, 30 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp

. Trebinje (FML Rudolf Braun) = 4 ¼ bns, 121 mob batties, 8 fort arty comps, ¼ tech comp

. Bileca (GM Anton Andrian) = 3 ½ bns, 5 mob batties, 6 fort arty comps, ¼ tech comp

. Avtovac fortified area (Col Wanek) = 3 ¾ bns, 1 ½ mob batties, 1 fort arty comp, ¼ tech comp

. Kalinovik (Major Antosch) = ¾ bn, 1 mob batty, 1 fort arty comp, ¼ tech comp

. Mostar (with Grad and Stolac) (FML Maudry) = 2 bns, 2 ½ mob batties, 5 fort arty comps, ¼ tech comp

. Sarajevo (FML von Rollinger) = 5 bns, 3 mob batties, 9 fort art comps, ¾ tech comp

. Brcko bridgehead (Col Hroch) = 1 comp, 6 fixed guns

Drina security<sup>23</sup> (6 ¾ bns, 2 ½ batties)

. Foca Sector (GM Vukadinovic) - 4 ¾ bns, 1 ½ batties

. Gorazde Sector (GM von Vuchetich) = 2 bns, 1 batty

In formation

. Col von Zhuber's Group = k.k. Lst Bns 22, 59, 83; k.k. Lst Ma Bn 6; k.u. Lst Eta Bn I/17

TOTALS of troops under the commanding general in BHD = 47 ½ bns (only 11 ¾ mobile bns), 36 ½ mobile batties, 60 fort arty comps, 3 tech comps; 51,714 foot, 148 mobile guns

## **2<sup>nd</sup> BULGARIAN ARMY<sup>24</sup>**

Commander = GM Todorov

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Rusev

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23 The Drina security troops between Megjegja and the mouth of the Drina were placed under command of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

24 Overall commander of the Bulgarian Army was General Zekov; his chief of staff was GM Zostov. There were 240 bns, 44 sqdns and 198 batties (240,000 foot, 5700 horse and 934 guns). The overall disposition was:

. On Serbia's eastern border (including 1<sup>st</sup> Army under Mackensen's Army Group - 144 bns, 28 sqdns, 88 batties

. On the Greek border - 2<sup>nd</sup> "Thrace" and 10<sup>th</sup> "Belomora" ID

. On the Romanian border - 4<sup>th</sup> "Preslav" and 5<sup>th</sup> "Danube" ID

. In general reserve - 11<sup>th</sup> "Macedonia" ID (in formation).

- . 3<sup>rd</sup> "Balkan" ID (GM Ribarov) = 24 bns, 12 batties
    - . 1 Bde [IR 11, 24], 2 Bde [IR 29, 32], 3 Bde [IR 45, 46]
    - . 3 Arty Bde [AR 6, 16]
  - . 7<sup>th</sup> "Rila" ID (Col Vasiliev) = 16 bns, 8 sqdns, 12 batties
    - . 1 Bde [IR 13, 14], 3 Bde [IR 53, 54] (2 Bde with 1<sup>st</sup> Army)
    - . Attached 2 Cav Bde (regiments unknown)
    - . 7 Arty Bde [AR 7, 17]
- TOTALS for Army = 40 bns, 8 sqdns, 32 batties

**Grand total** for allied units in the Balkans (as of mid-October):  
 493 bns, 66 ½ sqdns, 483 ½ batties, 8 MW dets; 492,000 foot,  
 9480 horse, 1717 guns, 16 MW; units which were in the attack  
 against Serbia were: 397 bns, 59 ½ sqdns, 373 ½ batties, 8 MW  
 dets.

**THE SERBIAN ARMY**

Commander-in-Chief = Prince Regent Alexander

Chief of Staff = Voivode Putnik

(NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, the divisions were organized like the first listed unit (Drina Div II). That is, besides infantry they each had a Cavalry Detachment of 2 sqdns and an Arty Regt; the Cav Det and Arty Regt had the same name as the parent Div.)

**On the western/northern front** (facing the Drina and Danube)

1<sup>st</sup> Army (Voivode Zivojin Misic)

(58 bns, 4 sqdns, 112 guns)

. Drina Div II = II Ban IR 4, 5, 6; Drina II Cav Det; Drina II Arty Regt (12 bns, 2 sqdns, 22 guns)

. Dunav Div II = I Ban IR 7; II Ban IR 8 & 9 (12 bns, 2 sqdns, 22 guns)

. Sokol Bde = III Ban IR 5 & 6 (8 bns, 18 guns)

. Uzice Detachment = III Ban IR 2 & 4; Cadre IR 4;

Doniovocebank Bde (of 3 bns) (14 bns, 26 guns)

. Morava Div II = II Ban IR 1, 2, 3 (12 bns, 24 guns)

Belgrade Defense Group (General Zivkovic) = II Ban IR 7; III Ban IR 7, 11, 15; Cadre IR 10 (20 bns, 2 sqdns, 75 guns<sup>25</sup>)

3<sup>rd</sup> Army (General Jurisic-Sturm)

(53 bns,<sup>26</sup> 7 sqdns, 155 guns)

. Branicevo Detachment = III Ban IR 8 & 9 (6 bns, 1 sqdn, 44 guns)

. Dunav Div I = Veteran IR 4; I Ban IR 9 & 18; Cadre IR 12 (16 bns, 3 sqdns, 28 guns)

. Drina Div I = Veteran IR 3; I Ban IR 5 & 6 (12 bns, 3 sqdns, 36 guns)

. Krajina Detachment = I Ban IR 4; III Ban IR 3, 13, 14 (13 bns, 47 guns)

In reserve under the high command

. Timok Div II = II Ban IR 13, 14, 15 (12 bns, 2 sqdns, 20 guns)

TOTALS for western/northern front = 143 bns, 15 sqdns, 362 guns

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25 The 75 guns included 11 medium and 8 heavy pieces.

26 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Total of 53 bns appears in the original; the individual unit totals from the Serbian official history indicate that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had just 47 bns.

**On the eastern front** (Serbian-Bulgarian border)

Timok Army Group (General Gojkovic)

(42 bns, 4 sqdns, 88 guns)

. Negotin Group = I Ban IR 8; Ist Vet Bn of III Ban IR 13 (6 bns, 10 guns)

. Combined Division = Veteran IR 1, 2, 5, 6 (16 bns, 1 sqdn, 44 guns)

. Sumadija Div II = II Ban IR 10 & 11; Cadre IR 5; II Ban "Extra Sumadija IR" (16 bns, 2 sqdns, 22 guns)

. Fortress garrisons = Four III Ban bns and one sqdn

2<sup>nd</sup> Army (Voivode Stepanovic)

(59 ½ bns, 21 sqdns, 150 guns)

. Tumba Detachment = I Ban IR 10 (5 bns, 10 guns)

. Morava Div I = I Ban IR 1, 2, 16; Cadre IR 19 (16 bns, 2 sqdns, 38 guns)

. Timok Div = I Ban IR 13, 14, 15, 20; IV Bn of III Ban IR 2 (17 bns, 44 guns - no cavalry)

. Sumadija Div I = I Ban IR 11, 12, 19 (12 bns, 3 sqdns, 36 guns)

. Cavalry Div = 1 Bde [1 & 3 Regts], 2 Bde [2 & 4 Regts] (16 sqdns, 8 guns - also a foot detachment of ½ a bn)

. Blasinska Detachment = I Ban IR 17; the Dobrovol Detachment (of 3 bns); III Ban Bns I/2 and II/1 (9 bns, 14 guns)

TOTALS for the Serbian-Bulgarian border = 101 ½ bns, 25 sqdns, 238 guns

**In the "New Territories"** (Macedonia)

Commander = General Popovic

Opposite Bulgaria (31 bns, 54 guns)<sup>27</sup>

. "Bregalnica Troops" = I Ban IR 2; Cadre IR 13, 14, 16, 20 (each of 3 bns); I & IV Bns of III Ban IR 1; Macedonia Border Companies # 8, 12, 21, 24 (18 bns, 4 comps, 30 guns)

. Krivopalanska Detachment = 2 bns of II Ban IR 12; 2 bns each of III Ban IR 3 and 12; Cadre IR 18 (3 bns); Macedonia Border Company # 25 (11 bns, 1 comp, 24 guns)

Opposite (or in) Albania (13 bns, 24 guns)

. Prizren Group = Ist Bn of III Ban IR 12; Cadre IR 11;

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27 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Total strength for the troops opposite Bulgaria & Albania are from the original. The figures don't exactly match the totals from the individual unit entries (which are from the Serbian official history).

Macedonia Border Comps # 9, 10, 11 (5 bns, 3 comps, 12 guns)  
. Podrim Group = Cadre IR 3; Macedonia Border Comps # 13, 14, 15  
(3 bns, 3 comps, 8 guns)  
. Ochrida Group = Cadre IR 1; Macedonia Border Comps # 16, 17  
(3 bns, 2 comps, 4 guns)

**Grand total** of the Serbian units (as of 15 October) = 288 ½ bns,  
40 sqdns, 678 guns

**THE MONTENEGRIN ARMY**

Commander = King Nikola  
Chief of Staff = Col Pesic

. Lovcen Group (Prince Peter; also called 1<sup>st</sup> Div) = 12 ½ bns, 42  
guns  
. Herzegovina Group (Voivode Petrovic) = 2 and 3 Divs; had 15  
bns, 19 guns  
. Sanjak Group (General Vukotic) = 1, 2 and 3 "Sanjak" Divs plus  
independent Kolasin Bde; had 40 bns, 54 guns  
. Old Serbia Group (General Vesovic) = 15 ¼ bns, 20 guns

TOTALS for Montenegrin Army (as of end of September) = 82 ¾ bns,  
134 guns

C. Italian Theater of Operations**HQ OF SOUTHWEST FRONT**

Commander = GO Archduke Eugene

Chief of Staff = FML Alfred Krauss

**A. TYROL**

Under HQ, Tyrol Land Defense

Commander = GdK Dankl

Chief of Staff = GM Pichler

TOTALS = 61 ½ bns (including 30 Lst, Res and Ma Bns); 1 bike bn, 51 SS dets<sup>28</sup>, 54 indep MG dets<sup>29</sup>, 4 sqdns, 58 ½ fort and heavy batties, 42 fort arty comps, 1 armored train, 12 tech comps, 2 flieg comps. 91,400 foot, 810 horse, 770 guns<sup>30</sup>

District I (Ortler) = 53 Half Bde (Col Abendorf)

(2777 foot, 61 horse, 23 guns)

. Res Bn I/29; SS Dets Prad, Schlanders, Stilfs, Taufers; one MG det

. ¼ 3 Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn; Tyrol FK Batty 1

. Nauders and Gomagoi forts - Two dets of L-Sch Regts II & III; 2 Res Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4, two dets of Fort Arty Bn 7 (19 guns: M.61 to M.05 of 6 to 15 cm caliber)

District II (Tonale) = 88 L-Sch Bde (GM von Eckhardt)

(5540 foot, 29 horse, 39 guns)

. L-Sch Regt I (3); SS Dets Bludenz, Cles, Innsbruck III, Malé, Ulten; "local SS"<sup>31</sup>; 3 MG dets

. ¼ 3 Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn; Foot Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn

. Tyrol FK Batty 2; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8; ½ 30.5 com Mor Batty

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28 The SS dets were originally SS Bns. Since they didn't receive replacements, many became just detachments with less strength than a company.

29 Outside the assigned MG dets of infantry and LW bns there were 54 indep MG det available. 10 were "Mtn MG Dets" under the German Alpenkorps, each of 4 MG. There were several Fort MG dets, for the most part improvised and mostly immobile dets with various weapons such as Italian, Russian, Greek, Dutch and Maxim MG. The 10 German Mtn MG dets left on 20 October, and were replaced by 10 Aus-Hung. MG dets with just 2 MG apiece.

30 The total number of guns includes all pieces in the area, including fortress guns and special guns in fixed positions. Of the 770 guns in Tyrol, 215 were mobile, 555 were fixed.

31 "Local Stand-Schützen" were individual men drawn from the immediate area.

19; two 47 mm marine cannon

. Tonale-Pejo forts - One det of L-Sch Regt II; 1 & 2 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 7 (30 guns)

District III (South Tyrol) = 91<sup>st</sup> ID (FML von Koennen-Horak)  
(About 39,900 foot, 220 horse, 270 guns)

Judicarien Sector = 50 Half Bde (Col Spiegel)

. KJ Streif Comps 1 & 4; one L-Sch comp; k.k. Lst Bns 163, 170; SS Dets Bezau, Klausen; local SS; 4 MG dets

. 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8; ½ 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 14

. ¼ 1 Comp/SB 9

. Lardaro fort group - One det of L-Sch Regt II; 3 & 4 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 7 (35 guns)

Riva Sector (GM Schiesser was fortress and sector commander)

. Res Bns III/29, I/37; Riva Garrison Bn; SS Dets Bozen, Lana, Arntal; local SS; 6 MG dets

. ½ 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 14, half of a 9 cm cannon batty

. ½ 1 Comp/SB 9

. Forts in Riva area - 1 & 3 Res Comps/Fort Arty Bn 1; 2 & 3 Fort and 3 & 4 Res Comps/Fort Arty Bn 4 (66 guns)

8<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Fabini)

Directly under the division - 8 Comp/SB 14, 6 Comp/PB 8

. Rovereto Sector (181 Inf Bde) (GM Georgi)

. Res Bns II & III/37; SS Dets Brixen, Landeck, Meran III; local SS; 5 MG dets

. Four 9 cm cannon batties; ½ 7 cm M.75 mobile Mtn Can Batty 1; half of an improvised 15 cm mortar batty

. ¼ 3 Comp/SB 14

. Etschtal fort - One Lst gendarme assistance comp; 7 & 17 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 4 (39 guns)

. Folgaria Sector (180 Inf Bde) (GM Edler von Verdross)

. III, IV & IV Bns/L-Sch Regt III; a bike bn; Tyrol Lst Bn II; k.k. Lst Bns 160, 164, 168; SS Dets Glurns, Gries, Imst, Kitzbühel, Kufstein, Reutte I; local SS: 7 MG dets

. 7 Batty/FKR 19, 5 Batty/FKR 40, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2, ½ 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 14, 3 Batty/Heavy FH Bn 3, half a 15 cm mor batty; ½ 30.5 cm Mor Batty 9, ½ 30.5 cm Mor Batty 19

. Bde Pioneer Bn 180

. Lavarone Sector (or Col Ritter von Ellison's Group)

. KJ Streif Comp 2; Res Bn II/29; Tyrol Lst Bn I; ½ k.k. Lst Bn 161; Upper Aus Vol Rifle Regt (2); SS Dets Meran I, Schwaz, Sterzing; local SS; 2 MG dets

. 5 Batty/FKR 2, 7 Batty/FKR 22, 3 Batty/FH Bn 45, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 9, 15 cm mobile Mor Batty 1; also 15 cm How

Batty 24 (from 5<sup>th</sup> Army), replacing 30.5 cm Mor Batty 2  
(moving to 5<sup>th</sup> Army)

. Lavarone-Folgaria forts - Seven dets of L-Sch Regt I;  
four comps of Fort Arty Bn 6 (42 guns)

Val Sugana Sector (52 Half Bde) (Col Edler von Kreschel)

- . I & II Bns/L-Sch Regt II; k.k. Lst Bns 169, 171; SS Dets Kaltern, Meran II, Rattenberg, Reute II, Zillertal; local SS; 4 MG dets
- .  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6
- .  $\frac{1}{2}$  9 cm mobile Can Batty 2, 1 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 9, 2 Can Batty and  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 How Batties/Mtn AR 14,  $\frac{1}{2}$  7 cm M.75 mobile Mtn Can Batty 1;  $\frac{1}{2}$  10 cm GERMAN Foot (Can) Batty 104
- .  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Comp/SB 8,  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Comp/SB 9,  $\frac{1}{2}$  3 Comp/SB 14
- . Tenna and Colle delle bene forts - 2 Fort & 2 Res Comps/ Fort Arty Bn 1 (22 guns)

Directly under District III - X Ma Bn/IR 14;  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6; two 47 mm marine cannon; Schober's Armored Train; Flieger Comps 7 and 17

XIV Corps

Strength = 28  $\frac{1}{2}$  bns, 6470 SS troops, 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  sqdns, 28 batties, 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  fort arty comps, 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  tech cops; about 34,300 foot, 500 horse, 200 guns

- . District IV = 90 ID (FML Edler von Scholz)  
(About 12,200 foot, 200 horse, 58 guns)
  - . 55 Mtn Bde [Fleimstal] (Col Spielvogel)
    - . KJ Streif Comp 3; Res Bn IV/37; two dets of L-Sch Regt III; k.k. Lst Bn 166, k.k. Lst Ma Bn 23; SS Dets Auer, Feldkirch, Rankweil; local SS; one gendarme-assistance comp; 5 MG dets
    - .  $\frac{1}{4}$  4 Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn
    - . 7 Batty/FKR 41; one 9 cm cannon batty
    - . 9 Comp/SB 14
    - . Paneveggio fort - one det of L-Sch Regt III; 1 Comp/ Fort Arty Bn 1 (18 guns)
  - . 179 Inf Bde [Fasstal] (Col Edler von Schiessler)
    - . k.k. Lst Bns 38, 39; SS Dets Dornbirn, Nauders, Kastelruth; local SS; one gend.-assistance comp; 4 MG dets
    - .  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6
    - . 8 Batty/FKR 20, 6 Batty/FKR 22, 8 Batty/FKR 42, Tyrol FK Batty 3; 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 9,  $\frac{1}{4}$  24 cm Mor Batty 12
    - . Part of 3 Comps/SB 8; Bde Pioneer Det 179
    - . Moena fort - SS Det Welschnofen; part of Fort Arty Bn 1 (6 guns)
  - . 58 Mtn Bde [Pordoi] (Col von Borotha)
    - . KJR 4 (3); SS Dets Bregenz, Gröden; local SS; one MG det
    - . 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8

- . 10 Comp/SB 14
  - . Directly under Div -  $\frac{3}{4}$  4 Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn
- . District V = Combined Div Pustertal (FML Ludwig Goiginger)  
(About 22,150 foot, 300 horse, 140 guns)
  - . 96 Inf Bde [Abteital] (Col Vonbank)
    - . KJR 1 (3), 3 (3), k.k. Lst Bns 162, 167; SS Dets Enneberg, Lienz, Passeier; two Alpine dets; 8 MG dets
    - .  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn
    - . 6 Batty/FKR 8, 6 Batty/FKR 40, Tyrol FK Batty 4, 2 Batty/FHR 14, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 8,  $\frac{1}{4}$  24 cm Mor Batty 12;  $\frac{1}{2}$  GERMAN Foot (Heavy How) Batty 102
    - . 2 Comp/SB 14
    - . Buchenstein & Tre Sassi forts - Two dets of L-Sch Regt III; a combined comp of Fort Arty Bn 1 (14 guns)
  - . 56 Mtn Bde [Innichen] (GM Englert)<sup>32</sup>
    - . KJR 2 (3), L-Sch Regt III (3), X Ma Bn/IR 59; k.k. Lst Bn 165; k.k. Lst Ma Bns 24, 29; SS Dets Innsbruck I, Innsbruck II, Sillian, Silz, Welsberg; one Alpine det; 3 MG dets
    - . Res Sqdn/DR 6;  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn
    - . 8 Batty/FKR 36, 8 & 9 Batties/FKR 41, 1 & 5 Batties/FHR 14, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 8,  $\frac{1}{2}$  24 cm Mor Batty 12,  $\frac{1}{2}$  30.5 cm Mor Batty 9; three 47 mm marine cannon;  $\frac{1}{2}$  10 cm GERMAN Foot (Can) Batty 104,  $\frac{1}{2}$  GERMAN Foot (Heavy How) Batty 102
    - . 6 Comp/SB 6, 7 Comp/SB 14
    - . Plätzwiese, Landro & Sexten forts - Three dets/L-Sch Regt III, two comps/Fort Arty Bn 1, two comps/Fort Arty Bn 4 (37 guns)
  - . Directly under Div - I Bn/L-Sch Regt III; Franzenfeste fort (with a garrison comp, 1 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Bn (10 guns))

Directly under Tyrol Land HQ (980 foot, 36 guns) = I Bn/KJR 2; KJ Streif Comps 5, 6; FKR 41 (6)<sup>33</sup>

Trent Fortress (FML Edler von Guseck) = 7900 foot, 24 mobile and 215 fixed guns - Two fort and four Ma comps/Fort Arty Bn 1; one fort and one Ma comp/Fort Arty Bn 5.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a combined sapper comp from SB 8 and 14

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32 Placed under 56 Mtn Bde was HQ of 51 Mtn Bde, Col Edler von Sparber.

33 FKR 41 was arriving in Tyrol; batteries not included in grand total for the area.

**B. CARINTHIA**

Under HQ of Armeegruppe GdK Rohr

Chief of Staff = FML Scotti

TOTALS = 40 ½ bns, 6 vol rifle bns, 5 ¼ sqdns, 58 ½ fort and heavy batties, 14 fort arty comps, 2 armored trains, 6 tech comps, 1 flieger comp; around 40,900 foot, 572 horse, 319 guns

Sector I = 48 ID (FML Gabriel): 15,350 foot, 161 horse, 99 guns

. Col Fasser's Group = Bn III/18; FJB 30 ; X Ma Bn/IR 7; k.k.

Lst Bn 43; II Bn/Carinthian Vol Rif Regt; ¼ 2 Sqdn/HR 9; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 4

. 11 Mtn Bde (GM Lawrowski) = Bns I/10, IV/20, I/21, IV/77, III/BH 3; ¼ 2 Sqdn/HR 9; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 10

. 12 Mtn Bde (Col Prince Schwarzenberg) = Bns I/3, II/57, I/93, II/100, III/BH 2; ¼ 1 Sqdn/UR 5; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 4 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 13

. Div cavalry = ½ 2 Sqdn/HR 9

. 48 FA Bde (Col von Smekal) = FKR 40 (4), 5 Batty/FHR 5; 1, 2 and 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 6, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 1, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 6

. Attached from Armeegruppe HQ = 15 cm How Batty 1; 15 cm Mor Batties 3, 6, 7; six 9 cm cannon, six 47 mm marine cannon; ¾ 5 Comp/PB 7

Sector II = 94 ID (FML Kuczera): 4852 foot, 445 horse, 48 guns

. Sub-Sector West (Col von Gautsch) = k.k. Lst Bns 40, 41, 150, 151, 153

. Sub-Sector East (Lt Col Frisch) = X Ma Comps of FJB 8 and 9; Lst Ma Bn 10; Jung-Schützen Bn; Salzburg Vol Rifle Bn

. Div Cavalry = 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 4

. 6 & 7 Batties/FKR 9; 3, 4 & 5 Batties/FKR 20, 7 Batty/FHR 7, 5 Batty/FHR 9; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 5

. 6 Comp/PB 3

. Attached from Armeegruppe HQ = ½ 10.4 cm Can Batty 1, one 15 cm marine cannon, two 9 cm cannon; ¼ 5 Comp/PB 7

Sector III = 92<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Fernengel): 12,336 foot, 166 horse, 103 guns

. 57 Mtn Bde (GM Freih. von Henneberg) = IR 27 (4); FJB 20

. 59 Mtn Bde (Col Edl. von Dietrich) = Bns II/37, III/57, I/Hon IR 13; Carinthian Vol Rifle Regt (3)

. Div Cavalry = 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4, Res Sqdn/HR 16

. 7 Batty/FKR 42, 5 (Can) Batty/FH Bn 22, 3 (Can) Batty/FH Bn 44, 6 Batty/FHR 5, 6 Batty/Turkey How Regt, 5 & 6 Can

Batties/Mtn AR 2, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 11

. 7 Comp/SB 3

. Attached from Armeegruppe HQ =  $\frac{1}{2}$  10.4 cm Can Batty 1, 12 cm Can Batty 13, one 15 cm marine cannon,  $\frac{1}{2}$  15 cm How Batty 3; 15 cm How Batties 11, 34;  $\frac{1}{2}$  15 cm Mor Batty 4, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 18, twenty 9 cm cannon, two 47 mm marine cannon

. Malborgeth fort - Det of LW IR 4; 8 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 2, 1 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4, 6 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 8 (16 guns)

. Raibl-Predil fort - Det of LW IR 4; 5 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 3,  $\frac{1}{2}$  1 Res Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4 (15 guns)

Sector IV = 44<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM Nemecek) = 8360 foot, 100 horse, 69 guns

- . 44 LW Inf Bde (Col Majewski) = (Mtn) LW IR 4 (3), 27 (3)
- . 87 LW Inf Bde (GM Jellenchich) = LW IR 2 (3), 21 (3)
- . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/DR 10
- . 44 FA Bde (Col Edl von Ellenberger) = 1 Batty/FKR 40, 4 Batty/Turkey How Regt; 1 to 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 3; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 3
- . 7 Comp/SB 7
- . Attached from Armeegruppe HQ = ½ 15 cm How Batty 3, ½ 15 cm Mor Batty 4, 24 cm Mor Batty 2, ½ 24 cm Mor Batty 7, eight 9 cm cannon, two 37 mm marine cannon, two 47 mm marine cannon; 3 Comp/ SB 11
- . Flitsch fort - Det of LW IR 27; ½ 1 Res Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4 (11 guns)

Directly under Armeegruppe HQ = 30.5 cm Mor Batty 1 (first available on 18 October); Armored Trains IX & X; Flieger Comp 16

### C. THE COASTAL LANDS

TOTALS = 103 ½ bns (including 30 Lst Bns), 5 vol rifle and bike dets, 20 sqdns, 142 ½ fort and heavy batties, 20 fort arty comps (manning marine and heavy batties), 2 armored trains, 22 tech comps, 4 flieger comps; 120,300 foot, 1576 horse, 610 guns

### 5<sup>th</sup> Army

Commander = GdI von Boroevic  
Chief of Staff = FML von le Beau

Sector I = XV Corps

Strength = 25 bns, 2 ½ sqdns, 27 ½ batties, 4 tech comps; 26,800 foot, 384 horse, 119 guns

Commander = FML von Stöger-Steiner

Chief of Staff = Col Theodor Edler von Körner

. 50<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Tunk to 6 November, then GM Gerabek) = 15,800 foot, 214 horse, 60 guns

- . 3 Mtn Bde (GM Gerabek) = Bns II/18, IV/30, IV/37, III/46, IV/80; ¼ 1 Sqdn/UR 5; 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 13

- . 14 Mtn Bde (Col Edl von Hausser to 15 November, then Col Edl von Conrad) = Bns II/45, II/72, I/98, V/BH 3; XI Ma Bn/28; ½ 2 Sqdn/Dalm RS Bn

- . 15 Mtn Bde (GM Edl von Wieden) = Bns IV/33, II/34, I/61, II/66, I/91; ¼ 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 5; 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 3, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 13

- . Div Cavalry = ½ Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn

- . 50 FA Bde (Col Rath) = 3 & 4 Batties/Hon FKR 6; 1 & 2 How

- Batties/Mtn AR 7
  - . A Lst sapper detachment
- . 1<sup>st</sup> ID (FML Schmidt Edl von Fussina) = 11,000 foot, 170 horse, 54 guns
  - . 7 Mtn Bde (GM Ströher) = Bns II/5, IV/25, III/85, III/86, V/BH 2;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 12; 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 3, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10
  - . 8 Mtn Bde (GM Wossala) = Bns IV/24, III/35, IV/53 IV/58, V/BH 1;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 12; 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14
  - . Div Cavalry =  $\frac{1}{2}$  Ma Sqdn/Tyrol RS Bn
  - . 1 FA Bde (Lt Col Karl Schmidt) = 7 & 8 Batties/FKR 39, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 1, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 11
  - . 4 Comp/SB 13
- . Corps troops = 1 & 2 Batties/FH Bn 15; 2 Comp/PB 8
- . Attached from Army HQ = 3 Batty/FK Bn 21 [of XVI Corps], 2 Batty/FH Bn 22 [of III Corps], 2 & 3 Batties/Turkey How Bn 5, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 2, 15 cm How Batty 14; 15 cm Mor Batties 1, 2;  $\frac{1}{2}$  15 cm Mor Batty 4; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 10; twelve 9 cm cannon, four 7 cm mtn cannon M.99; two 37 mm marine cannon; 2 Comp/SB 6

## Sector II = XVI Corps

Strength = 26 bns, 3 sqdns, 44 batties, 1 armored train, 6 tech comps, 3 flieg comps, 1 balloon det; 25,500 foot, 130 horse, 151 guns

Commander = FZM Wurm

Chief of Staff = Col Graf

- . 18<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Stracker) = 9800 foot, 60 horse, 71 guns
  - . 1 Mtn Bde (GM Novak von Arienti to 6 November, then Col Teus) = Bns I/1, IV/4 I/51, I/63, I/102;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 5; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 4, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 7
  - . 13 Mtn Bde (GM Graf Berchtold) = IR 22 (3); Bns III/64, III/BH 4;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 5; 4 & 6 Can Batties, Mtn AR 7
  - . (Div cavalry,  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 Sqdn/DR 14, was with Reifnitz Cav Group)
  - . 18 FA Bde (Col Secullic) = 1 & 2 Batties/Hon FKR 6; 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 7
  - . 6 Comp/SB 13
- . 58<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Erwin Zeidler) = 15,700 foot, 70 horse, 80 guns
  - . 4 Mtn Bde (Col Lercher to 21 October, then Col Adalbert von Dani) = Bns II/52, III/69, LW IR 37 (3);  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/Dalm RS Bn
  - . 5 Mtn Bde (GM Nöhring) = Bns I & V/22; LW IR 23 (3);  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 Sqdn/Dalm RS Bn
  - . 60 Inf Bde (Col de Brunfaut) = IR 30 (3), 80 (3)
  - . (Div cavalry,  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 Sqdn/DR 14, was with Reifnitz Cav Group)

- . 58 FA Bde (Lt Col Grund) = 8 Batty/FKR 30, 5 & 6 Batties/FKR 23, 3 Batty/FK Bn 13, 3 Batty/FK Bn 26, 3 Batty/FK Bn 43, 5 Batty/FHR 4, 5 Batty/FHR 8
- . Corps troops = ½ 10.4 cm Can Batty 16; 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy FH Bn 16; 4 Comp/PB 17
- . Attached from Army HQ = Graz Vol Bike Bn; 6 Batty/FKR 4, 6 Batty/FKR 12, 7 Batty/FKR 17, 7 Batty/FKR 20 1 & 2 Batties/FK Bn 44, 1 Batty/Turkey How Bn 5, 10.4 cm Can Batty 1, 12 cm Belgian Can Batty 1; one 12 cm marine cannon, one 15 cm marine cannon; 3 Batty/Heavy How Bn 14; 15 cm How Batties 18, 24<sup>34</sup>, 26, 43; 24 cm Mor Batty 1; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 7, 13; one 7 cm automatic flak batty; twenty 9 cm cannon, eight 7 cm mtn cannon M.99; 7 Comp/SB 1, 8 Comp/SB 3, 3 Comp/SB 6; Armored Train II; Flieg Comps 2, 4 and 8; Balloon Comp 1

## Sector III.a = VII Corps

Strength = 37 bns, 2 sqdns, 43 ½ batties, 7 tech comps, 1 flieg comp, 1 balloon det; 28,700 foot, 197 horse, 174 guns

Commander = GdK Archduke Joseph

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Eisner-Bubna

- . 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (Gm von Lukachich) = 7700 foot, 67 horse, 70 guns
  - . 39 Hon Inf Bde (Col Stadler) = HIR 3 (3), 4 (3)
  - . 81 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Weeber until 30 Sept, then Col Sarkany) = HIR 1 (3), 17 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = ½ Res Sqdn/HR 3
  - . 20 Hon FA Bde (Lt Col Mostböck) = Hon FKR 8 (5), I Bn/FKR 20 (2)
  - . 6 Comp/SB 14
- . 17<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Gelb) = 12,900 foot, 50 horse, 46 guns
  - . 33 Inf Bde (Col von Soss) = IR 39 (4)<sup>35</sup>, 61 (3); FJB 24
  - . 34 Inf Bde (Col Boleslav Wolf) = IR 43 (4), 46 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = ½ Res Sqdn/HR 3
  - . 17 FA Bde (Col Czapp) = FKR 21 (6), I Bn/FHR 7 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 7
- . 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID (FML Kletter) = 8100 foot, 80 horse, 50 guns
  - . 110 Lst Inf Bde (GM Maag until 14 Nov, then Col Mietzl) = k.k. Lst IR 31 (3), 32 (3)
  - . 111 Lst Inf Bde (Col Göttlicher) = k.k. Lst IR 6 (3), 25 (2)
  - . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/UR 1
  - . 106 FA Bde (Col Edl von Portenschlag) = FKR 32 (6), FK Bn 106 (2); II Bn/FHR 11 (2); 15 cm Can Batty 7; five harnessed 9 cm cannon
  - . 1 Comp/SB 6; 1 comp/PB 4

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34 The 15 cm How Batty 24 was temporarily in Tyrol.

35 The IV Bn/IR 34 arrived from Carinthia on 23 October.

. Corps troops = 1 & 2 Batties/Heavy FH Bn 7  
 . Attached from Army HQ = 7 Batty/FKR 7, 1 Batty/FH Bn 22 [from III Corps], 10.4 cm Can Batty 15 [from XV Corps], 12 cm Can Batty 14, 4 Batty/Hvy FH Bn 3, two 15 cm marine cannon, 24 cm Mor Batty 6, ½ 30.5 cm Mor Batty 3, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 4, 13 cm BAVARIAN Can Batty 106, one 8 cm automatic flak batty, ten 9 cm cannon, four 7 cm mountain cannon M.99, two 47 mm marine cannon; 1 Comp/SB 1, 3 & 4 Comps/SB 2; Flieger Comp 12, Balloon Det 13

Sector III.b = III Corps

Strength = 29 bns, 2 sqdns, 24 ½ batties, 1 armored train, 4 tech comps; 22,550 foot, 128 horse, 112 guns

Commander = FML Ritter von Krautwald

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Freiherr von Karg

. 28<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schneider Edl von Manns-Au) = 8850 foot, 84 horse, 64 guns

. 55 Inf Bde (Col Pilar) = IR 96 (3); Ma Bn 17<sup>36</sup>

. 56 Inf Bde (GM Hugo Schmidt) = IR 47 (4), 87 (3)

. Div Cavalry = Res Sqdns of DR 3 and of UR 5

. 28 FA Bde (GM Kratky) = FKR 8 (5), II Bn/FHR 3 (2)

. 4 Comp/SB 14

. 22<sup>nd</sup> LW ID (GM Schön - Div in Army reserve at Selo) = 5000 foot, 64 horse, 14 guns

. 43 LW Inf Bde (Col Edl von Merten) = LW IR 3 (3), 26 (3)

. (Div cavalry, Res Sqdn/DR 12, was in Sector IV)

. 22 FA Bde (Col Gärtner) = FKR 7 (4), FK Bn 22 (2)

. 5 Comp/SB 3

. k.u. 19 Lst Mtn Bde (Col Drennig until 14 Nov, then Col von Szabo) (4900 foot) = k.u. Lst Bns III/1, II/3, I/4, I/6, II/12, IV/19

. 187 Inf Bde (Counter Admiral Freih von Koudelka) (3800 foot) = k.k. Lst Bns 37, 42, 152, 157; k.k. Lst Ma Bn 30; Naval Bn 4; ½ of a vol bike comp

. Corps troops = 1 & 4 Batties/Heavy FH Bn 3

. Attached from Army HQ = 5 Batty/FKR 7, 5 Batty/FKR 26, 7 Batty/FKR 32, 12 cm Can Batty 15, one 12 cm marine canon, two 15 cm marine cannon, 4 Batty/Hvy FH Bn 14, 15 cm How Batty 30, 24 cm Mor Batty 7, ½ 30.5 cm Mor Batty 3, 10 cm GERMAN Foot (Can) Batty 14, twelve 9 cm cannon, two 7 cm mtn cannon M.99, one 47 mm marine cannon; one 7 cm automatic flak batty; 4 Comp/SB 1, 5 Comp/SB 8; Armored Train V; Balloon Comp 1

Sector IV = Trieste Coastal Sector

Strength = 2 ½ bns, 4 sqdns, 2 batties; 4200 foot, 540 horse, 10

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36 March Bn 17 was created by combining March bns of IR 17 and 97 of the dissolved 185 Inf Bde.

guns

Commander = GM Alexander Ritter von Wasserthal

. Cavalry Group = Ist Bn HQ/HR 7; 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 7 [from VII Corps], Res Sqdn/DR 12; a combined Ma Sqdn from DR 4, 5 & 15; ½ Trieste Vol Rifle Bn; two coast defense dets, a finance watch comp, railroad security troops

. Trieste City Command = k.k. Lst Bn 154; half a naval bn; Trieste Lst Watch and Police Bn

. Col Vogelhuber's Group = ½ Trieste Vol Rifle Bn; nine coast defense dets and gendarme and finance watch posts, one railroad security comp

. Sector Artillery = One and a half of a 9 cm can batty; two 47 mm marine cannon

Sector V = Fiume Coastal Sector

Strength = 1 bn, 1 sqdn, 1 batty; 2850 foot, 126 horse, 4 guns

Commander = GM von Istanovic

. k.k. Lst Bn 155; one vol rifle comp; three coast defense dets and gendarme and finance watch posts; 4 Sqdn/Hon HR 4 [from 20 Hon ID]; one 9 cm can batty

Directly under 5<sup>th</sup> Army...

. 61<sup>st</sup> ID (FML Winkler) = 9700 foot, 71 horse, 40 guns

(In reserve by Schön Pass; 10 Mtn Bde was sent by rail on 18 and 19 October from Prvacina-Reifenberg to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in Serbia)

. 10 Mtn Bde (GM von Droffa) = Bns I/48, I/62, I/90, II/92, III/BH 1; ¼ 1 Sqdn/UR 12

. k.u. 16 Lst Mtn Bde (GM Breit until 22 Oct, then Col Fiebich-Ripke) = k.u. Lst IR 17 (3), 29 (2); ¼ 1 Sqdn/Dalm RS Bn

. (Div cavalry, 6 Sqdn/HR 9, was with Reifnitz Cav Group)

. 61 FA Bde (Col von Dobner; attached to XVI Corps) = 6 Batt/FKR 20, 8 & 9 Batties/FKR 21, 6 Batt/FKR 28, 6 Batt/ FKR 31, 7 Batt/FKR 37, 6 Batt/FKR 39; 1, 2 & 3 Batties/ Turkey FHR

. A Lst sapper detachment

. Reifnitz Cav Group (dissolved at end of October) = 2 Sqdn/DR 14, 6 Sqdn/HR 9, Res Sqdn/HR 10, 3 Sqdn/Hon HR 4

#### **Area of the Pola Military Harbor**

Strength = 15 bns, 1 sqdn, 2 mobile batties, 41 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp; about 15,700 foot, 80 horse, 610 guns

Commander = Vice Admiral Ritter von Chmelarz

Chief of Staff = Col Funk

. Security garrison

. II & IV Bns/LW IR 5; k.k. Lst IR 5 (3), 26 (3); k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/8, II/27, V/29; Naval Bns 1, 2, 3

- . Res Sqdn/DR 4
- . Res Can Batty/FKR 6, 6 Batty/FKR 14
- . 4 Comp/SB 6; four fortress balloon dets
- . 4 Fort Arty Bde (GM Hlavacek) = 17 fort, 10 reserve and 10 Ma comps of Fort Arty Regt 4; 2 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 3
- . Rovigno and Albona coast defense sectors - Each had 4 coast defense dets of 100 men plus several gendarme posts and finance and cable watch troops
- . Lussin island - An infantry det, a Marine Lst det; 4<sup>th</sup> Fort Comp and 4<sup>th</sup> Res Comp/Fort Arty Regt 4

**TOTALS** for the Italian theater of operation (mid-October 1915) = 245 bns, 62 vol rifle bns and dets, 30 sqdns, 256 mobile batties, 117 fort arty comps, 41 tech comps, 7 flieg cops; about 268,300 foot, 3000 horse and 2310 guns

### Reinforcements for 5<sup>th</sup> Army

1. Units which entered 5<sup>th</sup> Army's sector during the III Battle of the Isonzo (total was 27 bns, 1 sqdn, 5 batties)<sup>37</sup>

a) Arrived from Carinthia...

- . On 25 October at Ranziano - Bns III/18, II/37, IV/77
- . On 3 November at Podmelec - Bns III/57, III/BH 2

b) Arrived from Tyrol on 25 October at Ranziano - ½ Res Bn/IR 29; Bns I/KJR 2, II/L-Sch Regt II<sup>38</sup>

c) Arrived from the Russian front in Wippach valley, beginning on 27 October:

- . 6<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Prince Schönburg)
  - . 11 Inf Bde (GM Walter Ritt. von Schreitter) = IR 17 (2 ½); FJB 7, 8, 9
  - . 12 Inf Bde (Col Rudolf Müller) = IR 7 (3), BH 2 (2)
  - . 6 FA Bde (Col Edl von Steiner) = FKR 9 (5), I Bn/FHR 3 (2)
  - . 5 Comps/SB 8

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37 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Despite the total figure, the original doesn't show any cavalry sqdn; presumably the 6 ID had a sqdn which was omitted in error.

38 The 5 ½ bns which arrived at Ranziano on 25 October (3 from Carinthia and 2 ½ from Tyrol) were united as the Army's reserve under Col Konstantin Ritter von Wasserthal. The bns from Tyrol didn't enter the fighting; after the arrival of 6 ID they were returned to the Tyrol Land Defense HQ.

d) Arrived from Sylvania on 21 October at Trieste  
 . k.k. 206 Lst Inf Bde (Col von Szabo) = IV & V Bns/LW IR 37;  
 k.k. Lst Bn 35; k.k. Lst Ma Bn 7; k.u. Lst Eta Bns I & II/29  
 (The Brigade was broken up in mid-November - The two bns of LW  
 IR 37 went to 28 ID, the two Hungarian Eta bns formed the new  
 III Bn of Lst IR 29 in k.u. 16 Mtn Bde. Lst Ma Bn 7 and Lst Bn  
 35 were split up as replacements among the troops of 106 Lst ID.  
 The brigadier took over command of k.u. 19 Mtn Bde.)

e) Arrived from Pola at Selo on 29 October (later to XV Corps)  
 . k.k. Lst IR 26 (3)

2. Units which entered 5<sup>th</sup> Army's sector during the IV Battle of  
 the Isonzo (total was 23 bn, 1 sqdn, 6 batties, 4 tech comps)

a) Arrived from Carinthia on 15 November: Bns IV and V/IR 27

b) Arrived from Tyrol on 23 November: k.k. Lst Bns 165, 169;  
 Res Bn III/37 (they came temporarily, until 16 December)

c) Arrived from the Russian front...

. 9<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edl von Schenk) on 21 November  
 . 17 Inf Bde (GM Ritter von Mossig) = IR 91 (3), 102 (2)  
 . 18 Inf Bde (Col Wokoun) = IR 11 (3), 73 (4)  
 . Div Cavalry = Res Sqdn/UR 12  
 . 9 FA Bde (Col Baumann) = FKR 24 (4), I Bn/FHR 8 (2)  
 . 5 Comp/SB 2  
 . 9 Inf Bde (Col Trimmel) on 26 November. Had IR 54 (4), 93 (2)

d) Three technical companies (details lacking)

### THE ITALIAN ARMY

Commander-in-Chief = King Victor Emmanuel III

Chief of Staff = G.Lt Conte Cadorna (as the King's pleni-  
 potentiary)

**1<sup>st</sup> Army** (Trent front)

(6 ½ reinforced ID; about 114 bns, 16 sqdns, 70 batties)

Commander = G.Lt Brusati

III Corps

. 5 ID - Bdes Cuneo [IR 5, 6], Palermo [67, 68]; 27 AR  
 . 6 ID - Bdes Sicilia [IR 61, 62], Toscana [77, 78]; 16 AR  
 . Some Alpini

- . Corps troops - 7 Bersag Regt; 27 Cav Regt; 6 AR (to Isonzo in late Oct); several Finance bns; a volunteer motorcycle bn

V Corps

- . 9 ID - Bdes Puglie [IR 71, 72], Roma [79, 80]; 29 AR  
(At the end of October the Div HQ, along with one brigade each of 5 and 35 ID, moved to the Isonzo front)
- . 34 ID - Bdes Treviso [IR 115, 116], Ivrea [161, 162]; 41 AR
- . 35 ID - Bdes Novara [IR 153, 154], Milano [159, 160]; 42 AR
- . Some Alpini
- . Corps troops - 4 Bersag Regt; 22 Cav Regt; 5 AR; several independent Bersaglieri and Finance battalions

Directly under 1<sup>st</sup> Army

- . 15 ID - Bdes Abruzzi [IR 57, 58], Venezia [83, 84]; 19 AR
- . Bde Mantova (in Verona garrison) - IR 113, 114
- . Several heavy batteries

**4<sup>th</sup> Army** (Cadore)

Commander = G.Lt Nicolis di Robilant

(5 reinforced ID; about 74 bns, 10 sqdns, 73 batties)

## IX Corps

- . 1 ID - Bdes Parma [IR 49, 50], Basilicata [91, 92]; 25 AR
- . 17 ID - Bdes Reggio [IR 45, 46], Torino [81, 82]; 13 AR
- . 18 ID - Bdes Alpi [IR 51, 52], Calabria [59, 60]; 33 AR
- . 3 Alpini Bde (of three bns)
- . Corps troops - 3 Bersag Regt; 9 CR; 1 AR; several heavy batteries

## I Corps

- . 2 ID - Bdes Como [IR 23, 24], Umbria [IR 53, 54]; 17 AR
- . 10 ID (moved to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army at end of October) - Bdes Marche [IR 55, 56], Ancona [IR 69, 70]
- . One Alpini bn and one Bersaglieri bn
- . Corps troops - 8 Bersag Regt; 21 CR; 8 AR; several heavy batteries

**Zona Carnia** ("Carnic Group")

Commander = G.Lt Lequio

(Over just one corps; 2 reinforced ID; 37 bns, 6 sqdns, 49 batties)

## XII Corps

- . 24 ID - Bde Piemonte [IR 3, 4]; 2 Alpini Bde (of four bns); 36 AR
- . 26 ID - Bdes Catania [IR 145, 146]; 1 Alpini Bde (of seven bns); 49 AR
- . Corps troops - 10 Provisional Bersag Regt; 15 CR; 10 AR; several Finance bns; some heavy batteries

**2<sup>nd</sup> Army** (on upper and middle Isonzo)

Commander = G.Lt Frugoni

(11 ½ ID, 2 Alpini groups, 10 to 12 independent bns; total of 163 bns, about 24 sqdns, 164 batties)

## IV Corps

- . 7 ID - Bdes Bergamo [IR 25, 26], Valtellina [65, 65]; 21 AR
- . 8 ID - Bdes Modena [IR 41, 42], Salerno [89, 90]; 28 AR
- . 33 ID - Bdes Emilia [IR 119, 120], Liguria [157, 158]; 40 AR
- . Bersaglieri Div - 6, 9, 11, 12 Bersag Regts; Mondovi Arty Group; attached Bde Aosta [IR 5, 6]
- . Alpini Command - Groups A and B (each of several bns)
- . Corps troops - 5 Bersag Regt; 14 CR; 4 AR; several independent Bersaglieri and Bersaglieri Bike Bns

## VIII Corps

- . 27 ID - Bdes Benevento [IR 133, 134], Campania [135, 136]; 38 AR
- . Half of 13 ID - Bde Messina [IR 93, 94]; 31 AR
- . Corps troops - 23 CR; 7 AR; several Bersaglieri Bns

## II Corps

- . 3 ID - Bdes Ravenna [IR 37, 38], Forli [43, 44]; 23 AR
- . 4 ID - Bdes Livorno [IR 33, 34], Lombardia [73, 74]; 26 AR
- . 32 ID - Bdes Spezia [IR 125, 126], Firenze [127, 128]; 48 AR
- . Corps troops - 16 CR; 11 AR

## VI Corps

- . 11 ID - Bdes Re [IR 1, 2], Pistoia [35, 36]; 14 AR
- . 12 ID - Bdes Casale [IR 11, 12], Pavia [27, 28]; 30 AR
- . Corps troops - 17 CR; 3 AR; several Bersaglieri Bike Bns; one Finance Bn

Directly under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

- . Bde Sardegna from 13 ID [Grenadier Regts 1, 2]
- . Several Bersaglieri Bike Bns

**3<sup>rd</sup> Army** (on lower Isonzo)

(9 ½ ID; 125 bns, 20 sqdns, 136 batties)

Commander = G.Lt Duca di Aosta

## XIV Corps

- . 28 ID - Bdes Bari [IR 139, 140], Catanzaro [IR 141, 142]; 45 AR
- . 29 ID - Bdes Perugia [IR 129, 130], Lazio [131, 132]; 37 AR
- . 30 ID - Bdes Piacenza [IR 111, 112], Alessandria [155, 156]; 39 AR
- . Half of 23 ID - Bde Napoli [IR 75, 76]
- . Corps troops - Several Bersaglieri Bns

## X Corps

- . 19 ID - Bdes Siena [IR 31, 32], Bologna [39, 40]; 24 AR
- . 20 ID - Bdes Savona [IR 15, 16], Cagliari [IR 63, 64]; 34 AR
- . Corps troops - 18 CR; 12 AR; several Bersaglieri and Bersaglieri Bike Bns

## VII Corps

- . 14 ID - Bdes Pinerolo [IR 13, 14], Acqui [17, 18]; 18 AR; reinforced by an unspecified infantry regt
- . Special column (of 6 bns)
- . 16 ID - Bdes Cremona [IR 21, 22], Friuli [87, 88]; 32 AR

- . Bde Trapani from 23 ID [IR 149, 150]
- . Corps troops - 29 CR; 2 AR

Directly under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (not engaged in the fighting)

- . Bdes Caltanissetta [IR 147, 148] and Padova [IR 117, 118]

#### **Reserves of the high command**

(4 ID, 4 CD; 49 bns, 4 Bersaglieri Bike Bns, 92 sqdns, 50 batties)

XI Corps

- . 21 ID - Bdes Regina [IR 9, 10], Pisa [29, 30]; 35 AR
- . 22 ID - Bdes Brescia [IR 19, 20], Ferrara [47, 48]; 15 AR
- . Corps troops - 11 CR; 9 AR

XIII Corps

- . 25 ID - Bdes Macerata [IR 121, 122], Sassari [151, 152]; 46 AR
- . 31 ID - Bdes Chieti [IR 123, 124], Barletta [137, 138]; 43 AR
- . Corps troops - 1<sup>st</sup> bis (or 13 Provisional) Bersag Regt; 2 CR

Cavalry Corps (on both sides of the Tagliamento and on coast guard)

- . 1 CD - 1 Bde [CR 13, 20], 2 Bde [CR 4, 5]; 1 Horse Arty Group
- . 2 CD - 3 Bde [CR 7, 10], 4 Bde [CR 6, 25]; 2 Horse Arty Group
- . 3 CD - 5 Bde [CR 12, 24], 6 Bde [CR 3, 8]; 3 Horse Arty Group
- . 4 CD - 7 Bde [CR 1, 26], 8 Bde [CR 19, 28]; 4 Horse Arty Group

(Thus the forces available on the Isonzo in mid-October opposite the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army and 44 LW ID for the fall offensive were 338 bns and 343 batties (not counting the Cavalry Corps))

#### **Forces outside Italy**

In Libya, the Dodecanese [Aegean islands] and in Albania there were about 65 bns and 6 sqdns, as well as a number of field and mountain batties.

#### **Reinforcements to the Isonzo during the fall fighting**

- . At the end of October and start of December - 9 ID from 1<sup>st</sup> Army, 10 ID from 4<sup>th</sup> Army
- . In mid-November: Bde Novara (half of 35 ID) from 1<sup>st</sup> Army

**TOTALS** of Italian units opposing the Aus-Hung. Southwest Front in mid-October = 35 ID, 1 Bersaglieri Div, 3 independent Bdes, 2 Alpini Bdes, several Alpini Groups, 4 CD. About 566 bns, 170 sqdns, 500 batties.

E. Units outside the three areas of operation

In Transylvania...

- . 70 Hon ID (GM Goldbach) (Reorganized from the Transylvania Gendarme Division by incorporating Honved Ersatz troops)  
Had 9600 foot, 300 horse, 42 guns
  - . 207 Hon Inf Bde (Col Andreas Berger) = HIR 312 (3), 313 (3)
  - . 208 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Csicsery) = HIR 314 (3), 315 (3)
  - . Div Cavalry = Hon Hussar Bn 70 (2)
  - . 7 Batty/FKR 35; 9 cm Can Batties "1/70" through "7/70"; 6 Batty/FHR 16; one 12 cm Can Batty M.61
  - . Three Miners' Bns (made up of draftable workers in the Petroseny coal fields)

The fortified Danube line (FZM Benda)

- . Krems bridgehead (GM Hauninger) (1400 foot) = k.k. Lst Bns 25, 83; Lst Watch Bn II; one fort arty comp, three Lst arty dets
- . Tulln bridgehead (GM Krasel) (1500 foot) = k.k. Lst Bns 63, 82, 84; one fort arty comp; two Lst arty dets
- . Vienna bridgehead (FML Fath) (6000 foot)...
  - . k.k. 3 Lst Terr Bde (GM Freih. von Hartlieb) = k.k. Lst Bns 21, 22, 23, 64, 65, 92, 93; Lst Watch Bns I, III and II/39
  - . Five fort arty comps, 8 Lst arty dets
- . Pressburg bridgehead (GM Ritter von Bolberitz) (1300 foot)
  - . k.k. 8 Lst Terr Bde (GM Ritt. von Grasern) = k.k. Lst Bns 59, 61
  - . One fort arty comp; two Lst arty dets
- . Komorn fortress/bridgehead (FML Meister) (2000 foot) = k.k. Lst Bns 50, 55, 56; k.u. Lst Eta Bn 508; four fort arty comps, three Lst arty dets
- . Budapest bridgehead (GM von Lilienhoff) (4000 foot)
  - . k.k. 11 Lst Terr Bde (GM von Grimm) = k.k. Lst Bns 85, 90, 91, 94, 95; k.u. Lst Eta Bn I/7
  - . Three fort arty comps; nine Lst arty dets

TOTALS for units outside the three areas of operations = 43 bns, 2 sqdns, 10 batties, 15 fort arty comps, 27 Lst arty dets; 25,800 foot, 300 horse, 42 mobile guns

E. The operational fleet (as of mid-September)

Commander = Admiral Haus

1<sup>st</sup> Squadron (Vice Admiral Njegovan)

- . 1<sup>st</sup> Division (V.A. Njegovan) = Viribus unitis, Tegetthoff, Prinz Eugene, Szent Istvan (each about 20,300 T)
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (Vice Admiral Willenik) = Erzherzog Franz Ferdinand, Zrinyi, Radetzky (each about 14,500 T)

2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron (Vice Admiral Löfler)

- . 3<sup>rd</sup> Division (V.A. Löfler) = Erzherzog Karl, Erzherzog Friedrich, Erzherzog Ferdinand Max (each about 10,600 T)
- . 4<sup>th</sup> Division (Counter Admiral Seidensacher) = Habsburg, Arpad, Babenberg (each 8300 T)

## Cruiser Flotilla (Vice Admiral Fiedler)

- . 1<sup>st</sup> Cruiser Division (V.A. Fiedler) = Sankt Georg (7300 T), Kaiser Karl VI (6300 T), Novara (3500 T), Saida (3500 T), Aspern (2400 T), Szigetvar (2300 T)
- . 1<sup>st</sup> Torpedo Flotilla (L.Sch Capt Seitz) = Flagship Helgoland (3500 T); 12 destroyers, 9 torpedo boats
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Torpedo Flotilla (L.Sch Capt von Millenkovich) = Flagship Admiral Spaun (3500 T); 7 destroyers and 18 torpedo boats

Submarine Flotilla = 11 submarines

## Guarding sectors of the coast...

- . 5<sup>th</sup> Division (Counter Admiral Hansa) = Monarch, Wien, Budapest (each about 5600 T)
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Cruiser Division (L.Sch Capt Grund) = Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia (5200 T), Kaiser Franz Joseph I (4000 T), Panther (1530 T)
- . Also - Pola Sea Defense Command, Trieste Sea District Command, Sebenico S.D.C., and Castelnuovo S.D.C. They had a number of special vessels, 7 destroyers and 38 torpedo boats.

Danube Flotilla (L.Sch Capt Lucich) (under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ)

- . In the Danube
  - . 1<sup>st</sup> Monitor Division - Temes, Enns, Bodrog, Maros; patrol boats "i" and "f"; minesweeper Balaton
  - . 2<sup>nd</sup> Monitor Division - Sava, Inn, Köröss, Leitha; patrol boats "k" and "h"; minesweeper Vag
  - . Armed steamer group - Almos, Helena, Samson
  - . Motor boat detachment - 9 boats, a river mine detachment, train
- . In the Sava (Sava Monitor Group) - Szamos; the armed steamer Una, one motor boat



## II. The Rovno Campaign

### ***A. The offensive of the Aus-Hung. Army in Volhynia and east Galicia***

#### **1. Preparations of the armies under the k.u.k. high command**

As of 25 August, the X Corps (24 and 62 ID) and IX Corps (10 ID and 26 LW ID) had finished their deployment between the Luga and the Turya, and XIV Corps (3 ID and 21 LW ID) had reached Kovel. At this point FZM Puhallo wheeled with his northern wing toward the southeast to envelop 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. Since it was assumed that until now the Russians were holding the front only as far as the Luga with infantry, X Corps would strike the main blow in the direction of Lokaczy, while IX Corps would thrust ahead to Torczyn and be prepared to intervene through Zaturcy in the actions of X Corps. 4 CD would advance in step with IX Corps along the road leading from Kovel to Luck. XIV Corps would follow 4 CD, so that its leading elements would be ready to cross the Stokhod on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The troops along the Luga upstream from Zimno and those on the Bug as far as the mouth of the Rata would join the attack by the northern wing; they were FML Szurmay's Corps (40 Hon ID and 7 ID), I Corps (9 ID and 46 LW ID) and II Corps (25 ID). The Army's reserve was 13 LW ID, which meanwhile was coming up behind X Corps.

On the upper Zlota Lipa, GdK Böhm-Ermolli had already been long preparing the attack by the southern wing of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. He gave the V Corps, which was three divisions strong (14, 34 and 33 ID), the 43 LW ID (three regiments) as its reserve, and reinforced it with artillery. Thus FML Goglia had 44,000 riflemen and 182 guns on a front that was 20 km long. The first objective of his Corps was the edge of the valley west of the Zloczowka. The Army's left wing consisted of FML Czibulka's Corps (31 ID, 1 Lst Inf Bde, and 1 CD, reinforced by one regiment of 43 LW ID and by 1 Lst Huss Bde); they would advance in conjunction with II Corps of 1<sup>st</sup> Army if that unit gained ground. The center contained XIX Corps (29 ID), IV Corps (51 Hon ID) and XVIII Corps (27 and 32 ID); they would join the attack by Goglia's V Corps. The goal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was to pursue the Russians to the Ikwa at Werba.

GdI Graf Bothmer, the commander of the South Army, instructed

GdK Freih. Marschall's Corps on his north wing to make the decisive attack. Its 3 Gd ID (GM von Lindequist) was reinforced by parts of 19 ID, 48 Res ID and 38 Hon ID; they would break through the Russian front at Buszcze (below Dunajow) in the direction of Zborow. At the same time the main body of 48 Res ID and FML Hofmann's Corps (55 ID, 131 Inf Bde, and Col Edler von Bolzano's Bde) would attack over the Zlota Lipa at Zawalow. In 7<sup>th</sup> Army, GdK Freih. von Pflanzer-Baltin reinforced XIII Corps (36 ID and main body of 15 ID) with half of 5 ID (9 Inf Bde) from FML Ritt. von Henriquez's Corps (5 and 30 ID, 8 CD), by IR # 16 from the Army's reserve, and by four batteries. On 27 August, at the same time as South Army, XIII Corps would attack over the lower Zlota Lipa and out of the bends in the Dniester at Koropiec and Kosmierzyn. Once this operation on the Army's left wing succeeded, Pflanzer-Baltin then wanted to strike the Russians still on the Dniester with a two-pronged attack; for this purpose FML Ritt. von Benigni's Corps (6 ID; 3, 5 and 6 CD) would thrust north on the 29<sup>th</sup> out of their bridgehead at Sinkow. Therefore the 10 Inf Bde of 5 ID was replaced at Henriquez's front by his Corps' reserve, 8 CD; along with the rest of the Army's reserve, IR # 66, the 10 Bde was sent to Benigni's Corps.

#### Prospects for the offensive

Because there had been a long period of quiet on the entire front in east Galicia, all the preparations for the attack were carried out undisturbed. The ammunition columns were filled to capacity. The XII March battalions of the Landwehr and XIII Bns of the common Army, which arrived in mid-August, had been incorporated into the Armies; thus their divisions had attained a strength of about 8000 to 10,000 riflemen apiece. In total, GO Conrad had 38 ½ infantry and 8 ½ cavalry divisions to carry out his plans. According to the calculations of the k.u.k. high command, Ivanov had 29 infantry and 14 cavalry divisions. Thus the Russians had only around one third as many infantry units. FZM Puhallo had a decisive advantage on his north wing. Here there were 9 infantry and 1 cavalry divisions available at the start of the offensive; in the 50 km wide gap in the Russian front between the Luga and Roziszcze they were opposed for the moment by just 2 infantry and 4 cavalry divisions. Apparently the only unit farther north (as far as the Pripyat) was the Russian IV Cavalry Corps of 2 divisions, so at this time there was no danger to the northern flank. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and South Armies had 15 ½ infantry and 1 ½ cavalry divisions against the Russians' 9 to 13 infantry and 1 or 2 cavalry divisions, so their situation was also favorable. Only in 7<sup>th</sup> Army's sector was the balance of forces tilted in favor of the Russians; here

the Austro-Hungarians' 8 infantry and 5 cavalry divisions were opposed by 8 or 9 infantry and 6 to 8 cavalry divisions.

One disadvantage to the upcoming offensive was the peculiarity of the terrain on which the Aus-Hung. high command had to mount their thrust against the Russian Southwest Front. From the Galician-Podolian watershed the tributaries of the Dniester flow to the south through deep valleys: the Zlota Lipa, Strypa, Sereth and Zbrucz. They provided the Russians with a parallel series of excellent lines of resistance; each was no more than one day's march distant from the next. In the north were the Bug and the swampy area around the source of the Luga, the Turya and the Stokhod, as well as the stocky flat valleys of the Styr and the Horyn with their tributaries the Sierna, Polonka, Putilowka and Stubiel; all of them made troop movement very difficult.

The supply situation of the k.u.k. Armies was also quite unfavorable. The Russians had destroyed all the railroads during their retreat. At the end of August the line from Radom through Lublin and Cholm toward Kovel was still broken where the bridge over the Vistula had been blown up at Ivangorod. This vital main supply artery thus could be reached only by a stretch of track from Rozwadow through Krasnik; it had been built during the war and had a limited capacity. Behind the decisive sector, the left wing, the railroad could be used only between Lublin and Cholm. There was only a military field line from Belz to Vladimir-Volynsky. The 1<sup>st</sup> Army suffered from the fact that its line of supply was over 150 km long. The main rail lines through Rawa Russka and through Lemberg were already running to points just behind the right wing, but in many places they had only been temporarily patched up; hundreds of "caution signs" and a lack of water stations hindered the establishment of regularly scheduled traffic. On the other side, the Russians could send reinforcements to Volhynia on a large-capacity, strategically-sited rail net, consisting of the lines Kiev-Sarny, Kiev-Rovno, and Odessa-Tarnopol; there was also a useful connecting route from Brody through Rovno to Sarny. Nonetheless, it seemed possible that a great success could be won if the left wing attacked quickly to envelop the enemy.

## **2. The general situation of the Russians**

In the days when the Aus-Hung. forces concentrated in Volhynia were threatening the Russian Southwest Front with envelopment, the Stavka's attention was directed entirely toward the north

wing of their armies. For a long time, the German advance in Lithuania and Courland had caused earnest concerns in Petersburg for the security of the capital city.<sup>39</sup> Kovno fell on 17 August, and Hindenburg let the 10<sup>th</sup> German Army attack north of the Bobr from Augustow to Grodno, over the Niemen, and in the direction of Vilna. Therefore the Stavka did all they could to guard the flank of the central armies as they retreated from Brest-Litovsk to the line Pinsk-Slonim. They sent reinforcements to the threatened area. At the end of August the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Armies were dissolved; some of their units merged into the new 12<sup>th</sup> Army which was being assembled at Riga, others - along with the Guard Corps - deployed at Vilna.<sup>40</sup> On the night of 30-31 August, the division of the Northwest Front, which had been planned since the end of July, took effect. GdI Russky became commander of the new North Front, consisting of 12<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies plus the Petersburg reserve force (6<sup>th</sup> Army). The other Armies of the former Northwest Front (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) became the "West Front" under General Alexeiev.

Since 22 June, the day when Lemberg fell, the Southwest Front had been operating under the Stavka's order to General Ivanov that his Armies should gradually fall back to the border of the Kiev Military District. Meanwhile, however, they always were to maintain a firm front to slow the enemy advance. General Ivanov's task was considerably eased by the geography of the area in which his armies operated. Making excellent use of the terrain, General Savitsch (the Southwest Front's Chief of Staff) had prepared a series of positions, the westernmost of which ran behind the upper Bug, the Olszanica and the Zlota Lipa.

Here GdK Brussilov's 8<sup>th</sup> Army was standing at the end of August on the Bug with XII, VIII, XVII and VII Corps, plus Rehrberg's Cavalry Corps (a total of 8 ½ infantry and 4 cavalry divisions). Farther south, on a line running through the Galicia-Podolia watershed between the Brody-Lemberg and Tarnopol-Rohatyn railroads, was GdI Shcherbatchev's 11<sup>th</sup> Army; it had VI, XVIII and XXII Corps (a total of 6 ½ infantry and 1 ½ cavalry divisions). Still farther south was GdI Letschitzky's 9<sup>th</sup> Army on the lower Zlota Lipa, the Dniester and the eastern border of the Bukovina; it had XI, XXX, XXXIII and XXXII Corps plus the II and III Cavalry Corps (totaling 13 infantry and 7 ½ cavalry

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39 Paleologue, "La Russie des tsars" (Paris, 1921), Vol. I, pp. 389 ff. Knox, "With the Russian Army 1914-1917" (New York, 1921), pp. 329 ff.

40 Danilov, "Russland im Weltkriege" (German edition - Jena, 1925), pp. 537 ff.

divisions).

The long pause in operations on this part of the eastern front had enabled the commanders of the Russian armies to provide badly needed rest to their troops, who were unnerved from the previous heavy fighting. Ivanov brought up as many replacement troops as possible from the interior of Russia. Thus the average effective strength of his divisions, some of which had been reduced to 4000 combatants and were melting away, back up to 7000 men. The replacement troops, however, were barely trained, and lacked officers, non-commissioned officers, rifles and especially artillery ammunition.<sup>41</sup> Therefore some of the guns had to be pulled back from the front. During the summer Ivanov had to give up at least 11 divisions for the Northwest Front. These included two divisions (58 and 78) which were sent in mid-July to garrison Novogeorgievsk, and six whole divisions plus 120 companies which left for the north at the start of August due to the danger threatening Vilna and Riga. Thus at the end of August Ivanov had available no more than 31 infantry and 12 cavalry divisions.

Meanwhile the retreat of the former 13<sup>th</sup> Army from Kovel and Wlodawa caused great concern about the Front's northern wing. Ivanov ordered General Brussilov to stretch his right wing from Poryck to Luck and to secure the roads leading from Roziszczce to Sarny and Alexandriya (these were railroad stations north of Rovno); General Gillenschmidt's IV Cavalry Corps would cover the area toward Kamien Kaszyrsky and Ratno. Brussilov, who was aware that substantial enemy forces were advancing between Vladimir-Volynsky and Kovel, built a covering force behind the upper Stokhod (between Kisielin and Poryck) with his four cavalry divisions. He also pulled XII Corps from the center of his Army and moved it to Torczyn and Swiniuchy, and suggested an immediate retreat. Ivanov, however, wanted to stand fast in the good positions behind the upper Bug; he intended to send XXXIX Corps (formed with one second-line division apiece from 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies) to guard this flank.<sup>42</sup>

Before the new Corps arrived in Luck with its relatively weak units, FZM Puhallo had opened the offensive of his left wing.

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41 Paleologue, Vol. I, pp. 372 ff. "Memoires du General Broussilov - Guerre 1914-1918") (in French, Paris 1929), pp. 142 ff.

42 Broussilov, pp. 152 ff.

***B. The advance to the Strya and the Strypa, 26-31 August*****1. Actions of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army at Zaturcy**

The attacking groups of 1<sup>st</sup> Army moved southeast on 26 August in the territory around the sources of the Luga, Turya and Stokhod on foot-bridges through the swamps, through thick woods, and small ridges of hills lying between them. In the afternoon X Corps reached the Chorostow area during heavy fighting with Russian cavalry; IX Corps was advancing to Makowczy and trying to win the crossing points over the Stokhod at Kisielin. XIV Corps, which was tired from marching, came up to Lubitow. 4 CD wasn't opposed by the enemy and hurried ahead to Holoby. Behind the Army's pivoting wing, 7 CD was arriving at Luboml and FML Smekal's Group (4 ID and 45 LW ID) at Cholm.

Based on reports received in the morning, FZM Puhallo had the impression that the Russians in front of his Army's left wing intended to withdraw to the stretch of the Strypa around Luck. This impression was strengthened by news that 12 ID of XII Russian Corps, stationed behind the Luga at Poryck, was marching to Torczyn. Puhallo ordered his north wing to advance somewhat beyond the goals which had been set for the 26<sup>th</sup>. The X and IX Corps should pass the line Biskupiczy-Wojmica-Kisielin-Stokhod around 6:00 AM on the 27<sup>th</sup>; they were to attack toward Szelwow-Torczyn-Ulaniki. Szurmay's Corps, along with 24 ID of X Corps, would attack the enemy north of Biskupiczy and with 9 ID of Ist Corps would attain the line Steniatyn-Szelwow. The advance elements of XIV Corps (21 LW ID, 3 ID and the attached 2 ID) should reach Holoby on the 26<sup>th</sup>; on the next day their goal would be the area southeast of Perespa. 4 CD would guard the Army's northern flank; 13 LW ID would continue to follow the right wing of X Corps. Thus eleven infantry and one cavalry divisions were making an envelopment attack into an area in which the enemy - as far as could be determined - had much weaker forces: two infantry (12 and 19 ID of XII Corps) and three or four cavalry divisions.

FML Szurmay's Corps crossed the Luga between Markostaw and Zytanie after darkness fell on the 26<sup>th</sup>; they pushed back the Russian rear guards entrenched on the eastern bank, and by the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> reached the area between Poryck and Szelwow. On Szurmay's right, 9 ID of Ist Corps started to advance early on the 27<sup>th</sup> and by evening was nearly on the line Steniatyn-Poryck. Here, and between Poryck and Szelwow, the enemy offered new resistance in hastily-prepared positions. X Corps,

advancing on this day through Lokaczy-Wojmica during hard fights with Russian horsemen, reached the area north of Szelwów and east of Zaturcy. In front of IX Corps the enemy gave up Kisielin and the nearby Stokhod crossing points during the night. Early on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the 10 ID pivoted toward Zaturcy, while 26 LW ID advanced toward Chorochorin, fighting several skirmishes with Russian cavalry. Here the IX Corps came to a halt in front of entrenched Russian outposts which defended the routes leading into the low ground along the Siernabach. In the afternoon there was a critical moment when 12 Russian ID, which had halted at Torczyn, counterattacked the center of IX Corps. In furious actions which lasted until darkness fell the Russian thrust was halted by 26 LW ID, and further progress was made at Chorochorin.

On the left of IX Corps, the XIV Corps had meanwhile reached the Perespa area with 21 LW ID, the Stokhod with 3 ID, and Holoby with 2 ID (which was moving up from Kovel). 4 CD advanced to the northeast and reached the Styr at and downstream from Roziszczce, without meeting noteworthy enemy resistance.

## **2. The Battles of Gologory and of the Złota Lipa**

On 27 August, the day on which the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, advancing from Vladimir-Volynsky and Kovel to the southeast, was already deep in the flank of the main body of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army standing on the the upper Bug, the Armies of Böhm-Ermolli, Bothmer and Pflanzer also went over to the offensive.

Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, at 8:00 AM the guns of V Corps (14, 34 and 33 ID, 43 LW ID) opened their bombardment of the Russian trenches from Ciemierzynce to Gologory. After a one-hour artillery battle, the first regiments to attack over the Złota Lipa were those of 14 ID on the right wing. Around noon they broke into the positions of VI Russian Corps upstream from Dunajów. Meanwhile 34 ID, their neighbor on the left, had also crossed the Złota Lipa, though suffering heavy casualties, and stormed the forested heights southeast of Gologory. In the afternoon the Russians counter-attacked 14 and 34 ID. Nevertheless, both divisions, after the intervention of half of 43 LW ID, registered further gains; only the north wing of 34 ID was pushed back again to the Złota Lipa. The right wing of 33 ID joined the advance of 34 ID; in the evening it was struck by a Russian attack from Gologory. Then the Hungarian (Esztergom) IR "Schreiber" # 26 hit back; after difficult fighting that lasted until late at night they conquered the village. Around this time there was a lively fire fight involving 34 and 14 ID, but

the Russians launched no further counterattacks from the heights on their side of the eastern Zlota Lipa.

Over 2000 prisoners were brought in during the day; our own units lost about 4500 men in this costly offensive.

The offensive on 27 August also netted a gratifying gain of ground for South Army. On the north flank the attacking group of Marschall's Corps (consisting of 3 Gd ID plus troops from 48 Res ID, 38 Hon ID and 19 ID) broke through the stubbornly defended positions of XVIII Russian Corps during the morning at Buszcze (downstream from Dunajow). In the afternoon they threw back to Pomorzany some enemy reserves who had counterattacked. Meanwhile toward noon the regiments of 48 ID and of Corps Hofmann's 55 ID crossed the Zlota Lipa at Zawalow on hastily erected bridges; powerfully supported by artillery, they took the entrenchments of XI Russian Corps on the eastern bank. The left wing of Col. Bolzano's Brigade joined the advance toward evening. In this sector the Russians also made bloody counterattacks until long after darkness fell, but they were repulsed. During the day the South Army brought in more than 2000 prisoners.

In Pflanzler-Baltin's Army the attack opened with a diversionary maneuver by Henriquez's Corps at dawn on 27 August. Under XIII Corps the center of 15 ID broke into the Russian positions at Kosmierzyn, while the left wing was still pinned down in front of Koropiec. The main blow by the reinforced 36 ID from the area east of Uscie Zielone couldn't start until 10:00 AM. Heavy fog hampered the artillery preparation. After a hard fight, the Division forced its way over the Zlota Lipa on the road leading from Uscie Zielone to Monasterzyska. In the afternoon they captured the heights just east of the river, and created a bridgehead that was about 10 km wide and 2 km deep. In the evening and night the XXX Russian Corps counterattacked, but was defeated; about 800 prisoners were taken. However, the group from 15 ID which had broken into the enemy position at Kosmierzyn had to be pulled back to their starting positions because of Russian fire on their flank. The attack of the northern wing of GdI Freih. von Rhemen's group would resume on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Simultaneously the South Army and V Corps, who had now driven the enemy from their entrenchments on the Zlota Lipa in several places, would complete their breakthrough.

On the northern wing of the entire front, FZM Puhallo wanted to continue the envelopment attack toward Swiniuchy-Torczyn with Szurmay's and X Corps on the 28<sup>th</sup>. IX Corps would secure the

eastern bank of the Sierna and XIV Corps would advance to Roziszcze.

### 3. The Capture of Luck

Because of the threat to his northern flank and the powerful blows which his opponents were striking on the Zlota Lipa, General Ivanov decided on the evening of 27 August to pull back his entire front -

- . The 8<sup>th</sup> Army behind the Sierna (covering Luck) and then to the watershed between the Bug and Styr on the line Torczyn-Swiniuchy-Stojanow-Radziechow-Toporow

- . The northern wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, whose line had been broken, to the heights of Bialy Kamien (which extended ahead like a bastion) and east of Zloczow, and

- . The southern (left) wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army and right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army behind the Strypa.<sup>43</sup>

#### 28 August

Because of the great danger that he would be outflanked, General Brussilov began his retreat on the night of 27-28 August; he abandoned the east bank of the Bug to the southern wing of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> the II Corps began to pursue through Sokal, and Ist Corps through Steniatyn and Poryck; without encountering the enemy, they moved over the pre-war border and through Zawidowo (respectively). Szurmay's Corps as well as the X and IX continued to push weaker Russian forces to the southeast in lively fighting; in the evening they came up to the new enemy positions on both sides of Swiniuchy, at Torczyn, and on the Sierna as far as Ulaniki. On the Army's left wing, the leading troops of XIV Corps encountered resistance in the morning from 3 Orenburg Coss Div in the area west of Roziszcze. GdI Roth sent 3 ID and 21 LW ID into the attack while bringing 2 ID, which marched through Holoby, to Perespa. 4 CD, operating farther north, didn't encounter the enemy; during the afternoon they crossed the Styr at Borowicz on a makeshift bridge.

Early on 28 August the k.u.k. high command had already told FZM Puhallo that to advance quickly through Luck and carry out an

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43 A. Nesnamov, "Strategic Sketches" (in Russian; Moscow, 1992), Part IV, pp. 105 ff. Zayontschovsky "The period of mobile warfare 1914-15 on the Russian-European theater of war (in Russian; Moscow, 1929), p. 370.

effective envelopment offensive, it was especially important that he should cross the Styr with a strong left wing downstream (i.e., north of) Roziszcze. Therefore FZM Puhallo ordered XIV, IX and X Corps to take Luck as quickly as possible. For this purpose, XIV Corps would advance with two divisions on the eastern bank of the Styr and one division on the western bank, while IX Corps threatened the western side of Luck. Around noon, when the AOK learned that XIV Corps was attacking the enemy troops who'd halted on the west bank of the Styr at Roziszcze, they immediately ordered GdI Roth to break off this costly frontal assault and to cross the Styr downstream from Roziszcze, as 4 CD was doing. Meanwhile, however, the enemy had already evacuated Roziszcze. Parts of IR # 59, following the retreating Russians, stormed over the burning bridge; other troops from 3 ID were quickly brought over to the other bank on boats. GdI Roth now wanted to send the main body of 3 ID to the eastern bank of the Styr by the end of the 28<sup>th</sup>, and then to send 21 LW ID after 3 ID. 2 ID would cross the bridge on a military bridge at Czeben. 4 CD, already on the eastern bank, was told to cover the crossing of 2 ID and advance against the roads leading east from Luck.

#### 29 August

Continuing the offensive, on 29 August the 25 ID on the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army attacked the enemy troops who'd halted at Stojanow-Druszkopol. They took firm control of Stojanow, but finally couldn't break through. Ist Corps farther north took all day, moving through forests and swamps without roads, before reaching the enemy positions at Gorochow. In Szurmay's Corps, 7 ID threw the Russians out of their foremost trenches south of Swiniuchy; 40 Hon ID didn't make any substantial progress. The exhausted divisions of X and IX Corps stayed in place and had already reported in the morning that the positions in front of them were strongly occupied. FZM Puhallo now wanted to bring up the artillery, which was lagging behind on the miserable roads; he reported to the high command that on the 30<sup>th</sup> he would attack the strong Russian positions at Swiniuchy and on the Sierna with Szurmay's, X and IX Corps.

To the high command, however, it seemed that the commitment of such strong forces in the center of 1<sup>st</sup> Army would put the success of the planned envelopment maneuver into doubt. GO Conrad expressed his displeasure to FZM Puhallo in a telegram with the following words:

"The AOK is waiting to see binding orders issued to the corps HQ to fully carry out our plans and to achieve the great objective which is surely attainable given our significantly

larger forces. This will only happen, however, if we avoid committing strong forces to useless frontal assaults in sectors determined by the enemy. A full-scale envelopment of the enemy's northern wing will make it impossible for them to hold the Ikwa-Styr line at Dubno and Luck. 4 CD should advance as widely as possible toward Rovno to destroy the rail line there."

Therefore on the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> FZM Puhallo ordered that XIV Corps, which meanwhile had reached the Styr with all three divisions at and north of Roziszczce, would capture the area east of Luck on both sides of the road leading to Rovno, while guarding against a thrust from the former city. He further decided to pull X Corps out of the front, so that on 1 September he could send it through Roziszczce after XIV Corps; this would deal with the possibility that the Russians might send troops by railroad through Rovno against Roth's Corps. Behind the Army's left wing the 7 CD (then marching through Kovel) and FML Smekal's Group could follow through either Roziszczce or Luck. FZM Puhallo, whose HQ meanwhile had moved from Zolkiew to Sokal, reported his intentions to Teschen in the evening. He added to this report that he intended to carry out his earlier orders by enveloping the Bug position, striking the north wing of the Russian Southwest Front, and taking Luck as quickly as possible. He was making Luck the principal objective. Downstream from Roziszczce the XIV Corps and 4 CD had already crossed the Styr; stronger forces weren't available here because the attacking wing of the Army would have to concentrate on the fighting in the Luck area. Above all, IX Corps couldn't be shifted north from its current position near the Styr because it was facing strong enemy forces which had attacked yesterday. He had ordered a redeployment for the new mission of enveloping the Ikwa-Styr line, and on 1 September would have 7 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions available on the eastern bank of the Styr.

GO Conrad still considered the rapid advance of all available units on the northern wing of his force to be of decisive importance for the success of the whole operation. After getting FZM Puhallo's report, Conrad replied late on the 29<sup>th</sup> that the AOK did agree that 1<sup>st</sup> Army should attack in the general direction of Luck, and that the area in which the Army's southern wing advanced should be bounded by a line running due east from Krystynopol toward Werba. However, instead of moving its center toward Luck, by the start of the 29<sup>th</sup> the Army had sent only 3 of the 13 available divisions north of Luck, while the other 10 were deployed against the Styr-Ikwa sector (between Luck and Dubno), which was fortified and unfavorable for an offensive. While the enemy continued to avoid envelopment by retreating, the high command would continue to emphasize that

the attack to the east must be carried out in echelon toward the left, to interfere with the Russian's northern wing and turn their retreat into a catastrophe. It was expected that the arrival of XIV Corps in the area east of Luck would cause the Russians to evacuate their positions on the Sierna; then IX Corps should immediately be sent east over the Styr downstream from Luck. A quick approach to the fortress and its investment on both banks should make it possible to determine whether the enemy intended to make a major effort to hold Luck, and what units 1<sup>st</sup> Army would have to divert to take the place. As the offensive continued, no more than six divisions should be sent toward the area Werba-Dubno-Luck.

In accordance with this order, later in the night of 29-30 August FZM Puhallo told FZM Kralicek that if the enemy pulled back from the Sierna he should pursue only with small mixed detachments; the main body of IX Corps, however, should assemble next to the mouth of the Sierna so that they could cross the Styr as soon as possible and as closely as possible to Luck. The II, I and Szurmay Corps were ordered to attack the enemy if any forces moved away from their fronts.

Meanwhile 3 ID and 21 LW ID, under the leadership of FML Edl. von Horsetzky, were making substantial progress between the Styr and the railroad leading to Rovno. By the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> they were on the heights at Zydyczyn, 10 km north of Luck. Here and at the Kiwercy railroad station (toward which the 2 ID, coming up in the rear, was sent) some Cossacks as well as troops brought up by train hurled themselves against the exhausted Austrian columns. GdI Roth's three divisions fought far into the night against the desperate Russian defenders, without reaching a decision. 4 CD had rode through Trostiniec, and by noon was already just a short distance from the rail line east of the Kiwercy station; LW IR # 6 (from 21 LW ID) was attached to the cavalry. Artillery from 4 CD fired against the station and brought traffic on the railroad to a halt. Pioneers destroyed the tracks.

30 August

Fighting intensified on 30 August because the enemy was reinforced with additional troops. However, all efforts by the Russians to halt their opponents' advance were in vain. Covered by 4 CD, which occupied Palcza, 2 ID stormed the Kiwercy railroad station in a difficult action; by the time darkness fell they reached the area east of the hamlet of Kiwercy. Meanwhile 21 LW ID (at Teremno) and 3 ID had nearly reached the northern front of the Luck fortress. By this time the troops reported the capture of 2000 men, 6 machine guns, 5 locomotives and 2 trains, along with considerable military equipment.

While XIV Corps was fighting hard and advancing victoriously, the Army's center and southern wing spent the 30<sup>th</sup> in waiting; they restricted activity to a continuous fire fight. The movement of X Corps to Roziszcze, as demanded by the high command, necessitated a reorganization of the units in the center after they had already been prepared to attack. 24 and 62 ID were relieved by 10 ID and 13 LW ID; the latter division was placed under Szurmay's Corps. Therefore FZM Puhallo postponed the attack in this part of the front until the 31<sup>st</sup>.

The situation, however, called for a continuation of the offensive on 30 August rather than a postponement. In clear weather on 29 and 30 August the aerial scouts observed long columns marching east from Luck and from Beresteczko; their reports seemed to indicate that the enemy was pulling back on the entire front of 1<sup>st</sup> Army in response to the danger from the north. Also, there was no longer any doubt that the Russians were sending troops by rail through Rovno, because Roth's Corps was bringing in prisoners who said they belonged to XXXIX Corps, and had obviously come from east Galicia. In the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup>, GO Conrad therefore instructed FZM Puhallo that it was urgently necessary to create a cavalry corps under GM Berndt from 4 and 7 CD, and to send it ahead as far as possible along the road leading through Klewan to Rovno; farther north, detachments should be sent to destroy the railroad bridges at Polonno, Antonowka and Sarny. Moreover, FZM Puhallo should promptly report how he intended to use the forces stationed in the Stojanow-Luck area now that the Russians were retreating, and whether he still thought it was necessary for X Corps to shift north through Roziszcze to support the Army's left wing.

In the evening, FZM Puhallo reported to Teschen that the enemy was still in place in front of II and I Corps, in front of Szurmay's Group, and on the Sierna; therefore X Corps would have

to move behind the front of IX Corps to get to the Roziszcze area. On the 31<sup>st</sup> he would attack again; 13 LW ID, now on Szurmay's north wing, would attack Luck. On the same day the front farther right would advance to the Leniewkabach and the line Gubin-Skrykolow; IX Corps would pursue the enemy with small detachments if they pulled back from the Sierna. The main body of this Corps would assemble next to the mouth of the Sierna, so that they could cross the Styr as soon as and as close to Luck as possible.

### 31 August

Around the same time that FZM Puhallo was issuing these directives, Brussilov was ordering a retreat behind the Styr. When morning began on 31 August the Russians evacuated their positions in front of the right wing and center of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. They continued to offer desperate resistance against XIV Corps on the northern wing. Brussilov attempted to save Luck. To General Stelnitzky, commanding his northern wing, he sent the last arriving troops of XXXIX Corps by rail through Klewan; he told Stelnitzky to throw the enemy back to Roziszcze and behind the Styr. However, in the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> the IR # 59 was already storming the railroad station and military barracks in Luck; with the other troops of 3 ID they pushed ahead into the still stubbornly-defended city.<sup>44</sup> On the left of 3 ID, the 21 LW ID and 2 ID pushed south over the Luck-Poddubcy road and in the afternoon won the heights east of the fortress. At this point the last troops of XXXIX Russian Corps arrived on the battlefield and drove the advance detachments of 4 CD back from Palcza. The main body of this division, which was supposed to thrust through Olyka to block the road from Mlynow to Rovno, was still standing on the railroad east of Kliwercy. GM Berndt did push his front ahead toward the east, but in the afternoon the arrival of new Russian forces from Klewan forced him to withdraw a bit toward the north. Toward evening, another Russian attack was held off by 21 LW ID. 7 CD arrived behind 4 CD on the east bank of the Styr.

Meanwhile the pursuing columns of II, I and Szurmay's Corps had reached the line Skrykolow-Gubin, the Leniewka, and the

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44 Here IR # 59 seized a Russian magazine full of flour, enough to supply the needs of 4<sup>th</sup> Army for many months. For these actions, see Hoen - "Geschichte des salzburgisch-österreichischen k.u.k. Infanterieregiments Erzherzog Rainer Nr. 59 für den Zeitraum des Welt-krieges 1914-1918" (Salzburg, 1931), pp. 334 ff.

Antonowka area without fighting. IX Corps crossed the lower Sierna during the morning; upon learning of the Russian withdrawal, FZM Puhallo ordered this corps "to quickly take Luck in cooperation with XIV Corps, if possible today." At 5:00 PM the Corps' 26 LW ID, still without encountering the enemy, came up to the western front of the fortress; at the same time 13 LW ID occupied the works of the southern front, which had already been abandoned.<sup>45</sup> By now the main body of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, although enveloped from the north, had completed the retreat behind the Styr which had been prepared for several days, with all their weapons and equipment. Nonetheless the enemy withdrawal and their evacuation of Luck was a success that also influenced the course of events in east Galicia.

#### 4. The pursuit in east Galicia

Threatened by envelopment from the north, General Ivanov already felt compelled on 27 August to order the retreat from the upper Bug and from the Zlota Lipa.

##### 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

The Russians were already in full retreat in the early morning hours of 28 August in front of the center and left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. During the morning FML Czibulka's Corps and the XVIII and IV Corps crossed the upper Bug and began to pursue the enemy. At the same time XIX Corps began its advance. In front of V Corps the Russians still offered stubborn resistance in the morning east of Gologory and behind the eastern Zlota Lipa; then they also disengaged from their attackers.

Now that Böhm-Ermolli saw the enemy in retreat along his entire front, he wanted to pursue them sharply as far as possible to the east, so that the Russians would have no opportunity to hold onto the watershed between the Bug and Styr and the heights of Zloczow. For the 29<sup>th</sup>, Böhm-Ermolli gave the brooks which were the sources of the Sereth and Styr as goals for his corps. Brody and the crossing points on the Styr upstream from Beresteczko were to be occupied on this day by advanced detachments, and Nw. Poczajew should be reached if possible. Without encountering the enemy, by evening of 28 August the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was able to reach the area west of Zloczow and west of

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45 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The permanent fortifications of Luck were located west and south of the city, to the west of the Styr. XIV Corps had entered Luck from its unprotected northern side.

Bialy Kamien, then the line Adamy-Cholozow-Rozdzalow. However, it soon became apparent that the Russians were occupying a hastily-prepared position on the heights behind the Zloczowka, south of Bialy Kamien, at Ozydow, and west of Toporow, Radziechow and Stojanow.

#### South and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies

In the South Army, GdI Bothmer attempted on 27 August to separate the Russian center, whose line had been broken, from their southern wing. Therefore he ordered his attacking group, Corps Marschall, to continue to push through Pomorzany and Koniuchy to the northeast, toward Zborow. To maintain a continuous front, the 19 ID, main body of 48 Res ID and Corps Hofmann would also advance toward the northeast.

The Russians pulled back from the front of South Army early on 28 August. While Corps Marschall pursued them as ordered, the main body of 48 Res ID and 55 ID (from Corps Hofmann) advanced out of the Russian positions which they had conquered at Zawalow, and toward Kozowa and Podhajce. On the southern wing of Corps Hofmann, in the second hour of the morning the foremost elements of Col. Bolzano's Brigade and of 131 Inf Bde drove into the Russian strong points on the east bank of the Zlota Lipa, now held only by patrols. After both brigades had crossed the Zlota Lipa - partly at fords and partly on hastily-built foot bridges - they drove the Russians out of Holhocze and Monasterzyska.

Their neighbor, Corps Rhemen on the north wing of the k.u.k. 7th Army, repulsed an attack by 2 Russian Rifle Bde with bloody losses at the start of the 28<sup>th</sup>; this made it easier for 36 ID to continue their advance. Fighting with Russian rear guards, the Division crossed the railroad from Nizniow to Monasterzyska around noon; then the Russians abandoned their positions in the bend of the Dniester at Koropiec. Five battalions from 15 ID joined the advance of 36 ID.

Toward evening, Rhemen's and Hofmann's Corps plus the main body of 48 Res ID reached the Koropiecbach, where the Russians were still making a stand. Corps Marschall, advancing toward Zborow, had meanwhile also met new resistance on the watershed between the Zlota Lipa and Strypa. Here the Russians occupied a temporary position on the line Rykow-Kozowa.

Bothmer ordered his entire South Army and Pflanzler-Baltin ordered Rhemen's Corps to attack these new Russian positions.

The principal objectives were Zborow (for Corps Marschall's attacking group), Kozowa (48 Res ID), Podhajce (left wing of Corps Hofmann), and the rail line from Monasterzyska to Buczacz (Corps Rhemen). The attack was to start at 3:00 AM on 29 August. Prolonged resistance by the enemy wasn't expected. Pilots reported that the Russians were burning numerous villages on their side of the Koropiecbach; this indicated that they would soon resume their retreat. Rhemen's and Hofmann's Corps were therefore ordered to immediately advance to the Strypa after they crossed the Koropiecbach. If Rhemen could advance further to the east over the Strypa, then Pflanzner-Baltin also wanted to attack with Corps Benigni from south of the Dniester.

In fact the Russians did continue their retreat, after Marschall's attacking group captured part of their positions between Rykow and Kozowa in the night of 28-29 August. On the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>, 36 ID on the north wing of Corps Rhemen took the heights southeast of Monasterzyska, which were still defended by a weaker enemy force, and reached the Baryszbach around noon after unimportant skirmishes with rear guards. During the night the Russians had also evacuated their positions in the bends in the Dniester between the mouths of the Koropiec and Strypa, and in front of Rhemen's right wing and the left wing of Corps Henriquez. Early in the morning the 15 ID pushed against the retreating enemy and drove them over the Strypa. To the right of 15 ID, DR # 2 of 8 CD crossed the Dniester at Hubin and was able to reach the lowest reaches of the Strypa. Meanwhile 36 ID on the north wing of Corps Rhemen had collided with Russian detachments that apparently wanted to hold onto the west bank of the Strypa.

Corps Hofmann (on the south wing of Bothmer's Army) moved northeast to attack the retreating Russians on 29 August on a 35 km broad front. 131 Inf Bde moved through Monasterzyska to Bobulince, and Brigade Bolzano through Holhocze to Wisniowczyk; 55 ID advanced on both sides of the road from Podhajce to Sosnow. It was soon apparent that the Russians were halting on the west bank of the Strypa in numerous well-prepared bridgeheads. FML Hofmann wanted to drive the enemy to the other side of the river, and had his Corps attack the Russian positions on the 29<sup>th</sup>. However, 131 Inf Bde was stopped in front of Bobulince by heavy enemy artillery fire, as was Brigade Bolzano in front of Wisniowczyk. The reinforced 129 Inf Bde of 55 ID also remained in front of Burkanow and Sosnow after an attack that lasted into the night and cost heavy casualties. Farther north the rest of 55 ID (parts of 130 Inf Bde) was spread over a wide front reaching from the Rohatyn-Tarnopol

railroad to a point south of Zborow, in order to maintain contact with Marschall's Corps. This Corps' main attacking group (3 Gd ID and 38 Hon ID, reinforced by parts of 48 Res ID and of 19 ID) continued to advance on the 29<sup>th</sup> up to the areas southwest of Zborow and around the source of the Strypa. Here the Russians were in position for a new battle.

## **5. The Battle of Zloczow-Strypa River, 29 August-1 September**

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

Meanwhile the pursuit by Böhm-Ermolli's Army had also come to an end in front of new Russian positions, which ran behind the Zloczowka, then on the heights on both sides of Bialy Kamien, and from there through the low ground by Sokolowka and Toporow and in an arc south and west of Radziechow.

The regiments of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army now began three days of fighting with the entrenched enemy. On 29 August, FML Goglia's V Corps made a powerful attack on the heights east of Zloczow with 14 ID, parts of 43 LW ID, and 34 ID; however, they made no significant progress. 33 ID, reinforced by the rest of 43 LW ID, struck the steep heights south of Bialy Kamien along with the main body of 29 ID (from FML Trollmann's XIX Corps); they launched repeated attacks until deep into the night, but couldn't break through. The left wing of 29 ID took Ozydow, where they could cover the offensive against the heights of Bialy Kamien and Zloczow, which extended forward like a bastion. To the left of XIX Corps, FML Schmidt von Georgenegg's IV Corps slowly gained ground against the enemy on the line Sokolowka-Toporow. The north wing of FML Czibulka's Corps meanwhile was working its way through Cholojow, Suszno and south of Stojanow up to the half circle formed by the positions of XVII Russian Corps around Radziechow. At this point Czibulka's HQ merged with and took over the designation of XVIII k.u.k. Corps.<sup>46</sup>

On 30 August GdK Böhm-Ermolli wanted to attack again on the entire front. The enemy resistance should be broken and the Russians pursued up to the line Zagorze-Podkamien-Radziwilow-Leszniow, and up to the Styr. FML Goglia, however, decided to give a day of rest to his troops, who had already suffered 5000 casualties. On the next morning he wanted to renew the

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46 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - XVIII Corps was only commanding one unit (32 ID), so the HQ had become superfluous.

offensive with his main effort on the left wing, where 33 ID had made progress on the night of 29-30 August, in order to break through to Sassow. Therefore he asked for artillery support from his neighbor on the left, 29 ID. GdK Böhm-Ermolli approved postponement of the attack.

Under IV Corps, on 30 August FML von Kornhaber's 51 Hon ID attacked through Sokolowka; they planned to then pivot to the south to cooperate with the left wing of 29 ID in capturing Olesko. This would have enabled them to envelop the advanced Russian front on the Bialy Kamien from the north. However, in difficult fighting which lasted until late at night the Honveds were unable to penetrate through Sokolowka; in the open terrain they suffered terribly from enemy artillery fire. XVIII Corps at Radziechow also encountered stubborn resistance on this day. They attacked along their entire front, but made no substantial progress. In the night of 30-31 August, however, the Budapest 32 ID threw the Russians out of their trenches on the heights southwest of Radziechow, while on Czibulka's northern wing the 31 ID and Viennese 1 Lst Inf Bde were able to force their way through a weaker enemy force south of Stojanow. Thus the south wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, which had been left facing west toward Radziechow in advance of the rest of the Army, was pushed back. Brussilov couldn't continue the fighting around Radziechow, because on the evening of 30 August he had to order the center of his Army to withdraw after the north wing was enveloped by Puhallo. Therefore Brussilov now also ordered his left wing to retreat.

By daybreak on 31 August the Russians had already evacuated all their positions opposite XVIII Corps and the north wing of IV Corps (27 ID). XVIII Corps and 27 ID immediately began to pursue, and by evening reached the Styr between Hrycowola and Stanislawczyk. At this time the north wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was still offering stubborn resistance to 51 Hon ID, XIX Corps and V Corps at Sokolowka and Ozydow, and then on the heights of Bialy Kamien and of Zloczow. Despite powerful artillery support, 51 Hon ID could gain only a little ground by advancing through Sokolowka toward Olesko; its units were already intermingled and their ranks diminished due to the long, continuous fighting. Under V Corps, 33 ID repulsed a Russian counterattack on the night of 30-31 August. After artillery preparation on the next day, 33 ID began to attack Sassow around 3:15 PM. They were joined on the right by 34 ID and on the left by 29 ID. However, these troops weren't able to secure the steep heights of Bialy Kamien and of Zloczow by storm until the night of 31 August-1 September after bloody fighting in which

the north Bohemian IR # 92 and 94 were in the first line.<sup>47</sup>

Only enemy rear guards now remained in these positions. This was because Corps Marschall of the South Army had meanwhile thrown the Russians back, after hard fighting, over the eastern branch of the source of the Styr, taken Zborow, and forced Shcherbatchev's Army to retreat. Despite rainy weather and bad roads, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army pursued immediately and moved a good distance forward on 1 September. V and XIX Corps reached the Graberka and the area of Jasienow. IV Corps advanced along and north of the railroad to Brody; in the evening the 51 Hon ID entered the city, already evacuated by the Russians. 27 ID north of Brody approached the Monarchy's border, behind which they identified Russian positions. On the Army's left wing the main body of XVIII Corps pushed the withdrawing Russians back over the Styr and to Leszniow. Here the enemy was apparently moving back to Radziwilow and behind the border.

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47 "Der Heimat Söhne im Weltkrieg, IR 94 im Weltkrieg" (1927), pp. 358 ff.

South Army and Corps Rhemen

Meanwhile the north wing of the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was offering stubborn resistance to the Corps of Hofmann and Rhemen. On the morning of 30 August GdI Rhemen had again attacked the well-prepared Russian positions along a difficult sector of the Strypa. 15 ID tried in vain to cross the river near its mouth. The woods made observation difficult, and the narrow crossing points were heavily bombarded by Russian artillery; these factors made the advance so difficult that only parts of the Hungarian IR "Ziegler" # 60 were able to make their way through the deep valley up to the enemy entrenchments. Troops from 72 and 9 Inf Bdes (which made up a group under GM Edler von Luxardo of 36 ID) and the 131 Inf Bde of Corps Hofmann farther north tried to come forward in a combined attack on the Russian bridgehead stretching from south of Buczacz to north of Przewloka. In the afternoon Letschitzky hastily brought up reinforcements by truck on the road from Czortkow, sent them to the western bank of the Strypa at Przewloka, and had them counterattack. The enemy was pushed back by the north wing of 36 ID, with support from GM Blum's 131 Inf Bde. Now GdI Rhemen sought to bring his corps forward by committing his reserve, IR # 16. After a difficult action that lasted until late at night, GM Luxardo's group was able to break into the enemy lines at Przewloka; farther south, however, the Russians held on stubbornly to their bridgehead positions at Buczacz.

Under Hofmann's Corps, which was holding a front that was too long for its relative strength, the right wing of Bolzano's Bde took part in the attack of 131 Inf Bde early on 30 August, but without success. 55 ID was supposed to send 129 Inf Bde (reinforced by parts of 130 Bde) to attack the broad bridgehead at Burkanow; the rest of 130 Inf Bde covered the left flank of this operation. Early on the 30<sup>th</sup>, however, General Shcherbatchev sent his south wing to counterattack 48 Res ID and 19 ID, which were deployed to demonstrate along a wide front between the Kozowa-Tarnopol railroad and Glinna (south of Zborow). This surprise attack gained substantial ground. The unprepared troops suffered considerable casualties and abandoned some guns after ruining them (four batteries); they retreated from the territory just west of the bank of the Strypa to Kozowa and the area farther north. 55 ID was also attacked out of the Burkanow bridgehead, but was able to hold its positions; only its left wing had to be pulled back during the day when they were enveloped by the enemy. The divisional commander GM Fleischmann expected further Russian thrusts at night; he considered the situation to be so serious that after darkness

fell he pulled the whole Division back to a front facing northeast.

While this setback was occurring in the center of Bothmer's Army, Corps Marschall on the northern wing was carrying out a costly but successful attack in the area around the source of the Strypa. GdK Marschall protected his endangered southern flank by sending his Corps' reserve, a brigade of 48 Res ID, through Glinna to counterattack from the north. The intention was to push back the Russians who'd broken the lines of the Army's center. However, the enemy eluded this attack. 55 ID occupied their earlier positions during 31 August; 48 Res ID and 19 ID also moved their lines forward again toward the Strypa, although the troops advanced only slowly. The enemy artillery was powerful, and the Russians steadfastly held onto the bridgeheads of Burkanow-Kupczynce.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Army

GdK Pflanzler-Baltin had ordered Corps Rhemen to continue to attack on 31 August with a strong left wing. Already in the night, however, Letschitzky had concentrated fresh forces at Przewloka and started a new counterattack. After heavy fighting, the north wing of Luxardo's group and the adjacent wing of Hofmann's Corps were pushed back to the west around 10:00 AM. Then FML Ritt. von Schreitter assembled a few battalions from 36 ID and sent them up from the south against the flank of the advancing enemy; after additional severe fighting the enemy was pushed back again to Przewloka in the afternoon. The other units of Corps Rhemen were unable to make progress on the 31<sup>st</sup>. A new attempt of 15 ID to cross the Strypa south of Jazlowiec was shattered by the stubborn Russian defenders.

To assist the advance of the hard-fighting XIII Corps (which since 27 August had lost 4400 men), and to force the Russians to retreat from the Strypa, Pflanzler-Baltin now ordered the opening on 1 September of the long-planned flank thrust by FML Benigni's Corps, which was dug in on both sides of the mouth of the Sereth. The right wing of FML Henriquez's Corps (30 ID), which was in the Zaleszczyki bridgehead, would join this attack as soon as it made progress.

Benigni made his flank attack on both sides of the mouth of the Sereth around noon on 1 September, with half of 5 ID, one regiment of 15 ID and the main body of 6 ID, plus 6 and 3 CD and 5 Hon CD. However, by evening they had only been able to reach

the Russian barbed wire barriers; therefore 30 ID, held in readiness at Zaleszczyki, didn't intervene. On this day the 36 ID on the north wing of Corps Rhemen attacked several times more, but gained no further success; the neighboring 131 Inf Bde was also unable to advance. The other troops of XIII Corps kept up a useless fire fight.

#### The Russians pull back from the Strypa

On 1 September the Russians were still holding their ground on the Strypa opposite Corps Hofmann and the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army. Meanwhile, however, the 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army - whose southern wing had been broken in several places by Corps Marschall at Zborow, had begun to retreat. On 1 September Marschall's leading troops followed the withdrawing enemy up to a point west of Troscianiec, to Olejow, and to the area west of Jezierna. Thus General Letschitzky was being outflanked from the north. This danger finally forced him to abandon the Strypa. The right wing of his Army retreated in the night of 1-2 September.

Thus the armies of Ivanov's Southwest Front had given up the Sierna, the watershed between the Bug and Styr, and the heights east of Zloczow and of the Strypa. This success was due primarily to the envelopment of the Russian northern wing. However, a decisive victory - which seemed to be likely because of the numerical superiority in the north - wasn't achieved. As GO Conrad grumbled to his closest confidants, this happened because FZM Puhallo had sent his units into frontal assaults of strongly fortified positions instead of moving to the flank where he could have inflicted a major defeat on the Russians. Now, however, the high command hoped they could still achieve this great objective by advancing to Rovno with a strengthened northern wing.

## ***C. The advance toward Rovno and Dubno, and to the Sereth***

### **1. The fighting on the Putilowka, 1-6 September**

On the afternoon of 31 August, GO Conrad issued his plans for the continuing advance on Rovno with the following words:

"The operations taking place in east Galicia are intended not only to recover east Galicia from the enemy, but also to hit them with a truly decisive blow. The 2<sup>nd</sup>, South and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies will have to launch a mainly frontal advance; 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies are in a situation where by concentrating strong forces on the north wing and sending them east toward Rovno they can win a decisive success against the Russians' north wing. This will create a real threat to all Russian units farther south. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies must avoid sending strong contingents to the line of the Ikwa; 2<sup>nd</sup> Army can avoid this by going around the line farther south, through Kremieniec. 1<sup>st</sup> Army will capture the forts guarding Dubno. Since the enemy can use their railroads to easily concentrate around Rovno, the thrust in that direction should commence as early as possible. These are the guide lines that the Armies should follow."

Command of the northern wing was delegated to GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand. After his last troops had left Mackensen's Army Group, the Archduke had come to Vladimir-Volynsky. Here on 31 August he took over the units hitherto led by FZM Puhallo, from which an Army Group of two Armies was organized. FZM Puhallo's 1<sup>st</sup> Army had I, II and Szurmay's Corps; the Archduke's own 4<sup>th</sup> Army had IX, X and XIV Corps, FML Smekal's Group (4 ID and 45 LW ID), and 4 and 7 CD. In the first order issued by the Army Group, on the evening of 31 August, GdI Roth was instructed to thrust to Rovno with XIV and X Corps. He was also given the two cavalry divisions, which formed a Corps under GM Berndt. If possible, the horsemen were supposed to destroy the railroad bridges over the Styr at Polonno and over the Horyn at Alexandriya, as well as the rail line at Sarny. IX Corps would send 26 LW ID behind Roth's Group, in echelon on the right, while 10 ID stayed east of Luck as a reserve. FML Smekal's Group, arriving from Kovel, was ordered to continue to march through Roziszczce. 1<sup>st</sup> Army would advance to Dubno with a strong left wing. On the evening of the 31<sup>st</sup> August it was still not known whether the Russians would oppose 1<sup>st</sup> Army from behind the Styr. Therefore on the morning of 1 September one division of Roth's Group would first thrust along the eastern bank of the Styr toward the south. This would help 26 and 13 LW ID, which were in the vicinity of Luck but not in contact with the enemy, to cross the river as soon as possible and roll up the line on

the Styr from the north.

Meanwhile the Russians had abandoned the field along the entire front of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group. Originally the left wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had intended to stay in their prepared position along the Styr on both sides of Beresteczko, as ordered by General Ivanov.<sup>48</sup> However, Brussilov recognized that Luck was lost and that XXXIX Corps had been beaten; if he paused on the Styr he might be cut off from Rovno. Therefore he also evacuated the prepared positions on the Styr. In the night of 31 August-1 September he told his entire 8<sup>th</sup> Army to continue to retreat to the east.

#### 1 September

Thus the XIV Corps didn't find any enemy in front of them early on 1 September. GdI Roth's columns were unopposed as they reached the area southwest and north of Chorlupy. 26 LW ID lost a great deal of time during the afternoon as they crossed the Styr on a military bridge at Luck; they were temporarily placed under GdI Roth, and reached Ostrozec after darkness fell. Farther in the rear, 13 LW ID came to Krupy. Behind XIV Corps the 10 ID (the Army's reserve) camped east of Luck, and the X Corps (24 and 62 ID) at Kiwercy. FML Smekal's Group was moving through Perespa.

Without encountering the enemy, 1<sup>st</sup> Army reached the Styr between Werben and the mouth of the Polonka. GM Berndt's cavalry moved ahead to Olyka. They already encountered new resistance on both sides of Pokaszczewo, but this still wasn't known at Army Group HQ in the evening. There it was believed that the Russians, after giving up their strong positions on the Styr without a battle, were in full retreat to Rovno and Dubno. Therefore the order which Archduke Joseph Ferdinand issued for 2 September instructed GdI Roth to advance quickly to make it impossible for the enemy to set up a new line, and to force them to retreat to Rovno. IX Corps (now composed of 26 and 21 LW ID) would serve as the link between Roth's Group (advancing along the Rovno rail line) and the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army on the lower Ikwa, which would advance through Ujezdycy and Pelza toward the southeast.

Meanwhile Brussilov had very quickly led his 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army back to a new line; it ran along the Putilowka (which covered the approaches to Rovno from the west), and then from the

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48 Broussilov, pp. 54 ff. Korolkov, "Strategic Overview of the World War 1914-1918" (in Russian; Moscow, 1923), p. 371

Putilowka to Radziwilow (through the area between Ujezdcy and Bol. Dorogostaj, then straight through the hills west of Dubno between Mlynow-Smordwa-Wolkowyje and Kozin, and along the eastern part of the ridge separating Galicia and Podolia). Here he prepared a new position and, as ordered by Ivanov, sent all his cavalry (three divisions) to the Horyn near Derazno. At the same time he reinforced the defeated XXXIX Corps with 4 Rifle Div from the center of the Army.<sup>49</sup> Brussilov assembled VIII Corps in the hills around Dubno. He intended to bring his advancing opponents to a halt by making short counter-thrusts.

## 2 September

Not foreseeing these developments, the troops of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group set forth confidently on the 2<sup>nd</sup> toward Rovno and Dubno. During the advance of XIV Corps to the Putilowka there were already indications that the Russians had by no means fallen back all the way to Rovno. There were reports that Berndt's Cavalry Corps had already encountered resistance on the evening of the 1<sup>st</sup> on both sides of Pokaszczewo. If it was true that the enemy was again offering battle behind the Putilowka, GdI Roth wanted to pin them down in the front with thrusts by XIV Corps, while X Corps advanced through Derzno and then attacked Rovno from the north and northeast. Berndt's Cav Corps was supposed to open the way for this wide envelopment operation by quickly seizing the crossing points on the Horyn at Diuksin.

However, since the early hours the Cavalry Corps was already engaged in heavy fighting in front of Olyka, so that their commander couldn't simply move his horsemen toward the north. XIV Corps came up from the west during the morning and went over to the attack at noon. FML Edl. von Sellner, who advanced with 2 ID on both sides of the road toward Klewan, established a firm foothold on the east bank of the Putilowka in the afternoon. FML Horsetzky with 3 ID stormed the heights west of Olyka; several hundred Russians had to surrender to his Division. Meanwhile IX Corps had also reached the Putilowka and found the enemy ready for defensive battle. FML Lischka's 26 LW ID tried in vain to win the heights of Dolgoszeja, which would make it possible for 21 LW ID, its neighbor on the left, to cross the river. In the afternoon the left wing of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division was attacked by parts of XII Russian Corps which had stayed on the west bank, and after a difficult action was thrown back at Zorniszczce. The ground lost in this setback was recovered

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49 Broussilov, pp. 154 ff.

toward evening, but this necessitated the use of half of 10 ID, part of the Army's reserve.

Puhallo's Army, whose next goal was Dubno, came up against a strongly fortified position between Koryto and Murawica on the lower Ikwa and in the hills around Wolkowyje. An attack was launched in the evening by parts of Corps Szurmay, I Corps and 25 ID, but without significant success.

After the high hopes which had arisen at Army Group HQ after the Russians lost Luck and evacuated the Styr line, the results of the fighting on 2 September were a disappointment. The enemy, who had been supposed to be in full retreat to Rovno and Dubno, was offering battle along the entire front in a very favorable position. There was also disturbing news from the north flank of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Gillenschmidt's IV Russian Cav Corps, which had pulled back far to the north in the Polesie after the fall of Kovel, now seemed to be again advancing to the south. Numerous Cossack detachments were appearing in the large forested area between the Styr and Stokhod. It was also reported that enemy troops of all arms, who apparently had been brought up by rail through Sarny, were on the march from Stepan to Zurawicze. On the evening of 2 September, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand entrusted the protection of the north flank to the security detachments of X Corps who'd stayed behind in Kovel, Holoby and Luck. At the same time, 7 CD was ordered to move to Zurawicze to drive away the enemy troops reported to be approaching; however, the Division was still engaged at Zorniszczce and had thus far been able to pull just one regiment out of the line.

Moreover, the high command ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to release 1 CD from its left wing and to send it to Luck on 3 September. Pflanzer-Baltin was supposed to send 10 CD to 4<sup>th</sup> Army. For the protection of the north flank, which would become longer as the attack on Rovno progressed, the high command also had available the 1 and 3 Polish Brigades and three cavalry divisions: 11 Hon CD (from the Bug Army) and 2 and 9 CD (from 9<sup>th</sup> German Army). XVII Corps, which was to deploy against Serbia, was temporarily held at Cholm because the negotiations with Bulgaria still hadn't been completed. GO Conrad was prepared if necessary to also commit VI Corps, which had come to Rawa Russka and was also supposed to be sent to the lower Danube, to the decisive fighting of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group. However, he still hoped that the large forces on the northern wing would be able to win a great success without this corps.

For 3 September, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand ordered the attack to

continue, with the main effort on the left wing. Meanwhile X Corps had reached the Moszczanica area without fighting, and GM Berndt with 4 CD was at Cuman, where 62 ID had also sent a small detachment. Now X Corps and 4 CD were to advance north of the Putilowka to Derazno, Biczal and Postojno, from where they could cross the Horyn. Under XIV Corps, FML Horsetzky was instructed to throw back the enemy units still stationed on the west bank of the Putilowka at Olyka, using 3 ID and 10 ID (which was now placed under his command), while 2 ID supported the attack with a thrust to the south. IX Corps would also attack.

3 September

Early on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, GM Berndt wanted to lead his cavalry from Cuman to Derazno to open the way over the Horyn for the approaching X Corps, but he was opposed by the Russians. By now Brussilov had thrown Rehrberg's Cav Corps (3 Orenburg Coss Div; 7 and 11 CD) against his opponents north of the Putilowka, while 4 Russian Rifle Div was hurrying up from Klewan to help XXXIX Corps. Part of this Corps attacked 2 ID where it had crossed to the east bank of the Putilowka at and south of Moszczanica; other parts held a front toward Cuman and dominated the opposite bank with artillery fire. Thus 62 ID, moving toward Derazno, was seriously endangered from the south. Part of the Division was shifted from Karpilowka to support detachments which were engaged south of Cuman, while the rest continued to advance along the northern bank of the Putilowka, pushing back the Russian cavalry from Cuman to a point half way to Derazno. 24 ID meanwhile marched from Wolka Kotowskaja to the Karpilowka area; some of its troops deployed in the evening on the south bank of the Putilowka, where detachments of 62 ID and the left wing of 2 ID were being attacked by 4 Russian Rifle Div.

In the afternoon of 3 September the right wing of 2 ID, as ordered, thrust to the south. Initially the Russians withdrew, but then fell upon the flank and rear of the attacking troops of 2 ID from the east; the Division suffered heavy losses and was driven back to the west bank of the Putilowka.<sup>50</sup>

Simultaneously, FML Horsetzky's Group on the south wing of XIV Corps and 21 LW ID (reinforced by half of 10 ID) on the north wing of IX Corps were also launching thrusts; they failed to storm Olyka or to drive the Russian on the heights east of Zorniszczce over the Putilowka. Farther south the XII Russian Corps attacked 26 LW ID, but was defeated by LW IR # 9 and 10.<sup>51</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> Army also saw heavy fighting on 3 September. Puhallo was making his main effort on his north wing (I Corps and Corps Szurmay), which were supposed to advance on both sides of the lower Ikwa in step with 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The wide and hilly area in

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50 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The Putilowka flows from south to north down to a point west of Cuman, then bends to flow from west to east. That is why the text refers to north, south, east and west banks, depending on which sector of the river was involved.

51 Wisshaupt, "Die 52. Landwehr-Infanterie-Brigade im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Reichenberg, 1928), pp. 325 ff.

front of Dubno was left to the weak II Corps (with 9 ½ battalions and 15 batteries of 25 ID); they would move as close as possible to Dubno while maintaining connections with I Corps on the left and the north wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on the right. GdI Johann Freih. von Kirchbach, commanding II Corps, had the main body of 25 ID advance southeast toward Werba on the Ikwa, along the Plaszewka and the southern edge of the Dubno hills. Thus they could take advantage of better roads and could threaten the Plaszewka bridge of the Radziwilow-Rovno railroad, where the Russians maintained a busy traffic hauling supplies behind the front. Into the wide area that separated 25 ID from the neighboring 46 LW ID, they sent only a small column to maintain communications.<sup>52</sup> The dangers posed by this unavoidable dispersal of 25 ID were further heightened by the Russians' heavy counterattacks.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Szurmay's Corps had to fend off Russian attacks; however, under Ist Corps the 9 ID made progress in attacking toward Mlynow, as did 46 LW ID toward Smordwa. Meanwhile the VIII Russian Corps advanced through Wolkowyje and farther north into the wide gap between Ist and II Corps, covered only by one battalion. At dawn the Russians were already attacking the north wing of 25 ID, and threw it back after bitter hand-to-hand fighting; IR # 4 alone lost more than 1000 men in this action. GdI Johann Kirchbach now empowered the entire 25 ID to pull back to the west. Quickly reacting, the commander of Ist Corps (GdK Karl Freih. von Kirchbach) sent a regiment from the heavily engaged 46 LW ID and a battalion from his Corps' reserve into the area northeast of Demidowka; he placed this group under GM Haas, and sent it to counterattack toward the south. Moreover, the rifle battalion and horse artillery of 1 CD, which then was moving toward the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, were diverted to Demidowka. With this help the Russians who were advancing toward the flank and rear of 46 LW ID were pushed back by LW IR # 13 and 15. FZM Puhallo, however, still felt compelled by this setback to temporarily place both II and Ist Corps under one commander, GdK Karl Kirchbach.

At first the AOK at Teschen wasn't particularly concerned by the Russian counterattacks. In a phone conversation on the afternoon of the 3<sup>rd</sup> with Col. Ritter von Paic (Chief of Staff to 4<sup>th</sup> Army), GM Metzger pointed out that the enemy force of 6 to 6 ½ divisions was facing 13 Aus-Hung. divisions (or 15, if one included FML Smekal's Group). The situation wasn't serious, and

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52 Hoen, Waldstätten-Zipperer and Seiffert, "Die Deutschmeister" (Vienna, 1928), p. 485.

the main thing was that the left wing drove forward quickly.

Thus the staff in Teschen was all the more disappointed by the result of the fighting on 3 September. Nothing decisive had been achieved on the north wing, while 25 ID had suffered a severe setback. GO Conrad expressed his dissatisfaction in a command to 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ with the following words:

"The AOK [at Teschen] has assembled the strongest possible forces in a small area for the attack against the north wing of the Russian Southwest Front, thus establishing the conditions needed for a quick, complete success. It is expected that the 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ will exercise decisive influence on the leadership so that the goals can be met and its orders carried out. Difficult situations may arise on the weakly-held front of the south wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army; they must be overcome by determined battle leadership of the subordinate commanders, and by a ruthless advance by 4<sup>th</sup> Army, which is much stronger than its opponents. Thus the situation can be exploited to win a greater success."

However, there were major obstacles to the forward push. Rebuilding the destroyed bridges, the poor roads, and the rail line through Kovel - as well as maintaining the extraordinarily long supply line - all cost much time. The troops were worn out from fighting and from their forced marches, and every day it became more difficult to supply them with ammunition and rations. During their retreat the Russians had burnt cities and villages, driven away the livestock, and destroyed the harvest. The high command, however, was convinced that the prospects for success would be reduced if the attack was delayed, because the enemy could bring reinforcements to their northern wing. 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ shared this conviction, and ordered GdI Roth to continue the offensive in force on 4 September. The enemy resistance should finally be broken, and X Corps should reach the Horyn.

#### 4 September

Early on the 4<sup>th</sup>, amid storms and rain, FML Martiny sent the troops north of the Putilowka (62 and 24 ID under GM Tunk) forward to attack toward Derazno. The Russian artillery on the southern bank of the river bombarded the flank of the attackers. Nevertheless, GM Tunk's units pushed the Orenburg Cossacks (reinforced by infantry) and Russian 7 CD back in stubborn actions in the forests and moved closer to Derazno. The advance, however, came to an end in the afternoon. The Russian 4 Rifle Div renewed its thrust against the parts of 24 and 62 ID which were still deployed south of the Putilowka under GM Urbarz. The Russians even temporarily gained a foothold on the north bank of the river at Cuman and thus threatened the flank and rear of the group that had been sent to attack toward Derazno.

Early on 4 September the Russians still standing on the west bank of the Putilowka were attacked by Groups FML Horsetzky (3 ID and one infantry brigade of 10 ID) and FML Edler von Mecenseffy (21 LW ID and the rest of 10 ID); the attack was discontinued after some insignificant progress. The enemy counterattacked here in the afternoon, as they did along the entire front of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, and the fighting surged back and forth. The Russians made their principal effort against 46 LW ID, which was engaged south of the lower Ikwa between Bokujma and Demidowka; the Landwehr bravely repulsed all the Russian thrusts. 25 ID, ordered by GdK Karl Kirchbach to make a major advance, succeeded in establishing a bridgehead at Demidowka after a thrust by FJB # 10 and 17; the Division was also able to advance again somewhat toward Wolkowyje. Thus the dangerous assault of VIII Russian Corps had been fended off.

To continue the thrust to Rovno, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand had meanwhile ordered FML Smekal's Group, which reached the northern wing after forced marches, to Moszczanica; its 4 ID was placed under GdI Roth. The Archduke now planned to first have the north wing throw the Russians back behind the Horyn; then the main body of X Corps and 4 ID would mount the decisive thrust toward Rovno between the Stubiel and Ustje. XIV and IX Corps, as well as 1<sup>st</sup> Army, would gradually join the attack of the left wing as it made progress.

Because of the menace from the 4 Rifle Div, however, the Chief of Staff of XIV Corps (Col. Göttlicher) had already advised Col. Paic by phone on the afternoon of 4 September that the advance on Derazno would require the commitment of substantial forces to guard its ever-lengthening south flank. Otherwise the X Corps couldn't maintain its thrust to the east any further. Under these circumstances, GdI Roth suggested that the main body of X Corps, with 4 ID, should immediately attack south over the Putilowka and thus roll up the Russian front along and west of the Cuman-Klewan road. Army Group HQ, on the other hand, believed that it was necessary to first secure the Horyn at Derazno to cover the rear of X Corps before they could pivot their main body to the south. Moreover, if X Corps was unable to envelop the Russians by moving east through Derazno, their push to the south shouldn't take place west of the Stubiel, but farther east through Klewan toward Rovno. The prospects of success in this sector looked good. The latest intelligence reports indicated that there still weren't any strong Russian forces at Rovno, and its fortifications were obsolete. The key to success was that X Corps should move forward quickly, since

perhaps Russian reinforcements were already on their way to Rovno.

After a discussion with FML Martiny, GdI Roth now (in the evening) warned Army Group HQ about the danger that threatened X Corps if it pushed farther east, since it could be attacked from the south by 4 Russian Rifle Div and from the north by advancing enemy cavalry. Moreover, the decisive attack to the south would be postponed if the Corps first had to move its left wing east to take the stretch of the Horyn at Derazno. The situation was unfavorable for postponing the attack past 5 September, because the dangers to the flank and rear of the attacking flank were increasing every day.<sup>53</sup> GdI Roth still believed that it was possible to strike to the south without first driving the enemy back over the Horyn. Late on 4 September the Army Group HQ decided to carry out the attack south though Cuman on the next day; they placed 4 ID under X Corps for this operation.

#### 5 September

After artillery preparation, the infantry of X Corps began to attack around 2:00 PM on 5 September. Despite substantial casualties, GM Urbarz's Group advanced west of the Cuman-Klewan road into the foremost Russian lines; however, they came to a halt in front of the main enemy position, and toward evening withdrew in some places back to their old trenches. 4 ID deployed in the center by Cuman; under heavy enemy fire, they were unable to cross the 150 meter-wide river, which was surrounded by broad belts of mud created by recent storms. To the right of X Corps, the 2 ID brought some detachments of its left wing to the west bank of the Putilowka at Litwa. The left wing of X Corps, north of the Putilowka, continued their offensive to the east up to the woods west of Derazno; here they defeated Russian attempts to attack. Thus the north wing didn't win a decision.

#### The growing menace from the north

While X Corps was still seeking victory at Cuman, Gillenschmidt's Russian Cavalry Corps was approaching from the north. Every day they were increasing the danger to the Austro-Hungarians' attacking wing, upon whose success the whole operational plan had been based.

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53 This is based on an unpublished manuscript of FML von Kralowetz, who at the time was Chief of Staff to X Corps.

4 CD had already left the front at Cuman on 3 September, so that it could move north of X Corps and then over the Horyn. However, the Division found the way through the swamps and woods around Berestiany blocked by the Russians' 3 Don Coss Div, and couldn't break through the heavily wooded terrain with its numerous streams. Farther left the 7 CD, which had been sent toward Zurawicze, was engaged at the same time against enemy troops who were pushing south from the areas around Czernysz and Kolki. Other Russian cavalry detachments were riding along the Styr toward Sokul and along the Stokhod toward Holoby. It appeared that the Russians were sending a screen of cavalry through the entire wide expanse of the Polesie, and also infantry (per a report from the Bug Army, the 77 ID) by rail from Ivanovo (east of Drogiczyn) through Sarny. The goal of these units might be to attack south against the north flank of 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

To cover the flank and rear of the attacking group, on 4 September Archduke Joseph Ferdinand ordered 7 CD to throw the Russians who were advancing between the Styr and Horyn back over the Kormin, and to seize the crossing point over the Styr at Kolki. Simultaneously the 1 CD, which had arrived at Kiwercy from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, would first ride to Nawoz; then it would advance between the Styr and Stokhod until it had crossed the Kovel-Sarny railroad. 1 CD would also scout toward Stobychwa, Kamien Kaszyski and Niewier (on the Pripyat). Detachments of 45 LW ID, deployed at Kovel, Holoby and Roziszczce, would back up the horsemen.

On 5 September the 4 CD was able to drive the enemy cavalry out of Berestiany and Garajmowka; 7 CD was engaged south of Kolki against a larger Russian force of all arms; 1 CD took Nawoz and was engaged at Janowka. Meanwhile very disturbing news arrived from Kovel. Cossacks were swarming toward the city; a platoon from the bridgehead garrison had been thrown back with heavy losses from Woloszki and over the Kovel-Luck road. 1 Polish Brigade, which had come from XVII Corps and arrived at Macijow, was immediately sent toward Kovel in quick marches. The main body of 1 CD, near Janowka, was instructed to advance through Mielnica against the flank and rear of the strong Russian cavalry force reported to be marching through Uchowieck toward Kovel. Soon, however, this report was found to be exaggerated. Therefore on 6 September 1 CD received a revised order; for now they would only send scouts toward Mielnica. While holding the crossing points on the Stokhod at Janowka, the main force of the Division would advance along the northern bank of the Styr to Kolki; from this point they could fall on the flank and rear of

the enemy units fighting 7 CD.

### 6 September

GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand wanted X Corps to continue to thrust south through Cuman, but on the 6<sup>th</sup> he was compelled to give the over-taxed troops a day of rest, as FML Martiny had urgently requested. The attack would resume on 7 September. The Archduke moved his headquarters on the 6<sup>th</sup> from Vladimir-Volynsky to Luck so that he could have a more directly personal influence on the offensive. On this day there was quiet along most of the front of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. 4 CD defeated Russian attempts to attack on the Kormin.

FML Martiny was now in charge of 4, 24 and 62 ID as well as 45 LW ID and Berndt's Cav Corps. He was ordered to assemble strong forces in the night of 6-7 September between Cuman and Moszczanica, so that they could attack as planned in the next morning. However, the difficulty of moving in the swamps and woods through darkness in the rain delayed the deployment of 24 ID on the left of 4 ID. Therefore the attack was again postponed for twenty four hours.

## **2. Further advance in east Galicia, 2-6 September**

While Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group was bogged down in a bloody contest on the Putilowka and west of Dubno, the offensive in east Galicia was making encouraging progress. On 1 September the troops of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army followed the enemy who had been defeated at Zloczow in an energetic pursuit toward Zagorze; they approached the Austro-Russian border at Podkamien and Radziwilow. Around noon on this day, GdK Böhm-Ermolli issued orders for an attack on the Ikwa line. Consistent with the instructions from the high command on 31 August, the main blow would be an attempt to envelop this strong position with five divisions (V Corps, reinforced by a division taken from IV Corps); the goal was the area between the Ikwa and the uppermost reaches of the Horyn. The XIX, IV and XVIII Corps would move up carefully to the Ikwa itself; 32 ID of XVIII Corps at Radziwilow would be the Army's reserve. The first targets on 2 September were: Zagorze and Podkamien for V Corps, Suchowola for XIX Corps, the Slonowka valley for IV Corps, and the area south of Chotyn for XVIII Corps. When the troops of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army continued their march on this day, Army HQ still didn't know the point at which the enemy intended to again offer prolonged resistance. In the afternoon the pursuers came up to new positions on the

ponds of the Sereth by Ratyszczce, west of Podkamien, and on both sides of the Plaszewka near Karpilowka; they were held by the extreme north wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army and the south wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army. All the corps of Böhm-Ermolli's Army immediately deployed for the attack.

On 2 September, Bothmer's Army crossed the deep valleys of the Wosuszka and the Strypa, drove away enemy rear guards near the Sereth, and sent their foremost troops toward Zalosce and to the heights of Nesterowce, Dolzanka, Nastasow and Darachow.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Army experiences heavy fighting

Farther south, next to Corps Hofmann, the XIII Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army pushed the retreating Russians back to the line Mogielnica-Kossow-Jagielnica on 2 September. The next unit to the south, FML Henriquez's Corps, reached Tluste and the Sereth opposite Bilcze without fighting. Benigni's Corps continued in the morning with the flank attack they had already started on both sides of the mouth of the Sereth. On Benigni's left was FML Ritter von Brudermann's Group with troops from 3, 5 and 6 CD and from 10 Inf Bde of 5 ID; the group's Galician UR # 7 stormed the Miejska Gora Heights on the west bank of the Sereth; on the other hand, the important Sloteria Heights on the east bank couldn't be taken. Farther to the right, FML Fürst Schönburg's Graz 6 ID captured several enemy trenches, but their advance came to an end in the afternoon. The Russians launched counter-thrusts against Benigni's dangerous flank attack because, as soon would be apparent, they wanted to hold the Sereth line under all circumstances. Here their 11<sup>th</sup> Army and the north flank of 9<sup>th</sup> Army had prepared bridgeheads positions at Zalosce, Tarnopol, Mikulince, Strusow, Trembowla, Budzanow and Czortkow; between these points they also occupied the land along the eastern bank.

GdK Pflanzner-Baltin began to attack the strong Sereth position with the north wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army on 3 September. He hoped that FML Benigni, who was supposed to break through to Karolowka by exerting all his strength, would open the way over the river. To support Benigni the right wing of Corps Henriquez, which had reached the Sereth at Bilcze, would attain the eastern bank and then pivot south toward the Sloteria Heights; the other parts of Corps Henriquez, and Corps Rhemen, would advance over the Sereth to the Niezlawabach and the line Kopyczynce-Kobylowloki.

36 ID on the left wing of XIII Corps was indeed able to drive the Russians from the west bank of the Sereth on 3 September,

after hard fighting at Budzanow; 15 ID, however, came to a halt in front of the strongly fortified bridgehead at Czortkow. In Corps Henriquez, 8 CD deployed along the Sereth at Szypowce; at Bilcze a regiment of 30 ID managed to establish a foothold on the opposite bank. Farther down the river, a detachment of three battalions from 30 ID under Col. Rudolf Müller was ordered to help FML Brudermann's hard-pressed group, but was unable to cross the Sereth under heavy fire from Russian artillery. On the right wing of Corps Benigni, 6 ID had stubbornly repulsed Russian counterattacks the night before, and gained ground toward Szuparka around noon on the 3<sup>rd</sup>; Brudermann's Group conquered the hotly-contested Sloteria Heights and in the afternoon advanced a bit up the eastern bank of the Sereth toward the north. Here they were supported by Col. Müller's detachment, which had meanwhile finally come over to the eastern bank. In these difficult actions, Corps Benigni had taken over 1400 prisoners, but their own losses were heavy. Finally they came to a halt in the face of new Russian counter-thrusts.

36 ID continued their attack on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>; the main body concentrated on the left flank and moved nearer to the Russian positions at Budzanow. Farther north, GM Blum's 131 Inf Bde (of Corps Hofmann) was still west of the low ground along the Sereth, and holding a 10 km front with just 4000 riflemen. Russian units were pushing against the weak front of Blum's Brigade and toward Mogielnica. Thus the left flank of XIII Corps was seriously endangered. Pflanzner-Baltin demanded that 131 Inf Bde should immediately advance to the Sereth. FML Hofmann therefore reinforced the Brigade, which was able by the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> to drive the Russians back again into their bridgehead at Janow. The north Moravian IR # 93 supported this operation, while guarding the north flank of 36 ID.

On the south wing of Corps Rehmen, 15 ID had meanwhile tried in vain to drive the Russians out of the Czortkow bridgehead. In Corps Henriquez's sector, the Russians sought on 4 September to push the battalions of 30 ID which had crossed the Sereth at Bilcze back over the river. Although with help from artillery the Austrians repulsed the enemy with heavy losses, FML Henriquez himself couldn't make any further progress. Since the start of the new actions he had lost more than 1000 men.

Corps Benigni was ordered to push further to the north by committing all available units; it became engaged in bitter fighting with the Russians. General Letschitzky massed his troops in this sector for new counterattacks; he wanted to prevent any further advance by 6 ID, which was threatening to

roll up his line on the Sereth. On the 4<sup>th</sup> the Russians also made local attacks between the Pruth and the Dniester, where GdK Edler von Korda's XI Corps had until now usually enjoyed quiet. However, Pflanze-Baltin soon recognized that these attacks, directed mainly against 202 Hon Inf Bde at Okna, were only a demonstration. Therefore he ordered his available reserves to help Benigni's heavily-embattled corps. These troops, however, consisted only of two Honved battalions plus the rifle battalion of 10 CD (the mounted units of that Division were being sent to 4<sup>th</sup> Army). Also the horse artillery of 10 CD, which was already with Corps Benigni, was left in place for the time being. The k.u.k. high command intended to send 37 Hon ID of VIII Corps (which had been picked to replace 6 ID) to the area.

Early on 5 September the Russians opposite Corps Korda again fell back on the defensive. Through this day Corps Benigni had fought honorably and repulsed all the Russian counterattacks; only the right wing of 6 ID had to be pulled back to its old positions in the Sinkow bridgehead.

Meanwhile the attack of the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army had run out of steam. It was apparent that the divisions here were deployed against the Sereth on too broad a front, and that the troops were already too worn down to carry out Pflanze-Baltin's plan by breaking through the strongly fortified Russian positions at Budzanow and Bilcze without substantial artillery support. Moreover, the South Army had also come to a halt. Recognizing these facts, the 7<sup>th</sup> Army commander intended to temporarily pause. In the next few days he would concentrate his strength in front of selected breakthrough points.

#### Planning by the South Army

After the fighting on the Strypa, GdI Bothmer wanted to continue the advance by making the main effort in the center of his South Army. He planned to break through the Sereth line south of Tarnopol with three divisions (55 ID, 3 Gd ID and 48 Res ID). First, however, he would need to bring up his left wing and Corps Hofmann on his right wing as far as the center. This would take time, as would the deployment of artillery on roads which were in bad condition after recent rains, and careful observation of the enemy trenches. Therefore he intended to make his powerful attack on 7 September.

FML Hofmann, on the other hand, felt that the terrain was more favorable for an attack on his right wing, where his troops were already assembled and could immediately advance in cooperation

with the north wing of XIII Corps. Hofmann was also concerned that the Russians themselves might be able to fall upon the long line held by his mostly Landsturm troops, which stretched for 37 km toward the Sereth. However, he was unable to gain the consent of the commander of South Army to his suggestion. Therefore he had to shift the strength of his Corps toward the left so that they could take part in the planned main offensive south of Tarnopol.

### **3. The Battle of Podkamien**

While GdI Bothmer carefully prepared his next enterprise, the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was already bitterly engaged along the final Russian positions on the Galicia-Podolia watershed.

#### 2-3 September

Böhm-Ermolli's divisions began to attack in the afternoon of 2 September, but on this day couldn't advance much farther than the enemy's line of forward outposts. On the next day (the 3<sup>rd</sup>), V Corps with 14, 34 and 33 ID made their way right up to the main positions at Styberowka and Podkamien. 29 ID of XIX Corps occupied the Mogila Heights. IV Corps sent 51 Hon ID toward the Makutra Heights and 27 ID toward Radziwilow. North of Radziwilow the front bent sharply to the east; here the 31 and 32 ID were making an envelopment attack on Michalowka. The Russians opposite FML Freih. von Lütgendorf's Group (on the left wing of XVIII Corps, with 1 Lst Inf Bde and 1 Lst Huss Bde, reinforced by a regiment from 31 ID) evacuated their positions south of Kozin in the morning. In the afternoon, however, the Russian advance against the neighboring 25 ID of 1<sup>st</sup> Army forced FML Lütgendorf to guard against being outflanked by bending his left wing back to form a front facing north.

There were also heavy Russian counterattacks on the other fronts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army during 3 September and the following night, but they were repulsed. In the continuing fights and marches of the last four days, the IV, XIX and V Corps had lost a total of 8000 men. The regimental commanders reported that the condition of the troops was good; however, dysentery and stomach flu were claiming many victims because of the damp weather and insufficient food (the latter problem was caused by the difficulty of bringing up supplies). The Corps were also complaining about a lack of artillery ammunition, despite which they were forced to engage in difficult offensive actions. Moreover, in the afternoon of 3 September the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

learned that the South Army wouldn't join the attack until 7 September.

Despite these problems, GdK Böhm-Ermolli considered the situation to be very promising. As far as could be determined, the 9 ½ infantry divisions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were opposed by only about 5 Russian divisions, made up in part of troops who'd already been beaten, and whose actual strength was no greater than that of our own units. Besides a nearly 2:1 advantage in infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - with 68 field and 13 heavy and very heavy batteries - had a great superiority in artillery over the Russians. The villages behind the enemy front seemed to be free of troops as far as the Ikwa. Pilots who were able make flights despite bad weather during the day reported that there were Russian positions on the east bank of the Ikwa and between the Ikwa and Horyn; farther east there were troops in Kremieniec, Gorynka and Wiszniewiec, but not more than two battalions in each location. Böhm-Ermolli wished to exploit this favorable situation by keeping the advance in motion. He ordered that the attack would continue on the 4<sup>th</sup>: first the enemy would be thrown behind the Ikwa, and then the decisive thrust would be launched as planned into the area 10 km wide between the Ikwa and Horyn, into the flank of the hills around Kremieniec. For this purpose the V Corps, which already had four divisions (14, 33, 34 and 43) was given 51 Hon ID from IV Corps, and would therefore have 50,000 riflemen and 180 guns.

#### 4 September

However, the stubborn Russian defenders couldn't be pushed back toward the Ikwa on the 4<sup>th</sup>. FML Goglia of V Corps wanted to break through the enemy positions between the island in the Sereth at Zalosce and Podkamien. First, however, he would have to bring 43 LW ID up from reserve into the line south of Styberowka and regroup his artillery before opening the decisive attack. Therefore with the permission of the Army commander he postponed his main effort until 5 September.

The XIX and IV Corps were also pinned down in front of the enemy positions on 4 September. FML Schmidt-Georgenegg, the commander of IV Corps, had asked XIX Corps to support the advance of his 51 Hon ID against the Makutra Heights. FML Trollmann, however, had refused because the unprotected terrain on the left wing of 29 ID didn't seem favorable for an attack. He preferred to make his main effort on his right wing, and thus work with V rather than IV Corps.

Meanwhile the 32 and 31 ID were heavily engaged on the south wing of XVIII Corps; their envelopment attack toward Michalowka didn't gain any ground. Farther north the right wing of FML Lütgendorf's Group repulsed a sharp Russian thrust. His left wing was instructed to attack over the Plaszewka to support 25 ID, which had resumed its advance. FML Lütgendorf was unable to carry out this order because he didn't have enough troops; however, he maintained a connection with 25 ID and guarded the north flank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on the Plaszewka.

#### 5-6 September

During the night of 4-5 September most of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's front was quiet. On the next morning the V Corps was supposed to make the decisive thrust, and the other corps would join in. However, V Corps still didn't attack during the morning of 5 September; it was a gloomy, rainy day. Fog affected the effectiveness of the artillery, and so it didn't seem that sufficient damage had been done to the Russians in their strong positions. Therefore FML Goglia wished to spend the day continuing the bombardment by the artillery while having the infantry work their way forward slowly. The situation was the same for IV Corps, where FML Schmidt-Georgenegg wanted to make ready the 30.5 cm mortar battery which he had been given, so that he could assault the fortified Makutra Heights with some chance of success. In the other sectors of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the day was also spent in making preparations for a decisive attack.

2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ had the impression that the resistance of the Russians, who had already seemed less eager to attack on 4 September, was beginning to weaken. Therefore GdK Böhm-Ermolli was dissatisfied with the new postponement of the offensive, and he made this clear in orders he issued in the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>; he stated his expectation that most of the Russian position "would be broken through by evening of 6 September at the latest." In the afternoon GdI Bothmer suggested that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army should wait until 7 September, then attack along with his South Army. Böhm-Ermolli, however, stuck firmly to his order that the offensive would open on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

On this day the divisions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army stormed against the enemy after completing the artillery preparation. The tightly massed troops of 34 ID broke through the Russian positions north of Styberowka around noon. Soon afterwards the 33 ID secured Podkamien and 29 ID of XIX Corps captured Nakwasza. In the sector northeast of Radziwilow GM Ritter von Willerding with 31 and 32 ID, supported by the powerful mortar fire of IV Corps,

had already broken through on both sides of Krupiec around 10:00 AM, and at noon reached the Michalowka Heights after difficult fighting. This now made it easier for 27 ID to take the stubbornly defended town of Radziwilow, since the Russians here were already outflanked from the north. Finally the 43 LW ID, advancing south of Styberowka, was ordered to thrust south to roll up the enemy troops who were still holding their ground in front of 14 ID. Before this envelopment became effective, however, the Russians abandoned their trenches behind the ponds of the Sereth at Ratyszczce. By evening they were still standing firm only on the Makutra Heights opposite 51 Hon ID. Now more than ever it seemed that a thrust by 29 ID from Nakwasza into the flank of this enemy force offered success. Here too, however, the Russians pulled back their line in the nick of time. At 2:00 AM (on 7 September) the 51 Hon ID secured the Makutra Heights. In other actions during the night the leading troops of V and XIX Corps, following closely behind the withdrawing Russians, reached the areas around Zagorze and Krutniew. By this time the 27 ID of IV Corps was southeast of Radziwilow, while 32 and 31 ID had advanced past Michalowka. Thus Böhm-Ermolli had defeated the southern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army for the third time. His men brought in more than 3000 prisoners and 6 captured machine guns. The center of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army also had to fall back between Sitno and Mlynow to stay in touch with the beaten south wing.

The furious Aus-Hung. attack had its effect on the Russian leadership. After the unwelcome surprise at Luck, Brussilov was now also concerned about the fate of Rovno. He feared he would be unable to stay much longer on the Putilowka, and urgently requested fresh troops from Ivanov.<sup>54</sup> The commander of the Southwest Front pulled all of the poorly-equipped replacement troops who were available in the recruiting depots and sent them to Brussilov; he also informed the commander-in-chief, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievitch, about the critical situation of 8<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>55</sup> The envelopment attack by the enemy's larger force in Volhynia had finally separated that Army from the units fighting north of the Pripyat. Ivanov also forcefully warned the Stavka about the dangers that would threaten the Kiev area, vital for providing supplies to the Russian Army, if his armies had to

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54 Broussilov, p. 156. Zayontschovsky, "The War of Movement in 1914 and 1915", p. 371.

55 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - There is an error here. By this point the Grand Duke was no longer commander-in-chief at Stavka (as explained in the next section).

fall back to the Dnieper.<sup>56</sup> However, it transpired that this call for help was unnecessary.

#### **4. Actions of the k.u.k. XII Corps under the German Eastern armies, 27 August-7 September**

On 20 August the Stavka had to leave Baranowicze and move to Mogilev. Here the War Minister Polivanov arrived from Petersburg and brought the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievitch a letter from the Tsar. The monarch informed his uncle that he had decided, as he had long wanted, to finally place himself at the head of the Army. Developments in the Caucasus demanded the intervention of someone with an experienced and hard hand; therefore the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievitch must take over the posts of commander of the Caucasus Army and governor of the province. On 4 September, Tsar Nicholas II arrived at Mogilev as supreme commander. The former Chief of the General Staff, General Yanushkevitch, had followed the Grand Duke to the Caucasus; he was succeeded by General Alexeiev.<sup>57</sup>

The new leadership naturally focused their attention on the Northern Front, where the German Army of the Niemen had intensified its pressure against the Dvina sector Uxkull-Friedrichstadt since the end of August. 5<sup>th</sup> Russian Army vainly sought to bring GdI Otto von Below's attack to an end by thrusts from Jakobstadt and on the Swienta. The advance of 10<sup>th</sup> German Army also caused General Alexeiev great concern. Despite stout resistance, the Germans' enveloping left wing pushed back the 10<sup>th</sup> Russian Army on both sides of the Wilia; the right wing reached Orany at the start of September. Alexeiev sent reinforcements from West Front (the center of the Russian forces) to Vilna, and sought to halt the Germans between the Dvina and Niemen in the area that was the door to the lines of communication leading to the interior of the Muscovite Empire.

However the situation of the Russian West Front, now commanded by General Evert, was no more enviable. On 4 September the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army captured the fortress of Grodno. Around this date the 12<sup>th</sup> Army broke out of the primeval Bielowiesia Forest. At the end of August and beginning of September the Army Groups of Prince Leopold (9<sup>th</sup> Army and GO von Woysch's Army) and Mackensen (11<sup>th</sup> and Bug Armies) pushed the Armies of the West Front (1<sup>st</sup>,

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56 Nesnamov, Vol. IV, p. 125.

57 Paleologue, Vol. I, pp. 395 ff and 411. Lemke, "250 Days at the Tsar's Stavka" (in Russian, Leningrad, 1920), pp. 150 ff.

2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) away from the Narewka and Lesna and from the Muchawiec sector. They fell back to the Zelwianka, to Jasiolda, over the Dnieper-Bug canal, and in the tongue of land between Jasiolda and Pina.<sup>58</sup> Because of the progress of Hindenburg's and Conrad's offensives, and the possibility that the weakened Russian armies could be driven past the line Baranowicze-Pinsk, GdI Falkenhayn agreed that Prince Leopold's and Mackensen's Army Groups could push farther east than the line where on 28 August he had ordered them to halt.<sup>59</sup>

GdI von Kövess' XII k.u.k. Corps (16 and 35 ID) took part in these operations as part of Woyrsch's Army. Both of the k.u.k. cavalry divisions (9 and 2) which had been attached to 9<sup>th</sup> German Army left the front on 3 and 6 September (respectively) and moved to join 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### The advance to the Jasiolda

On 27 August, Woyrsch's Army drove into the bend in the Lesna northeast of Kamieniec-Litowsk in light fighting; by the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> they reached the Szereszowo-Sochopol area after a tiresome pursuit. Here the northern group of 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army, in conjunction with 4<sup>th</sup> Army, had chosen a good position behind the swamps of the eastern Lesna to block the roads on which Woyrsch's columns were hurrying northeast toward Rozany. On the 29<sup>th</sup> the 16 ID seized the heights south of Szereszowo from the enemy; 35 ID on their left came to a halt in a swamp just in front of the town. In the north the Silesian Landwehr Corps gained ground by Sochopol.

16 ID was supposed to renew their attack through Szereszowo early on 30 August. The Russians, however, had already evacuated the town and the eastern Lesna sector because of the threat from the north, and pulled back toward the Jasiolda. German pilots reported that endless columns were on the road from Pruzany to Rozany and Slonim; therefore GO Woyrsch wanted XII Corps to win the crossing point on the Jasiolda at Koledicze as soon as possible while the Landwehr moved through Smolenica to cut the Russian divisions off from their line of retreat to Rozany. Therefore Kövess' Corps didn't delay after occupying Szereszowo; they pushed ahead - with 16 ID on the right and 35 ID on the left - along the Pruzany-Koledicze road and toward the Jasiolda. This march involved considerable exertion, because as

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58 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 217 ff.

59 Per a report of the German Reich Archive, 7 July 1931. Also Foerster, Vol. II, p. 67.

usual the Russians had destroyed all the bridges behind them, and left rear guards at various points to delay the pursuers. Nevertheless Kövess had already reached the Jasiolda on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

35 ID was instructed to cross the river on 1 September at Koledicze; they were unsuccessful, however, because the Russians defended this sector covering the road to Rozany with the greatest stubbornness. Therefore on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kövess shifted 16 ID to the right, so that they could cross the river through Siedlec. Here they found the Russians standing firm behind a broad area of swampy low ground. Parts of 16 ID made their way with difficulty from island to island until they reached the opposite bank of the Jasiolda. However, they couldn't continue their attack in the fully water-logged woods. The Russians launched counterattacks. The hard pressed advance battalions of the Transylvanians couldn't be reinforced because the enemy kept the crossing points under heavy fire both day and night.

To the right of XII Corps, the Beskid Corps of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army had advanced along the northern edge of the Pripjat swamps, and on 4 September they stormed the bridgehead west of the Jasiolda at Kartuszkaya Bereza. To the left (north) of XII Corps the Landwehr had forced their way out of the swamp at and southeast of Nw. Dwor by the 5<sup>th</sup>. Still farther north, the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army secured the northeastern exit from the Bielsk forests. Now the Russians also fell back a piece from the Jasiolda in front of Corps Kövess. However, their artillery and machine guns still swept the road along the causeway at Siedlec, which was the only route to Michalin. The enemy finally ended their resistance to Corps Kövess on 8 September, when the German units of Woyrsch's Army were already at Rozany and on the Rozanka.

#### Operations farther south

On 29 August the Bug Army took Kobrin; their main body advanced to the town from the west while G.Lt von Heydebreck's Cav Corps (11 Hon CD and German 5 CD) attacked from the south. General Letsch, commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian army, led his south wing back to the fortified line Drogiczyn-Chomsk. On 6 September the Bug Army was also able to seize this position. Letsch now blocked the tongue of land at Pinsk in a new position on both sides of Iwanowo. South of the Pripjat his IV Cav Corps under Gillenschmidt guarded the roads which led through Kamien Kaszysky and between the Stokhod and the Horyn to Pinsk and Luniniec (in the rear of 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army). At the start of September, the Stavka ordered Letsch to reinforce Gillenschmidt with 77 ID of XXXI Corps, which was sent by rail through

Luniniec-Sarny. This would enable the cavalry corps to restore the lost link with Brussilov's Army and harass the rear areas of the k.u.k. forces advancing toward Rovno.<sup>60</sup> This, however, was the only help which Alexeiev could offer 8<sup>th</sup> Army, since he was still under pressure from the German offensive.

Now Ivanov decided that because of the threatening situation in Volhynia he would remove XXX Corps from the front and send it from east Galicia by rail to the north wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army. He believed he could risk thus weakening his southern wing because of the temporary pause in operations on the Sereth (where Bothmer and Pflanzner-Baltin were regrouping their units). This hiatus in the fighting also gave Ivanov time to prepare attack groups in 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies. He felt that his forces were too weak for a large scale counterattack, but hoped that by sorties from the bridgeheads on the Sereth they could provide relief for the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in its desperate battle.

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60 Zayontschovsky, "The war of movement 1914 and 1915", p. 370

## ***D. Counterattacks by the Russian Southwest Front***

### **1. The Battle of the Sereth, 6-12 September**

#### **a. The Russians break through at Trembowla**

While Shcherbatchev and Letschitzky were preparing their counter-thrusts, Bothmer was moving the troops of his South Army nearer to the Sereth. On the left wing of Corps Marschall on 5 September, 38 Hon ID deployed in strength opposite the bridgehead at Zalosce, 19 ID opposite the one at Tarnopol. Farther south, 48 Res ID moved through the woods at Bucniow. 3 Gd ID stood directly behind these divisions. Corps Hofmann with 55 ID and 131 Inf Bde - a total of 14 weak battalions and 8 batteries on a front of 30 km - dug in in front of Mikulince, Strusow and Trembowla. Col Bolzano's Bde was moved from the south wing to the extreme north wing of Corp Hofmann, so that on 7 September they could break through south of Tarnopol along with the attacking group of Corps Marschall (48 Res and 3 Gd ID). On the same day, Pflanze-Baltin wanted to also thrust with the main body of XIII Corps through Czortkow, and with the reinforced left wing of Corp Benigni along the eastern bank of the Sereth toward the north.

#### 6 September

Now, however, Ivanov could begin his counter-measures. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the Russians didn't renew their efforts against Corps Benigni. However, according to prisoners the enemy had assembled considerable forces to protect their flank on the Dniester - about 3 infantry and 2 or 3 cavalry divisions along with 2 or 3 opolcheniye brigades. Enemy troop assemblies were also observed in front of Corps Henriquez and farther north in front of Corps Rhemen and Hofmann. Russian reconnaissance thrusts and artillery fire led to expectations that they would attack the right wing of Bothmer's Army.

On the afternoon of 6 September, stronger detachments of XI Russian Corps suddenly surged out of the bridgeheads around Trembowla against the weakest part of the front, the center and south wing of Corps Hofmann. Covered by cavalry who rode in front of the infantry, the Russians pushed into the inadequately constructed positions of 55 ID; despite the intervention of the

Corps' reserve, the enemy couldn't be thrown out again.

The Russians scored a second success on the north wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army at Janow, where they thrust south and broke through the thinly-held front between 131 Inf Bde and 36 ID. GdI Rhemen threw GM Luxardo's group (troops from 15 and 5 ID) through Mogielnica against the advancing Russians and brought them to a halt. Thus the situation on the left wing of XIII Corps was restored, but now the planned attack on Czortkow had to be canceled because all available forces were needed to defend against the Russians at Mogielnica. Nevertheless Pflanze-Baltin decided to carry on with the other attack planned for 7 September: the flank thrust by Corps Benigni, which he had meanwhile reinforced by a total of five battalions from Corps Henriquez and from 202 Hon Inf Bde.

#### 7 September

Similarly, the Russian thrusts against 55 ID didn't cause GdI Bothmer to give up his plan to break through south of Tarnopol. The south wing of Corps Marschall was supposed to attack on the morning of 7 September. Now, however, Shcherbatchev and Letschitzky were emboldened by the success at Trembowla, and had ordered that on the 7<sup>th</sup> their own troops should make new attacks, this time by XVIII Corps from the Tarnopol bridgehead and by XI Corps at Budzanow. This seemed all the more necessary to the Russian commanders because their opponents had meanwhile broken through the neighboring 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army at Podkamien and Radziwilow.

In the night of 6-7 September some troops from XXII Russian Corps had already pushed through the broken lines of 55 ID, and thus came upon the flank and rear of Bolzano's Brigade. This Brigade was supposed to join the planned advance of Corps Marschall in a few hours, and thus was more ready to attack than to defend when it was suddenly struck by the Russians at dawn. Bolzano's troops (IR # 81 and 88) were routed, and fled away through Nastasow. The Russians captured numerous prisoners and seized eight German guns which were directly behind the foremost line, prepared for the offensive. Fortunately the Russians didn't pursue eagerly. The quick intervention of two regiments of 3 Gd ID under Col Leu, who threw themselves from the north against the enemy, covered Marschall's highly endangered southern flank. Here the Russians were once more forced back on the defensive, and some of the lost guns were recovered. Bolzano's Brigade soon rallied and joined the advance of the Germans.

Meanwhile the 48 Res ID and 19 ID had repulsed the attack of XVIII Russian Corps from the Tarnopol bridgehead. However, the defense didn't have such a favorable outcome against the further thrusts which the Russians mounted from the Trembowla bridgehead. Here they were already grasping the flank of 55 ID at dawn on 7 September, and in the morning broke through the front in several places. After heavy fighting, the Division had to withdraw in the afternoon to the heights east of the Strypa toward Burkanow. The Russians struck south from Darachow and separated Blum's 131 Inf Bde from Corps Hofmann. Although beset on the north flank and in the rear by enemy cavalry, Blum's left wing fought their way with difficulty back to Dobropole. His right wing, along with GM Luxardo's Group of XIII Corps, were still offering stubborn resistance in the afternoon on the heights of Mogielnica against the Russian XI Corps, which was attacking from Trembowla and Janow. Toward evening, however, the right wing of 36 ID was thrown back from the Sereth at Budzanow. Therefore FML Schreitter took his entire Division plus the remnants of 131 Inf Bde back to the heights of Kossow and south of Laskowce.

Early on the 7<sup>th</sup>, some Cherkassian detachments stormed against the 6 ID on the right wing of Corps Benigni. The gallant Division, however, defeated the enemy and inflicted heavy losses. After an effective artillery bombardment, FML Brudermann's group (3 and 6 CD, reinforced by 8 battalions and 9 batteries) delivered the planned flank thrust along the east bank of the Sereth around 1:00 PM. Their energetic attack quickly gained ground; the brave Silesian IR # 1, along with UR # 4, HR # 1 and DR # 11, stormed the Russian position. Meanwhile parts of 6 ID also joined the advance. 3700 prisoners and 7 machine guns were taken.<sup>61</sup> The Russians had already begun to fall back in front of the right wing of Corps Henriquez, when Benigni's attacking troops were hit in the right flank by a counter-thrust in the afternoon. Our artillery stationed on the right wing of 6 ID supported the defenders with flanking fire. Eventually the Russians fell back; toward evening, however, Benigni's troops - who had suffered severe losses - were pulled back to their starting points.

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61 Dragoni, "Vier Kaiser-Regimenter am 7. September 1915" (Öst. Wehrzeitung 1927, Issue 36) [The title is due to the fact that Emperor Francis Joseph was himself the Inhaber of all four regiments listed above]; Adolph-Auffenberg, "Kaiser-Infanterie alle voran" (Ibid., Issue 39); also see the field diary of GM von Stöhr, at that time commanding 11 Inf Bde.

Unfortunately, the brilliant success of FML Brudermann's group therefore had no effect. Benigni lacked the reserves needed to make his attack operationally decisive. Now it was expected that the Russians, protected by the Dniester, would exploit the breakthrough already achieved at Trembowla. By mounting flank thrusts they could roll up the k.u.k. troops who were still holding their old positions along the Sereth. GdK Pflanzer-Baltin's primary concern was therefore to reinforce his left wing. At the moment, the only reserves available to him were some March battalions in the area north of the Dniester, and two battalions of Corps Henriquez. These troops were moved by truck to the left wing of XIII Corps. If 36 ID was unable to hold onto the line Czortkow-Kossow-Laskowce, GdK Pflanzer-Baltin wanted to pull all of Corps Rhemen back to the line Jagielnica-Przewloka. Meanwhile 37 Hon ID, coming by train from Ivangorod, could arrive at Nizniow and then move northeast against the enemy's flank and rear if they continued to push against Corp Hofmann. To cover the approach of 37 Hon ID, cavalry was sent to Buczacz (the half of 8 CD from Corps Henriquez on 8 September, and 6 CD from Corps Benigni on the 9<sup>th</sup>).

#### 8 September

Bothmer, on the other hand, wanted to already attack early on 8 September with the right wing of Corp Marschall through Nastasow; this wing, with its front bent toward the south, now contained the remnants of Bolzano's Brigade and parts of 3 Gd ID and 48 Res ID. It was hoped that this threat to the flank of the Russians who'd broken through over the Sereth would force them to retreat. When Pflanzer-Baltin, the energetic commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, learned of this plan he immediately decided not to wait for the intervention of 37 Hon ID, but to have the left wing of XIII Corps thrust north to catch the Russians in a pincers.

On Marschall's right wing, the brigades of Leu and Bolzano, reinforced by a regiment from 38 Hon ID, attacked at Nastasow. The Russians were pushed back a little toward the Sereth, but nothing else was accomplished. The weak 131 Inf Bde, which was supposed to thrust along the road from Dobropole to Darachow, encountered enemy detachments (mainly cavalry) at Chmielowka. These Russians began to advance in the afternoon toward Laskowce and against Corps Hofmann. Thus the situation remained very difficult because  
. the troops engaged on the left wing of Corp Rhemen had already suffered heavy losses,

. confidence and morale were sinking after the heavy setback on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and

. it could hardly be expected that the 55 ID, whose combat value was also rated as low, would be able to hold its ground for long against the enemy on the Strypa.

Thus Corps Marschall, which was still in position opposite Tarnopol but was itself menaced by a concentration of strong Russian forces, also faced the danger of envelopment from the south. In his distress, GdI Bothmer waited impatiently for relief from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

### **b. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army intervenes in the Sereth battle**

#### 7 September

Early on 7 September, just before starting the pursuit to Nw. Aleksiniec and toward the Ikwa, GdK Böhm-Ermolli had diverted FML von Csicseric's 14 ID (of V Corps), southeast through Gajeza Ruda. This would open the way over the upper Sereth for 38 Hon ID on the north wing of South Army. When Böhm-Ermolli learned during the day about the unfavorable development of the Sereth battle, he decided to send GM von Birkenhain's 34 ID in the same direction as 14 ID; the two divisions would form a group under FML Csicseric, with the mission of advancing as quickly and deeply as possible through Iwanczany and Gniezdiczno into the flank and rear of the Russians who were advancing against South Army. Also some portions of 38 Hon ID (of Corps Marschall) were placed under FML Csicseric, so they could advance behind the retreating Russians through Zalosce to Mszaniec. Moreover, on 8 September the 51 Hon ID would leave IV Corps and move by forced marches to the Nw. Aleksiniec area; here they would also be available to help FML Csicseric.

Böhm-Ermolli's bold plan to thrust to Zbaraz would considerably weaken V Corps. Nevertheless, he still didn't abandon the idea of enveloping the Ikwa line from the south. Now he could no longer deploy five divisions for a decisive attack between the Horyn and the upper Ikwa, as originally planned; there would be only three divisions - 43 LW ID and 33 ID of V Corps plus 32 ID (which had been moved from XVIII Corps to the Army's reserve). Böhm-Ermolli was in a hurry, because he knew that he still had overall numerical superiority over the Russians on his front but was concerned that the favorable balance of forces wouldn't continue much longer. The Army commander told FML Csicseric that on 8 September he should thrust toward Zbaraz; the other corps would prepare for the attack on the Ikwa line, which would

be opened by the right wing on the 9<sup>th</sup>. 32 ID would move as soon as possible to Nw. Poczajew to reinforce V Corps.

When Böhm-Ermolli issued these orders on the evening of 7 September, the units of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had reached the areas around Gontowa, Nw. Aleksiniec, east of Lopuszno, around Nw. Poczajew, and on both sides of Plaszewa in a rapid pursuit. Opposite Csicsserics' group the enemy was deployed between Ithrowica and Swiniuchy on the upper Horyn; opposite V Corps they were at Butyn and Rydoml. In front of XIX, IV and XVIII Corps, who'd already brought their advanced troops to the Ikwa on the 7<sup>th</sup> in light fighting, the Russians were deeply entrenched on the other side of the river, on the edge of the hills around Kremieniec.

### 8 September

During 8 September the three northern corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army deployed their main forces near the Ikwa and drove the remaining enemy detachments west of the river to the other side. V Corps prepared for its attack on the strong Russian positions between the upper Ikwa and Horyn. During the morning, Army HQ informed FML Csicsserics that because of the critical situation of South Army he should advance as quickly as possible toward Zbaraz. He was opposed only by 4 Russian Division, which had already been defeated at Gologory; he could attack this unit energetically and smash it with his first blow.

FML Csicsserics, however, couldn't decide to attack on 8 September. For one thing, it seemed to him that the enemy had already prepared strong positions between Iwanczany and Swiniuchy, which couldn't be simply overrun. Moreover, the troops he had immediately available - 14 ID and 75 Hon Inf Bde - were so exhausted after their recent actions and marches that they couldn't start immediately. On the left wing, only parts of 34 ID had arrived. 51 Hon ID was still marching up to Nw. Aleksiniec, and Csicsserics wanted to await their arrival. Finally, it rained throughout 8 September, so that the heavy artillery remained stuck on the soaked roads. Fog hindered the action of the batteries that were already in position.

When FML Csicsserics reported to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ in the afternoon that the attack on Zbaraz hadn't started yet, they were greatly disappointed. GdI Bothmer meanwhile had complained about the hesitant advance of Csicsserics' group. For the time being they were opposed by only weak enemy forces, but if given more time the Russians could reinforce their positions, bring up fresh troops, and thrust into the gap between Marschall's and Rhemen's

corps. However, if Csicseric's group advanced quickly, Tarnopol (the Russians' sally port on the Sereth) would inevitably fall, which would allow Bothmer to move reinforcements from this sector to help Hofmann's threatened corps. GdK Böhm-Ermolli, who meanwhile had moved his HQ from Lemberg to Brody, believed that the Zbaraz operation was lacking energetic leadership. He transferred command of Group Csicseric to the leader of XIX Corps, FML Trollmann, and instructed him to thrust ruthlessly to Zbaraz on 9 September with all his strength. In the evening, FML Csicseric asked his Army commander to wait until 10 September to open a systematic attack. GdK Böhm-Ermolli, however, insisted that the offensive should be carried out already on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Now FML Csicseric took 34 ID, which had arrived on his left wing, and moved it farther south so that it could make a combined assault with 14 ID on the enemy front at Ditkowce. Apparently Csicseric wished to make his main effort on the right wing because of local conditions, but this entailed exhausting night marches for the troops.

#### 9 September

FML Trollmann arrived at Bukowica (north of Mszaniec) in the morning of 9 September and took over command of the Zbaraz operation. It was a rainy day. Thick fog continued to hamper any effective artillery activity. In the afternoon, when the weather improved somewhat, FML Trollmann opened the infantry attack with three groups, but couldn't break through. VI Russian Corps had by now deployed between the upper Sereth and the Horyn. If the troops had made a more methodical attack with closely concentrated forces on the 10<sup>th</sup>, as Csicseric had envisioned, perhaps the breakthrough to Zbaraz might have succeeded.

FML Goglia, whose task was to roll up the Ikwa line from the south, had meanwhile already attacked the strong Russian positions between the upper Ikwa and the Horyn in the morning; he sent 43 LW ID against Butyn and 33 ID through Rydoml (32 ID stayed in the Corps' reserve for now). The attacking divisions of V Corps took the forward Russian positions and during the day made their way up to the main line of resistance, but suffered heavy losses. By evening the XIX Corps, which also faced stubborn Russian resistance, hadn't achieved any more. The XIX and V Corps were supposed to continue their attack on the next morning; if they did manage to throw the enemy back, they then would launch a pursuit.

**c. Further Russian advances against Corps Marschall and the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army**

Although the attack by the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army didn't break through on 9 September, at least on this day they brought some relief to the hard-fighting South Army in its desperately critical situation. This was evident by the fact that for the time being the Russians between Marschall and XIII Corps didn't dare to thrust further to the west. The commander of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, General Shcherbatchev, was apparently concerned mainly about holding in check the opposing forces east of the upper Sereth, who were threatening to break into his rear. The Russian units who'd been pushing against Corps Hofmann pulled back on 9 September, also because they were threatened by a new thrust of 3 Gd ID at Nastasow. On this day the 55 ID was therefore able to move its thin lines ahead somewhat on the heights east of the Strypa.

New fighting meanwhile flared up to the right of Hofmann's Corps. General Letschitzky, commanding 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, sought to push the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army, which held a position between Biala, Kossow and Laskowce, toward the south. Apparently Letschitzky wanted to free his own right wing for an attack over the Strypa. Detachments of XI Russian Corps attacked out of Laskowce and Zwiniacz early on the 9<sup>th</sup>. They threw back the right wing of 36 ID and soon afterward the left wing of 15 ID back to Kossow, inflicting substantial casualties. At Kossow the battered Croatian IR # 53 and 16, which had already lost many troops in the fighting at Przewloka on the Strypa, sought to offer new resistance. Around noon, however, both Aus-Hung. divisions had to give way before the advancing Russians; they fell back to the line Jagielnica-Dzuryn-Pilawa. They lost contact with 131 Inf Bde, still stationed at Chmielowka. When the Brigade found that the Russians were moving around their right flank, they withdrew through Dobropole toward the Strypa. The half of 8 CD which had been pulled from Corps Henriquez to cover the approach of 37 Hon ID to Buczacz was called up to guard XIII Corps' left wing. In the afternoon, enemy units were already striking from Kossow and the area farther northwest against Pilawa and Dzuryn. There was danger of a new breakthrough, which would drive Rhemen's already damaged Corps away from South Army and toward the Dniester. To prevent this, Pflanzer-Baltin empowered the Corps commander to go back if necessary to a bridgehead over the Strypa on both sides of Buczacz, and to the line Jazlowiec-Koszylowce.

Since the condition of the troops was alarming - XIII Corps had

already lost 17,000 men, more than half of its strength, since crossing the Zlota Lipa - GdI Rhemen didn't believe they were capable of prolonged resistance, and therefore ordered the retreat as authorized. After darkness fell he pulled 36 ID back to the Buczacz bridgehead; on the left he deployed the half of 8 CD in the Bobulince area. Farther north, 131 Inf Bde was posted at Wisniowczyk, so that there would still be some troops between Rhemen and Corps Hofmann. 6 CD, which had moved from Corps Benigni behind Rhemen's lines, was entrusted with the defense of the area between Pomorce and Jazlowiec. To the right of the cavalry, 15 ID took up a position at Koszylowce. FML Henriquez, with the remainder of 8 CD and the left wing of 30 ID (which had been reinforced by Lt Col Bekesi's Lst Inf Bde), fell back to the area on both sides of Tluste. These movements took place in the night of 9-10 September without interference from the enemy.

Meanwhile General Shcherbatchev, whose right wing had stood their ground against the first assault of their opponents, gave orders to attack Corps Marschall. Early on the 10<sup>th</sup>, the Prussian 3 Gd ID at Nastasow was assaulted after a heavy artillery barrage. This Division, supported by artillery, flung back the Finnish riflemen of XXII Russian Corps, who advanced in several lines. However, on Marschall's left wing the Russian XVIII Corps pushed into the positions of 19 ID - in the morning on the road to Dolzanka and then in the afternoon farther to the north. The Division was able to hold its ground only with difficulty.

Shcherbatchev had attacked Corps Marschall frontally out of the Tarnopol bridgehead and at the same time in the flank through Nastasow. After XIII Corps retreated to the west, Letschitzky sought in similar fashion to overwhelm the left wing of Corps Henriquez, which was bent toward the west, from his position on the Sereth with a two-pronged attack from the east and north. While making diversionary thrusts against Corps Benigni, Letschitzky sent reinforcements over the Sereth; toward noon on 10 September he fell on 30 ID (now commanded by GM Jesser)<sup>62</sup> in the front and in the flank. At Bilcze the Russians were repulsed. At Szypowce, however, they smashed Lt Col Bekesi's Lst Inf Bde and then drove all of Corps Henriquez, after it launched a fruitless counterattack, in retreat to the outskirts of the Zaleszczyki bridgehead. 15 ID pulled their right wing back from Koszylowce west to the mouth of the Strypa. The situation thus became more serious. At this time the only

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62 The former divisional commander, FML Kaiser, had taken over II Corps in the place of GdI Johann Freiherr von Kirchbach.

troops along the Dniester between XIII Corps and Henriquez were half of 8 CD. If the Russians thrust over the Dniester there could be serious consequences for the center of 7th Army. GdK Pflanzer-Baltin ordered IR "Khevenhüller" # 7 to move from Benigni's Corps to the left wing of Henriquez. Moreover he sent Hon IR "Trencsen" # 15 of 37 Hon ID, which was detraining at Nizniow, on to Horodenka. He hoped that the intervention of further reinforcements, which the high command was meanwhile making available, would completely retrieve the situation.

#### The reaction of the high command

GO Conrad was very unpleasantly disturbed by reports about the setbacks on the Sereth. After lengthy negotiations, he had recently (on 6 September) signed a military convention with Bulgaria, along with Falkenhayn and the Bulgarian Col. Gantshev. Austria-Hungary and Germany had each pledged to have six divisions ready to operate on the Serbian border within 30 days, while Bulgaria prepared at least four divisions within 35 days. Now the crisis in east Galicia made it questionable whether the k.u.k. high command could carry out its promised responsibility. On 10 September, Falkenhayn did send a telegram in which he said he would understand if the Aus-Hung. units which had been chosen to go to the Serbian border were deployed in east Galicia. He promised to take their place with German troops.<sup>63</sup> However, the German Chief of Staff went on in his message with some bitter words: "Certainly such a change in plans won't make up for the political and military damage already inflicted. However, it may avert even more unfavorable results, which to me seems all the more important because of the affect on the morale of the Russian Army and on Romania."

Under the pressure of the crisis of the moment, later on 10 September GO Conrad decided that VI Corps (12 ID and 39 Hon ID), which was supposed to board trains for Serbia at Rawa Russka on the 11th, should provisionally travel instead to Halicz, Stanislau and Nizniow to reinforce 7<sup>th</sup> Army. 37 Hon ID was already arriving gradually in this area. Thus the security of the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army would be ensured, and preparations made for a thrust to recover the line along the Sereth.

#### **d. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's attack stalls; further danger for the South Army**

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63 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", p. 127

Especially strong Russian attacks were in progress against Corps Marschall from early on 10 September, while the thrust of XIX Corps toward Zbaraz and of V Corps between the Horyn and Ikwa had led to long and difficult fighting. It remained to be seen if these actions would lead to a decision. In the meantime, would the troops of 19 ID be able to hold on? This seemed doubtful based on the reports which the k.u.k. high command had received from South Army. Therefore at noon on the 10<sup>th</sup> GO Conrad asked the HQ at Brody whether they still hoped that the south wing of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could win a success. If not, Böhm-Ermolli should suspend his offensive and send a division by the quickest route to Corp Marschall, so that the enemy advancing out of Tarnopol could be driven back.

The commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army replied that the attack by V Corps seemed promising, even though the enemy was offering stubborn resistance. FML Trollmann had ordered his divisions to continue their attack with daring. Army HQ was therefore of the opinion that it would be better to continue the offensive and to stick to the original plan of seeking a decision by thrusting to Zbaraz and between the Horyn and Ikwa, than to shift a division to South Army. The latter course would doubtless take much time because of the bad roads.

While bloody fighting continued on the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, in the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> the Russians had thrown the right wing of 19 ID off the heights at Proniatyn. Böhm-Ermolli learned of this toward evening. Major Say, the Aus-Hung. liaison officer with HQ of South Army, reported also that the badly damaged 19 ID had no reserves available. Relief could only be expected if XIX Corps broke through that very day. In case this was impossible, the 75 Hon Inf Bde would have to be sent in the night to the west bank of the Sereth, so that it could intervene on the seriously endangered north wing of Corp Marschall early on the 11<sup>th</sup>. At the close of this telegram, South Army asked to be quickly informed whether or not XIX Corps had broken through.

This, however, was not the case. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ received reports in the evening which indicated that XIX Corps was pinned down by the stubborn resistance of VI Russian Corps in front of Ithrowica and Iwanczany; on Trollmann's right wing, 75 Hon Ind Bde had even been forced to pull back in the afternoon by a Russian counter-thrust on the heights south of Mszaniec. This Brigade did begin to advance again in the evening. Böhm-Ermolli therefore decided that for now he would just send Hon IR # 302 (from 51 Hon ID), which was in reserve behind XIX Corps, to help Corps Marschall. He still had a fading hope that V Corps would

break the enemy line at Rydoml. In this sector the regiments of 33 ID had made their way right up to parts of the strong Russian positions; FML Goglia had ordered them to storm ahead that night.

#### 11 September

Before this action was decided, the tribulations of the north wing of Bothmer's Army became ever greater. While it was still dark, the Russians sought to exploit the wedge they'd driven into the positions of 19 ID near Dolzanka by driving toward the west. As dawn broke on 11 September, the burnt-out battalions of 19 ID once again collapsed, and the Russians pushed ahead through the town of Dolzanka. When GdI Bothmer learned this, he again urgently appealed to Böhm-Ermolli to give him the 75 Hon Inf Bde. The Aus-Hung. liaison officer reported that perhaps Corps Marschall would now have to withdraw behind the Strypa "to avoid becoming encircled and destroyed." If South Army did in fact retreat, the south flank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would also be greatly endangered.

Based on this news, GdK Böhm-Ermolli ordered FML Trollmann to make 75 Hon Inf Bde available to Marschall. He wanted to continue the attack toward Zbaraz even after this Brigade left. However, the XIX Corps, whose divisions had already suffered heavy losses, was not longer capable of attacking. The same was true of the exhausted regiments of 33 ID in V Corps, who'd been unable to advance further into the enemy lines at Rydoml in a series of fruitless night assaults. FML Goglia reported toward noon that the troops must be given rest, and that a successful attack would require considerable support from heavy batteries. GdK Böhm-Ermolli therefore let V and XIX Corps go over to the defensive. Thus he abandoned the scheme of simultaneously rolling up the Ikwa line with a thrust through Rydoml and the Sereth line with a flank attack to Zbaraz. The most important task now was to bring direct help to South Army west of the Sereth, where further Russian advances could outflank 2<sup>nd</sup> Army from the south. For this purpose, in the night of 10-11 September GdK Böhm-Ermolli had also sought to make troops available from his north wing - where the only assignment was to tie down the enemy - and to move them closer to the south wing. For this purpose, XVIII Corps was sending GM von Felix's 62 Inf Bde (of 31 ID), and IV Corps the IR # 67 and 85 of 27 ID as well as IR # 74 of 29 ID. When the Army commander had to halt the attack of V and XIX Corps around noon on the 11<sup>th</sup>, he decided with the approval of the high command to send the following units to the left wing of South Army:

. A combined division under GM Kroupa (over IR # 67, 74 and 85), and

. 32 ID (from V Corps).

Both were placed under the commander of XVIII Corps, FML Czibulka. Meanwhile FML Lütgendorf temporarily took over XVIII Corps.

In the afternoon of 11 September, while these troops were hurrying toward Zalosce, the Russians launched probing attacks against XIX Corps. It seemed that this might lead to a serious enemy counter-offensive. FML Trollmann therefore asked his Army commander to give him 32 ID. He wanted to open an attack of his own on 12 September with the help of this Division. Instead, FML Trollmann was given 62 Inf Bde, which had come from XVIII Corps. 32 ID, along with Kroupa's combined division, was still supposed to support Corps Marschall.

Meanwhile Marschall had been able by using his last reserves to bring the Russian advance at Dolzanka to a halt on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The 3 Gd ID had held on against all the Russian assaults at Nastasow. Therefore in the night of 10-11 September GdK Marschall was able to assemble an *ad hoc* infantry regiment of German troops, and to send it to help the hard-pressed 19 ID. This regiment, supported by heavy batteries and by Hon IR # 302 which had arrived hurriedly from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, brought the Russians to a halt in heavy fighting after they had already advanced through Dolzanka. However, the crisis was by no means over.

#### 12 September

On 12 September the Russians at Tarnopol were inactive. However, there were several attempts by strong forces to strike the right wing of Corps Marschall, which had been bent toward the north, in an envelopment attack. The Russians also advanced against the north wing of Corps Hofmann. All of these attempts were nipped in the bud by surprise artillery fire. Nonetheless concern persisted that the enemy would continue their thrusts against Corps Marschall and that at least the 19 ID, which had very little remaining combat value, would have to fall back. As long as Corps Marschall stayed in its position it risked being caught in a two-pronged flank attack by XXII and XVIII Russian Corps.

In this situation, on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> GdI Bothmer decided to pull Marschall back toward the west, so that he would have a closer connection with Corps Hofmann. However, Bothmer didn't want to expose the flank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army by this maneuver. Therefore

Marschall was supposed to establish a new front on the heights east of the line of ponds between Horodyszczce and Jezierna. Meanwhile Corps Czibulka would be held in readiness on both sides of Nesterowce for a thrust to the south along the western bank of the Sereth. This seemed to be the best way to guard the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

GO Conrad, on the other hand, at first wanted to deploy Czibulka on Marschall's right, so that he could intervene from the flank in the fighting which was beginning to develop in Hofmann's sector. Conrad had to abandon this plan, because at the moment Marschall's left wing was too weak to offer resistance long enough to allow an attack south along the Strypa to be carried out. It also seemed that the Russians were now about to strike toward Zalosce.

On the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, during the 12<sup>th</sup> the Russians made probing attacks along Trollmann's front, along with strong artillery fire, up to a point north of the Horyn. The left wing of 51 Hon ID was pushed back during the morning, and the parts of 43 LW ID stationed east of Swiniuchy were thrown back over the Horyn toward the north. Reserves from the latter division, which hurried to the battlefield from the other side of the Horyn, pushed the enemy out of Swiniuchy again during the afternoon. Troop movements behind the enemy front from the hills around Kremieniec to the south, as well as reports that a Caucasian corps was on its way on the railroad to Tarnopol, made it certain that the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army as well as Bothmer's Army were threatened by heavy new attacks.

## **2. Striving for a decision in Volhynia, 7-13 September**

### **a. The advance to the Stubiel and to Dubno**

In these days of mounting tension in east Galicia, the AOK at Teschen was waiting with all the greater impatience for a decisive success in Volhynia. Here the advance of GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group had already been stalled for eight days on the Putilowka. In the night of 6-7 September, however, the breakthrough of Böhm-Ermolli's Army at Podkamien had forced the Russians in front of the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to retreat behind the Ikwa. As soon as the high command learned of this at noon on the 7<sup>th</sup>, they ordered the Archduke to move very quickly on the north wing. It was anticipated that after the enemy was established on the strong Ikwa front they could shift units to

the Putilowka, which they apparently wanted to hold indefinitely. 1<sup>st</sup> Army should not assault the Ikwa line frontally; further attacks should be directed mainly toward Olyka and in the area north of the Luck-Dubno road.

These orders were sent to Archduke Joseph Ferdinand in the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>. The Archduke in turn instructed FZM Puhallo to only send weak forces toward Dubno and the Ikwa, in order to pin down the enemy. Puhallo would assemble two infantry divisions behind the left wing of his 1<sup>st</sup> Army. These units could either add weight to the offensive by Corps Szurmay or perhaps be employed even further north.

On the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, the Army commander still sought to win a decision by enveloping the enemy. On 8 September the X Corps (4, 24 and 62 ID, 45 LW ID) was supposed to break through from Cuman to Klewan, which would roll up the Russians still on the Putilowka from the north. 2 ID of XIV Corps would take part in this attack. 3 ID (of XIV Corps) and IX Corps would hinder the Russians from shifting their troops. 13 LW ID, which at the time was stationed behind XIV Corps, would march on the 8th to Moszczanica, behind X Corps; 21 LW ID was relieved from the front of IX Corps and would move to Palcza. Cav Corps Berndt would secure the Army's left flank on the Kormin, while 1 CD patrolled between the Styr and Stokhod.

The high command, on the other hand, wanted as many as possible of the twelve infantry divisions stationed north of the Luck-Dubno road to attack on the 8<sup>th</sup>, because the outcome of the fighting along all of the Russian Southwest Front depended on success on the north wing.<sup>64</sup>

#### 8 September

Early on 8 September, GdI Roth and FML Martiny on the Putilowka opened artillery fire to prepare for their often-postponed attack on Russian XXXIX Corps, which had been reinforced by 4 Rifle Div. Fog reduced the effectiveness of the bombardment of the enemy trenches; rain, which had been pouring since the preceding evening, turned the low ground along the Putilowka into a broad swamp. Under X Corps the regiments of 24 and 4 ID

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64 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Although not stated explicitly, apparently this sentence points out that 4<sup>th</sup> Army, by keeping so many divisions out of line or using them merely to hinder Russian troops movements, wasn't carrying out the intentions of the AOK to the best of their ability.

took all day to work their way up to the enemy from their starting points on the south bank of the Putilowka. 2 ID, deployed on the left wing of XIV Corps along the railroad, was unable to cross the river because of heavy Russian defensive fire. The divisions on the right wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army and the left of 1<sup>st</sup> Army restricted their activity to a mere fire fight. On Puhallo's south wing the 46 LW ID and 25 ID continued their pursuit during the day without encountering serious fighting; they advanced between Mlynow and Werba almost up to the Ikwa. In the morning the HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army already received a surprising report that the enemy had evacuated Dubno and that the bridges over the Ikwa in the city were in flames.

Archduke Joseph Ferdinand now ordered FZM Puhallo to leave only 25 ID in the Dubno area; 46 LW ID, on the other hand, would move along the line behind the west bank of the Ikwa to the Army's left wing. On this front FZM Puhallo wanted to build an attacking group out of 46 LW ID, I Corps and Corps Szurmay; on the 10<sup>th</sup> they would carry out a carefully-prepared attack on the Russians at Uzyniec.

The high command was waiting for a decision with growing impatience. Toward evening on the 8<sup>th</sup>, GO Conrad angrily noted to 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ: "The AOK has deployed 14 divisions against 5 ½ or 6 Russian divisions on the north wing. This superiority has been achieved by dangerously thinning the front in east Galicia, which is now being attacked by larger Russian forces." Once again Teschen stated that only a quick and overwhelming success by 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies could secure the decision.

GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand ordered FML Martiny and GdI Roth to continue the attack in strength. He placed 13 LW ID under X Corps. He ordered FZM Puhallo not to wait until his entire attacking group was assembled, but to attack on 9 September with all the units already available north of the Ikwa. IX Corps would also take part in this attack.

### 9 September

Meanwhile on the north wing the 4 and 24 ID broke into the enemy positions south of Cuman as darkness fell. The coming of night and the exhaustion of the troops made it temporarily impossible to advance any further. As 9 September dawned, it was ascertained that the Russians in front of the parts of 62 ID on the south bank of the Putilowka, and in front of 24 and 4 ID and the north wing of XIV Corps, had pulled back during the night. Soon reports arrived that the enemy had also abandoned their

positions opposite IX Corps and Corps Szurmay. Thus Brussilov's north wing had given up the entire front on the Putilowka and north of the Ikwa which they had held since 2 September. The k.u.k. troops followed the retreating enemy toward the east. In the process, the 24, 4, 2, 3 and 21 ID south of the Putilowka were packed closely together. The AOK at Teschen, on the other hand, wanted the advance to proceed with a strong left wing stretching far to the north. They expected the Russians to offer new resistance on the Stubielbach, the last defensible line in front of Rovno, and warned against attempting a frontal assault on this front which was well protected by the terrain. Instead the 4<sup>th</sup> Army should envelop the Stubielbach position from the north before the Russians could again fortify themselves in front of Rovno.

Therefore Archduke Joseph Ferdinand wanted the IX and XIV Corps in the center of his Army Group to first pursue the Russians to the Stubiel and then merely to pin down the enemy if in fact they again offered serious resistance at this point. X Corps, now reinforced to five divisions (4, 24, 62, 45 and 13), would cross the Horyn below the mouth of the Stubiel before thrusting south toward Rovno. Berndt's Cav Corps should cover the flank west of the Horyn and destroy the Rovno-Sany rail line. As previously ordered, Puhallo's Army would make their main effort on their left wing and break through the Russian front between the Stubiel and Ikwa.

Thus the plan of attack issued on 9 September by 4<sup>th</sup> Army was still following the original intention of enveloping the Russian north wing and the whole line on the Stubiel and Ikwa by striking over the Horyn through extraordinarily unfavorable terrain. This would require further exertions by troops who'd already been fighting or marching for many weeks and were now poorly supplied. Many regiments, especially in X Corps, had already suffered heavy casualties. The line of supply to the left wing was now 200 km long. Supplies still had to be brought up from Cholm over poor roads, mostly with light horse-drawn carts. The railroad leading north toward Sokal was in service only as far as Ulwówek (two stations before Sokal). A field line was being constructed from Vladimir Volynsky, but it had not yet reached Luck.

Although logistics seemed to require a halt in the fighting, it now seemed necessary to move quickly before the Russians could move stronger forces to their north wing. For the time being only cavalry units covered the flank north of Rovno: 3 Don Coss Div opposite Cav Corps Berndt on the Kormin and 3 Orenburg Coss

Div opposite 62 ID on the west bank of the Horyn near Derazno. In a promising pursuit, the troops of 4<sup>th</sup> Army moved forward to the Stubiel on 9 September. Here, as expected, the X, XIV and IX Corps came up against a new Russian position on the east bank of the brook as far as Zariack. Corps Szurmay and 9 ID of I Corps encountered the enemy between Moszkow and Iwanie. On the south wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, 25 ID occupied the forts at Dubno, which the Russians had blown up the day before, and raised the black-yellow flag over the old citadel. Here the enemy had pulled back to the east bank of the Ikwa, except at Straklow where they retained a bridgehead on the west side of the river.

## **b. The Battle of the Stubielbach**

### 10 September

Heavy fighting developed on both wings of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group on 10 September. After 24 ID took over the job of guarding the sector between Derewiane and the mouth of the Stubiel, FML Martiny sent 62 ID (reinforced by one regiment from 13 LW ID, the rest of which went to Cuman) north of the Putilowka toward Derazno. Farther to the right, he had 45 LW ID attack toward Diuksin. With great difficulty the 62 ID made their way toward the Horyn through the swampy, thickly wooded terrain in front of Derazno, while 45 LW ID couldn't make progress in the narrow area where the Horyn makes a loop at Diuksin. XIV Corps (2 and 3 ID, 21 LD ID) and IX Corps (10 ID and 26 LW ID) moved closer to the Stubiel on the 10<sup>th</sup> and reconnoitered the Russian positions on the opposite bank.

On this day FZM Puhallo wanted Corps Szurmay to also thrust to the Stubiel with a strong right wing. Ist Corps was to attack the enemy on the Dubno-Rovno road, while 25 ID crossed the Ikwa at Dubno and farther south. The 25 ID, however, couldn't carry out its difficult assignment. At Straklow the Russians were blocking the crossing point with a strong bridgehead on the west bank. South and north of Dubno the waters of the Ikwa, running through broad swamps, created a large pool that was almost a lake. Therefore the only feasible crossing points were where the bridges of the city had stood, but they were under heavy fire from Russian artillery.<sup>65</sup> In this situation, FZM Puhallo decided to try to break through first between Zariack and the Ikwa on the Dubno-Rovno road. Here the main body of Ist Corps

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65 Hoen, Waldstätten-Zipperer and Seifert, "Die Deutschmeister", pp. 509 ff.

(9 ID) and Corps Szurmay moved up in lively fighting during the 10<sup>th</sup> through the enemy outpost lines and up to their main positions.

Because of the increasingly dangerous situation in east Galicia, the high command twice demanded during the day that 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies should make "an immediate, decisive attack."

#### 11 September

However, even on 11 September FML Martiny was unable to carry out the thrust through Derazno and Diuksin because of the understandable exhaustion of his troops. The Orenburg Cossacks who'd been pushed back the day before at Derazno now occupied a flanking position on the west bank of the Horyn at Biczal and Postojno. Russian infantry arrived here, so that 62 ID felt greatly threatened from the north. This concern was intensified by the fact that 4 CD, which was supposed to advance from the swamps around Berestiany to the Horyn and thus protect the Army's flank, didn't thrust ahead because it was pinned down by parts of Velyasev's Russian Cavalry Corps. On the other hand, on 8 September the 7 CD had taken the important crossing points on the Styr at Kolki and Kulikowice, while 1 CD secured the point on the Stokhod at Kaszowka. Then 1 CD, along with the 1 Polish Bde (which had come up from Kovel between the Turya and Stokhod) advanced to Czartorijsk, Okonsk, Hulewicze and Czeremoszno while fighting with Russian cavalry detachments. The 11 Hon CD and 2 CD, moving from the German front north of Pripyat to Ratno, were placed under the command of FML Graf Bissingen; their mission was to cross the Turya and advance to the mouth of the Stokhod.

While these cavalry units entrusted with the protection of the north flank were fighting Gillenschmidt's Russian Cavalry Corps, on 11 September the 7 CD took over from 4 CD the security duties on the Kormin at Garajmowka. This allowed 4 CD to shift closer to the left wing of 62 ID. 13 LW ID entered the line between 62 ID and 45 LW ID to strengthen the attacking wing.<sup>66</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Army was striving to cross the Horyn. 13 LW ID would go over the river south of Derazno in the night of 11-12 September, and at dawn would take the heights northeast of Diuksin. 4 ID was sent behind the left wing of X Corps; 21 LW ID, which had been standing in reserve at Olyka, took the place of 4 ID near Cuman.

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66 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The original text says 13 LW ID was inserted between 62 and 24 ID, but the rest of the text and the map make it clear that 24 ID should read 45 LW ID.

While preparations were thus made for a thrust on 12 September over the Horyn on both sides of Derazno, 45 LW ID was engaged on the 11<sup>th</sup> without success in the bend of the river at Diuksin. There seemed to be no prospect of success in advancing through the broad swamps along the Stubiel against Russian positions that were already protected by barbed wire. That night the XIV Corps pulled 2 ID and IX Corps pulled 26 LW ID from the front as Army reserves.

On 11 September the north wing of Puhallo's Army didn't continue their attack, except for some actions around the Russian advanced positions. Corps Szurmay and Ist Corps were firing their artillery in preparation for their major effort on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Meanwhile the high command learned from intercepted Russian radio broadcasts that XXX Corps (71 and 80 ID) were moving from Husiatyn by rail to join 8<sup>th</sup> Army. The movement was expected to be finished on 13 or 14 September. Another broadcast revealed that the HQ of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had shifted from Rovno to the east. The Bug Army reported that Russian troops were getting on trains at Pinsk; it was possible that these reinforcements could also be sent by rail to Rovno. Nonetheless, GO Conrad continued to hope that because of the great numerical superiority on his north wing he could thrust to Rovno before XXX Russian Corps was fully deployed. He immediately informed Archduke Joseph Ferdinand of the Russian troop movements. In the afternoon of 11 September he sent him a telegram to once again point out the urgency of winning a decisive success. In turn, that evening the Archduke told 1<sup>st</sup> Army and X Corps that the attack should be carried out "under the personal direction of all commanders with the greatest speed and energy."

#### 12 September

However, there was further prolonged and difficult fighting on 12 September. 45 LW ID repulsed a Russian thrust in hand-to-hand combat, then was able to take the stubbornly-defended village of Ugliszcze near the confluence of the Putilowka and Horyn. The gallant Lower Austrian LW IR # 24 of 13 LW ID crossed the Horyn south of Derazno at dawn. Despite bitter resistance and heavy fire from the flank and rear, they established a firm foothold in the land within the bend of the river northwest of Diuksin but couldn't advance out of this narrow area. The main body of 13 LW ID was supposed to follow; because of the limited space and of the enemy fire which

dominated the crossing point, only LW IR # 1 was able to come over behind # 24. To the left of 13 LW ID, the 62 ID fended off a Russian thrust toward Derazno during the night. This Division, supported by 4 CD, was supposed to secure the crossing points over the Horyn at Biczal and Postojno during the 12<sup>th</sup>; they failed, however, due to the exhaustion of the troops and to the strength of the enemy artillery fire. Cav Corps Berndt, which had been ordered to operate against the flank and rear of the enemy opposing X Corps, made their way with difficulty through the swamp at Berestiany; then, however, the 4 CD encountered a stronger Russian force at Kol. Perelysianka. Also opposite 7 CD the Russians had been reinforced at Garajmowka and farther north.

FML Martiny, the commander of X Corps, had already been ordered in the morning by Archduke Joseph Ferdinand to use all his forces to take advantage of his numerical superiority. He now decided to insert 4 ID into the front between 62 ID and Cav Corps Berndt, so that they could advance by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> through Postojno to the Horyn. However, FML Schmidt Edler von Fussina's 4 ID (which had just 4500 riflemen) had a very difficult march and didn't reach the front until late in the evening. Therefore the attack had to be postponed until the next day, the 13<sup>th</sup>.

On the north wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 12 September, an attack group was formed out of 46 LW ID and 40 Hon ID. Covered on the right by 9 ID and on the left by 7 ID, they were supposed to break through the center of the portion of the Russian front between Zariack and Dubno. Simultaneously with this attack, the II Corps (25 ID), now commanded by FML Kaiser, was to force its way over the Ikwa. In the morning the Lower Austrian FJB # 10 took the islands in the Ikwa by Dubno and established themselves on the eastern bank, while on their left the 9 ID advanced to the Dubno-Rovno road. However, the main frontal attack by 46 LW ID and 40 Hon ID couldn't achieve any noteworthy progress against the strong Russian positions.

Archduke Joseph Ferdinand now hurriedly took steps to hopefully win a victory on the battlefield before the arrival of the anticipated Russian reinforcements. In the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> he ordered 26 LW ID, which had been taken from the front of IX Corps, to join the attack by 1<sup>st</sup> Army. He placed 21 LW ID, which was on its way to Cuman, under FML Martiny; he also intended to send 2 ID, which had been made available by XIV Corps, to reinforce the north wing. Perhaps the intervention of these reserves would make it possible to win the objective, Rovno, at

the last moment.

### **c. Conrad decides to halt the offensive**

Meanwhile on 12 September the k.u.k. high command was faced with important decisions. In the morning GdI Bothmer reported that he would have to pull back Marschall's seriously-endangered corps to stay in touch with Corps Hofmann, which the Russians had again begun to attack. At the same time Böhm-Ermolli's Army, which had sent Czibulka's group to support South Army on the west bank of the Sereth, now found itself threatened by enemy thrusts against its right wing. It seemed that the Russians were sending reinforcements up from Kremieniec, and that a corps from the Caucasus was approaching Tarnopol by rail. The high command believed it was possible that the Russians were planning to break through past Brzezany and Zalosce to Lemberg. This had to be prevented under any circumstances. Therefore Teschen ordered that 39 Hon ID of VI Corps should detrain behind South Army at Potutory (rather than at Nizniow). GO Conrad also wanted to bring units from Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group to the rear of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Before taking such a significant step, however, in the afternoon he asked the Archduke and FZM Puhallo whether the 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies still had any prospects for success.

Archduke Joseph Ferdinand answered in the evening that his Army Group was facing a smaller enemy force. However, he had to win success before the Russians received significant reinforcements (XXX Corps). Because of the strength of the front on the Stubiel, he had been forced to seek a decision on both flanks. Despite all difficulties, the conditions for continuing the offensive were favorable. Although the troops were tired, he expected the 13 and 45 LW ID to gain ground on 13 September at Diusin, and 62 and 4 ID to do the same northeast of Derazno. 21 LW ID was following Martiny's Corps to exploit any success.

FZM Puhallo also commented on the great difficulties confronting the offensive and on the exhaustion of the troops. He believed that his strength was no longer sufficient to gain a decisive success; however, he counted on being able to push the enemy over the Stubiel if the attack continued.

Based on these statements it was hardly likely that the advance could continue as far as Rovno. With a heavy heart, GO Conrad had to decide to go over to the defensive along the entire front; only on the north wing should the last possibilities for

success be explored further. The following order was issued at Teschen in the evening:

"4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ should carry out the attack in progress on the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, and send 26 and 2 ID on the 13<sup>th</sup> to march to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army through Mlynow and Kozin. 1<sup>st</sup> Army should stop attacking, reorganize and create some reserves. Until replacement troops are incorporated and reinforcements arrive, the mission of 2<sup>nd</sup>, South and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies is to hold onto the current battle line, which should be intensively fortified."

The order to halt the Galician armies was consistent with Falkenhayn's opinion. He wrote to Conrad on the same day:

"Your Excellency will agree with me that the further unfavorable development of the situation in Galicia must be halted to keep it from having a harmful effect on the overall situation, as well as from heavily damaging the k.u.k. and also the German troops. Unfortunately at present there are no indications that the situation is improving. Since the troops have already suffered considerable loss to their fighting potential, I believe that the only course is to avoid further attack attempts and to go over completely to the defensive in a strong position which should immediately be constructed with all available resources."

GO Conrad could respond to his ally that the orders to go over to the defensive had already been issued, and that the planned attack would continue only on the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### **d. The last attack of FML Martiny's Corps**

For 13 September, FML Martiny had told 4 ID to attack through Postojno, while 62 ID on the right attacked toward Biczal. As soon as the enemy was driven back in these areas, 13 and 45 LW ID would secure the area around Diuksin and the bank of the Horyn farther east. 21 LW ID would follow 45 LW in echelon on the right in order to enter the line at Susk. This operation, which was the last hope for winning a decision, should begin around 5:00 AM.

At this same time, however, the commander of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (General Brussilov) had the left wing of his XXXIX Corps attack over the Stubiel on both sides of Klewan. Thick fog made it easier for the Russians to cross the low ground; at several points they punctured the thin lines of the inner wings of X and XIV Corps. Therefore Archduke Joseph Ferdinand felt compelled to bring 21 LW ID from Cuman and 2 ID from Olyka to the places where the enemy had made progress. Parts of 10 CD, which had come from 7<sup>th</sup> Army to Palcza, were also sent in this direction. Together with 3 and 24 ID, these troops attacked the Russians

and after a hot action threw them back over the Stubiél.

Meanwhile, on the north wing of X Corps the 62 ID had advanced nearly to Biczal and 4 ID through Postojno in the morning. 45 LW ID on their right was unable to cross the Horyn at Diuksin; thus the forward units of 13 LW ID (LW IR # 24 and 1) were still pinned down in the narrow tongue of land at Derazno, with the enemy firing into their flank and rear. Now 4 ID was supposed to thrust southeast from Postojno, but FML Schmidt-Fussina delayed the attack because his troops were exhausted; also, Russian reinforcements had been observed marching up from the Horyn.

At this time Archduke Joseph Ferdinand was doing everything possible to make it possible to resume the attack of his north wing after a short pause in the fighting. He ordered the units to incorporate the latest replacements (the XIV March battalions of the common Army and XIII battalions of the k.k. Landwehr). He created a reserve in the area west of Klewan from some troops of 45 LW ID who hitherto had been used as bridgehead garrisons at Kovel and Luck. 21 LW ID, which had been brought back again to Cuman, was also available. Finally, he expected that 9 CD would arrive at Kovel on the 18<sup>th</sup>. In the evening, however, the Archduke was surprised to receive an order from Teschen that the operation toward Rovno wouldn't be pursued any farther. He was supposed to prepare a defensive position on his north wing, that could be held by a minimum number of troops. On 14 September he was to send 2 ID to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, followed on the next day by 46 LW ID. Another infantry division would be pulled from the line and held at Olyka at the disposal of the high command. The AOK informed the Archduke that this was necessary because in east Galicia the situation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and the units farther south was very dangerous; all available forces were needed there to thwart the Russian offensive toward Zloczow and Brzezany.

### **3. The Russian attack continues in east Galicia, 12-17 September**

#### **a. Actions at Zaleszczyki and Nw. Aleksiniec**

General Ivanov didn't have such a wide-ranging goal, but in the meantime it had become clear to him how much success he had won by his short counterattacks on the Sereth. Besides taking thousands of prisoners and many guns, there were signs that several of the opposing divisions had become unnerved.<sup>67</sup> The victory at Trembowla had already given him an opportunity to send the Front reserve, XXX Corps, from east Galicia to Rovno. Encouraged by the withdrawal of his opponents from the Sereth, he now let 11<sup>th</sup> Army and the right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army mount a general offensive to provide relief for the desperately struggling right wing of Southwest Front.

#### Actions of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army

As a prelude to this new battle in east Galicia, the commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (General Letschitzky) sent his XXXIII Corps to strike a new blow against Zaleszczyki. In the morning of 12 September this attack fell upon Corps Henriquez, which was stationed on the outer perimeter of the bridgehead. Although GM Jesser's 30 ID on the right wing was able to hold its ground, Lt Col Bekesi's 1st Inf Bde in the center was thrown back. This penetration caused great disorder. The Russians pushed on against the left wing of Corps Henriquez, where the troops (half of 8 CD, reinforced by IR # 7) were taken partly from the rear. Suffering considerable losses, they retreated over the Dniester. The Russians seemed to be advancing toward the bridges, which hadn't been destroyed. If they thrust over the Dniester there could be grave consequences for the center of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. GdK Pflanzler-Baltin, who was right at the front, threw Hon IR # 15 of 37 Hon ID (which had just detrained at Horodenka) into the fight. He also sent all other available units to the threatened sector: 6 CD from the south wing of Corps Rhemen and the half of 5 Hon CD which was in the Army's reserve. FML Edler von Lehmann, commanding 8 CD, sent the reinforcements as they arrived to cover the area between Uscieczko and the south bank of the Dniester. Meanwhile in the Zaleszczyki bridgehead on the

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67 Per Nesnamov (Vol. IV, p. 127) the 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies by mid-September had captured 36,000 men, 34 guns and 126 machine guns.

north bank the LW IR "Pola" # 5 of 30 ID, supported by parts of Hon IR # 15, launched a counterattack. After strenuous fighting that lasted late into the night, they threw back the Russians who'd been advancing against the open flank of 30 ID. However on the next morning, the 13<sup>th</sup>, the 30 ID was assaulted on its right wing and pushed back behind the ramparts of the Zaleszczyki bridgehead. Fortunately the pursuing Russians were checked by concentrated fire by all available guns, so that the troops in the bridgehead could sort themselves out and offer new resistance.

Since 1 September, Corps Henriquez had lost more than 7000 men. To reinforce this command, GdK Pflanzer-Baltin selected a regiment of 12 ID, whose first echelon was arriving at Nizniow; Corps Benigni was also supposed to release further troops. Benigni's command, however, had also suffered heavy casualties (5000 men) and was constantly expecting Russian attacks. On the other hand, GdK Korda's XI Corps with its 30,000 riflemen had been left in relative quiet. To support the endangered center of the Army, Pflanzer-Baltin wanted to take a regiment away from Korda's 202 Hon Inf Bde and send it by rail to Zaleszczyki. In the next few days, however, Letschitzky unexpectedly halted his advance against Henriquez, while sending his XI Corps on the Army's right wing to operate with 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army against the allied troops on the east bank of the Strypa.

#### Actions of the South Army

General Shcherbatchev, commanding 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, had already on 12 September issued orders to resume the offensive against South Army and the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Apparently he wanted to assault Corps Marschall early on the 13<sup>th</sup> with his XXII and XVIII Corps, while VI and VII Corps (the latter temporarily attached from 8<sup>th</sup> Army) would thrust toward Zalosce and Lopuszno, thus threatening the flank of the Austrians stationed on the Ikwa.

On the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>, however, Corps Marschall had already avoided serious danger by retreating under cover of darkness to the heights east of the line of ponds between Kupczynce and Jezierna. On their left, Czibulka's group (32 ID and GM Kroupa's division) had already taken up a position on both sides of Nesterowce.

This withdrawal apparently took Shcherbatchev by surprise. On the 13<sup>th</sup> his XXII Corps followed Marschall very cautiously toward the Strypa. The leading troops of XVIII Corps, feeling their

way along the east bank of the Sereth toward the northwest, didn't appear in front of Czibulka's group until evening.

#### Actions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

During the day the fighting was much heavier on the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. At dawn the Russians attacked the entire front of Corps Trollmann. After a gallant defense, the Pressburg 14 ID was pushed back on both its flanks. Only the Győr FJB # 11, fighting in the center at Ditkowce, stood fast long enough to allow the neighboring regiments to overcome the confusion caused by the Russian thrust and to again advance somewhat.<sup>68</sup> The successful stand of this Battalion was largely responsible for preventing the enemy from reaching our artillery positions. 34 ID was attacked by a greatly superior enemy force and its right wing was thrown back through Gontowa. The troops on the left wing tried to hold their ground in a heavy action, but finally the Division had to fall back on its entire front because its neighbor on the left, 51 Hon ID, gave ground to the onrushing enemy in the area southeast of Nw. Aleksiniec. When the situation seemed especially gloomy, IR # 101 and BH IR # 3 under GM Felix counterattacked and again took firm possession of the heights at Gontowa.

Thus XIX Corps lost just a little ground in this hot fighting. Meanwhile, however, the V Corps suffered a serious setback. Heavy artillery fire had already opened on the evening of 12 September against 43 LW ID between Swiniuchy and Rydoml. This was followed during the night by infantry attacks which in some sectors penetrated the wavering lines of the Czernowitz Landwehr Division. Early in the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> the advancing Russian columns broke through the left wing of 43 LW ID in thick fog. Then they wheeled north through terrain dotted with vegetable gardens to roll up the right wing of the neighboring 33 ID from the south, while simultaneously striking the left of that Division. The disorder was tremendous. IR # 26, which was holding Rydoml, was cut off and overwhelmed by the Russians after a gallant resistance. Neither the two divisional generals nor the corps commander received accurate information regarding the unexpectedly deep Russian penetration, and therefore couldn't commit their reserves (which were rather far from the scene of action) in time to restore the situation. After 9:00 AM the disorganized troops of V Corps withdrew to the west: the remnants of 33 ID to Rostoki, and 43 LW ID to the area north of

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68 From a report to the military archive by the erstwhile commander of FJB # 11, GM Handel-Mazzetti, in December 1930.

Nw. Aleksiniec.

Here they were supposed to offer new resistance. As usual, the Russians pursued only hesitantly. Nevertheless, both divisional commanders in V Corps were concerned about the condition of their badly damaged regiments and wanted to retreat further to a defensive line on the heights of Lopuszno and on both sides of Wolica. FML Goglia in turn asked 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ for permission to fall back. GdK Böhm-Ermolli, however, decided that V Corps should hold its ground by expending its last strength, and thus avoid exposing the flanks of XIX and IV Corps. In the afternoon he ordered that on the 14<sup>th</sup> the V Corps should advance back to its old positions at Rydoml. Now, however, the Russians had already established themselves on the north bank of the Ikwa at Borszczewka, on the naked flank of IV Corps; they were pushing toward Rostoki and Gorynka Bol. Upon learning about this, FML Schmidt-Georgenegg took two battalions of the north Bohemian IR # 94 from the reserves of IV Corps and sent them from Nw. Poczajew to help the troops from 27 and 29 ID who were desperately defending themselves near Borszczewka. The sorely afflicted troops of V Corps could no longer hold on. Toward evening they fell back to the heights on both sides of Lopuszno and of Wolica. Despite their exhaustion, they were put to work to prepare new positions during the night of 13-14 September.

Meanwhile GdK Böhm-Ermolli had been informed of the full extent of V Corps' misfortune around noon, and in turn notified the high command about the seriousness of the situation. He asked that GM Kroupa's division should be returned to him from South Army. He wanted to employ this division under XIX Corps to envelop the enemy as they advanced toward Lopuszno, while farther north the reserves of IV Corps fell upon the flank of the Russians through Losiatyn. Böhm-Ermolli also intended to bring up 26 LW ID, already on its way from 1<sup>st</sup> Army, by forced marches. He was concerned that the enemy might thrust toward Zalosce, into the area between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and South Armies, which now was held just by 32 ID. Böhm-Ermolli therefore asked Bothmer whether the South Army might be again able to advance toward the Sereth. GdI Bothmer answered that now he needed above all to dig in and to incorporate replacement troops; he did promise to attack to help the sore-pressed south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army if the Russians should hesitate to attack South Army also.

## **b. The Russian attack toward the Strypa**

This, however, was not to be. General Shcherbatchev had

instructed all his corps to make a new attack on 14 September, and the right wing of Letschitzky's Army joined his attack. Fortunately the blow which had been anticipated against Goglia's Corps at Lopuszno wasn't fully effective. It was also possible to fill the gap between 33 ID and IV Corps south of Losiatyn with a mixture of troops from 27 and 29 ID, and to throw the enemy at Borszczewka back to the south bank of the Ikwa. For the time being the VII Russian Corps didn't venture to seriously attack V Corps in the Lopuszno area.

Farther south, the batteries of VI Russian Corps hammered early on the 14<sup>th</sup> with greater intensity against the positions of the k.u.k. XIX Corps; however, the enemy didn't attack at either Gontowa or Ditkowce. Corps Trollmann had bent back its left wing (51 Hon ID) to Nw. Aleksiniec and stretched it to the north to regain contact with 43 LW ID. Thus the situation momentarily improved for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army during the course of 14 September. By noon the two regiments of GM Kroupa's Combined Division were returned from South Army and arrived at Zalosce, although they were very tired. Böhm-Ermolli wanted this Division to attack through Gontowa on the 15<sup>th</sup> to bring relief to the hard-pressed South Army.

In the morning of 14 September Shcherbatchev sent his XXII Corps against Kupczynce after strong artillery fire; however, as on the earlier days they ran up against an unyielding wall presented by 3 Gd ID and 48 Res ID of Corps Marschall. The enemy restricted activity against 19 ID to some heavy gunfire. On the other hand, the XVIII Russian Corps attacked and broke into the sector on the inner wings of 32 ID and 38 Hon ID. Fortunately the Russians once again were hesitant to pursue their advantage and in the afternoon Czibulka's group was able to push them back in a counterattack.

Developments were much more ominous for Corps Hofmann. Here detachments of XI Russian Corps broke through the thin lines of 55 ID at Burkanow in the morning, and reached the west bank of the Strypa with their next thrust. Since the troops still on the east bank were now endangered from the rear, FML Hofmann was forced to pull back his entire Corps. This latest setback caused serious concerns about the fighting value of the k.u.k. troops in Bothmer's Army. In a telegram to the k.u.k. AOK, the commander of South Army included the depressing news that 75 Hon Inf Bde, which had been returned by 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, had just 400 riflemen. In 19 ID, the majority of whose personnel were Czechs, a great number of soldiers and reserve officers had

given up to the enemy in the actions in front of Tarnopol.<sup>69</sup> Panic had broken out in 55 ID when the Russians thrust to Burkanow. The situation was considered so earnest that for a while a retreat to the Zlota Lipa was contemplated.

The retreat of Corps Hofmann also caused 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to feel that their left wing was seriously menaced. There was a wide gap, patrolled only by a March battalion, between Hofmann and the 37 Hon ID, which had come to the Buczacz bridgehead on the left wing of Corps Rhemen. When GdK Pflanzler-Baltin received the alarming reports about the Russian breakthrough at Burkanow, in the afternoon he held the leading troops of 12 ID, which had come up from Nizniow to Buczacz, in readiness to guard the left flank along the western bank of the Strypa. As the remaining echelons of 12 ID came up by rail they would also be placed on the north wing of XIII Corps. Moreover, Pflanzler sent a wire to the high command to request that 39 Hon ID (parts of which had already detrained at Brzezany) be sent immediately to the front on the south wing of Corps Hofmann. This would prevent a Russian breakthrough toward Podhajce, which could have serious consequences for the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### Reactions of the high commands

All these reports didn't cause the AOK to waver from its determination to bring a halt to the Russian advance in east Galicia. Early on 14 September, GdI Falkenhayn came to Teschen along with GM Tappen. He suggested that it would be best to bring the worn out Aus-Hung. Army back to strong positions on the Zlota Lipa, and farther north to the shortest possible line between the Zlota Lipa and through Vladimir Volynsky to the German front north of the Pripyat. However, such a major retreat, which would give back all the ground recently won from the Russians, could have a damaging effect on the morale of the k.u.k. troops and on relations with Romania. Conrad therefore wanted to continue the fight on the Strypa and the Ikwa. Instead of sending XVII Corps to Syrmia, he planned to send it to east Galicia, where it could be deployed in any sector where the Russians were seeking to win a decision.<sup>70</sup> The units from XVII Corps would have to be replaced by sending troops from the Bug Army to Serbia. This Army had meanwhile pushed the enemy back to Pinsk and over the Oginski Canal, and therefore could

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69 19 ID had lost 6500 men in the fighting at Dolzanka.

70 At this time the XVII Corps HQ and 11 ID were at Cholm; most of 41 Hon ID was at Lublin, but had already sent six troop trains through Rozwadow and Debica toward Budapest.

guard the western edge of the Rokitno swamp with weaker forces in case the Russians later tried to advance again.

The main concern of the Chief of Staff of the Aus-Hung. Army was that Hindenburg's offensive in Lithuania should continue at full force. In this area the 10<sup>th</sup> German Army was encircling the Russians at Vilna, and a strong force of German cavalry had penetrated deep into the Russian front between Vilna and Dvinsk, reaching the Lida-Polotsk railroad at Vileika. This was a serious threat to the lines of communication of the center of the Russian armies. At this time Conrad also hoped that the German offensive in the north would bring him relief in the south. He believed anyway that the Russians wouldn't be able to further exploit their attacks in Galicia. He was certainly convinced that the enemy would be halted due to the intervention of XVII Corps and the four divisions already sent to support the front in east Galicia (37 Hon ID, 12 ID, 39 Hon ID and 26 LW ID), which would be followed by two more divisions from the north wing (2 ID and 46 LW ID). This was especially probable because according to the calculations of the AOK the 40 Aus-Hung. infantry and 11 ½ cavalry divisions had a total of 280,000 men and after the incorporation of the latest replacements (XIV and XIII March battalions) would have 400,000. They were opposed by about 30 Russian infantry and 14 cavalry divisions with a total strength of 360,000 men at most.

At this point GdI Falkenhayn had little hope that Hindenburg's offensive would still lead to a great victory, but he still declared himself in agreement with Conrad's assertions that the Aus-Hung. Army should remain in its current battle positions, and that XVII Corps should be sent to east Galicia. Because of the increasing tension in the West, where the Entente was threatening to begin a great offensive in Champagne and Artois, Falkenhayn wanted to quickly conclude the campaign in the East.

In the morning of 14 September the k.u.k. high command had already ordered 41 Hon ID to move by rail through Rozwadow and Lemberg to Krasne behind 2<sup>nd</sup> Army before they received news from the battlefield about the new Russian attack in this sector. 11 ID meanwhile would march from Cholm to Rawa Russka. When the alarming reports from South Army (described above) arrived in the evening, it was decided to have 41 Hon ID detrain in the area of Dunajow and Pomorzany.

### **c. The situation changes in east Galicia**

Counter-measures of the South and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies

During the day when the Teschen conference was held, the momentarily gloomy situation of Corps Hofmann was already improving. On 13 September GdI Bothmer had made Col. Bolzano's Brigade and half of 48 Res ID available from Corps Marschall. From these units, IR # 88 of Bolzano's Brigade arrived after a quick march on morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> near Burkanow, where 55 ID was in a critical position after the enemy breakthrough. This mainly Czech regiment, commanded by Lt Col. Wächter, put a halt to the flight of 129 Inf Bde and stopped the advancing Russians on the west bank of the Strypa.

For 15 September, GdI Bothmer decided to prevent the Russians from breaking through toward Zalosce by having Czibulka's group attack along the west bank of the Sereth; it had 38 Hon ID and 32 ID, the latter reinforced by one regiment apiece from 51 Hon ID and 27 ID. GdK Pflanzler made a similar decision. Unable to directly support Corps Hofmann because of the threat to his own left flank, the commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Army ordered GdI Rhemen on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> to intervene with all available forces out of the Buczacz bridgehead into the fighting at Burkanow.

This thrust from Zielona to Dobropole began early on 15 September and was carried out by 37 Hon ID with parts of 36 ID - a total of 15 battalions and 8 batteries under GM Tabajdi. The main body of 36 ID guarded the Buczacz bridgehead toward the east. The first arriving echelon of 12 ID - four battalions under Lt Col. Albrecht - accompanied this operation per the instructions of the high command; they were deployed on the west bank of the Strypa and moved against the flank of the enemy units who'd crossed the river. As the other troops of 12 ID got off their trains they would be brought up by quick marches, some to the east bank and some to the west bank of the Strypa.

Tabajdi's group fought hard during the 15<sup>th</sup> and gained ground toward Dobropole. It seemed that the Russians wanted to stand fast here regardless of losses, in order to protect their attacking group. On Tabajdi's right flank, in the area southwest of Laskowce and in front of the Buczacz bridgehead, stronger enemy forces appeared and threatened themselves to attack. Now Pflanzler wanted Tabajdi's group to capture the Dobropole area and the Baba Heights with the help of the battalions from 12 ID which had advanced on the west bank of the Strypa; this would secure the north flank and make it to possible fall upon the enemy in front of Buczacz from the north. On the 16<sup>th</sup> Tabajdi had to repulse a Russian thrust on his right

wing with a counterattack, and was unable to make further progress toward Dobropole.<sup>71</sup> Moreover the parts of 12 ID fighting on the west bank of the Strypa were unable to cross the river at Sapowa. To the immediate left of 7<sup>th</sup> Army the enemy troops who'd moved past Burkanow, apparently a relatively weak force, were held in check by 131 Inf Bde, Col. Bolzano's Bde and 129 Inf Bde. The first echelon of 39 Hon ID arrived at Podhajce behind Corps Marschall. Pflanzner-Baltin now halted his attack, since the danger of a Russian breakthrough against Corps Hofmann was over.

The situation had similarly improved on the other sectors of South Army. On 15 September the Russian XXII Corps along the Tarnopol-Brzezany railroad again tried in vain to break through the front of 3 Gd ID. On the same day the 32 ID and 38 Hon ID made a combined attack from the line Nesterowce-Jezierna toward the southeast and gained ground in a hot fight with Russian XVIII Corps. More than 1000 prisoners were taken. On the 16<sup>th</sup> the only activity along the entire front of South Army was artillery fire. The exhausted Russian infantry remained in their trenches.

#### Operations of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

Fighting flared up again on the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in the evening of 14 September. VI Russian Corps tried to attack in several places between the Horyn and Sereth, but was pinned down in its trenches by the fire of 14 and 34 ID. The Russians pushed into a gap between 51 Hon ID and 43 LW ID, but the hole was sealed during the night by two battalions from GM Kroupa's Division.

Böhm-Ermolli had planned to send Kroupa's Division from XIX Corps plus the reserves of IV Corps at Borszczewka into a pincers attack against VII Russian Corps as its advanced toward Lopuszno. On 15 September, however, new fighting that extended to the Ikwa front made this plan impossible. 34 ID was involved in exceptionally heavy combat this day. BH IR # 3 fought bravely and calmly in a bitter hand-to-hand-struggle, but in the afternoon lost Gontowa and the heights to the north of the village. An hour later the enemy was again driven from this position by strong artillery fire. That night the Russians once more drove onto the Gontowa heights in a surprise attack, but in

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71 During Tabajdi's counterattack, Col. Rudolf Pillepic von Lippahora of Hon IR # 11, who was commanding 73 Hon Inf Bde, won the Knight's Cross of the Maria Theresia Military Order.

the morning of 16 September were pushed back by IR # 85.

While the Russians stormed against Gontowa, they simultaneously struck 51 Hon ID at Nw. Aleksiniec. Here, and along the front of IV Corps, the enemy was kept pinned in their starting positions by artillery. On the right wing of IV Corps, 27 ID repulsed new Russian attempts to cross the Ikwa at Borszczewka early on the 15<sup>th</sup>. At dawn, parts of XVII Russian Corps broke out of the hills around Kremieniec against the thin lines of 29 ID. Although this Division had to defend a wide sector with reduced strength, they held the Russian success to a minimum. At Dunajew the enemy pushed back 1st IR # 2, which had been sent from XVIII to IV Corps the day before, a little to the west; in the evening, however, two more battalions were quickly brought up and forced the Russians to retreat.

On 15 September the Russians also directed heavy artillery fire, along with some local infantry thrusts, against XVIII Corps, which had only a few units (the main body of 1 Lst Inf Bde, all of 1 Lst Cav Bde, and half of 31 ID). These were difficult days, in which the fighting as it flared up first in one sector and then another prevented the regiments of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, already in need of recuperation, from gaining any rest. Böhm-Ermolli was constantly urging his commanders and troops to hold on, reminding them that specific reinforcements were on the way, and that replacement troops would also soon be available. All the regiments, especially in V and XIX Corps, were reduced to fragments. Average division size was just 5000 riflemen; since 27 August the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had lost about 45,000 men.

The fighting slackens off

Action along the front of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army became less intense on 16 September. Troops from 1<sup>st</sup> Army arrived on this day - 26 LW ID behind the left wing of IV Corps and the main body of 46 LW ID at Kozin. There were now about 15,000 replacement troops around Zalosce, and 11 ID had begun to detrain at Pomorzany. GdK Böhm-Ermolli believed that in the next few days the time would come for his planned thrust against VII Russian Corps. Therefore on the 16<sup>th</sup> he moved 26 LW ID ahead to Losiatyn and placed it under the commander of 29 ID, FML Kosak. The goal of the attack would be to gain the area around Rostoki south of the Ikwa. This thrust would grip the flank of the VII Russian Corps, which had been advancing toward Lopuszno, and perhaps force its retreat to Rydoml and Swiniuchy, while placing the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on the Ikwa front in an advantageous position.

On the Russian side, General Ivanov reacted to his opponents' stubborn resistance to the troops of 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies which he'd sent toward the Strypa by advising on the 16<sup>th</sup> that they should retreat to their earlier positions on the Sereth. He was satisfied because 8<sup>th</sup> Army was now relieved, and thus the goal of the short offensive in east Galicia was achieved. When Bothmer and Pflanzler learned of these Russian movements on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, they immediately had some detachments pursue the enemy; while skirmishing, they advanced to the Dzuryn brook and to the line Pilawa-Chmielowka-Nastasow. Corps Hofmann again occupied their original bridgehead positions east of the Strypa. FML von Arz's VI Corps HQ, which had arrived at Buczacz on the 15<sup>th</sup>, took over the north wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army: 12 ID (reinforced by IR # 63), 37 Hon ID and half of 8 CD.

Early on 17 September on 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's front, after a short fire preparation the 52 LW Inf Bde of 26 LW ID attacked Rostoki from the north, along with some troops from 27 and 29 ID. Parts of 33 ID, likewise placed under FML Kosak, joined the advance from the west. In a difficult action that lasted until evening the foremost Russian positions and the town of Rostoki were taken.

However, this operation couldn't be exploited. Already in the afternoon of 17 September Böhm-Ermolli had been ordered by Teschen to refrain from further attacks. Because of the new situation developing in Volhynia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would have to return 26 LW ID and 46 LW ID to 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The k.u.k. high command also had to abandon the offensive toward the Sereth. Pflanzler and Bothmer were ordered in the same hour as Böhm-Ermolli to follow the withdrawing enemy with only small detachments, while

preparing defenses on the Strypa.

#### **4. Brussilov's counteroffensive to Luck, 13-24 September**

##### **a. The Russians break through at Derazno**

Already on 12 September, the day when the main body of XXX Russian Corps (71 and 80 ID) detrained at Rovno, Brussilov wrote to Ivanov: "At one time the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was opposed by 22 enemy divisions; now they have only 14 divisions here. This means that we are facing a nearly equal force of Austrians, whom we have already often beaten. My opinion is that we have already fallen back far enough; after we've regrouped and replenished our units we will soon strike them [the Austrians] a new blow."<sup>72</sup>

Brussilov's plan was to envelop the enemy's left wing and recover Luck. He felt it was necessary to depict the prospects for his success as favorably as possible because Ivanov, as always in earlier situations, was decidedly against any wide-ranging offensive operations. After Brussilov held numerous telephone conversations with Southwest Front HQ, in which he assured them that he would only undertake a short thrust to improve the situation of his north wing, Ivanov gave him permission to act as he saw fit.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, early on 13 September the XXXIX Russian Corps was able to drive into the positions of 3 and 24 ID at Klewan on the west bank of the Stubiel. Brussilov now instructed this Corps to exploit its success. At the same time he ordered VIII Corps, along with the left wing of XII Corps, to attack on the front Dubno-Zarieck. XVII Corps would make local thrusts on the Ikwa. XXX Corps would strike the Austrian north wing; therefore Brussilov sent the Corps to march quickly behind the four divisions of Velsaiev's Cavalry Corps, on the west bank of the Horyn south of Stepan. Speed was necessary, because the Cossacks of General Velsaiev, though reinforced by infantry, were already being pushed back by 62 ID and 4 ID of Corps Martiny to Biczal and through Postojno to the Horyn. The first troops of XXX Russian Corps arrived on the battlefield in the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup>. 4 ID was forced to evacuate Postojno, and in the evening reported to FML Martiny that strong Russian reinforcements were coming up from the Horyn.

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72 Nesnamov, Vol. IV, p. 127

73 Broussilov, pp. 156 ff.

While the 4 and 62 ID were already fighting against the newly arrived troops of XXX Russian Corps, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand ordered FML Martiny late in the day to prepare a defensive position running north from the line on the Stubiel. X Corps should also place two divisions at the disposal of Army HQ, one immediately and another later. FML Martiny decided that he would first take 4 ID from Postojno back to the area west of Derazno, even though this Division had reported that fresh Russian units were approaching. Thus the left flank of 62 ID was left open, although this unit was able in the night to move back closer to Derazno without any difficulty. At the same time the right wing of Cav Corps Berndt had to withdraw from Lipno to the Kormin after very heavy fighting.

#### 14 September

The 14<sup>th</sup> of September began quietly on the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. During the morning the Russians advanced only with very great caution toward Derazno and the Kormin. Around noon, GdI Archduke Joseph Ferdinand ordered FML Martiny to select a position "which can be held against a larger force even with weak units, and which is safe against envelopment." To be sure, this was a very difficult problem in an area of forests and swamps where it was impossible to spot the enemy. The only solution was for the 62 ID, already very much reduced in size, to take up a position on the higher ground directly east and north of Derazno, in order to cover the flank of the troops fighting in the bend of the Horyn at Diuksin and on the tongue of land between the Putilowka and the Stubiel (25 LW Inf Bde of 13 LW ID,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of 45 LW ID, and 24 ID). The new front left a gap of almost 10 km between 62 ID, whose north wing was bent at a right angle north of Derazno and rested on what was supposedly an impassable swamp, and Cav Corps Berndt which was standing behind the Kormin. By the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> the Russians had neared 62 ID and soon began to attack, although without success. At the same time the enemy seemed to be moving toward the gap in the line. Therefore FML Martiny, as requested by GM Tunk, sent his Corps reserve (26 LW Inf Bde) to this area. At this time interrogation of prisoners and other information made it certain that the XXX Russian Corps and Velsaiev's Cav Corps were in motion toward Derazno and the Kormin.

However, since the Russians were also very active on 14 September against the thinly-held Stubiel front, 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ didn't dare to send its reserves to the north wing. These were 10 CD and parts of 45 and 21 LW ID, located at Olyka and Derewiane. The Archduke also felt it was necessary to move most

of 4 ID from Derazno to the right wing of X Corps because:

- . He wanted to have a reserve available behind 24 ID, which was mostly composed of Ruthenes, and

- . The high command had ordered him to free all available units for employment elsewhere.

The Army commander believed that in addition to 2 ID, which was already marching toward the south, he would have to send 21 LW ID, parts of which were still in the front line at Klewan.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Army's sector, the Russian attacked 9 ID of I Corps and 40 Hon ID of Corps Szurmay on 14 September, but were pushed back in a counterattack.

#### 15 September

On the next day, the 15th, the enemy kept the entire front between Dubno and Diuksin in suspense with heavy artillery fire and small-scale local sorties, and calamity overwhelmed the north wing of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group. In the morning the Russian XXX Corps fell upon 62 ID at Derazno with 71 ID from the east and 80 ID from the north. At the same time Velsaiev's Cav Corps struck against the Kormin but was repulsed by Berndt's Cav Corps, although the latter had already been greatly weakened. In the morning the enemy found a point where they could wade through the swamp in the gap between 4 CD and 62 ID, causing the unit in this sector, 26 LW Inf Bde, to fall back to the south. Now the Russians could penetrate into the flank and rear of 62 ID.

When he learned that 26 LW Inf Bde had withdrawn, the Army commander sent the main body of 4 ID, which he had taken away from Derazno the day before, to hurry back to the left wing of X Corps. Cav Corps Berndt, whose 4 CD on the right wing was stationed at Boguslawka, reported that the Russians were advancing to Brod Kladki [Kladky]. Therefore some troops from 4 ID were sent in the afternoon toward Berestiany, but then were diverted south to help the hard-pressed 62 ID.

Throughout the day, the 62 ID had opposed the attack by overwhelming Russian forces at Derazno with great bravery, and tried to push back the Russians threatening the flank and rear by counter-thrusts on the bent-back left wing.<sup>74</sup> As night fell, however, the menace of encirclement compelled GM Tunk to pull 62

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74 In these actions around Derazno, the commander of 121 Inf Bde - Col. Eduard Edler von Merten - won the Knight's Cross of the Maria Theresia Military Order.

ID back to a front southwest of Derazno. Meanwhile FML Martiny, with the approval of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, had made preparations for X Corps to retreat to the Klewan-Cuman-Karpilowka road. The troops fighting on the left wing (62 ID, 26 LW Inf Bde, 4 ID) began to move back after midnight, so that the defenders of the tongue of land by Diuksin (the main bodies of 45 and 13 LW ID) could retreat without interference on their north flank. The exhausted troops were able to carry out this difficult movement to the rear in tolerable order. The Russians were reluctant to pursue in the darkness. Cav Corps Berndt, withdrawing overnight from the Kormin to the new front Silno-Zurawicze-Kolki, was also hardly bothered by the enemy. 10 CD was shifted from Olyka to Karpilowka.

#### 16-17 September

On the morning of 16 September the 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ hoped that X Corps would be able to defend their new lines. The enemy was apparently concentrating much of XXX Corps in the Boguslawka area, so they could attempt a further envelopment through Silno. Therefore in the morning Archduke Joseph Ferdinand ordered FML Martiny to send an infantry brigade from 4 ID to the right wing of Cav Corps Berndt. At the same time he reported his further intentions to Teschen. He wanted to fend off the enemy envelopment of his left wing by shifting two divisions - 21 and 45 LW ID - from his center; because of the continuing menace to the Stubiel front he wanted 2 ID, which was on its way to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, to be returned. When the high command had first learned in the night of 15-16 September of the severe setback on the left wing of X Corps, they had already halted 2 ID at Bokujma. The unit was now placed again at the disposal of the Archduke. That morning the high command sent a telegram to urgently suggest making a counterattack with the units not on the left wing, since the situation wouldn't be improved merely by reinforcing the front north of the Putilowka.

Archduke Joseph Ferdinand now planned to move 21 and 45 LW ID behind the right wing of Cav Corps Berndt by 17 September to the area west of Silno; then these divisions would attack the enemy with the help of the troops of X Corps north of the Putilowka between Karpilowka and Cuman (10 CD and 13 LW ID with the attached half of 4 ID). Cav Corps Berndt would join this advance; its left wing was being joined by a regiment of 3 Polish Brigade and by 11 Hon CD, which had been relieved of its security responsibilities on the lower Stokhod by 2 CD. 2 ID would move by forced marches from Bokujma to Olyka. As long as the south wing and center of 4<sup>th</sup> Army could hold out on the

Stubiel, the Archduke intended to also move this Division to the north wing.

These plans, however, couldn't be implemented. For one thing the troops had been so over-taxed that some were breaking down during the marches. FML Martiny therefore reported that it would take two days to complete the shifting of units to the left which had been ordered.<sup>75</sup> Then, early on 16 September, the Russians on the lower Stubiel attacked 24 ID and broke through its left wing. Thus the enemy was in a position to threaten the flank of 62 ID in its lines east of the Klewan-Cuman road. In the morning the HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army therefore had to move 45 LW ID and half of 21 LW ID, which had already marched to the Putilowka, back to the south wing of X Corps to throw the Russians back over the Stubiel. The troops who were to carry out this counterattack under the command of FML Smekal came up so slowly that the enemy was able to drive 24 ID to the west after some heavy fighting. In the evening the main body of 45 LW ID, along with parts of 24 ID and 21 LW ID, were considerably behind the right wing of 62 ID, half way between the Stubiel and the Putilowka.

In the night of 16-17 September the 62 ID, shifting to its right, was holding a position at Cuman facing both toward the north and east. FML Smekal meanwhile stationed his mixed bag of troops (parts of 45 and 21 LW ID and 24 ID) on a broad front on both sides of the railroad leading to Klewan. He planned to counterattack to the east early on the 17<sup>th</sup> to drive back the enemy who were threatening 62 ID from the south. Before Smekal's attack began, however, units from XXXIX Russian Corps advanced from the confluence of the Putilowka and Stubiel, and fell upon 62 ID at dawn on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The Division's center was broken while the Russians also hit its open southern flank and rear; its remnants fell back to the Putilowka after a gallant resistance. When FML Smekal's group was finally ready to counterattack, they had to stay in place to face Russians who were also attacking their front.

When Archduke Joseph Ferdinand learned of the unfortunate fate of 62 ID, at 6:30 AM he authorized FML Martiny to withdraw his Corps to the Putilowka, since no reserves were at hand to restore the situation. Therefore the units farther south would also have to pull back to new positions - XIV Corps (half of 21 LW ID and 3 ID) to the heights at Olyka and IX Corps (10 ID)

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75 Kralowetz, "Das k.u.k. X Corps im Herbstfeldzug 1915 in Wolhynien" (a manuscript in the military archives).

which would leave its right wing on the Stubiél.

Meanwhile catastrophe also overtook the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Velsaiev's Cav Corps and XXX Corps had already pushed their way over the Kormin and through the gap between the Kormin and Putilowka on 16 September. Cav Corps Berndt, trying to defend a front of 13 km with about 2600 troops and 9 guns, were heavily attacked in the evening at Zurawicze; their lines were broken in several places the next morning. In this action the enemy also heavily assaulted IR # 8 (of 4 ID), which had been sent to Silno. Farther to the south the 10 CD, which had been placed under the left wing of X Corps, lost Karpilowka. When this happened, the 13 LW ID (with half of 4 ID attached) retreated from the Karpilowka-Cuman line toward the west to stay in line with 62 ID as it retreated to the Putilowka. FML Martiny tried to fend off the enemy on his north flank by sending the units which were moving to his left wing from Moszczanica (half of 21 LW ID along with some troops of 13 LW ID and 4 ID) to counterattack toward Karpilowka. However, the broken front in this sector couldn't be restored, although a temporary line was established next to 62 ID at Moszczanica. Cav Corps Berndt, fighting on a broad front north of Karpilowka to Kolki, was also unable to withstand the Russian pressure. They withdrew to the west. Nor was this all. 1 CD had been guarding the area between the Styr and Stokhod, and a few days before had advanced to the bend in the Styr at Czartorijsk and to Okonsk; now the Division was pushed back again by Gillenschmidt's Russian Cav Corps to the line Kolki-Kaszowka. 2 CD, which had been sent from Milenica to join Corps Berndt, had to divert some troops to reinforce 1 CD. 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ sent a brigade of 2 ID, which had arrived in the Pelza area, to Kotow behind X Corps. However, they no longer hoped that these weak reinforcements would suffice to prevent the envelopment of the north wing in time.

The withdrawal of the Army's over-extended cavalry forced FML Martiny in the morning to report to his Army commander that X Corps could no longer hold its position on the left wing. He had no reserves left to thwart the enemy's envelopment attempt; the troops were completely exhausted and their combat value was very low.<sup>76</sup> Martiny was convinced that he would have to pull

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76 What FML Schmidt-Fussina, the commander of 4 ID, reported about the condition of his regiments was true of the other components of X Corps. The troops were so worn down from their extraordinary exertions that they were falling asleep in action or while on outposts; others, dead tired, broke down while marching.

back to a strong defensive position before the situation could improve. Based on this sober report, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand decided it was necessary to take 4<sup>th</sup> Army back to the Styr and the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to the Ikwa. With a heavy heart, the high command agreed to a deep withdrawal by 4<sup>th</sup> Army, which would also cause 1<sup>st</sup> Army to retreat to the Ikwa. The necessary orders were issued by Army Group HQ in the afternoon.

#### The Archduke retreats

In 1<sup>st</sup> Army the center (Ist Corps with 9 ID) and left wing (Corps Szurmay with 40 Hon ID and 7 ID) would deploy behind the Ikwa from Dubno to Torgowica. The right wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army (IX Corps with 10 ID, reinforced by half of 2 ID) would hold a position along the west bank of the Styr as far as the mouth of the Polonka. XIV Corps (with 3 ID, half of 21 LW ID, half of 2 ID, 24 ID and 45 LW ID) would garrison the Luck bridgehead. Farther north the west bank of the Styr would be held by X Corps, now containing three divisions (62 ID, 13 LW ID, 4 ID) plus the attached 10 CD. Still farther downstream, Cav Corps GM Graf Herberstein<sup>77</sup> would guard the river as far as Sokul with 4 CD and 7 CD, reinforced by half of 2 CD. A new cavalry corps under Hauer would take over responsibility for the areas between the Styr and Stokhod and farther north along the Stokhod to Lubieszow, with 1 and 9 CD, 11 Hon CD, half of 2 CD, 1 Polish Legion Bde and half of 3 Polish Bde. To Hauer's left, the German 5 CD was entering the front along the Stokhod as far as the point where it flows into the Pripyat.

This retreat began when darkness fell on 17 September. Only rear guards stayed on the Putilowka until the next morning to slow down the enemy. At first the Russians didn't notice the retreat, and neglected to advance. When the new situation became apparent during the morning, Brussilov sent a strong cavalry force to overrun his opponents as they withdrew; the Russian horsemen were told to ride rapidly to Luck and to try to seize this important city and its depots in a *coup de main*. Meanwhile, however, the troops of 4<sup>th</sup> Army had gained a head start and after strenuous forced marches had reached the Styr. XIV Corps stayed on the east side of the river to cover Luck; here the Russian cavalry came up from Poddubcy around 5:00 PM to the perimeter of the bridgehead. They fired against the mass of supply wagons which clogged the streets and bridges of Luck. The chaos in the city would have intensified, but troops from 21

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77 This had been Cav Corps Berndt. GM Berndt had now taken over the post of Chief of Staff to 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

LW ID hastily moved against the enemy and forced them to retreat.

Except for this incident, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's Army Group occupied their new positions without any fighting. The earlier actions and the retreat, however, had worn down the troops, who were in need of rest; the units had become intermingled. The divisions which had suffered most severely were 62 ID (reduced to 3600 riflemen), 4 ID (3700) and 13 LW ID (6000). The combat strength of 24 ID and 45 LW ID wasn't much greater; the ranks of 7 and 9 CD had also been decimated. Many horses died of exhaustion. Since beginning the advance to Rovno, the 4<sup>th</sup> Army had lost a total of 50,000 combatants.

### **b. Measures to relieve the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army**

GO Conrad was greatly disturbed by this unfortunate conclusion to the difficult and costly fighting in front of Rovno.

On the other hand, the Bug Army had captured the city of Pinsk on 16 September and pushed the enemy back over the Jasiolda and the Oginski Canal into the Pripyat Swamps. This caused GO Conrad to immediately devise a plan to help 4<sup>th</sup> Army with a thrust from the Polesie. On 17 September he advised Falkenhayn of the seriousness of the situation on his north wing, and asked him to lead all available forces from the Bug Army to the south through Lubiaz to Kolki, onto the flank of the Russians who were advancing against 4<sup>th</sup> Army. On the same day GdI Falkenhayn responded that two divisions from the Bug Army could be sent marching to the south on 19 September. However, he attached the condition that these German reinforcements, the horsemen in the Polesie (the Cav Corps of Herberstein and Hauer plus German 5 CD) and 4<sup>th</sup> Army should be placed under a German commander, GdI von Linsingen. Because of the momentary pressure of the situation, GO Conrad finally agreed with his ally that on 20 September GdI Linsingen would receive an Army Group under the control of Archduke Frederick; it consisted of the units coming from the Bug Army (1 and 22 ID, under GdI von Gerok the commander of XXIV Res Corps, plus 5 CD) plus 4<sup>th</sup> Army and the two cavalry corps in the Polesie.

The danger in east Galicia seemed to be over after the Russian retreat to the Sereth and the defensive victory of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Therefore Conrad at this time decided to move his strategic reserve, XVII Corps, nearer to the north wing. 11 ID, which had been marching to Rawa Russka, was sent ahead to Vladimir

Volynsky along with XVII Corps HQ. 41 Hon ID, whose first echelon had already reached Pomorzany, was sent to Kamionka-Strumilowa and from there would proceed on foot through Radziechow to Gorochow. As of 19<sup>th</sup> September the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies would be joined as GdK Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group, which was responsible for defending the Ikwa line.

In a telegram of 18 September, the Chief of Staff of Army Group Hindenburg - G.Lt Ludendorff - objected to the detachment of German units to the north wing of the Aus-Hung. front. At this time the offensive of 10<sup>th</sup> German Army was making good progress; their strengthened left wing was striving to envelop Minsk. Vilna was about to fall. However, it seemed that the Stavka were already taking steps to prevent the German envelopment. They were assembling strong reserves at Dvinsk and bringing reinforcements from their central armies to Molodieczno. This was a threat to the German cavalry on the Wilia. Therefore Hindenburg naturally felt it was important to instruct the Bug Army north of the Pripyat to advance northeast with all its forces; this would catch the center of the Russian armies in a pincers from the south while they were already being threatened in the north (through Vilna).

Ludendorff's objections didn't cause a change in plans. GdI Falkenhayn agreed with Conrad that any further advance of the Russians in Volhynia had to be prevented under all circumstances in order to maintain the front on the Ikwa and in east Galicia. On 19 September, GdI Linsingen received a brief order from FM Archduke Frederick, based on the agreement between Falkenhayn and Conrad, that he was to halt the offensive of the north wing of the Russian forces in the area south of the Pripyat.

### **c. The fighting at Luck**

Meanwhile GdI Linsingen had already set to work in the evening of 18 September. He instructed 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which had moved from Luck to Vladimir-Volynsky, to assemble strong forces on the north wing for a new offensive. 11 Hon CD and the German 5 CD on its left would advance in the Maniewicze area to secure the local crossing-points on the Styr. A day later, in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand received a second order from Linsingen; 4<sup>th</sup> Army was to make three infantry divisions available behind its left wing as an Army Group reserve. Herberstein's and Hauer's Cav Corps would block the crossings of the Styr. "The German units coming from the north, the two cavalry corps, and the three infantry divisions taken from the

front of 4<sup>th</sup> Army would mount a thrust against the enemy's right flank."

Archduke Joseph Ferdinand was meanwhile very busy restoring order among his troops and creating reserves. He had again united 4 ID on the north wing of X Corps, and taken the half of 21 LW ID and 10 CD from the front and stationed both units north of the Sierna. For the time being, however, these were all the troops he could make available. Parts of 2 ID and of 21 LW ID, which he also intended eventually to place in reserve, now had to remain under XIV Corps to build up the bridgehead positions at Luck. The Russians were coming up from the east and were nearing 4<sup>th</sup> Army's new line of resistance. A report from GdI Roth indicated that the enemy on the Poddubcy-Luck road intended to attack XIV Corps. Because of this threat, 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ hesitated to weaken the front. The Archduke informed GdI Linsingen of the difficult situation in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, and at the same time asked Teschen to give him XVII Corps. This would make it possible for him to carry out GdI Linsingen's instructions to prepare a striking group of three infantry divisions on the north wing of his 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

Meanwhile Brussilov had already instructed the 4 Rifle Div of XXXIX Russian Corps to storm the Luck bridgehead.<sup>78</sup> The attack began in the evening of 19 September. The violent thrust was directed mainly against the half of 21 LW ID stationed on both sides of the road from Klewan, but also engulfed the half of 2 ID farther north and the left wing of 3 ID to the south. The enemy offensive was repulsed in a costly action, which in places included hand to hand fighting, by LW IR "Eger" # 6 and "Pilsen" # 7, by the Salzburg-Upper Austrian IR # 59, and by the reserve unit of XIV Corps, LW IR "Jaroslau" # 34 (which was quickly sent into the battle).

After this failure, the Russian 4 Rifle Div stayed in position outside the bridgehead on 20 September. 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ now received reports that most of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was in motion - XXXIX Corps followed by XXX Corps toward Luck, the main body of XII Corps toward the south wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, and Velsaiev's Cav Corps toward the Styr at Roziszczce. Gillenschmidt's Cav Corps (reinforced by three infantry regiments) would cover the area between the Styr and Stokhod. In the evening of the 20th, the Russians opened a sharp cannonade against the Luck bridgehead. This was followed in the night of 20-21 September by some new but small-scale probing thrusts from 4 Rifle Div, which were

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78 Broussilov, p. 157

easily repulsed by XIV Corps. On the next two days the Russian artillery also shot at the bridgehead positions while enemy infantry approached nearer on the southeast front. At the same time actions developed on the south wing of IX Corps, where the Russians seemed to be planning to attack at the confluence of the Styr and Ikwa.

Meanwhile on the 19<sup>th</sup> and again on 20 September Archduke Joseph Ferdinand informed his commanders and troops that German reinforcements were approaching, and exhorted them to hold on. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, 11 ID and the HQ of XVII Corps arrived at Vladimir-Volynsky, at the disposal of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The high command still hadn't made a decision about the deployment of 41 Hon ID, which was moving to Gorochow. The Archduke now planned to assemble 11 ID, 13 LW ID (of X Corps) and 21 LW ID (which still had its 41 Bde attached to XIV Corps) behind his Army's left wing by evening of the 24<sup>th</sup>. These troop movements would start in the night of 22-23 September.

On the Russian side, Brussilov brought his XXX Corps up to the Styr. This Corps would cross the river on the right of XXXIX Corps to seize the Luck bridgehead by envelopment. After the recent setbacks it seemed inadvisable to send 4 Rifle Div into another frontal attack on the position. However the commander of XXXIX Corps, General Stelnitzky, wanted to take part along with his neighbor in the recovery of Luck and therefore ordered 4 Rifle Div to attack once more.<sup>79</sup>

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79 Broussilov, pp. 157 ff. Korolkov, "Strategic Overview", p. 371

4<sup>th</sup> Army loses Luck

At 9:30 in the evening of 22 September, after a heavy cannonade, the Russians furiously attacked the k.u.k. XIV Corps. 24 ID on the left wing, which hadn't recovered from its catastrophe on the Stubiell, had its center and right wing broken. The troops fell into confusion and withdrew to the Styr and over the bridge at Wyszkw. Upon learning about this, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand quickly decided to hold 13 LW ID, which was already moving to the north wing, in reserve for any emergency. He placed 10 CD under FML Martiny to cover the threatened right wing of 62 ID, and wanted to send the half of 21 LW ID which was still behind the Sierna to reinforce the north wing of XIV Corps. This unit (the 42 LW Inf Bde) was supposed to cross to the east bank of the Styr at Zydzczyn. However, the 62 ID, which was in charge of this sector, had prematurely destroyed the Zydzczyn bridge; therefore the remnants of 24 ID which hadn't crossed the river were overwhelmed by the Russians after an honorable resistance. Now the Russians drove through the open area around Zydzczyn into the center of XIV Corps, forcing the troops of 45 LW ID and 2 ID to retreat. GdI Roth, who had already thrown his scanty reserves (five companies of 45 LW ID) into the costly fighting, reported to Archduke Joseph Ferdinand that the situation was serious and requested permission to evacuate the bridgehead if necessary. As the Russians approached the northern edge of Luck at 3:00 AM, GdI Roth issued the order to retreat. Thanks to stubborn resistance by detachments which were left to cover the northern part of the city, the batteries and the intermingled troops of 45, 2 and 21 ID were able to accomplish the difficult march through the streets of Luck and to cross the bridges.

Early on 23 September, Russian forces also crossed the Styr on the bridge at Wyszkw, which 24 ID hadn't burnt as it fled back, and reached the west bank of the river at other places. Although troops from 21 LW ID and 62 ID were sent to this area and at first hindered the Russian advance, other units fell back to Zaborol. 3 ID, which had gallantly stood its ground on the right wing of XIV Corps during the night, was meanwhile able to withdraw over the river upstream from Luck without interference from the enemy, and set up a new position on the west bank. However, when 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ learned that the Russians had also come over the river downstream from the city, and that the condition of 45 and 24 ID was not good, they felt that the situation of this part of the Army was so serious that all of XIV Corps would have to withdraw.<sup>80</sup> In the afternoon the Corps took up a

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80 Zayontschovsky ("The War of Movement 1914 and 1915," p. 371)

position that formed an arc running from Polonnaja-Gorka through Zaborol and then linked up with the pulled-back right wing of X Corps.

Upon learning of this latest setback, the high command sent very urgent exhortations to 4<sup>th</sup> Army to hold on and thus keep the Ikwa line from being outflanked. They had already felt compelled early on 23 September to order 41 Hon ID to march north from Gorochow to Czarukow. Archduke Joseph Ferdinand asked to be given this Division; meanwhile he halted 11 ID, which had been moving to the north wing, at Zaturcy. Now he wanted to use these two divisions plus 13 LW ID (which had stayed at Ulaniki) along with 3 ID for a concentric attack against the enemy as they advanced out of Luck. GdI Linsingen, however, didn't agree with this plan at all. He believed that the Russians didn't intend to make a decisive thrust through Luck, and therefore it wouldn't be necessary to deploy four infantry divisions nearby. His main concern was that reinforcements reached the north wing in time for the upcoming flank attack. Linsingen said that both divisions of XVII Corps could be placed near the point where the Russians had broken through, but shouldn't enter the line unless there was a dire emergency; by the time this order arrived at 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ in the night of 23-24 September, the Archduke himself had arrived at the same conclusion.

The commander of the new Army Group had analyzed the situation correctly. The Russians didn't mount a strong attack out of Luck. Early on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the enemy did attempt to thrust against 62 ID along the road to Sierniki. Opposite XIV Corps, however, they played a waiting game throughout the day. The Russians seemed to be awaiting reinforcements, and kept most of their units in the positions they'd seized on the east bank of the Styr. Archduke Joseph Ferdinand now sent the troops selected for the flank attack toward the north, except for 13 LW ID which was held back at Ulaniki.

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states that XXX Russian Corps brought in 12,000 prisoners.

**d. New Russian thrusts on the Ikwa and at Nw.  
Aleksinieć, 19-23 September**Redeployment of the allied units

The fronts of 7<sup>th</sup> and South Armies had generally remained quiet since 18 September. The Russians had again pulled back to the Sereth and were occupying their former bridgeheads west of that river. The only fighting involved scouting groups which were sent deep into the area lying between the two sides. GdK Pflanzler-Baltin and GdI Bothmer used this time to bring order to their ranks, to bring up reserves, and to construct their positions.

Behind Corps Henriquez (6 CD and 30 ID), which had again moved their line ahead to the outer edge of the Zaleszczyki bridgehead, Pflanzler created an Army reserve south of the Dniester; it consisted of 5 Hon CD, 8 CD, and a regiment from 202 Hon Inf Bde. On the east bank of the Strypa, to the left of XIII Corps (15 and 36 ID), FML Arz's VI Corps took over the sector between Wisniowczyk and Buczacz; he had 37 Hon ID plus 39 Hon ID, which had been sent from the South Army back to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. 12 ID was placed in reserve at Buczacz. Corps Benigni, stationed on both sides of the mouth of the Sereth, now contained 5 and 6 ID and 3 CD. Korda's XI Corps, as previously, consisted of 42 Hon ID, half of 202 Hon Inf Bde, 2 Polish Legion Bde, and Lt Col. Papp's Brigade.

After the Russians retreated from the right wing of South Army, Corps Hofmann occupied its earlier bridgehead positions east of the Sereth between Burkanow and Kupczyńce; all of its troops (55 ID reinforced by 131 Inf Bde, and Col. Bolzano's Bde) were again united. Corps Marschall (3 Gd ID, 48 Res ID, 19 ID, 38 Hon ID) with the attached 32 ID were still in line east of the low ground between Kupczyńce and Jezierna and in the area southeast of Nesterowce as far as the Sereth. The regiments which had been attached to Corps Marschall - Hon IR # 302 of 51 Hon ID and IR # 67 of 29 ID - were returned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

This (2<sup>nd</sup>) Army made several substantial alterations to its organization. On the evening of 19 September, Böhm-Ermolli pulled 26 LW ID from the line at Rostoki so that he could send it - along with 46 LW ID on his northern wing - to 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which had now been placed under his control. FML Trollmann, the commander of XIX Corps, had been called along with his staff to join 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the Balkan theater of operations. The 14 and 34

ID and 51 Hon ID of the former XIX Corps were placed under FML Schmidt-Georgenegg, commander of IV Corps. FML Kosak in turn took over the 27 and 29 ID of the former IV Corps, creating a group named after himself. Both of these Divisions were rejoined by the regiments which had been detached as "GM Kroupa's Division" to serve on the left wing of South Army, but later had been sent behind the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Parts of 27 ID assembled at Nw. Poczajew as the Army's reserve, while 29 ID (where GM Kroupa resumed command) remained in the front on the Ikwa between V Corps (33 ID, 43 LW ID) and XVIII Corps (half of 31 ID, most of 1 Lst Inf Bde, 1 Lst Hussar Bde). Furthermore the 34 ID on the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had suffered heavy losses at Gontowa, was relieved from line and sent behind the front of the (new) IV Corps to Zalosce, in the Army's reserve. The half of 31 ID (GM Felix's Brigade) which had been attached to 34 ID returned to XVIII Corps. FML Czibulka again took over XVIII Corps from FML Lütgendorf.

#### The Russians attack again

While these troop movements were going on, General Brussilov sought in conjunction with his thrust toward Luck to pin down his opponents along the Ikwa with local attacks; this would prevent them from sending troops to their northern wing. Early on 19 September, parts of his XVII Corps attacked over the river from the hills around Kremieniec. Upstream from Dunajew the IR # 42 of 29 ID was pushed back; farther to the left the Lst IR # 2, which had been attached to this Division, was rolled up from the south. The Russians had thus broken in along a front of 8 km and penetrated to a depth of 3 ½ km. However, the adjacent troops of 29 and 27 ID offered such prolonged and courageous resistance to the larger enemy force that reinforcements (IR # 75 and 25) had time to come up. In a combined counterattack the Russians were driven back over the Ikwa. They left 800 prisoners in the hands of the north Bohemian 29 ID.<sup>81</sup> A similar enemy advance into the thin lines of XVIII Corps at Sapanow was thrown back after the intervention of reserves. Soon afterwards, in the night of 20-21 September, the 33 ID on the north wing of V Corps was taken by surprise by troops from VII Russian Corps, suffered substantial casualties, and pushed back to Lopuszno. Because of this local setback, a route through the Ikwa line at Rostoki was again open the Russians on the flank of Group Kosak.

Fighting also developed along 1<sup>st</sup> Army's front on 19 September.

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81 "Das Infanterie-Regiment 94 im Weltkrieg", pp. 386 ff.

On the left wing of II Corps the Russians sought unsuccessfully to drive the outposts of 25 ID off the islands in the Ikwa by Dubno. Opposite I Corps (parts of 46 LW ID and 9 ID) and Corps Szurmay (40 Hon ID and 7 ID), Russian units advanced from the upper Stubiel, occupied the north bank of the Ikwa, and seemed to be preparing to cross the river at Torgowica as well as farther downstream against the right wing of IX Corps. Bulgaria had begun to mobilize against Serbia, so GO Conrad reckoned that the Russians would soon attack along their entire line. On 22 September he again urged his Armies to work zealously on their fortifications.

As expected, Brussilov opened an earnest attack over the Ikwa immediately after his capture of Luck. Perhaps he planned to break the Ikwa front by thrusts from the north through Mlynow-Chorupan and from the south at Rostoki.

Early on 23 September, VII Russian Corps first struck against 33 ID of V Corps at Lopuszno, and also against the right wing of Group Kosak at Borszczewka. Although the enemy wasn't able to break into the gallantly defended positions of 29 ID on the west bank of the Ikwa, by attacking in several lines they broke through 33 ID at Lopuszno. When GdK Böhm-Ermolli learned that this Division was in great distress, from his Army reserve he sent parts of 27 ID to FML Kosak at Nw. Poczajew and 34 ID to FML Goglia at Zalosce; he instructed these units to mount a two-pronged counterattack and decisively defeat the Russians who'd broken through toward Lopuszno. Moreover the main body of 26 LW ID, which had been on its way to 1<sup>st</sup> Army, was again shifted behind XVIII Corps because it seemed that the Russians were about to attack here also. In the afternoon, FML Kosak sent two regiments of 27 ID (# 67 and 85) over the Ikwa at Losiatyn, and opened a counterattack toward Rostoki. This thrust struck the enemy's flank so hard that they had to abandon their attack against 33 ID even before the k.u.k. 34 ID, which was being hastily brought up from Zalosce, was able to intervene.

#### 24 September - the high point of the fighting

At dawn on 24 September, parts of Russian VIII Corps crossed the river at Dubno, where the north wing of 25 ID was stationed. Some of the outposts of the Vienna IR # 4 which had dug in on the Ikwa islands were driven back by larger enemy units. When the Russians tried to cross over the burning bridges to the western bank of the river, the Deutschmeister counterattacked. This thrust from the edge of the bridges forced the enemy to

retreat.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, however, the Russians threatened to break through downstream from Dubno. Here the 9 ID was still constructing its positions on high ground around Chorupan, south of the swampy land along the river. Covered by morning fog, the Russian VIII Corps attacked and broke into this line, despite a gallant defense. The Russian advance was then immediately checked by extremely effective flanking fire from a battery of Heavy FH Bn # 2 (of the neighboring 25 ID), which was stationed on the heights west of Dubno. FZM Puhallo had already anticipated the Russian attacks, and on the day before had brought 51 LW Inf Bde of 26 LW ID to the area southwest of Dubno. This Brigade, along with troops from 9 ID, counterattacked toward Chorupan in the afternoon. The Russians had to abandon the south bank of the Ikwa and left about 1500 prisoners in the hands of the victors.

Meanwhile the Russian XII Corps made local thrusts against Corps Szurmay and against the neighboring IX Corps of 4<sup>th</sup> Army; they were repulsed. Thus the attack of Brussilov's Army on the Ikwa was ebbing by the evening of 24 September. On the other hand, Russian General Shcherbatchev on the same day had gained ground at Nw. Aleksinieć with a thrust by VI Corps on the right wing of his 11th Army. This sudden assault in the thick morning fog was successful against 51 Hon ID, whose tired troops apparently hadn't taken proper security precautions. The Russians were able to break this Division's northern wing and roll it up. Three of the regiments were hit from the rear and mostly taken prisoner. Once again the local reserves were sucked into the disastrous trench fighting. The reserves at divisional level were insufficient to save the desperate situation, and anyway they went astray in the hilly terrain covered with fog. The smashed 51 Hon ID had to give up Nw. Aleksinieć; the remnants (about 1000 combatants) withdrew west toward Zagorze. The Russians pursued cautiously and didn't send a strong force through Nw. Aleksinieć; nevertheless a counterattack by FML Schmidt-Georgenegg's Corps reserve in the afternoon soon came to a halt.

In the center of V Corps, FML Goglia had brought up 34 ID from Zalosce and inserted it in line between 43 LW ID and 33 ID; on 24 September he originally was supposed to exploit the thrust which FML Kosak had already started, and to win the line Rostoki-Gorynka Bol., thus guarding the long flank of Group Kosak south of the Ikwa. However, when GdK Böhm-Ermolli learned

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82 Hoen, Waldstätten-Zipperer and Seifert, "Die Deutschmeister", pp. 516 ff.

of the severe setback suffered by 51 Hon ID, he canceled this operation and told FML Goglia to send an infantry brigade from 33 ID to Zagorze, where the right wing of 43 LW ID had also lost ground to the enemy.

Meanwhile considerable reinforcements were also hurrying to the scene from the south. Already on 23 September, when the Russians had attacked V Corps at Rostoki, GdK Böhm-Ermolli asked the high command to return 32 ID to him from Corps Marschall. In the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> the AOK ordered this Division to move from Nesterowce to Zalosce because of the threatening situation on the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. In the evening there was a stalemate at Nw. Aleksiniec and in the sector of 14 ID on the right wing of IV Corps.

The fighting tapers off

On the next day, the 25<sup>th</sup>, FML Schmidt-Georgenegg was given control over the troops who'd arrived on his northern wing (32 ID and half of 33 ID), and was ordered by GdK Böhm-Ermolli to counterattack. After fierce and difficult fighting, he recaptured most of the lost positions at Nw. Aleksiniec, and took 700 prisoners. During the day the Russians made new thrusts against 14 ID at Gontowa and Mszaniec, but were held off.

This defensive victory relieved the most serious concerns that the front on the Ikwa might be enveloped. However, the Russians still seemed to have the potential to make further attacks. Their artillery continued heavy bombardments, which toward the end of September were also extended to the northern wing of South Army. It was possible that they might renew their thrusts at Nw. Aleksiniec. Because of this continuing threat, on the 27<sup>th</sup> GdK Böhm-Ermolli sent the main body of 26 LW ID, which had been stationed behind XVIII Corps, to Zagorze. Moreover the high command moved 37 Hon ID, which meanwhile had been relieved at Buczacz on the south wing of VI Corps by 12 ID, by rail to Brody where it became the strategic reserve for the Ikwa front.

The Russians however restricted themselves mostly to smaller offensive operations, which didn't lead to breakthroughs. On the other hand their VI Corps, as expected, made a new thrust at Nw. Aleksiniec early on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The Russians once again were able to penetrate the Aus-Hung. positions after a short but heavy artillery fire. The units on the north wing of the k.u.k. IV Corps (51 Hon ID, 32 ID and half of 33 ID) were supposed to recover the lost trenches by counterattacking, but their thrust was unsuccessful. FML Schmidt-Georgenegg was forced to abandon plans to reconquer Nw. Aleksiniec. He now wanted to hold the line just west of the town. GdK Böhm-Ermolli agreed with this plan. The long, drawn-out fighting on the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had caused the units of IV and V Corps to become considerably intermingled. Above all, it was necessary to bring the units back into order and to pull 51 Hon ID, which had long been in need of relief, back to Zalosce as the Army's reserve.

2<sup>nd</sup> Army analyzes the recent actions

Because of the continuing partial setbacks, GdK Böhm-Ermolli initiated an analysis of the performance of the divisions involved (14, 33, 34 and 51). In the resultant reports the conduct of the troops was found to be excellent. Like all the

regiments of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, they had participated in three breakthrough battles - Gologory, Zloczow and Podkamien - and since 9 September had been engaged almost continuously. The depressing fact that even very limited enemy penetrations into our trenches had led to the surrender of neighboring parts of the front that often hadn't even been seriously attacked was blamed primarily on deficiencies in current defensive tactics. Almost all the troops were deployed in the foremost line. When the enemy pushed into this line, they could turn against the rear of troops in adjacent positions almost without hindrance; the weak local reserves, stationed directly behind the first trenches, were either simply overwhelmed or found themselves unable to respond except by a frontal counterattack because they lacked freedom of movement. The wire lines of communication between the higher level staffs and the troops were often severed at the most critical moments. Thus the commanders frequently didn't know the actual situation until it was too late; an enemy penetration could already be gaining a large amount of ground before the main reserve forces could be sent in the proper direction to counter-attack. Besides these ill-conceived defensive tactics, deficiencies of the lower-ranking officers and in the training of replacement troops were causes of the setbacks. Naturally these factors diminished the combat strength of the troops. On days when extraordinary efforts were demanded, the regiments of less reliable origin in particular were found to lack the determination to carry out their duty to the utmost with their last strength.<sup>83</sup>

Further demands, however, would still have to be made on the troops' capacity to work. In these same days at the end of September, the high command ordered that defensive works should be constructed. Based on lessons learned on the Western Front, the AOK wanted to build three parallel lines of trenches with intermediate positions. Cross-trenches would limit the enemy's ability to exploit penetrations. The strength of the troops in the front line was worn down by the need to build positions and to constantly patrol against the enemy; because there was a lack of reserves, they couldn't be relieved. However, the troops behind the front line were also kept busy. They were constructing the new second and third lines, as well as trenches running to and from the front; they were also being force

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83 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The expression "Regimentern mit unzuverlässigen Ersatz", translated here as "regiments of less reliable origin", is presumably an oblique reference to the sensitive subject of the differing levels of commitment to the cause by different nationalities.

marched from one sector to another whenever new fighting flared up.

### ***E. The second offensive toward Rovno***

#### **1. The flank attack by Gerok's Group, 23-28 September**

While 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, despite such great difficulties, was honorably defending the field in the second Battle of Nw. Aleksiniec with a minimal loss of ground, the situation on the north wing was changing completely in favor of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The opening phase had already been carried out by the cavalry in the Polesie even before the setback at Luck.

As noted above, 5 German CD had crossed the Stokhod at Lubieszow on 19 September in order to advance toward the Styr. At Zeleznica the German horsemen encountered resistance which they couldn't overcome, so their commander G.Lt Heydebreck asked 11 Hon CD, which was still behind the Stokhod, for help. This Division wasn't able to cross the river until the next day (the 20<sup>th</sup>) because the bridges had been destroyed. At noon on the same day, GdK Hauer was ordered by Archduke Joseph Ferdinand to advance to the Styr with his Cavalry Corps (11 Hon CD; 9, 1 and half of 2 CD; 1 and half of 3 Polish Bdes); this would open the way into the flank of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army for GdI Gerok's German XXIV Res Corps, which was marching up to the crossing point on the Pripyat at Lubiaz.

GdK Hauer sent his units toward the Styr with the left wing deployed in echelon. They fought numerous actions with Gillenschmidt's Russian Cav Corps (2 Comb Coss Div; 3 and 16 CD<sup>84</sup>; 3 Cauc Coss Div; parts of 77 ID), whose north wing was reinforced by 83 ID from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army; these Russians were also engaged with 5 German CD on the heights at Zeleznica. The Aus-Hung. cavalry divisions and the Polish legionnaires made progress against the weaker southern wing of the Russian horsemen.

On 23 September, the day on which the enemy took Luck, 11 Hon CD had already reached the line Jeziercy-Galuzia and sent its

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84 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The original text shows that Gillenschmidt's Corps contained the "3<sup>rd</sup> Gd Cossack Div", but of course there was no such unit. Other sources make it seem probable that the division in question was the regular 3<sup>rd</sup> CD, as shown in the translation.

leading troops further ahead toward the Styr. By this day the Polish Legion had driven the Russians out of Trojanowka and Maniewiczze, while 9 CD was encountering resistance at Okonsk and Jablonka.

Behind this cavalry screen, Corps Gerok advanced over the Stokhod bridges at Rudka and Czerwiszcze. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, just before the arrival of the leading German brigade, 9 CD was able to drive the Russians out of the Okonsk-Jablonka area and toward the east. 1 CD, reinforced by half of 2 CD, meanwhile broke out of the narrow area where the Styr and Stokhod flow closest together, drove Russian cavalry out of Borowicy and Kopyli, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> attacked the bridgehead at Kolki; the latter position was stormed in the evening when the leading brigade of the East Prussian 1 ID hurried to the scene.

Thus the stage had been set for Linsingen's flank attack. On 26 September the XXIV Res Corps, led by G.Lt von Conta (commander of 1 German ID) would cross the Styr at Kolki. GdI Kritek's XVII Corps (11 ID, 41 Hon ID and the attached 13 LW ID), which meanwhile had deployed on the left wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, would take the place of Cav Corps Herberstein at Borowicy, Sokul and Kol. Czeben and prepare to advance. On the following day (27 September) the corps of Conta and Kritek, under the overall command of GdI Gerok, would attack from the line Kolki-Sokul-Kol. Czeben against the north wing of the enemy units confronting 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The advance would continue in the direction of Rovno. Conta and Kritek's men made up the right wing of the newly-formed "Group Gerok"; the left contained the cavalry formations. 4<sup>th</sup> Army, now made up of X, XIV and IX Corps, would join in beginning with its left as Gerok made progress. However, if the enemy withdrew east over the Styr, 4<sup>th</sup> Army was to pursue immediately. Cav Corps Hauer would cover the left flank of Group Gerok; they were reinforced by Cav Corps Herberstein (half of 2 CD; 4 and 7 CD; two regiments of the Polish Legion), which had been sent to the west bank of the Styr. GdK Hauer was ordered to advance over the Styr between Kolki and Mulczycy, on the left of XXIV Res Corps; then he would advance against the Rovno-Sarny railroad. The main body of 11 Hon CD was sent to deploy on the south wing of 5 German CD, and placed under G.Lt Heydebreck. This general was ordered to use both his divisions to drive the Russians out of the areas east of Jeziercy-Zeleznica and around the confluence of the Styr and Pripyat.

When these intentions of GdI Linsingen were reported in Teschen, GM Metzger raised objections against involving 4<sup>th</sup> Army in the

pending offensive. Because of the intensification of the crisis of 4<sup>th</sup> Army since 24 September, that command already urgently needed rest and quiet. It appeared that the Russians weren't going to attack further from Luck as 4<sup>th</sup> Army had originally anticipated, and wanted to defend themselves on the Styr. Under these circumstances, might it not be better to restrict our own operations to holding the line of the Styr? However, Metzger's considerations couldn't change the decisions that had already been taken. Because of the recent events, GO Conrad feared that 4<sup>th</sup> Army would suffer new setbacks unless it was fully relieved by Group Gerok's flank attack. That Army was still facing the bulk of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (most of XII Corps, plus XXXIX and XXX Corps), while only relatively weak forces (Velsaiev's Cav Corps) opposed Cav Corps Herberstein and the advancing XXIV Res Corps. This was a good reason to hope for the success of the operation, which might even still lead to the capture of Rovno.

## **2. The Russians evacuate Luck**

On 25 September, General Brussilov had already received confirmation from Cav Corps Gillenschmidt and from air reconnaissance that German troops (perhaps two to three divisions) were approaching Kolki.<sup>85</sup> Despite this danger threatening the Russian north wing Brussilov didn't want to again abandon Luck and the line on the Styr. He immediately ordered XXX Corps, reinforced by 4 Rifle Div and 7 CD, to Kolki; he also pulled an infantry division from the center of his Army to serve as a reserve in the area Klewan-Olyka. Brussilov's superior, General Ivanov, quickly learned of these measures and in the evening sent him a wire which instructed 8<sup>th</sup> Army to withdraw under cover of darkness to the line Berestiany-Olyka-Mlynow, so as not to be cut off from Rovno. The reinforced XXX Corps was to be sent in forced marches to Garajmowka and would deploy in the forests farther north on the Kormin. From this point it could launch a surprise thrust against the flank of the Germans as they marched from Kolki toward Rovno. Brussilov opposed this maneuver. He couldn't make such a long retreat to the Putilowka over night, and would have to leave strong rear guards with artillery on the Styr to cover the withdrawal. Also, it would be impossible to long conceal from the Germans the presence of XXX Corps on the Kormin, and anyway it would be difficult for the troops to maneuver in this area covered by forests and swamps. Therefore he would prefer to remain on the

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85 Broussilov, pp. 158 ff. Zayontschovsky, "The War of Movement", p. 372

Styr for the upcoming battle. Ivanov stuck to his own decisions, and ordered Brussilov to carry them out quickly.

#### The allies develop a pincers attack

While the Russians were moving back from their opponents on the night of 25-26 September, Archduke Joseph Ferdinand was preparing for the planned attack. To restore order among his units, he took the halves of 21 LW ID and of 2 ID out of the front of XIV Corps and returned them to the rest of their Divisions; thus all of 21 LW ID was on the right wing of X Corps, and 2 ID on the left wing of IX Corps. Early on the 26<sup>th</sup> it was discovered that during the night the enemy had evacuated the west bank of the Styr at Luck and were also pulling back in front of the other sectors held by 4<sup>th</sup> Army, and in front of the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The Archduke immediately ordered his troops to go over the Styr. However, the crossing was difficult and didn't begin until afternoon because it took much time to bring up boats and to build bridges. By evening the IX Corps (10 and 2 ID) had crossed the river at Borzemiec and Jalowiczy. 45 LW ID of XIV Corps advanced unhindered through Luck and into the original bridgehead positions east of the Styr; downstream from the city the 62 and 4 ID of X Corps also crossed the river. The entire front of 4<sup>th</sup> Army had lost contact with the enemy, who apparently were moving back to the Putilowka.

In Group Gerok, on 26 September the XVII Corps (13 LW ID, 11 ID, 41 Hon ID) took the place of Cav Corps Herberstein along the Styr between Kol. Czeben and Borowicy and prepared to cross the river. On this day XXIV Res Corps took Kolki and established a firm foothold south of the Styr with a brigade of 1 ID; farther to the left the 22 ID came up from Okonsk and moved their lines nearer to the river. For the time being the situation remained unclear in this sector. It appeared, however, that Cav Corps Velsaiev, opposing Group Gerok, had been reinforced by units which had been taken from the front opposite 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Group Gerok was to thrust ahead to the southeast with all its strength on 27 September. 4<sup>th</sup> Army should continue to march east, pushing aside any rear guards which they encountered, while preparing to attack with concentrated force in case the enemy offered serious resistance on the Putilowka.

If 1<sup>st</sup> Army thrust from the south, it might be possible to catch the Russians in a pincers attack in front of Rovno. Therefore on the 26<sup>th</sup> GdI Linsingen approached the k.u.k. high command with a request to be given control of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Otherwise that Army should be instructed to join the attack of 4<sup>th</sup> Army with its

left wing while its strong right wing also advanced in echelon along the Dubno-Rovno road. GO Conrad refused to place 1<sup>st</sup> Army under German control, but did immediately issue its orders, through Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ, which were consistent with GdI Linsingen's suggestion. GdK Böhm-Ermolli instructed FZM Puhallo to immediately assail the enemy, especially with a reinforced right wing; the objective was to prevent the Russians from shifting units toward the north. FZM Puhallo responded that he was moving 46 LW ID, which at the time was in the second line behind Corps Szurmay, to his right wing. However, it seemed to him that an attack at Dubno through the swampy low ground on the Ikwa wouldn't be possible until his left wing had advanced to the northern bank of the river downstream from the city. Nonetheless the 1<sup>st</sup> Army would do everything possible to support Linsingen's Army Group.

Corps Szurmay (40 Hon ID and 7 ID) had meanwhile crossed the Ikwa at Torgowica and Mlynów. Continuing the advance, on 27 September the Corps' left wing passed the Dubno-Luck road. However, the Russians in front of I and II Corps still held their original lines behind the Ikwa.

All remaining units of 4<sup>th</sup> Army passed to the right bank of the Styr in the night of 26-27 September. There was no intention of using 62 and 24 ID, which had suffered most severely, for the further offensive; they were kept back at Luck in the Army's reserve. The 62 ID was dissolved at the start of October, and the bulk of its troops sent to 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Most of 4<sup>th</sup> Army advanced to the Putilowka without fighting. Under IX Corps, 10 ID reached Ujezdcy on 27 September and drove away some Russian cavalry detachments. XIV Corps (3 ID and 45 LW ID) reached the area south of Romanov without incident; to their left the X Corps (21 LW ID and 4 ID) made equal progress.

During the night the Russians opposite Group Gerok had pulled back. XVII Corps crossed the Styr unhindered at Kol. Czeben (13 LW ID), Sokul (41 Hon ID) and Borowcy (11 ID); during 27 September it reached the line Sikiricz-Trostieniec. XXIV Res Corps encountered heavy resistance in the woods south of Kolki; however, it was able to reach Zurawicze (1 ID) and the area west of Czernysz (22 ID). Velsaiev's Russian Cav Corps seemed to be withdrawing east from this area and crossing the Kormin. According to an intercepted radio message, the HQ of XXX Russian Corps had moved from Derazno to Bol. Stydynie, and 7 Russian CD was at Ml. Mick. The inference was that the enemy was moving units away from the front of 4<sup>th</sup> Army and toward the north and intended to fall upon the flank of XXIV Res Corps with infantry

reinforced by the cavalry formations. During the course of 27 September GdI Linsingen reported these impressions to Teschen and stated that because of the Russians' speedy retreat it would now be impossible to envelop them west of the Horyn. The attacking wing must now switch to the east and north east to throw the enemy over the Horyn. The goal of the advance was Rovno. "Whether this goal can be achieved by having Group Gerok and the cavalry continue to advance over the Horyn toward the Rovno-Sarny railroad, or whether it will be necessary to regroup west of the Horyn, will be determined by the course of events."

The orders issued by Linsingen's Army Group HQ for the 28<sup>th</sup> reflected this changed situation. 4<sup>th</sup> Army was to move up to the Putilowka. If the enemy defended the river in strength, the offensive would open after all the corps of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, and also the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, were in line. If the Russians withdrew, however, they were to be immediately pursued on the east bank. In Group Gerok, XVII Corps would advance through Karpilowka and Silno, XXIV Res Corps through Berestiany and Garajmowka. Cav Corps Herberstein (2, 4 and 7 CD, half of 3 Polish Bde), which at the time was at Raznicze and Kopyli, was ordered to go over the Styr at Kolki and then thrust toward the northeast on the left of XXIV Res Corps. This would open the way over the Styr for Cav Corps Hauer.

After five days of fighting, Hauer's troops (1 and 9 CD, 1 Polish Bde) had meanwhile driven the enemy completely from the villages in the bogs and from the forested swamps near the bend in the Styr at Czartorijsk, and occupied the west bank of the river north of Czartorijsk up to Mulczycy. Still farther north, Cav Corps Heydebreck advanced to the area of Kuchocka Wola and to the Wiesiolucha sector. It seemed that the Russians had pulled the entire 77 ID out of the front north of the Pripyat and were moving it by rail through Sarny toward the Styr at Rafalowka.

Linsingen's HQ awaited further reports with growing tension. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, Corps Szurmay (of 1<sup>st</sup> Army) and 4<sup>th</sup> Army drove the opposing Russian covering troops toward the east. After a short advance, however, they came up against strongly fortified positions running from Mlynow through Dorogostaj and Koryto to Pelza, and then over the heights west of Olyka and along the Putilowka to a point north of Moszczanica. From this point, Cav Corps Velsaiev, reinforced by infantry, was deployed on both sides of Karpilowka and on the Kormin to cover the movement of XXX Russian Corps. Group Gerok attacked this enemy force on the 28<sup>th</sup>. XVII Corps, holding 11 ID in the second line, had 13 LW ID

drive a weaker force out of Moszczanica, while 41 Hon ID broke through the Russian cavalry screen at Silno and stormed the town of Boguslawka by the end of the 28<sup>th</sup>. 1 ID of XXIV Res Corps moved forward to the sand heights at Berestiany; 22 ID took the hamlet of Czernysz, but at Garajmowka came up against strong resistance. Farther to the left, Cav Corps Herberstein with two divisions of horsemen came up through Kolki to occupy the front as far as the Styr.

Intercepted Russian broadcasts and other reports received during the 28<sup>th</sup> gradually convinced GdI Linsingen that the Russians had been reinforced on the Kormin and also farther north near the Styr at Rafalowka. Therefore it was desirable to assemble stronger forces at Kolki, where they could be deployed quickly to help either XXIV Res Corps or Cav Corps Hauer. For the moment it wasn't clear whether there was still a chance to throw the Russians over the Horyn. GdI Linsingen set only limited goals for the 29<sup>th</sup>. G.Lt Conta was ordered to push back the remaining Russians west of the Kormin, using his own two infantry divisions and Cav Corps Herberstein which was placed under his command. For the time being the further advance toward the Horyn was put on hold. XVII Corps would only advance in conjunction with 4<sup>th</sup> Army, and that Army - which originally was going to attack the Russian lines on the Putilowka on the 29<sup>th</sup> - had been told to stay in place for now.

### **3. The war of movement comes to an end**

#### **a. Events north of the Pripyat, 8-27 September**

On the front north of the Pripyat, the advance of the Army Groups of Hindenburg and Prince Leopold of Bavaria pushed the Russians far to the east in the second and third weeks of September. Vilna fell on the 18<sup>th</sup>. In heavy fighting, by 25 September the 10<sup>th</sup> Army reached the area west of Smorgony, the 12<sup>th</sup> the Berezina (east of Lida), while the 9<sup>th</sup> and Woyrsch's Armies reached the Szczara.

The k.u.k. XII Corps had again done a good job during this advance. After the Russians withdrew from the Jasiolda, on 8 September the 16 ID, with 35 ID behind them, hastened ahead in several columns. They marched on a road running along a causeway through Michalin which was choked with troops and fleeing civilians, and turned into a morass by rain. The goal was to intervene in the action being waged by the Landwehr Corps, which at this time was already fighting on the Rozanka.

After a wearisome march, on the 9<sup>th</sup> the 16 ID (without its artillery) entered the battle line; in two days of hard fighting on the sandy knolls west of Kosowo they captured several strong points. At first the right flank of 16 ID was open, but later was protected by the Beskid Corps, which after capturing Kartuszkaja Bereza had sent the German 47 Res ID to Kosowo (northeast of Michalin) and drove the enemy back on the 11<sup>th</sup>. On 12 September the Russians threw reinforcements into the action at Kosowo, and pressed very hard against 16 ID. Meanwhile the pressure from the Landwehr in the north and from the Beskid Corps in the south began to take affect. In the night of 12-13 September the Russians evacuated the Rozanka-Zelwianka sector and pulled back to Slonim. Once more they set farms and villages on fire, destroyed all bridges, and saved their artillery and supply trains thanks to gallant resistance by their rear guards. The k.u.k. XII Corps pursued along the poor roads south of the main Rozany-Slonim highway; after super-human exertions, on the 14<sup>th</sup> they had already reached the area west of the Szczara, covered with woods and swamps. Behind this strong barrier the Russians renewed their defensive fighting. Beyond the enemy fortifications the German airmen spotted troop trains that were moving through Baranowicze. Woyrsch ordered his corps to thrust rapidly toward this important railroad junction.

Accordingly, though the logistical situation was already critical, Kövess still wanted 35 ID to cross the Szczara at Szyłowicze on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The Division tried to accomplish this for three days, but without success. Russian guns continually destroyed the bridges which the Aus-Hung. pioneers constructed over the river and the adjacent swamps; the enemy fire also prevented the infantry from crossing on boats. The Landwehr Corps was able to force a crossing only at Slonim (early on the 17<sup>th</sup>). When the Russians threw themselves against the German battalions who had come over the river, Woyrsch prodded XII Corps to advance quickly. Troops from 35 ID established themselves on the opposite bank during the night of 17-18 September. Around this time the Russians had already disappeared from their fortifications on both sides of Slonim. Kövess' Corps followed the withdrawing enemy along the road to Baranowicze. An order from the German OHL urged all its troops on to hurry, so they could influence the fighting that in these days was coming to a conclusion around Vilna. The Russians sought to cover Baranowicze first on the the Luchozwa and then on the Muszanka. Nevertheless, XII Corps had already fought its way over the Luchozwa on the 19<sup>th</sup>. On the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> the 16 ID pushed ahead to the area south of Nowaja Mysz and in the night of 22-23 September the Landwehr Corps crossed the lower reaches

of the Muszanka. Now the Russians gave up their resistance. XII Corps immediately pursued the enemy and in the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> reached the important railroad crossing point of Baranowicze, where the Stavka had been located in rail cars for a year. In the following days the 16 and 35 ID, together with neighboring German troops, drove the last Russian rear guards over the eastern Szczara.

Thus Prince Leopold of Bavaria's Army Group had accomplished its mission. His and Mackensen's Groups had already given up nine divisions at the end of August and start of September - some for the West, others for the planned attack on Serbia. GFM Mackensen himself had left on the 19<sup>th</sup> for Temesvar in order to take command of the troops assembling for the Serbian operation. His former Army Group was dissolved. On 20 September GdI Kövess was named commander of the new 3<sup>rd</sup> Army which was deploying in south Hungary opposite Belgrade. FML Henriquez succeeded him in command of XII Corps on 28 September.

On 25 September the German OHL finally ordered the advance to cease. The Bug Army and Prince Leopold's Army Group would prepare a permanent position on a line running from Pinsk through Baranowicze to the Berezina. Farther to the left, Hindenburg would do the same as far as Riga. The great French offensive in Champagne had long been in progress, and the transfer of troops from 12<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Armies to the West, as Falkenhayn wanted, must finally begin. On 27 September GFM Hindenburg also decided that the boldly planned operation at Vilna had bogged down and would have to be shut down. The enemy was opposing 10<sup>th</sup> German Army in such great strength that it wouldn't be possible to push ahead past Smorgony. Army Group Hindenburg therefore dug into a permanent position running from the mouth of the Bierieza to Lake Narotch, and then west of Dvinsk, at Mitau, and west of Riga.<sup>86</sup>

#### **b. Establishment of a permanent front south of the Pripyat, 29 September-2 October**

When GO Conrad learned that Hindenburg had to stop his offensive toward Minsk and into the rear of the Russian masses north of the Polesie, his last hope for a great and decisive success disappeared. On his own north wing in Volhynia, he had managed with German help to resume the advance toward Rovno. The

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86 Kuhl, pp. 248 ff. Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, Second Part, pp. 227 ff. Ludendorff, pp. 131 ff.

Russians however had recognized in time that they were endangered by Linsingen's flank thrust, and apparently were taking counter-measures. Could the operation still gain further success? The troops of 1<sup>st</sup>, and especially of 4<sup>th</sup>, Armies were at the end of their strength and not capable of further exertions. The Aus-Hung. Armies on the Ikwa and in east Galicia had already been fighting on the defensive for three weeks. On this part of the front there was insufficient ammunition and other supplies to open an offensive with any prospect of victory.

According to a summary prepared at Teschen, the Aus-Hung. armies in the northeast, which had about 480,000 combat troops on 1 September, had lost over 200,000 by the end of the month. 120,000 men from March battalions (# XIV of the Common Army and Honved, # XIII of the k.k. Landwehr) had been incorporated as replacements.

In detail, the casualties in the autumn fighting were:

- . 4<sup>th</sup> Army - 60 officers and 2050 men killed, 216 and 9494 wounded, 449 and 7292 sick, 362 and 30,454 missing for a total of 1087 officers and 49,290 men
- . 1<sup>st</sup> Army - 76 officers and 2671 men killed, 249 and 8730 wounded, 312 and 5686 sick, 239 and 13,367 missing for a total of 876 officers and 30,454 men
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - 101 officers and 5347 men killed, 325 and 21,166 wounded, 601 and 11,325 sick, 470 and 29,549 missing for a total of 1497 officers and 67,387 men
- . South Army - 86 officers and 2891 men killed, 312 and 14,577 wounded, 218 and 3703 sick, 284 and 17,968 missing for a total of 900 officers and 39,139 men
- . 7<sup>th</sup> Army - 61 officers and 2612 men killed, 203 and 9517 wounded, 502 and 10,774 sick, 260 and 16,327 missing for a total of 1026 officers and 39,230 men.

Thus the grand totals were 15,955 dead, 64,789 wounded, 40,862 sick, 109,280 missing for a total loss of 230,886 officers and men. According to Russian reports, the vast majority of the "missing" (100,000 men) had been taken prisoner.<sup>87</sup>

Because of this situation the k.u.k. high command decided to also go over temporarily to the defensive on their northern wing. On 29 September they ordered GdK Böhm-Ermolli to halt the

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87 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Another point about these statistics is added by Stone (p. 191): "In the Aus-Hung. Army twice as many officers reported sick as were wounded. In the German Army, this proportion was reversed. It was good evidence of the different qualities of the allied armies."

attack by the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. At the same time GO Conrad let GdI Linsingen know that the 4<sup>th</sup> Army would stay on the defensive along the Putilowka to avoid heavy casualties, at least "until clarification of the position of the north wing [Group Gerok] makes it possible to determine whether continuing the offensive promises a lasting success." Therefore GdI Linsingen gave the Army the order to prepare a position on the west bank of the Putilowka unless the opposing enemy force didn't evacuate their own lines on the same day (the 29<sup>th</sup>). This, however, wasn't the case. 4<sup>th</sup> Army encountered stubborn resistance as soon as it began to attack, and therefore soon halted the operation in accordance with the orders of the high command.

Meanwhile there was substantial fighting on the Kormin, where Brussilov had united his XX Corps with Velsaiev's cavalry and began to counterattack early on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The Russian column sent toward Karpilowka was brought to a halt by the Vienna 13 LW ID, which itself wanted to take the town. After GdI Kritek committed his Corps' reserve, the enemy was driven from Karpilowka, and a secure connection established with the Brunn 4 ID on the right. The latter Division had moved its lines forward to the west bank of the Putilowka south of Moszczanica. Another column of XXX Russian Corps, which thrust toward Boguslawka, was pushed back onto the defensive by parts of 41 Hon ID. Thus the Russian offensive in the forests and swamps was nipped in the bud. Then the fighting on XVII Corps' front began to die out; it continued only on the north wing of Group Gerok. XXIV Res Corps pushed the Russians completely over the Kormin in the Czernysz sector; farther left Herberstein's Cav Corps was able to hold its ground against isolated enemy thrusts, in some cases by counter-attacking. 3000 prisoners were taken during the fighting. Opposite Cav Corps Hauer and Heydebreck the enemy reinforced their lines behind the Styr at Rafalowka, and on the Wiesiolucha Brook.

Thus at the end of September an almost straight line was emerging along the Putilowka and the Kormin, along which friend and foe were deployed in almost equal strength. Now Falkenhayn, who had moved with the German supreme HQ back to Mezieries, sent a wire to Conrad asking that as compensation for getting Corps Gerok and 5 CD the Austro-Hungarians should send troops of equal worth to the German front north of the Pripyat, unless it became possible in the next few days to resume the offensive south of this river "with very good prospects of success." The German Chief of Staff continued: "Naturally the commitment to the Serbian operation of four to five divisions more than originally

intended has already caused increasing difficulties. On the other hand, for the sake of the overall situation in the East it is desirable that pressure should be maintained on the Russians in at least one area."

The area where Falkenhayn wished to pressure the Russians was east Galicia, apparently to keep the Russians there from marching through Romania in the upcoming weeks, and especially to deter Romania from falling on the rear of Bulgaria during the latter's offensive on Serbia. However, the strength of the troops was used up; in the last six weeks the Aus-Hung. armies had lost almost a quarter of a million men. GO Conrad had to answer his German colleague on 1 October as follows:

"We can only contemplate a resumption of the offensive in Volhynia and east Galicia after replenishing the ranks of the troops, which were greatly reduced in the September fighting; this won't be accomplished before the second half of October. Therefore we aren't planning to move beyond the line Sarny-Rovno-east border of Galicia. Also, we can maintain the desired pressure on the Russians only if Corps Gerok and 5 CD stay on the northern wing of the Aus-Hung. part of the front."

Then Conrad voiced his opinion that the Russians, now that they were relieved by the departure of strong German forces to Serbia and to the West, would try either to:

- . separate the Austro-Hungarians from the Germans by an attack from the line Rovno-Dubno-Tarnopol, or
- . thrust into east Galicia and Bukovina in order to bring Romania into the war.

Before attacking again to relieve the German front north of the Pripyat, the Aus-Hung. armies would first need to ensure that they could fend off any such Russian offensives; this in turn entailed preparation of a permanent position and establishment of strong reserve forces.

Falkenhayn, however, insisted that an attack in the second half of October wouldn't be successful, sine the Russians by then would have already been reinforced. He also doubted whether large-scale military operations were possible in Volhynia in late autumn. Therefore on 2 October he asked Conrad to forego all further offensive operations and instead to concentrate "with all available means on the permanent defensive position." At the same time he requested that Aus-Hung. troops should relieve Corps Gerok, the German 5 CD, and also the Alpenkorps in south Tyrol.

GO Conrad answered on the same day that on 30 September he had already ordered the construction of permanent positions along the entire Volhynia-Galicia front. "In mid-October, after the k.u.k. units are back at full strength, we will be able to

determine whether it will still be possible to attack in the second half of October." Conrad also promised to do his best to provide Aus-Hung. troops to replace Corps Gerok and 5 CD. On 2 October he had ordered 37 Hon ID, which had been stationed at Radziwilow in the strategic reserve, to move to the north wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army where it would relieve 3 ID. This unit in turn would relieve 17 ID on the Isonzo; in mid-October the 17 ID, with one other infantry division plus 10 CD from Volhynia, would be able to join the German front north of the Pripyat. As will be related below, however, these plans would be crossed up by the Russians.

#### **4. New Russian attacks are fended off, 2-15 October**

Toward the end of September, the Russian supreme HQ felt free of the fearful pressure under which the armies of the Tsar had suffered in the days since Gorlice while they were pushed back for hundreds of kilometers in endless fighting. Good news was also coming from France, where the great attrition battles initiated by the western allies in Artois and Champagne seemed to be developing favorably. Apparently the menace on the Western front was forcing the Germans to leave the Russians alone. The Tsar now hoped to drive the invaders from Lithuania and Courland. In conjunction with this counterattack between Dvinsk and Minsk, Ivanov was supposed to resume his thrusts against the Aus-Hung. Army. Ivanov, however, feared that his antagonists - with help from the Germans - were about to launch a new assault on his Front, since they were being reinforced in Volhynia and on the Strypa.

Nevertheless, on 29 September Alexeiev issued general orders which expressed his opinion that for the time being the troops in Galicia had no reason to fear serious offensive operations by the Central Powers. All their troop movements were aimed only at maintaining an even balance of forces between the two sides. The only exception was on the north wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army, where the Stavka feared that their opponents were gathering a striking force. Ivanov was therefore authorized to move 125 ID from the Proskurow-Staro Konstantinov area to his north wing. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army of the West Front was ordered to reinforce its troops south of the Pripyat so that its left wing could attack in cooperation with 8<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>88</sup>

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88 Lemke, p. 64. Nesnamov, Vol. IV, p. 128

Fighting flares up on the Styr

These orders from the Stavka motivated Ivanov on 29 September to give his Armies the task of weakening the enemy and forcing them onto the defensive with brief sorties. The first of these new operations was initiated on 2 October by Gillenschmidt; he broke out of his bridgehead at Rafalowka to push Hauer, who'd dug in along the bend in the Styr at Czartorijsk, away from the flank of Brussilov's Army. The two cavalry divisions (1 and 9) and the Polish Legion couldn't resist this thrust, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fell back past the line Nowosielki-Galuzia. To prevent a further Russian advance into the flank of XXIV Res Corps, on the same day GdI Gerok sent the main body of 11 ID, which had come up from XVII Corps to Kolki, to confront the enemy on the Okonka. Linsingen, who had already anticipated a Russian offensive against Corps Hauer, also stretched the left wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army up to Karpilowka. This freed up 13 LW ID, which took the place of 1 German ID in the sector at Berestiany. Conta was instructed to have 1 ID assemble as quickly as possible at Kolki; then with this Division and 11 ID he would strike the flank of the enemy forces advancing from the Styr at Czartorijsk, and drive them back over the river. As soon as Conta's striking group gained ground, Hauer and his cavalry would join in on the left and envelop the Russians from the north through Galuzia. The counterattack would start early on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

At this point the troops on the right wing of Group Gerok - XVII Corps (which now commanded 41 Hon ID and 13 LW ID), the 22 German ID, and Herberstein's cavalry - screened Conta's attack by artillery fire and active patrolling. From Kolki, two regiments of 11 ID advanced on either side of the Styr toward Kulikowice, which marked the northern limit of Brussilov's right wing. Around 10:00 PM both regiments entered the town and established a bridgehead on the right bank of the river. At the same time the Russians were mounting relief attacks against the left wing of Cav Corps Herberstein; they were repulsed by 2 CD, which itself suffered heavy losses. Meanwhile XXIV Res Corps - with 1 German ID on the right and the main body of 11 ID on the left - were advancing without fighting through the forests and swamps near the Okonka. In the afternoon they met determined resistance on the line Nowosielki-Lisowo and had to postpone continuing the action until the next day. The left wing of Corps Hauer had fallen back to the Karasin area; Linsingen informed Hauer that it wasn't necessary to continue withdrawing in front of the Russians. He ordered Hauer to attack forcefully on the left of 11 ID through Galuzia and thus to encircle the enemy.

On the 6<sup>th</sup>, XVII Corps and Cav Corps Herberstein continued the envelopment operation initiated the day before. North of the Styr a brigade of 1 German ID took Nowosielki and reached the edge of the woods west of Czartorijsk in a vigorous pursuit. The other brigade of 1 ID stood in action against entrenched enemy troops in a position at Bielgow. The main body of 11 ID attacked from the northwest toward the heights east of Lisowo and against the Russian positions which stretched over the railroad to the area of Wolczeck. Cav Corps Hauer moved forward toward Galuzia and Sierchowo.

On the next day (the 7<sup>th</sup>), 1 German ID in the area east of Bielgow left some troops to guard in the direction of Czartorijsk, then pushed to the north; after hard fighting in the woods, they passed the Czartorijsk-Lisowo road. The main body of 11 ID advanced along the railroad toward the enemy which was entrenched on the sandy heights west of Miedwieze. Cav Corps Hauer sent dismounted detachments of 1 CD and artillery to support 11 ID, and drove weaker enemy units out of Galuzia and Sierchowo.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> Conta, ignoring the possibility that the Russians might attack his rear from Czartorijsk, continued to thrust successfully to the north, and threw the enemy from the heights at Miedwieze. The hope that Cav Corps Hauer would be able to cut off the Russians advancing from Rafalowka remained unfulfilled, because 9 CD was held up by resistance east of Kostiuchnowka. During the 8<sup>th</sup> the leading troops of 1 German ID were already reaching the Styr at the bend in the river at Czartorijsk and farther north; parts of 11 ID advanced toward Kolodia. However, it would take four more days of exertion in the enormous woods and swamps before 11 ID and Cav Corps Hauer (the latter reinforced on its north wing by 11 Hon CD) were able to reach their goal, the line Kolodia-Jeziery. Farther north, G.Lt Heydebreck with 5 German CD repulsed Russian counterattacks and worked his way up to the Wiesiolucha sector; here he maintained a link with Hauer, opposite a strong enemy force.

#### Actions on the entire front in Volhynia

While Linsingen's cavalry and XXIV Res Corps were engaged with the south wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army, Brussilov opened a new battle along the entire front in Volhynia. Early on 7 October, General Velsaiev's cavalry and XXX Corps attacked on the Korminbach. At Czernysz the German 22 ID repulsed all attacks; Cav Corps Herberstein (4, 2 and 7 CD, reinforced by two battalions) were

also able to check the enemy south of Kulikowice. A crisis developed at Karpilowka, where the Russians opened a breach between XVII and X Corps. 41 Hon ID were driven from their positions on the right wing; 21 LW ID, fighting to the south, had to abandon Karpilowka after a stubborn fight and withdraw to the west. Generals Martiny and Kritek brought up their respective corps reserves and counterattacked in the afternoon, but gained back only a little ground.

At the same time the Russians launched an equally heavy assault against 4<sup>th</sup> Army on the Putilowka. Here XXXIX Russian Corps was supposed to break through on the rail line leading from Rovno to Luck and on the main Olyka-Pokaszczewo highway. Covered by an armored train, the Russians tried to cross the Putilowka in the sector of 4 ID, but had to fall back under hefty artillery fire after suffering heavy losses. Farther south they drove into the trenches of 3 ID in the early morning hours; by the time evening fell, however, the hotly-contested positions west of Olyka had been recovered by Horsetzky's Division.

On the inner wings of 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies, the heights of Ujezdcy were the goal of XII Russian Corps. After the fighting surged back and forth, 10 ID and 4 Inf Bde of 2 ID on their right were able to hold their ground. However, the north wing of 7 ID was attacked from the woods at Koryto in the morning fog and driven back. Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, who had already anticipated a Russian thrust here, didn't hesitate to give 3 Inf Bde of 2 ID, which had been stationed behind IX Corps, to FML Kralicek; Puhallo sent half of 46 LW ID (which was behind Corps Szurmay) to counterattack. Before these reinforcements arrived, the local reserves of 7 ID pushed the enemy back a considerable distance.<sup>89</sup>

In the morning 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ let 37 Hon ID, which was supposed to go to Chorlupy to relieve 3 ID, stay behind IX Corps so that it could be sent into the fighting at Koryto if needed. In the afternoon it appeared this wouldn't be necessary, so Army HQ decided to send 37 Hon ID to the threatened north wing of X Corps. 10 CD had already been sent there in the morning.

The Russians attacked again on 8 October along the Kormin and

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89 FJB # 21 from Vienna played an outstanding role in these defensive actions. its commander, Major Joseph Baumann, won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for this feat of arms and also for leading IR # 37 during the X Battle of the Isonzo.

the Putilowka, but were repulsed in most places. At Koryto the old positions of 7 ID were recovered with the help of the reserves (parts of 2 ID and of 46 LW ID). The enemy suffered heavy losses in these actions; over 4000 of them were taken prisoner. Karpilowka, however, remained in the hands of the Russians. To retake this town, Martiny asked 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ for half of 10 CD (including its Rifle Battalion) and for all of 37 Hon ID; his request was granted. The Honveds counterattacked along with 21 LW ID and the reserves of XVII Corps, but couldn't drive the enemy completely from the terrain they'd captured around Karpilowka. The Russians kept striking back. After four days of fruitless fighting, Linsingen had to agree - for good or evil - to Martin's suggestion that further attacks be halted for now.

#### The fighting spills into east Galicia

Simultaneously with the thrusts on the Kormin and Putilowka, Brussilov prepared a blow against the north wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army on the upper Ikwa. Early on the 7<sup>th</sup> a strike force from XVII Russian Corps broke into the positions of 31 ID at Sapanow. Reserves from Corps Czibulka counterattacked from the northwest under the command of FML Lütgendorf. They closed the gap in the line, but by evening were still unable to drive the Russians who'd dug in on the east edge of Sapanow back over the Ikwa. In the night and on the next day (the 8<sup>th</sup>), new Russian thrusts against XVIII Corps and Group Kosak were fended off, but it was impossible to fully recover Sapanow from the enemy. The artillery couldn't defeat the well-placed Russian batteries, and the attacking troops of 31 ID and 1 Lst Inf Bde had already suffered severe losses. Therefore on the 10<sup>th</sup> FML Czibulka had to reply to an inquiry by Böhm-Ermolli that - even after the commitment of regiments from 29 ID which had meanwhile arrived - he had no prospect of taking Sapanow unless Lütgendorf could soon receive heavy batteries and 31 ID some needed replacement troops.

Shcherbatchev joined Brussilov's attacks on the 7<sup>th</sup>. He directed his main effort against the north wing of Corps Marschall. While the positions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on the Ikwa front as far as Mszaniec were only bombarded by enemy artillery, Russian infantry crossed the area along the Sereth east of Nesterowce. Here the concentrated units of XVIII Russian Corps threw 38 Hon ID out of their positions after hard fighting. Since the enemy thus threatened to break out between 2<sup>nd</sup> and South Armies, Bothmer brought up four battalions from his reserve (3 Gd ID) at Jezierna. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, moreover, Böhm-Ermolli responded to a

request for help from Bothmer by sending a brigade of 26 LW ID (which was in the second line in the Zagorze area) to march to Zalosce.

Meanwhile the four Guard battalions had hastened forward from Jezierna and thrown the Russians back to the Sereth. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, Shcherbatchev renewed the thrust against the north wing of Corps Marschall with reinforcements. He also seemed to be preparing an attack against the sectors farther south held by 19 ID and 48 Res ID. Moreover Corps Hofmann was attacked three times at Burkanow, though without success. For this reason GdI Bothmer was obliged to leave most of 3 Gd ID at Plotycza; in this tense situation he turned again to Böhm-Ermolli and asked the latter to have the entire 26 LW ID launch a flank attack through Nesterowce. In the event, this was no longer necessary. All further attacks of XVIII Russian Corps from the Sereth were shattered by the resistance of 38 Hon ID and the attached German reinforcements. Russian XXII Corps didn't make a serious attack against 19 ID and 48 Res ID on Marschall's right wing. Hofmann, despite a temporary setback on his right wing, was also able to hold his ground.

General Letschitzky's 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army opened its phase of the new fighting by sending III Cav Corps and XXXII Corps to attack between the Pruth and the Dniester. Enemy cavalry detachments had already been operating against Pflanzler-Baltin's eastern group since the first days of October. Deserters warned that a general assault was imminent; aerial scouts spotted fresh Russian battalions behind the broken and wooded terrain at Toporoutz. There were also reports that the XXIV Russian Corps was deploying opposite the eastern group of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. GdK Pflanzler held all his available reserves - 202 Hon Inf Bde, 8 CD and 5 Hon CD - in readiness to help Korda.

As expected, the Russians attacked XI Corps rather early on the 7<sup>th</sup>; first they hit Papp's Landsturm soldiers and then the Croats of Group Liposcak. The troops stood firm. In the afternoon a new attack at Onuth was hurled back by the gallant 42 Hon ID.

While serious fighting raged on Korda's front, the Russians made only isolated thrusts in the sectors of Corps Benigni, Hadfy (ex Corps Henriquez), Rhemen and Arz. It was especially likely that the attacks in the Buczacz area were only a feint, since the 2 Rifle Div and probably also parts of 32 ID had left the sector. However, since the situation was still unclear, Pflanzler left IR # 63, which he originally wanted to send from Buczacz to Corps Korda, behind XIII Corps.

The Russians didn't renew their brief operation between the Pruth and Dniester on the 8<sup>th</sup>. On the other hand, in the night their scouts made new thrusts against the corps of Benigni and Hadfy. Moreover, on the 8<sup>th</sup> the enemy cavalry opposite XIII Corps made a rare mounted assault against the position of 36 ID south of the Buczacz-Czortkow railroad, which was covered by several rows of barbed wire. The bold Russian horsemen were soon forced to turn back by artillery fire. At the same time, the enemy infantry in the northern sector of VI Corps, supported by continuous artillery fire, moved closer to 39 Hon ID. Since no further attack threatened XI Corps on the 9<sup>th</sup>, Pflanzler decided to shift the 5 Hon CD, which had been sent from Kisileu to Zastawna, on to Horodenka.

A setback to VI Corps

North of the Buczacz bridgehead, serious fighting developed on the morning of 9 October. Here Letschitzky sent XI Corps to attack, as he had in September; covered on the left by II Cav Corps, they strove to drive the Austrians from the east bank of the Strypa. The main Russian attack was directed against Arz, whose brave troops stood firm. However, after two days of fighting the 39 Hon ID (now led by GM Blasius von Dani) was struck early on the 11<sup>th</sup> in a furious assault by three Russian regiments and had to withdraw over the Strypa at Wisniowczyk.<sup>90</sup> Hon IR # 9 was practically destroyed. Arz brought up his Corps' reserve, IR # 57, from the south for a counterattack on the flank of the quickly advancing Russians, but the Regiment couldn't gain ground. After learning of this setback, Pflanze sent two battalions of IR # 63 from Buczacz to the threatened area. On the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> he also sent the Rifle Battalion of 5 Hon CD on trucks from Horodenka to VI Corps; the horsemen of the Honved division would continue to ride toward XIII Corps, where 15 ID was the target of Russian thrusts. GdK Pflanze, who was always careful to have reserves available where danger threatened, furthermore quickly moved Hon IR # 306 from XI Corps to Buczacz. For the 12<sup>th</sup>, he ordered Arz to have 39 Hon ID, 24 Inf Bde of 12 ID, the attached parts of IR # 63 and the riflemen from 5 Hon CD all attack from the front south of Burkanow and Zielona, with the main effort on the right in the direction of Dobropole; they should also firmly hold the heights east of the Strypa. GdI Rhemen, with 23 Inf Bde of 12 ID and XIII Corps (36 and 15 ID), would thrust east to pin down the enemy in front of the Buczacz bridgehead and to prevent them from endangering the flank of Corps Arz.

The fighting surged back and forth on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Under VI Corps the already damaged 39 Hon ID and IR # 57 tried in vain, while suffering heavy losses, to drive the stubborn enemy from the lost positions at Wisniowczyk. 24 Inf Bde, thrusting toward Dobropole, encountered an enemy force that counterattacked in turn in the afternoon. On the north wing of XIII Corps, 23 Inf Bde was halted by a Russian position at Pilawa. When the Russians here were reinforced and pushed against the south wing of Corps Arz, parts of 23 Inf Bde fell back to their starting positions. 36 ID advanced somewhat on both sides of the railroad leading to Czortkow, but then halted in front of a new Russian position. Near the Strypa, enemy cavalry detachments

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90 Arz, "Zur Geschichte des Grossen Krieges 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1924), p. 96

made mounted attacks against 15 ID. They were driven off, and then 15 ID sent a regiment toward the Dzuryzbach. Farther to the right, a brigade of 6 CD crossed the Dniester at Czernelica.

The attack of XIII and VI Corps was supposed to continue on the 13<sup>th</sup>. However, in the morning there was already a new setback. The regiment of 15 ID which had driven toward the Dzuryzbach had to pull back because of a Russian counter-thrust. When more enemy infantry appeared during the course of the day and XIII Corps was heavily bombarded by Russian artillery, GdI Rhemen - with the consent of the Army commander - decided to pull back to the main positions. This disengagement from the enemy naturally had an impact on the brigade of 6 CD on the right; it retreated behind the Dniester.

The fighting on the 13<sup>th</sup> involved VI Corps most of all. The retreat of 39 Hon ID to the west bank of the Strypa on the 11<sup>th</sup> had also involved the extreme south wing of Corps Hofmann. Therefore Bothmer sent three battalions of 3 Gd ID under Col. Leu to the threatened sector. On the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> these German troops counterattacked and threw the Russians back over the river upstream from Burkanow. On the next day the three Guard battalions crossed the Strypa and set foot in the old position of the southernmost sector of Corps Hofmann.

On the left wing of VI Corps the 39 Hon ID, which was already in bad shape, took part in this attack; however, despite powerful artillery support it was unable to capture a Russian strong point on the left bank of the Strypa south of Wisniowczyk. The indefatigable troops attacked repeatedly, but without making any progress. The counter-offensive was halted on the 15<sup>th</sup>, because the recovery of the east bank wasn't worth any further casualties.

#### The intentions of the high command

GO Conrad had no further intention of opening an offensive; he had never started serious plans for such an operation anyway. The attack on Serbia had been in progress since 6 October. The allies had to reckon on the possibility that the Russians would strike to save their protege from catastrophe at the eleventh hour. This was all the more likely since various reports indicated Ivanov was reinforcing his northern wing on the Styr. It also seemed that Romania was becoming more inclined to enter the war. Thus it wouldn't be wise to use up our strength by attacking.

In this tense situation, the k.u.k. high command let the Armies know on the 14<sup>th</sup> that holding the permanent defensive position was the first priority. "All available forces and means must be totally committed to the construction and strengthening of the position, in which we may be confident that the attack of even greatly superior enemy units can be repulsed." The high command also forcibly stressed the importance of avoiding casualties. After the arrival of the October replacement troops (the XV March battalions of the common Army and the Honved; the XIV March battalions of the k.k. Landwehr), strong strategic reserves should be held behind the front.

***F. Analysis of the fall operations against Russia***

In the last days of August and the first half of September 1915, the Aus-Hung. northern armies launched an offensive against the Russian Southwest Front. The goal was to finally separate Ivanov's armies from the other two Fronts and thus cut the vital rail artery from Rovno to Luniniec. Furthermore, the Russian Southwest Front was to be decisively beaten, and east Galicia was to be fully liberated. At the same time the German eastern armies were seeking to defeat the Russians north of the Pripyat by enveloping them through Vilna and driving them past the line which had been chosen for the allies' permanent defensive position. If the strategic goals were met south and north of the Polesie, the Central Powers would be free to divert strong forces against their other enemies. By seizing Rovno before the weather turned bad, GO Conrad also hoped to secure a point from which he could later invade Ukraine if the Russians didn't withdraw from the war and a decisive thrust toward Kiev or Odessa became necessary.

The envelopment operation would be undertaken by advancing a strong northern wing; the first step was the capture of Kovel on 24 August. Then the troops were to advance from the line Kovel-Vladimir Volynsky through Luck toward Rovno. The envelopment by the north wing was to be carried out by corps which had been pulled from the line west of Brest-Litowsk as the front narrowed in that sector. They would have to endure long and tiring marches on foot to reach their new positions. The k.u.k. high command intended to encircle the north wing of the Russian Southwest Front, wherever it was located, by a deep envelopment to the east. However, the AOK only hinted at this great but simple concept in the first orders which they issued as guidelines; neither the objective (Rovno) nor the idea of envelopment were stated explicitly. The first assignment given to FZM Puhallo was merely:

"To defeat the right wing of the Russian Southwest Front by a general offensive in the direction of Luck and to finally separate the Russian armies...In order to move around the strongly fortified Russian line, the attacking left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army should be as strong as possible. Prepare for the offensive so that once the attack begins it will continue without pausing until we reach the area of Luck."

The Chief of Staff apparently intended to closely manage his Armies by giving them step-by-step directions. The result was that the AOK and the generals commanding the northern wing of the Armies didn't have the same interpretation of the deployment for and implementation of the offensive. This problem, and the

frequent intervention of the AOK in the operations at inopportune moments, were the main reasons for two disappointments - in front of Luck and especially in front of Rovno.

Differences of opinion between Conrad and Puhallo

While the units were regrouping for the advance from the line Kovel-Vladimir Volynsky, the opinions of Teschen and of 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ were already diverging. FZM Puhallo wanted X Corps, which for more than a week prior to the offensive had been left in comparative quiet on the Bug, to initiate the envelopment on the flank. GO Conrad explicitly ordered that XIV Corps, which was still approaching, should be deployed there instead.<sup>91</sup> Conrad also demanded that the Army reserve (FML Smekal's Group) should follow XIV Corps, whereas Puhallo had intended to keep the group behind the middle of the units conducting the envelopment (XIV, IX and X Corps). Contrary to 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ, the Chief of the General Staff wanted to make the main effort entirely on the extreme left wing. When 1<sup>st</sup> Army actually started the offensive, however, more troops were concentrated toward the middle, between Swinarin and Poryck. The seven divisions of Generals Kralicek, Martiny and Szurmay advanced from this area toward the Ulaniki-Swiniuchy sector; Corps Roth, followed by Smekal's Group, was relatively far away and was supposed to move from Kovel to Roziszczce. The basis for this deployment was information which arrived at Sokal through 26 August indicating that the continuous Russian front extended only to the southern Luga; apparently there was only some enemy cavalry farther north. Thus Puhallo believed that his left was stretched far enough to carry out the mission he gave his Army: "To envelop the enemy's north wing and thus to destroy the Russian forces still on the Bug front as they try to retreat."

On 28 August the center of 1<sup>st</sup> Army reached the Sierna after some fighting; IV Corps reached Roziszczce almost without opposition. On the same day the Russians in east Galicia, attacked by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and South Armies, gave up the line of the Bug. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ believed that the AOK's instructions to envelop the Russian Southwest Front were already accomplished, and that it was now necessary to "smash" the Russians' northern wing. For this purpose the center of the Army would continue to deliver the main attack toward the southwest, and hopefully could force the Russians away from Luck and from the Styr. To continue outflanking the northern end of the enemy line, XIV Corps would cross the Styr at Roziszczce and quickly capture Luck, where it was believed there were only weak Russian forces. FML Roth suggested that his XIV Corps should cross the Styr farther

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91 Within XIV Corps, the 3 ID had already been marching for 640 km since the breakthrough at Gorlice-Tarnow before it arrived at Kovel.

downstream at Sokul or Nawoz; this wider-reaching maneuver would have been more in tune with the intentions of the AOK. Puhallo, however, turned down the idea because it would have delayed the Corps' attack by about three days.

In the event, the three center corps (IX, X and Szurmay) had already encountered new Russian positions on the 28<sup>th</sup> on the line Siernabach-Torczyn-Swiniuchy; Puhallo immediately had them attack. This wasn't fully consistent with an order of the high command issued earlier on the 28<sup>th</sup>, which called upon the Army to cross the Styr with a strong left wing and to have IX Corps thereafter move directly toward the east. FZM Puhallo had already instructed XIV Corps, on the left, to move over the river; however, he was only partially able to shift IX Corps, because it was already engaged on the Sierna. Puhallo thought he had already outflanked the Russian north wing and wished only to pummel it with a powerful attack. The high command, however, still wanted to carry out a wider-ranging envelopment toward the flank and rear of Ivanov's right.

Despite the orders from Teschen, 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ wanted to let the attack by IX, X and Szurmay's Corps continue on the 29<sup>th</sup>. However, they found it necessary to postpone the operation until the 30<sup>th</sup> because

- . the artillery still hadn't come up,
- . the troops were tired, and
- . preparations were needed to assault the Russian positions, which apparently were held by strong forces.

When the high command received this latest report from Puhallo on the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup>, they intervened forcefully. They declared that the intended attack by the main body of 1<sup>st</sup> Army would partly be to the advantage of the enemy, because it would tie down the units intended for the envelopment in a frontal assault. The AOK repeated its admonishment: "The strongest possible force should immediately advance east over the Styr downstream of Luck." Therefore Puhallo pulled X Corps from the front so he could send them over the Styr after XIV Corps. This in turn made it necessary to regroup the units which stayed in line, and the attack on the Sierna was postponed until 31 August. On this day, however, the divisions of Kralicek and Szurmay struck into empty space. Brussilov had been compelled by the menace from the k.u.k. XIV Corps in the north to let his Army carry out their planned retreat during the preceding night. Without any notable losses the Russians fell back to the east bank of the Styr. Thus the Austrians hadn't managed to either damage or encircle the north wing of the Russian Southwest Front. The only success was the occupation of territory by a

frontal advance.

The result of the operations from 27 to 31 August was only partly satisfactory; the primary reason is that 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ wasn't completely in tune with the intentions of the high command. Perhaps the AOK didn't explain their plan of encircling 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army from the north with enough clarity, or didn't intervene decisively enough in its execution. Undoubtedly they should not have scheduled the attack of 2nd and South Armies for the same time as that of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Only a frontal advance could be expected in east Galicia. By causing the Russians to prematurely retreat from the Zlota Lipa to the Strypa, the advance diminished the effect of the flank attack from the north, as well as that of 7<sup>th</sup> Army from the south.

The intervention of the high command on the 29<sup>th</sup>, which led to the diversion of X Corps, can only be described as unfortunate. A strategic envelopment can only be effective when it is directed deeply behind the enemy. The attempt to take X Corps from the front to envelop the enemy's flank and rear could never succeed because the Russians were already in motion backwards. If 1<sup>st</sup> Army had carried out its planned attack on the Sierna on the 30<sup>th</sup>, in all probability they would have broken through because of their numerical superiority (7 Aus-Hung. infantry divisions against the Russians' 2 infantry and 3 cavalry divisions). The enemy would thus have been under great pressure from an energetic pursuit as they withdrew behind the Styr.

#### Conrad's further plans for an envelopment

An encirclement of the Russian northern wing would have been possible at Luck if it had been carried out quickly, powerfully and with concentrated forces. As the situation developed, it is doubtful that such a maneuver could have succeeded in front of Rovno. The surprising advance by XIV Corps over the Styr at Roziszczce had now drawn Ivanov's attention to this area, where he recognized that further danger threatened his Front. Therefore he took advantage of a temporary pause by the Aus-Hung. attackers on the Sereth, and around 8 September moved XXX Corps from here to his northern wing.

Meanwhile Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's newly-formed army group had to fight hard on the Putilowka against the skillfully and actively led 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army before they could win their battle. Brussilov, just after retreating from the Styr, sent all his cavalry and the very distinguished 4 Rifle Div to the north to keep from being outflanked again. The Archduke had been

instructed to seek a decision by a wide envelopment toward the east. Because of the Russian build-up toward the north, he sent X Corps (62 and 24 ID) toward Derazno on 4 September; on the next day they were followed by 4 ID and on the 8<sup>th</sup> by 45 LW ID. Meanwhile Böhm-Ermolli's Army advanced through Podkamien, and Puhallo's reached Dubno. Therefore Brussilov, after gaining four days by powerful counterattacks, finally pulled back his front, which was now threatened on both sides by envelopment. They withdrew to the last line of resistance in front of Rovno, the Stubiel, on 9 September.

The k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army was once again ordered to reach their goal, which was now so near, by an envelopment from the north. Therefore the 13 LW ID, hitherto stationed behind the Army's center, was also sent to Derazno (further weakening the middle). Yet the five infantry divisions on the north wing, plus Cav Corps Berndt, weren't able to break into the open from the bend in the Horyn. The troops were exhausted from the hard fighting, and their ranks were thinned. Steady rain since the evening of 3 September turned the low ground north of the Luck-Rovno highway into a swamp which made all movement extremely difficult. Moreover, small groups of Russian horsemen swarmed against the enveloping group from the swamps and woods of the Polesie; they made it impossible for our troops to scout and thus concealed the bold counter-measures of the Russian commanders. On the Stubiel front the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army was brought to a standstill by the extremely active enemy.

#### The Russians strike back

On the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, the XXX Russian Corps - which had been brought up by rail behind the cavalry screen - was unleashed against the enveloping wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The latter was now forced onto the defensive. Although 4 ID on the left wing of Corps Martiny was heavily engaged with parts of XXX Corps, it was withdrawn on the night of 13-14 September in order to support the faltering south wing of the k.u.k. X Corps. This made it easier for XXX Russian Corps to gain ground from the weakened right wing north of Derazno. At the moment there were no strategic reserves available to move quickly to save the situation; XVII Corps was far away (with one division at Cholm and another at Lublin). Since South Army was also sorely pressed, on 14 September Conrad ordered the offensive to halt. While the Russian advance continued, 4<sup>th</sup> Army retreated to the Styr on the next day. The Russian counterattack shouldn't have been much of a surprise, since for days it was known that XXX Corps was moving to the area. Nonetheless, it had snatched away

the prize for which the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army had been contending, the capture of Rovno, at the last moment.

The Aus-Hung. leadership had pulled one division after another out of the front in the north and sent them into terrain that was barely passable, covered with swamps, and full of streams that had considerably overflowed their banks; here the fighting used up much time because the artillery couldn't deploy quickly. If, on the other hand, a concentrated assault had been directed along the road to Rovno, the Putilowka line would probably have been broken quickly. The Russian XXXIX Corps, composed of militia troops who'd already been repeatedly defeated, would hardly have had the strength to withstand a vigorous mass assault on the Stubiél. It is also doubtful whether the Russians would then have tried to defend the obsolete fortifications of Rovno. Therefore it is probable that if the Aus-Hung. troops had been deployed differently they would have taken the fortress, the primary goal of the campaign, before the Russian counter-measures took effect.

Originally the Russians had about 500 battalions to resist the attack of the Aus.-Hung Armies, which had only 460 battalions (not counting VI and XVII Corps or 37 Hon ID)<sup>92</sup>; however, the latter were in a better position because they were in greater strength on the decisive northern wing. Thus it is to the credit of the Russian Southwest Front that they were able to successfully fend off the assault without receiving reinforcements. The transfer of XXX Corps from 9<sup>th</sup> Army was a bold move, particularly since at the moment it occurred that Army was preparing to counterattack South Army. This Russian thrust was directed against the weakest part of Bothmer's Army, the long line held by Corps Hofmann which was mostly composed of Landsturm and March battalions. It was so effective that the AOK decided to send three divisions to the threatened area rather than to Serbia (37 Hon ID and VI Corps with 39 Hon ID and 12 ID). Today, when we know the true intentions of the Russians, it is doubtful that this diversion was necessary. The enemy had no intention of sustaining a major offensive to the west through Buczacz and Podhajce, and as always were very cautious in exploiting their breakthrough.

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92 After the arrival of these five divisions of the strategic reserve, the two sides had almost equal strength - 517 ½ Aus-Hung. and German battalions against 512 Russian. Finally the allies received another 21 battalions, which made up the German XXIV Res Corps.

To defend against the Russian counterattack through Luck on 20 September, the last Aus-Hung. strategic reserve - XVII Corps - also had to be employed. Thus all four of the divisions which were supposed to transfer from the northern armies for the attack on Serbia had been diverted. The indecisive fighting had also cost the Austro-Hungarians extraordinarily heavy casualties, about 230,000 men. To prevent further harm, it was finally necessary to request German assistance. The relatively small German force (two infantry and one cavalry divisions) was able to rather easily restore the situation, since their mere approach was a menace to any further advance by the Russian northern wing.

The results of the Rovno operations

The Aus-Hung. Army had only achieved a small part of their goals for the "Rovno campaign." In east Galicia they advanced their front from the Zlota Lipa and the upper Bug up to the Strypa and to the pre-war boundary at Zalosce; in Volhynia they moved up to the Styr. The vital rail artery from Rovno to Luniniec, however, was still completely in the hands of the Russians, and Ivanov's Armies hadn't suffered any decisive damage. Several times during the fighting the Russians struck with surprising strength and maneuvered capably; this may have been due in part to the Tsar's assumption of the supreme command and its psychological impact on his peasant soldiers. In any event, the enemy reaction now caused the Aus-Hung. leadership to exercise caution.

The unsatisfactory outcome of the "black-yellow offensive" (as the operation was called at the time) also had political consequences. The setbacks in Volhynia and in east Galicia made it necessary for the k.u.k. high command to restore and secure the front by using four of the six divisions which by the treaty of 6 September were supposed to join the combined allied attack on Serbia. Falkenhayn did replace them with German forces in roughly equal strength. However, the standing of Austria-Hungary suffered in the eyes of their new Bulgarian ally, while German influence increased. Also increased was the dependence of the Aus-Hung. military leadership on their German allies, who possessed an army which was more powerful, larger and nationally homogenous. This continued a trend which FML Hoen had identified as a result of the exclusion of the Habsburg Monarchy from Germany in 1866: "Since the change in political fortune [after Königgrätz], the armed forces have lost personnel from the other German districts; now their brothers in the alliance would have to replace this support with their own complete units."<sup>93</sup> Other manifestations of this historical process, and its political and individual consequences, will be discussed in connection with later topics.

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93 Quoted in Schwarte, "Der grosse Krieg 1914-1918" (Leipzig, 1922), Vol. V, pp. 15 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This passage is rather obscure. It apparently refers to the fact that the Habsburg forces received some of their most reliable officers and NCO's from the minor German states prior to 1866. Thereafter the allied German Empire would have to send its own units to the assistance of Austria-Hungary to make up for this loss.

Without making excuses, it can be stated that the great majority of the Aus-Hung. units which took part in the Rovno campaign fought honorably and in some cases excellently, despite the severe disappointments as events unfolded. This is equally true for the members of 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies. Because of the situation at the start of the envelopment maneuver and its subsequent development, the divisions of 4<sup>th</sup> Army which were assigned the decisive role were those which had already endured the longest marches and fighting. They had come from Gorlice to Vladimir-Volynsky in four months of steady combat and several hundred kilometers of marching. Understandably these units were already very tired, and many of them were sent to a new battlefield - which would demand the most difficult labor - with less than half of their authorized strength.<sup>94</sup> Our narrative has already mentioned how poor weather, miserable roads and insufficient supplies further hampered the operation.

Hindenburg's simultaneous thrust through Vilna went more smoothly than the Aus-Hung. advance toward Rovno, and didn't suffer setbacks like what we suffered on the Horyn. Here too, however, a bold plan wasn't fully implemented because of the "extraordinary demands on the endurance of the troops", the "increasing logistical problems" and the "timely counter-measures" of the Russians.<sup>95</sup> In connection with the decision on 27 September to halt the Vilna maneuver, Hindenburg noted in his memoirs that "We arrived too late, and were exhausted."<sup>96</sup>

With the failure of the thrust to Rovno and the premature end of the German offensive toward Minsk, the armies of the Central Powers were unable to achieve a success which might have been unparalleled.<sup>97</sup> The actual course of events, however, has caused some students of the Great War to question whether it might have been more advisable to remain content with the line reached at the end of August.<sup>98</sup> Based on what we now know about the

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94 For example, FML Horsetzky's 3 ID, as has already been mentioned, covered almost 900 km from Tarnow (on 4 May) until it settled into a permanent position at Olyka (at the end of September). In this period it only enjoyed four days of rest. This achievement was comparable to the astonishing marches which history records were undertaken by Napoleon's main Army from Kovno to Moscow in 1812.

95 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", p. 119

96 Hindenburg, "Aus meinem Leben" (Leipzig, 1920), p. 130

97 Kabisch, "Streitfragen des Weltkrieges" (Stuttgart, 1924), p. 189

98 Moser, "Ernsthafte Plaudereien über den Weltkrieg" (Stuttgart,

military, political and economic situation there is much to be said for this point of view (except for the unique position east of Lemberg, where more breathing room was necessary). If nothing else the allies - and Austria-Hungary in particular - would have made units available which could have operated successfully in other theaters. On the other hand, GdI Kuhl correctly points out "that the well-known English military historian Repington made the opposite criticism of us" [*i.e.* that the offensive shouldn't have been curtailed], and that according to General Gurko the Russians considered evacuating the art treasures, archives and gold reserve from St Petersburg during the German thrust through Vilna.<sup>99</sup> In war only success can prove that a certain point of view is correct, rather than any theoretical arguments.

Nevertheless, when the great offensive died out at the start of October the armies of the two Imperial powers had gained a strategically favorable line which ran from the Gulf of Riga partly along the Dvina to Dvinsk and then took an almost straight course from north to south down to Czernowitz. The length of this 1300 km front alone proves what an enormous territory had been conquered in summer 1915. Now these lands would be protected against new Muscovite thrusts by a permanent position, and possibly could be exploited to help the economies of the Central Powers, which were suffering under the English maritime blockade.

### **III. The Conquest of Serbia**

#### ***A. Mackensen's Army Group crosses the rivers***

##### **1. Development of the operational plans**

After the unfortunate outcome of the autumn campaign against Serbia in 1914, FZM Potiorek had already told his successor in December: "If you attack Serbia again, do so only at Belgrade."<sup>100</sup> In a suggestion to GdI Conrad regarding an offensive against Serbia, GdI Falkenhayn had also stated on 21 March 1915 that to him the most practical course was to have the

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1925), pp. 112 ff.

<sup>99</sup> Kuhl, Vol. I, p. 262

<sup>100</sup> Krauss, "Die Ursachen unserer Niederlage" (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Munich 1923), p. 165

main body of the Aus-Hung. and German divisions cross the Danube downstream from Belgrade. In April the discussions about the overthrow of Serbia to open a land route to Turkey progressed so far that 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ at Neusatz were asked to submit an operational plan. In the draft they sent to the AOK, without being aware of Falkenhayn's suggestion they also proposed to deliver the main attack from south Hungary over the rivers. In detail, the main body of about 120 battalions would consist of four corps - two would cross the Sava at Kupinovo and Ostruznica and the other two the Danube at Pancsova and Kevevara. Meanwhile only a small group would try to cross at Orsova. Then one army would move down the Kolubara valley, the other down the Morava valley; this pincers attack would cause the capital of Serbia to fall without being directly attacked. Two divisions with mountain equipment would advance from Visegrad through Cacak. 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ also envisioned that six Bulgarian divisions would assemble in the northwest part of their country, while farther south 100,000 Turks deployed at Caribrod. The allies would thus have 390 field battalions to develop a concentric attack by all the contingents against the Serbian army (estimated to have 230 battalions) in the Kragujevac-Kraljevo-Krusevac area. 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ stated clearly that the main condition for the success of the venture would be to assemble overwhelming strength (including artillery and river-crossing equipment) to overcome the strong natural obstacles.

However, this operational plan couldn't be carried out, because 5<sup>th</sup> Army with six divisions had to be sent to the Isonzo for the Italian war. Armeegruppe GdK Tersztyanszky, commanding the remaining troops, had very little strength and could only fulfill these objectives:

- "1. To hinder the Serbs from crossing the Danube and Sava and then advancing toward Budapest;
  2. To oppose an eventual Serbian invasion of Bosnia, to the extent this is possible without endangering the 1<sup>st</sup> objective."
- As noted earlier, the Serbs remained inactive, so Tersztyanszky didn't have to carry out the above assignment, which would have been all the more difficult because in summer he had to send his three German divisions (101, 103 and 105 ID) to the northeast, and the k.u.k. 59 and 61 ID along with 19 Lst Mtn Bde to the Isonzo front.

#### Tersztyanszky's plan of campaign

Despite the difficulty of the defensive assignment given to GdK Tersztyanszky, on 1 June this energetic commander was already telling the AOK: "Preparations for an eventual offensive

against Serbia should now be initiated so that the time spent by the forces here [in south Hungary] may be properly utilized." Conrad, however, responded a week later to the Armeegruppe HQ at Neusatz that time and men should rather be used "to improve the defensive situation and to hold onto our own territory." He permitted "only measures which are entirely directed toward gaining clarity about the conditions under which an offensive might be initiated."

Now began a period in which the only activity involved improving the fortifications in the border territory along the Danube, Sava and Drina, plus some scouting missions. The German Lt Col Hentsch, who had been attached by OHL to the Armeegruppe HQ, participated in this activity. When the operations on the Russian front neared their conclusion in mid-August, GdK Tersztianszky believed he could count on the arrival of stronger forces in the Balkans. He sent the AOK a plan for the complete overthrow of Serbia, which in many ways was based on the earlier concept of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ.

Tersztianszky started with the assumption that the Serbian main body - 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies - was deployed at and south of Belgrade, with a strong mixed detachment at the bend in the Danube south of Orsova, the 1<sup>st</sup> Army at the Sava-Drina confluence, and 4<sup>th</sup> Army between Visegrad and Uzice.<sup>101</sup> He wished to make the main effort through Belgrade and Kragujevac toward Nish; the force of about 18 divisions should be organized under two armies which would cross the two border rivers (the Danube and Sava) from the north. Based on current evaluation of the Serbian defenses, the "Belgrade Army" should go around the Serbian capital on both sides of the Danube. The main body of the "Morava Army" would cross the Danube in the very favorable sector by Ram, while one division would guard the river at Semendria. To support the main attacking group, the troops patrolling the Sava in Syrmia would make demonstrations at Klenak and Jarak and the troops on the lower Drina would do the same at Bijeljina. As the situation developed favorably, all these units could later actually invade the Macva at the towns named. 53 ID, which had just been formed from the best of the Landsturm troops in Bosnia, would thrust through Visegrad toward Uzice. At this point the Armeegruppe HQ didn't know whether they could count on cooperation from the Bulgarians or Turks; if so, two or three Aus-Hung. divisions with mountain equipment could advance

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101 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - There was never a 4<sup>th</sup> Serbian Army. The force in the Visegrad-Uzice area, called the "Uzice Group", in reality was relatively weak.

through Orsova to reach out a hand to these new allies. The staff was still studying where to actually deploy the various units which would be sent by rail, and especially the best points to send the 54 batteries of heavy artillery which they believed the two attacking armies would need. Meanwhile they were sending the outline plan to Teschen (and to Pless through the reports of Lt Col Hentsch) as the basis for further preparations.

On 7 September, the day after the conclusion of the treaty with Bulgaria, GdK Tersztyanszky was told which units would be involved in the planned deployment against Serbia. Besides 101 German ID, which was already *en route*, the 11 Bav, 103 and 105 ID would be sent to the Banat along with HQ of X Res Corps. They were the kernel of the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, which would receive at least two additional divisions; the Army would be commanded by GdA von Gallwitz. To Syrmia from the northeast would come the k.u.k. VI Corps (12 ID and 39 Hon ID) and XVII Corps (21 LW ID and 41 Hon ID), and from the Isonzo the 57 and 59 ID (which would come under HQ of VIII Corps). It was planned that the XIX Corps in northeast Bosnia would consist of 53 ID, 205 Lst Inf Bde, the new 206 Lst Inf Bde (created in Syrmia at the start of August) and GM Streith's Drina security group. All of these Aus-Hung. troops would make up the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, commanded by GdK Tersztyanszky with Col Adalbert von Dani as his Chief of Staff.

#### Mackensen takes command

On 16 September, GFM Mackensen as supreme commander of the German, Aus-Hung. and Bulgarian forces arrayed against Serbia received from the hands of the German Emperor his basic orders, dated 15 September.<sup>102</sup> The plan of campaign, developed with the k.u.k. high command, called for him to deploy for a concentric advance from the north and east. The main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would cross the rivers at Belgrade while parts crossed farther west at Kupinovo. The main body of 11<sup>th</sup> Army would cross at Ram, while parts crossed at Semendria and others made a feint at Orsova.<sup>103</sup> Then the individual armies would continue their advance - the 3<sup>rd</sup> toward Kragujevac (with its right flank guarded by the Kolubara), and the 11<sup>th</sup> in the Morava valley. 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army's main body should advance to Nish while their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army,

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102 As noted in the first chapter of this volume, these orders were the result of painful wrangling between the Aus-Hung. and German authorities.

103 Foerster, pp. 174 ff.

which was directly under the Bulgarian high command, would thrust into the Vardar Valley to cut the enemy's route of retreat toward the south as well as the railroad to Salonika, Serbia's only rail connection to the outer world. The German OHL decided not to exert simultaneous pressure by strong and first-rate units from east Bosnia, because of the poor capacity of the light railways there. Under these circumstances, the flank attack that would have been so useful was almost entirely lacking.

Regarding Mackensen's position in the hierarchy, the orders stated initially: "Changes and supplements to this directive must be decided jointly by the three high commands and reported to GFM von Mackensen through the k.u.k. AOK." Then, however, followed this interpretation: "Otherwise, the Army Group [Mackensen] and the German troops belonging to it naturally are placed directly under the OHL. However, orders of the k.u.k. AOK [Teschen] which pertain to territorial and administrative matters are to be followed as long as and as far as the Army Group is on Hungarian soil." This stipulation contradicted the sentence which was first quoted. Also it undoubtedly contradicted the written agreements which explicitly called for Mackensen to be placed formally under the k.u.k. high command. It casts a spot-light on the relationships between the two headquarters and the great mistrust which their Chiefs of Staff entertained for each other.

#### The deployment in south Hungary

After a brief stop at Teschen, GFM Mackensen arrived in Temesvar on 18 September. His Army Group HQ now began to exert influence on the deployment of the two Armies which were assembling in south Hungary. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army wasn't constituted as originally planned, because VI and XVII Corps had to remain on the Russian front due to the setbacks there. The German high command made up the difference with four divisions, of which three were sent to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - XXII Res Corps with 43 and 44 Res ID plus 26 ID. This organization didn't take place until resolution of a difference of opinion, since originally Mackensen wanted to keep this Corps directly under his command. For reasons of prestige, GdK Tersztyanszky wanted to send Aus-Hung. troops against Belgrade, and so he assembled the k.u.k. VIII Corps (57 and 59 ID) at Semlin while sending XXII Res Corps to the area farther west. Lt Col Hentsch had reported to his high command that the numerous Landsturm troops in 3<sup>rd</sup> Army didn't have sufficient ability to attack; to make this Army as strong as possible, Mackensen had the k.u.k. XIX Corps march to Sirmia rather than

to northeast Bosnia. This involved three Landsturm brigades (205, 206 and GM Schwarz's) and also 53 ID, which was brought from Visegrad (apparently because of a misunderstanding). The commander in Bosnia, GdI Sarkotic, was unhappy about having this Division taken from his area, because he thought the Serbs might still invade. To replace the lost 53 ID, he formed a new 62 ID<sup>104</sup>; since it was made up of less capable troops, however, there was no possibility that it would be able to launch an offensive in the very difficult mountainous terrain.

The deployment of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army took place without a hitch. In addition to the divisions mentioned earlier, it consisted of 6 and 107 ID and 25 Res ID, plus the IV Res and III Corps HQ. Thus the Army had seven divisions; an eighth division which was supposed to join them had to remain in the West because of the Franco-English offensive.<sup>105</sup>

The Landsturm troops who'd been guarding the border screened this deployment. Then they were assigned as follows:

- . FML Fülöpp's Group joined 11<sup>th</sup> Army;
- . The brigades of GM Mrazek and GM von Haustein in front of Belgrade joined the k.u.k. VIII Corps;
- . FML von Sorsich's Group, stationed between Sabac and the mouth of the Drina in division strength, came directly under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ; and
- . 62 ID also was directly subordinate to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

The soldiers guarding the border farther south in GdI Sarkotic's command were expected to hold the Montenegrins in check. Five Landsturm battalions brought up from the interior, which later made up Col von Zhuber's Group, were to hold the fortresses behind this line of border guard troops.

Except for the deployment orders issued on 21 September, the HQ of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army didn't receive any operational instructions from Temesvar. The AOK asked them where they intended to cross the rivers, and they reported that the crossing points were the obvious ones - the old fortress of Kalimegdan (dating from the Turkish wars) at the confluence of the Danube and the Sava, the Zigeuner ["Gypsy"] Island directly west of Belgrade, Boljevcic and Jarak. The units on the Drina would cross at Bijeljina, Slap and Visegrad.

GdK Tersztyanszky wouldn't be present to lead 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to

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104 The 62 ID on the Russian front had just been dissolved.

105 Gallwitz, "Meine Führertätigkeit im Weltkrieg 1914/16" (Berlin, 1929), p. 379

victory. He had fallen into an argument with the commissioner of the Hungarian government at his HQ regarding the use of civilian laborers for military purposes, and the issue was raised at the highest levels by the all-powerful Hungarian Minister President Graf Tisza. Although Conrad intervened to defend his Army commander, the Emperor decided against him. Tersztyanszky's successor was the former commander of XII Corps, GdI von Kövess, whose Chief of Staff was GM Konopicky. Kövess arrived at Neusatz on 26 September, after the departure of his predecessor. Konopicky joined him on the 26<sup>th</sup>, although Col. Dani stayed at Army HQ until 13 October.

In this time of feverish preparation, Falkenhayn initiated a feint attack, which was carried out on 18 and 19 September mainly by artillery and air units at several points on the front. It was hoped that after this demonstration wasn't followed by an offensive the Serbs might be lulled into complacency. However, the operation had little effect. From everything that we could learn about the enemy, it seemed that their trust in the strength of their river defenses was very great, since they diverted the Combined and Timok I ID to Zajecar at the cost of the Sava-Danube front. They also denuded Albania of troops to create a new army to defend against Bulgaria, which was unmistakably preparing to enter the war.

## **2. Counter-measures in the enemy's camp**

Serbia turned to its allies for help as soon as it recognized that it was endangered. This appeal came at an inopportune time. The attention of the Western powers had been drawn again to the Balkans by the substantial defeat which Hamilton's expeditionary corps had suffered at Anaforta. In their camp a burning debate had arisen as to whether the Dardanelles operation should be continued, and - if it was - as to where reinforcements could be obtained while an offensive was about to begin in France.<sup>106</sup> At the start of September it was decided that General Sarrail would be sent with four French divisions to reinforce the Dardanelles; British forces would follow through Egypt. Joffre, however, successfully demanded that success should first be won in the double battle in France (which

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106 Churchill, "Welktrisis" (German translation - Leipzig, 1926), Vol. II, pp. 456 ff. Robertson, "Soldaten und Staatsmänner" (German translation - Berlin, 1927), pp. 100 ff and 321 ff. Callwell, "Die Tagebücher des Feld-Marschalls Wilson" (German translation - Stuttgart, 1930), pp. 133 ff.

started on 20 September in Artois and in the Champagne). On the next day Bulgaria began to mobilize its army.

The western allies were less concerned about the momentary situation in Serbia than about the route which led from Salonika through Skopje and Prahovo to Russia, which would be directly threatened if Bulgaria joined the Central Powers. The Entente, however, was unable to come to Serbia's aid with substantial forces. Russia's millions of troops were tied down in their own theater. The Russians weren't in a position to land a force on the Bulgarian coast, as the Serbian General Staff wanted.<sup>107</sup> The Tsar could only promise a naval demonstration.<sup>108</sup> Italy also declared that it couldn't do anything for Serbia, because all its units were needed for the upcoming new attack on the Isonzo. Cadorna was fundamentally opposed to sending troops to secondary theaters of operation.

The Western powers, on the other hand, decided to immediately send one French and one British division from the Dardanelles army to Salonika. This corps, however, wasn't initially supposed to support the Serbs directly. Rather it was sent to help Venizelos, who had recently taken over the Greek government again, to bring his country over to the Entente, and later also to encourage the Romanians to intervene. The Romanian Minister President Bratianu, however, was little inclined to succumb to this temptation. He made extraordinarily great demands for military assistance; among other requests, he wanted Russia to send him several hundred thousand troops. Since the Romanians knew that the Tsar's Empire was in no position to do this, they were effectively burying the hopes of the Entente for intervention from Bucharest.<sup>109</sup>

At the beginning developments seemed more promising for the western allies in Greece. The attitude of Venizelos' government, which answered the Bulgarian mobilization by immediately building up their own army, seemed to be a guarantee that their country would honor the alliance treaty ratified with Serbia after the last Balkan war and would send 150,000 troops to help the Kingdom on the Sava without delay. Venizelos wasn't

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107 Serbian General Staff, "Serbia's Great War for the Liberation and Unification of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" (in Serbian - Belgrade, 1924), Vol. VIII, pp. 291 ff. Hereafter cited as "Serbian Official History."

108 Paleologue, Vol. II, pp. 85 ff.

109 "Das Zaristische Russland im Weltkrieg", pp. 145 ff and 223 ff.

surprised on 2 October when France notified the Greek authorities in Athens of the arrival of the first French troops in Salonika.<sup>110</sup> The Minister President did lodge a formal protest against the violation of his country's neutrality by the Entente, but on 4 October hurried to advise the legislature that Greece would carry out its treaty obligations to Serbia. Meanwhile, however, Germany was also exerting its influence in Athens. The German Emperor promised his brother-in-law Constantine that no Bulgarian soldier would enter Greek territory.<sup>111</sup> Venizelos was once again dismissed on 5 October. The new government questioned whether there was a requirement to bring help to Serbia, since the treaty envisioned a conflict in the Balkans, not a war involving the Great Powers. The Greeks would stay neutral, but their neutrality was tilted toward the Entente as proven by their silence regarding the landing at Salonika.

The Serbian General Staff became very uneasy once Bulgaria began to mobilize. They considered whether to anticipate the Bulgarian attack by striking while their potential enemies were still arming.<sup>112</sup> They encountered stiff resistance to this plan from the Entente, especially from the Russians, who in these first days of October still hoped that the Bulgarian people wouldn't break with the Tsar's Empire, with which they shared national, religious and historical ties. Perhaps they would override their King and government and go their own way.<sup>113</sup> Because of the express wishes of the allied Great Powers, the Serbian sentries on the Bulgarian border were ordered under threat of death to ignore any Bulgarian provocations. At the same time the allies exerted enormous pressure on Sofia - naturally in vain. Finally on 4 October the Great Powers of the Entente sent a note with a 24 hour time limit to Bulgaria, demanding that they immediately break with Germany, halt their military preparations, and expel all German officers from the country. Bulgaria refused; the Entente ambassadors demanded their passports. Tsar Ferdinand and Radoslavov's cabinet had

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110 Robertson, p. 322

111 Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. I, p. 286

112 General Sarrail considered similar plans, but believed that the French-English Army of the Orient would need at least four corps to carry them out. Nedev, "Les operations en Macedoine. L'epopee de Doiran 1915-1918" (Sofia, 1927), p. 10

113 Serbian Official History, Vol. VIII, pp. 284 ff. Paleologue, Vol. II, pp. 77 ff. "Das Zaristische Russland im Weltkriege", pp. 223 ff. Graset, "La Tragedie des Dardanelles" (Paris, 1931), pp. 229 ff.

proved to be stronger than the large pro-Russian party in Bulgaria, upon which the Entente had based such great hopes.

With Russia, Romania, Greece and Italy on the sidelines, the Western powers were now forced to send more troops to Salonika. At this time the fighting in Artois and the Champagne, which had started on 20 September, was taking on the characteristics of an attrition battle, and was increasing in intensity. The attackers, with a very great numerical superiority, had won some initial successions, but no final decision. They had made some temporarily dangerous breaches in the German wall, but in general the defenders stood unshaken along the front. Therefore it was Joffre himself who came to London before mid-October to overcome the last resistance of the English against expanding the Salonika operation. The decision to assemble 150,000 men under French General Sarrail at Salonika was made easier by the growing realization that Gallipoli would finally have to be evacuated. By this time the news wasn't particularly worthwhile to the Serbs. For several days they had already been engaged in a difficult battle that would settle the immediate fate of their country before the Entente would be able to send any help.

### **3. The military situation in Serbia and Montenegro at the start of October**

During the month of September the Serbs had moved considerable portions of their army to the eastern front. When October began, General Mistic's 1<sup>st</sup> Army was stationed in northwest Serbia (on the Drina and the Sava) with the Uzice Group, Sokol Brigade, Danube Div II, Drina Div II and Morava Div II. In the Belgrade sector, General Zivkovic deployed only a few more than 20 battalions from the III Ban and 75 guns on a front of 50 km between Ostruznica and Grocka.<sup>114</sup> On the Danube downstream from Grocka, General Jurisic-Sturm's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had the 24 battalions of the Branicevo and Krajina Detachments stationed in widely separated outposts; he was holding two divisions (Danube I and Drina I) at Semendria and Palanka to guard the gateway to the Morava valley. The new Timok Armeegruppe of General Gojkovic was stationed at Knjazevac, Zajecar and Negotin with the Negotin Group, Combined Div, Sumadija Div II, and troops from the III Ban. The units sent to Nish, Pirot, Vlasotince and Vranje (Tumba Group, Morava Div I, Timok Div I, Sumadija Div I, Cav Div and Vlasina Group) made up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army under Voivode Stepanovic.

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114 Serbian Official History, Vol. IX, p. 66

At Egri-Palanka and in the Bregalnica and Vardar valleys, 31 battalions under General Popovic guarded the eastern border of Macedonia; 13 other battalions occupied northeast Albania between Prizren and Tirana. Timok Div II, directly under the high command, was located at Vuk. Sopot on the railroad south of Belgrade.

At the end of September the Montenegrin Army had 50,000 men and 134 guns. They deployed three groups (Lovcen, Herzegovina and Sanjak) on the border between the coast up to the Lim River. A fourth group had been stationed since the end of June in north Albania.

Since July the Serbs had been trying to bring at least the Montenegrins stationed on the upper Drina under their direct control. King Nicholas turned down their repeated requests on the grounds that this would be unpopular among his troops. Threats were also unsuccessful, and on the Serbian side it was believed that the lord of the Black Mountain had already come to an understanding with Austria-Hungary. The reports which the Serbian General Staff received in September regarding the morale of the Montenegrins were highly disturbing. Finally they had to be content with having just the Montenegrin brigade stationed south of Visegrad placed under their command.

Because of the unclear situation and the influence exerted by the Entente, the Serbian units thus had finally deployed in two roughly equal groups. One would guard the country in the north and northwest, the other in the east. The Serbs reckoned that their enemies would attack on the Drina with just about four Landsturm brigades, in Syrmia with four divisions reinforced by some Germans. They expected the main offensive here to occur on the Sava between Obrenovac and Sabac; Voivode Misic's 1<sup>st</sup> Army would drive it back. The Serbian General Staff didn't fear any immediate attack on the Danube. The deployment of large bodies of troops opposite the Morava gateway hadn't been discovered by their airplanes by the start of October. Thus they were painfully surprised when the thunder of an artillery battle announced the beginning of an enemy attempt to cross the Danube on 5 October.

The small Kingdom on the Sava was on the threshold of one of the most difficult chapters in its history. Only the promise of help from their allies gave the Serbs hope as the inevitable trial of arms began.

#### **4. Final preparations to cross the Danube and Sava, 29 September-5 October**

On 29 September, the armies of Kövess and Gallwitz got orders from Mackensen's Army Group HQ regarding the crossing. The German 11<sup>th</sup> Army would "first secure the Danube between Semendria and Bazias; after winning the southern bank it would protect the crossing points and the communications with the rear while advancing on both sides of the Morava toward the line Palanka-Zabari-Petrovac." Mackensen's orders went on to prescribe that 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army would deploy on the Serbian-Bulgarian border and in conjunction with the movements of 11<sup>th</sup> Army would send four divisions toward the line Paracin-Nish. The k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army "would first secure the mountain positions south and southeast of Belgrade." For this purpose "after thorough preparation by the artillery, the main body (XXII Res and VIII Corps - five divisions) would cross the Danube in a combined attack with their immediate goal the line...Knezevac-...Avala-...Ritopek." After securing this line, Kövess' army would advance into the mountains farther south and reach the Arangjelovac-Kovacevac sector as soon as possible; thus they would draw strong Serbian forces in their direction and help the decisive thrust by 11<sup>th</sup> Army take its full effect. Besides this, GdI Kövess received instructions for the k.u.k. XIX Corps (whose 53 ID was still approaching by rail); their main body would cross the Sava at Kupinovo, with a weaker group at Boljevci; then they would push south to the west of the Kolubara, pinning down the Serb units in that sector and preventing them from intervening against the right flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Depending on the enemy situation, XIX Corps would later move through Lazarevac on Arangjelovac, on the right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Mackensen also alluded to the fact that the k.u.k. AOK was sending as strong a force as possible from the troops stationed along the Drina in Bosnia to thrust through Visegrad to Uzice; this operation would be coordinated with the advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. To avoid confusing chains of command, on the 29<sup>th</sup> the high command put these troops - FML von Kalser's 62 ID and GM Streith's Group which in the beginning was attached to this Division - under the command of GdI Kövess. Finally, military bridges were to be constructed at Belgrade, over the Zigeuner Island, at Boljevci and at Kupinovo. Mackensen intended to begin the operation on 5 or 6 October.

Meanwhile the assembly of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> and German 11<sup>th</sup> Armies was nearing completion. The railroad movement hadn't developed as planned; numerous changes were introduced because of the altered decisions regarding employment of 12, 37, 39 and 41 Divisions. Also the capacity of the railroads on the two sides

of the Danube were different. The area where 3<sup>rd</sup> Army deployed was relatively well serviced by rail; south of Temesvar the assembly area of 11<sup>th</sup> Army was reached only by lines with less capacity. Nevertheless, 37 trains per day were employed for 32 days (for a total of 1181 trains). The deployment period was four times as long as that which preceded the breakthrough at Gorlice; twice as many trains were involved, but only half as many could be used each day.

Preparations were being accelerated at the start of October, but difficulties were arising that made it seem that a short delay in starting the offensive might be desirable. 11<sup>th</sup> Army asked for more river-crossing equipment than was currently available. Also the plan of having XIX Corps attack a day before the main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would have to be abandoned, since the first echelon of 53 ID couldn't reach Ruma until the evening of 4 October. Moreover, on this day GdI Sarkotic reported that the units of 62 ID weren't yet ready to attack; he suggested that the thrust toward Uzice shouldn't be undertaken until the main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was nearing the upper valley of the Western Morava.

Meanwhile reports were on the way from liaison officers in Bulgaria that the Bulgarian mobilization would probably take longer than had been envisioned in the treaty. Nevertheless, there were factors that made it impossible for the units of the Central Powers to get a later start. The sooner they could attack the better would be the prospects for the security of Turkey. The climate and weather were also reasons to hurry. The staffs had to reckon with the outbreak of the autumn storms called the "Kossava", which could even endanger heavy military bridges on the Danube.

Moreover, at the start of October the rumors about the impending landing of British and French troops at Salonika became reality. The ambassadors of England and Russia had already warned the Bulgarian Minister President about this possibility on 24 September.<sup>115</sup> On the same day King Constantine started to equip his army, and in the next two weeks it wasn't assured that Greece wouldn't turn against Bulgaria despite all the efforts of the Germans to have the country stay neutral. Only the dismissal of Venizelos (on 5 October) clarified this situation.

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115 "Das Zarististische Russland im Weltkrieg", p. 154. The two ambassadors (Bax-Ironside and Savinsky) warned that 150,000 Entente troops would be going to the Balkans.

On 4 October Mackensen decided that the offensive would start on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On this day the troops on the Drina and at Jarak would advance, and the various feint attacks by the Armies would take place. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (XIX, XXII Res and VIII Corps), and X Res Corps of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, were ordered to cross the rivers on 7 October. IV Res Corps would cross on the next day, and III Corps would follow as soon as possible.

At this time a powerful force was set to fall upon Serbia. Army Group Mackensen and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army together had 350 battalions and 1400 guns, to which the Serbs could oppose just 275 battalions and 654 guns. On the Sava-Danube front and on the Drina the 143 battalions and 362 guns of the Serbs faced 202 battalions (of which 85 were Landsturm) and 990 guns. By Belgrade itself the Serbs had just 20 militia battalions and 75 cannon against the 66 battalions and 273 guns (including 108 heavy) of Kövess' Army. There is no doubt that Serbia faced an unequal combat.

Preparations of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

To carry out Mackensen's instructions of 29 September, the HQ of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (still under the direction of Colonel Dani) issued specific orders on the 30<sup>th</sup> for the crossing. VIII Corps would cross the Danube east of Semlin with 57 and 59 ID and the Landsturm brigades of GM Haustein and GM Mrazek. The German XXII Res Corps (43 and 44 Res ID) would cross the Sava through the Little and Great Zigeuner Islands. After reaching the south bank, both corps would win the line Zrkovo-Dedinje-Vk. Vracar and then advance to the heights of Petrovo brdo; here they would establish the line for their bridgehead south of Jajince and southeast of the Slancebach. The road from Belgrade to the Avala Heights was set as the border between the two corps. Brigade Mrazek of VIII Corps would guard the Danube east of Semlin and support the first actions on the Serbian side with artillery fire; then they would cross to Belgrade on steamships. The third division of XXII Res Corps (German 26 ID) was deployed as the Army's reserve in the area west of Semlin; it would pretend to attack at Ostruznica. The artillery would open fire on the first day of action (5 October) and increase its bombardment on the afternoon of the second day. In the following night the points chosen for the crossing would be held under light artillery fire. At the same time the Danube Flotilla would clear the water of mines. The artillery fire would reach its peak at 2:10 AM on the third day; under its cover the first wave of attackers would land on the Serbian side at 3:00 AM. Each corps would construct a military bridge as soon as possible - that of VIII Corps at Belgrade upstream from the destroyed railroad bridge, that of XXII Res Corps over the Large Zigeuner Island.

As instructed by Army Group Mackensen, the main body of the k.u.k. XIX Corps would cross the Sava at Kupinovo the day before the attack at Belgrade; a smaller group would cross at Boljevcı. The group of monitors on the upper Sava would support this operation. At the same time three other forces would break into Serbia to draw as many of the enemy as possible in their direction - FML Sorsich's troops at Jarak, GM Streith's near Bijeljina, and the main body of 62 ID next to Visegrad. The further movement of these groups would be coordinated with the advance of the main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army; it was intended that they would unite at Uzice.

3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ allocated the following technical troops for the river crossing:

. VIII Corps - Besides its own 4 technical companies and 3 sets of bridging equipment, it was given (under Col. Mischek) 4 sapper and 6 pioneer

companies, 11 sets of bridging equipment, and a number of vessels at Semlin (60 barges, 13 motorboats and 16 steam ferryboats).

. XXII German Res Corps - Would be able to cross the northern arm of the Danube with its own means; VIII Corps lent 65 parts of pontoons which would make it possible to bridge the southern arm of the Sava.

. XIX Corps - Besides its own 3 technical companies, XIX Corps had 4 pioneer companies, 14 sets of bridging equipment and 30 pontoon parts to cross at Boljevci; for Kupinovo it had 5 pioneer companies, 16 sets of bridging equipment and 35 pontoon parts under Lt Col Hamböck.

. FML Sorsich's Group - Got 1 pioneer company and 3 sets of bridging equipment

. GM Streith's Group - Got 2 pioneer companies and 6 sets of equipment

. 62 ID - Got 1 pioneer company and 4 sets of equipment.

The last preparations for the crossing were finished eagerly. To avoid detection from the air, the divisions of VIII Corps weren't moved to their jumping-off points until the last second. FZM Scheuchenstuel decided to begin to cross the Sava at Semlin with 59 ID, which would embark from the eastern bank of the Danube; his second division (57 ID) would follow from Alt-Banovce on steamships. GdK von Falkenhayn, the commander of XXII Res Corps, inconspicuously deployed 43 Res ID at Surcin, 44 Res ID at Karlovic-Dec and 26 ID at Prhovo in the first days of October. At the same time FML Trollmann assembled GM Schwarz's Brigade at Subotiste and Ogar behind 206 Lst Inf Bde (which was guarding the Sava), and sent 205 Lst Inf Bde to Asanja. 53 ID was still on its way from Bosnia; when it arrived it would deploy in the Ogar-Platicevo-Tovarnik area. On 2 October FML Sorsich already had the main body of his group (the Landsturm-Etappen brigades of Col Ybl and GM Schiess) at Sasinci and Hrtkovci; farther north four Landsturm battalions guarded the Drina down to its mouth.

Although several problems made it seem desirable to postpone the operation for a short time, on 4 October Mackensen dictated that the bombardment would start on the next day. The crossing would be carried out on 7 October.

## 5. Crossing the rivers, 5-11 October

In the afternoon of 6 October the cannon fire which had opened against the Serbian river positions the day before mounted to an enormous degree.

"The German and Austrian guns thundered from Orsova to Visegrad. The heaviest artillery battle occurred at Semendria and Belgrade, where the Serbs had their strongest fortifications; however, heavy fire also enveloped the Serb works along the rivers at Tekija (opposite Orsova), Ram, Obrenovac and Sabac. All calibers, from mountain guns up to 42 cm mortars were represented, and hurled their projectiles on the old walls around Belgrade and Semendria, as well as on the modern trenches and concrete bunkers which the Serbs had built on the river banks. The walls sank to the ground, Semendria caught fire, Belgrade's suburbs were reduced to ruin, and trenches and bunkers filled up with corpses. Despite the gruesome havoc caused by this unprecedented artillery assault, the Serbs didn't abandon the ruins of their positions; they continued to hold the works on the high banks south of the Danube and Sava and in the cornfields of the low lands, and awaited the onslaught of their enemies. They returned their opponents' fire to the extent possible and maintained a sharp watch on the water and the flat opposite banks of the Danube, Sava and Drina. They were ready to temporarily pull back their thin lines and then strike the enemy with quickly concentrated forces and throw them back into the rivers at the decisive points.<sup>116</sup>

### a. The crossing into the Macva, 6 October

Early on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the Austrian and Hungarian Landsturm troops had already begun to thrust into the Macva, which was covered by Dunav Div II (1<sup>st</sup> Army). East of Megjasi (northeast of Bijeljina), GM Streith's Group encountered just a few Serbian river guards who offered only slight resistance. However, it wasn't easy to move forward in the thick undergrowth, which was crossed by several streams flowing into the Drina. The Landsturm troops, who were little used to marching, didn't get past the eastern arm of the river. Toward evening they also had to fend off Serbian counterattacks from Badovinci. GM Streith therefore withdrew two battalions from the Zvornik sector (where the Serbian security detachments had pulled back due to artillery fire to the heights east of the Drina valley), and sent them to the crossing point. These reinforcements, however, would take two days to arrive. Meanwhile the Serbs near

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116 Stegemann, Vol. III, pp. 454 ff.

Badovinci were reinforced by a detachment of Dunav Div II, and pinned down Group Streith on the Drina.

On 6 October FML Sorsich's group managed to cross the Sava under enemy fire at Jarak and advanced up to the road which ran along the Drenovac-Mitrovica causeway. Thus the Landsturm troops established a bridgehead and held it against detachments of Dunav Div II which hurried to the scene from Sabac. The warships in the upper Sava - monitor "Szamos" and armed steamer "Una" - cooperated in this action. In the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> they moved downstream to join XIX Corps, but came under fire from Serbian artillery at Sabac, and "Szamos" was damaged.

On the same day, FML Kalser's Group was supposed to attack at Visegrad. However, neither the troops nor the 62 ID staff (which was coming from Volhynia where the original Division had been dissolved) were in place. Because of the limited fighting power of the battalions assigned to FML Kalser, it was doubtful anyway whether the operation could be carried out as planned. But 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, influenced by the high command, didn't want to give up the thrust toward Uzice. Therefore they intended to have 62 ID cross the Drina at Visegrad on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

#### **b. XIX Corps crosses the Sava, 6-8 October**

On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the bulk of the k.u.k. XIX Corps was concentrated thickly on the north bank of the Sava between Progar and Boljevcı. Contrary to specific orders, FML Trollmann chose to have his right group (17 Mtn Bde and GM Schwarz's Lst Inf Bde, both under the commander of 53 ID, GM von Pongracz) cross at Progar rather than Kupinovo. Here it might be possible to envelop the bend in the Sava, but mobility on the Serbian side of the river would be greatly restricted by a swamp. The left group (GM von Reinöhl's 205 Lst Inf Bde) would cross simultaneously at Boljevcı. The 20 and 21 Landsturm Mtn Bdes, which were just arriving, assembled at Asanja as the Corps' reserve. Bad weather greatly hampered the troops as they marched to the crossing points at night. Toward midnight the monitor group arrived off Progar. The "Szamos" could be steered only with its machinery, but its damage didn't keep it from powerfully bombarding the enemy's positions along the bank. Because one detachment was late, the first troops of GM Pongracz's group didn't attack until 4:00 AM on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Then, however, the crossing made good progress; by around 7:00 AM all of 17 Mtn Bde was already on the south bank. The first echelon had meanwhile moved through the bend in the Sava almost to

Krtinska; here, however, they were pinned down in the swamps by Serbs who'd dug in at the town. Parts of Brigade Schwarz followed 17 Mtn Bde to get the attack going again, but the Serbs held on at Krtinska despite a continuous artillery bombardment.

Opposite Boljevci the first troops of 205 Lst Inf Bde had already landed on the south bank around 3:10 AM. They pushed ahead to the north edge of Zabrez. Here Reinöhl's Brigade was hit with greater intensity by Serbian artillery firing from the cornfields. By afternoon all the battalions and the artillery of the brigade had crossed the river, but Drina Div II, brought up from Obrenovac, kept them pinned into the river bend north of Zabrez. In the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> a bridge was built over the Sava at Boljevci and in the night of 7-8 October another was built at Progar.

### **c. The capture of Belgrade, 6-11 October**

In the main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, on the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> the infantry of XXII Res Corps arrived at the points where they would embark, opposite the western front of Belgrade; some of the troops were very tired from their long and strenuous march. 43 Res ID on the left would advance over both of the Zigeuner Islands; parts of 44 Res ID would reach the Serbian bank via the western half of the Large Zigeuner Island, while the main body crossed the Sava farther upstream.

In VIII Corps, FML Snjaric's 59 ID moved on the 6<sup>th</sup> from Indjija to Alt-Banovce, where it was to embark on steamships, on which it would move downstream past Semlin to the other bank of the Danube. The troops marched to the embarkation points after darkness fell - 18 Mtn Bde to the area by the customs house at Neu-Borca, most of 9 Mtn Bde to Reiher Island. Battalions III/74 and IV/84 of the latter brigade were held in readiness at Semlin. The Division would land in Belgrade at the foot of the old city fortress of Kalimegdan and farther downstream. Because some sunken ships blocked part of the bank, there had to be two landing points. The group at Semlin would cross to the Serbian side at 2:10 AM on the 7<sup>th</sup> - Battalion III/74 would pass south of the Large Krieg Island, Battalion IV/84 to its north; both would land at Nebojseturm, just upstream from the sunken ships. IV Battalion of IR 87 would embark from the southeast edge of Reiher Island and at 2:45 AM would land on the southern bank downstream from the ships. Then the vessels available after the crossing would convey the second echelon - III Battalion of IR 49 from Kozara Island to the upper landing point, the remainder

of 59 ID to the lower point. 57 ID was stationed in the Neu-Banovac area since early on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Its 6 Mtn Bde would embark on steamers at Alt-Banovce early on the 7<sup>th</sup> and await the order to cross over; 2 Mtn Bde would for the time being stay on shore, ready to embark. Haustein's 1st Inf Bde would initially stay at Semlin as the Corps' reserve.

The flotilla, along with their river mining detachment and pioneer motor boats - aided by searchlights - cleared the Danube-Sava confluence of mines directly before the crossing began.

The terrain definitely favored the Serbs, because the banks on their side of the rivers were substantially higher than on the other side, where the land was flat and offered little concealment. This problem had already made the deployment of the attackers' artillery difficult. In the zone of the k.u.k. VIII Corps, only some rising ground between Surcin to Semlin gave some cover to the heavy artillery west of the Danube. East of the Danube the batteries mostly had to deploy behind villages. The Corps had 70 heavy and more than 90 light guns.<sup>117</sup> The advance of the neighboring XXII German Res Corps on the right would be supported by 32 heavy and 170 light guns.

General Zivkovic had 20 battalions and 75 guns, of which 6 battalions and 26 pieces were stationed between Mirijevo and the customs house at Jarac.<sup>118</sup> Once the allies crossed the rivers, the Serbs naturally could call up all available battalions from the neighboring sectors of the Belgrade Defensive District. Timok Div II, in the high command's reserve, was also ready to intervene; it was a long day's march behind the front (at Vuk. Sopot).

#### 7 October

At 2:30 AM on 7 October the attacking artillery opened its heaviest fire against the landing sites. Ten minutes later they switched to other targets. Searchlights played over the farther bank. Shortly afterwards the first pontoons, fully laden with troops, headed for Serbian soil.

Light rain was falling. The noise of the guns gradually

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117 Rodic, "Die Eroberung von Belgrad 1915" (in 7<sup>th</sup> Collection of Austro-Hungarian War Reports; Vienna, 1917), pp. 17 ff.

118 Serbian Official History, Vol. IX, pp. 66 ff. Col Lazarevic in the Belgrade "Vreme", 9 October 1931.

subsided, while the magical light of the searchlights moved back and forth over an unnaturally quiet scene. Fires in Belgrade were reflected on the river waters; as the flames grew ever higher, it became almost as light as day over the water around the Kalimegdan. The Austrian observers waited for a long time in vain to see rocket signals from the troops who were landing. Finally, after 4:00 AM a long line of pontoons appeared in the brightly lit arm of the Danube south of the Large Krieg Island, as they steered slowly toward the Serbian bank below the fortress. Immediately afterwards the attackers, packed together and defenseless on their boats, were found by the beams of the enemy's searchlights. Fully exposed, they were hit by overwhelming fire, in which English marine guns and French 15 cm cannon took part. Several pontoons sank with their passengers in the stream, others drifted helplessly downstream.

The boats were carrying the Czech-German III Bn/IR 74, which confidently steered ahead to its landing area, disregarding the rain of fire.

The Battalion's brave commander, Lt Col Mettelet, whose rain- and storm-tossed vessel was in the van, led his men immediately to attack the railroad embankment, wading through water that reached their knees under very heavy enemy fire. After a vicious hand-to-hand fight, in which Syrmian volunteers also participated on the Serbian side, the Battalion was able to establish itself along the rail line.<sup>119</sup>

The crossing of Battalion IV/84 was more troublesome; only a few platoons reached the Serbian bank, while the rest were driven off.

Meanwhile the Serbs directed their entire attention toward Lt Col Mettelet's group, which was illuminated by their searchlights. Taking advantage of this moment, the tireless pioneers shipped Lt Col Peter's IV Bn/IR 87 to the Serbian shore, without attracting any beams of light. The small groups from 9 Mtn Bde quickly overwhelmed the Serbian guards who'd moved forward to the edge of the river, and established a firm foothold in front of the steep railway embankment below the Kalimegdan. Meanwhile the troops of 18 Mtn Bde who'd been held in readiness at Neu-Borca were able to ship two battalions over without great difficulty. Then, however, all further movement over the rivers had to be postponed. More than two thirds of

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119 For this feat, Lt Col Anatol Mettelet received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

the pontoons had been sunk, damaged by gunfire, or drifted off.

West of Belgrade the German XXII Res Corps was covered by artillery and by trench mortars and machine guns deployed on the embankment north of the Sava; before dawn they managed to send a battalion over to the southern bank at the Jarac customs house, and ten companies to the Large Zigeuner Island. Then, just as in VIII Corps' sector, the advancing morning and heavy casualties made it impossible to ship over any more troops. Finally, two German companies succeeded in capturing the Small Zigeuner Island, which was connected to the Hungarian side by a dam, in the early afternoon. On the Large Island the German troops, supported by the monitors in bitter hand-to-hand combat, advanced as far as the two plank bridges over the southern arm of the Sava.<sup>120</sup>

The 14 Aus-Hung. companies on the northern edge of Belgrade had just as difficult an engagement throughout the day. General Zivkovic, the defender of Belgrade, brought up all his reserves and sought to throw the attackers into the river.<sup>121</sup> The artillery of VIII Corps couldn't intervene in these actions because the two sides were deployed so closely together on the railroad embankment; moreover they were unable to establish communications by rocket signals with the infantry who'd landed. The increasingly isolated companies from the k.u.k. 59 ID held fast on the sloping river bank. Ammunition was already running short in the morning, and the Serbian guns were tearing great holes in the line of skirmishers. In the early afternoon there were only 2500 troops holding a line 4000 paces long against a larger enemy force. In this very critical situation the Danube monitors supplied the first assistance. After 3:00 PM they cruised behind the Large Krieger Island in two groups (one of two, the other of three ships), and their guns bombarded the Serbian heavy batteries on the Kalimegdan and the Vk. Vracar. The flotilla was completely successful, since it drew the fire of the Serbian guns away from the hard-pressed infantry and toward themselves; thus they made it possible for the infantry to hold out. When the enemy batteries finally ceased firing after darkness fell, the monitors left the battlefield; some of them had been heavily damaged.<sup>122</sup>

In his dangerous situation, General Zivkovic had asked in the

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120 Regenauer, "Der Übergang über Donau and Save im Oktober 1915" (German Officers' League, Berlin, 1925 edition, p. 1102)

121 Serbian Official History, Vol. IX, pp. 66 ff.

122 Wulff, pp. 103 ff.

morning that Timok Div II should be sent; the high command granted his request. The first battalions of this Division entered the fighting just before darkness fell. They found that the defenders of the capital were in a rather doubtful state of mind. Around noon they had still been confident, but the intervention of the Aus-Hung. monitors had changed their outlook for the worse.<sup>123</sup> Officers at the front informed General Zivkovic that the badly unnerved troops could no longer withstand the fire from their front and flank, and should be allowed to pull back behind the city. The General refused to do this. He asked the high command for another division (besides Timok II) and also some heavy artillery. His superiors, however, didn't consider the situation at Belgrade to be so critical; early on the 8<sup>th</sup> they ordered that after all of the Timok Division arrived the enemy should be counterattacked and thrown back. Their confidence proved to be a delusion.

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123 Per Colonel Lazarevic, in the "Vreme."

8 October

Under cover of night the allies continued to ship over their troops. In the k.u.k. VIII Corps, the tireless pioneers made numerous trips and ferried almost all the infantry of 9 Mtn Bde to the Serbian side. Further parts of 18 Mtn Bde also were brought onto the south bank, so that about 27 Aus-Hung. companies stood on the northern edge of Belgrade in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>. The Serbs were no longer in a position to throw this force back into the Danube, but their artillery still kept any further troops from crossing during daylight. The Aus-Hung. troops again had to spend the entire day under heavy fire. They couldn't try to storm the city because their artillery couldn't get at the Serbian positions behind the railroad embankment.

FML Snjaric had been wounded, so GM von Hrozny was leading the k.u.k. 59 ID. While its battalions were holding their ground on the railroad embankment against a desperately fighting enemy, the German 44 Res ID had already attacked the south bank of the Sava on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>; during the day they rolled up the Serbian positions south of the Great Zigeuner Island. This made the fighting on the island easier. Toward noon the western plank bridge leading to the Serbian bank fell undamaged into the hands of the German troops; the eastern bridge, also undamaged, fell in the afternoon. The German 44 Res ID then opened their attack toward Belgrade from the west, and in the evening took the north slope of the Banovo Hill.

Meanwhile Lt Col Peter with the k.u.k. troops fighting on the north edge of Belgrade was able in the afternoon to establish communications with the Danube Flotilla using light signals. The monitors "Leitha" and "Körös" used their low-trajectory guns to destroy the houses which the Serbs were occupying directly south of the railroad embankment.<sup>124</sup> Then Lt Col Peter led his sector, containing troops from various battalions, forward to attack. All adjacent troops joined this gallant thrust.<sup>125</sup> In bitter fighting, the battalions of 59 ID advanced from house to house into the portion of Belgrade lying east of the Kalimegdan, and secured the streets.

When night fell, most of the Serbian guns became silent. Again the pontoons and other vessels, steered by the pioneers, fared

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124 Wulff, p. 104

125 Lt Col Franz Peter, the commander of Bn IV/87, received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for this feat of arms.

over both rivers and brought the rest of 59 ID's infantry over to the Serbian shore, as well as that of both German reserve divisions (except for parts of 43 Res ID). Thus the great work was accomplished - the crossing at Belgrade was a success! After two days of gallant fighting the Serbs were forced to give up their positions on the river banks.

### 9 October

Now General Zivkovic saw the disappearance of his last opportunity to continue to hold onto the city. Shortly after midnight on the 9<sup>th</sup> he pulled his worn out battalions back to the line Vk. Vracar-Zarkovo-Zeleznik-Ostruznica, which they occupied by 10:00 AM. Timok Div II was fighting on the left wing.

Already at dawn of this third day of the battle a battalion of 43 Res ID advanced without fighting into the southern part of Belgrade; they occupied the Konak, the residence of the Serbian kings. At the same time detachments of the k.u.k. 59 ID entered the Kalimegdan. Since 6:00 AM the honorable old black-yellow flag waved over the fortress' walls, which dated back to the Turkish wars, just as it had often before in history.

A detachment from Lt Col Peter's group made contact with the Germans at the Konak. During the morning the 44 and 43 Res ID reached the line Banovo brdo-Topcider; 9 Mtn Bde of 59 ID advanced through the empty streets of Belgrade, and toward noon reached the south edge of the city. Here the Aus-Hung. troops linked up with German XXII Res Corps. At the same time, GM Skvor's 18 Mtn Bde (on the left of 9 Mtn Bde) secured the routes leading out of the Serbian capital to the southeast after a brief fight with enemy rear guards. Belgrade was conquered.

While the main body of XXII Res Corps and the two brigades of the k.u.k. 59 ID advanced through Belgrade during the 9<sup>th</sup> to the line Banovo brdo-Topcider-Vk. Vracar, the pontoons and steamers brought new reinforcements over the Danube and the Sava. 6 Mtn Bde of 57 ID had already been shipped from Alt-Banovce to Belgrade in the morning, and was followed by 2 Mtn Bde. In the night of 9-10 October, FML Heinrich Goiginger's 57 ID deployed at the front to the left of 59 ID. Haustein's 1st Inf Bde came to Belgrade as the Corps' reserve. The next task was to push the Serbs back further into the hills south and southeast of the city and to open the way down the Danube toward 11<sup>th</sup> Army. It was expected that stubborn resistance would be encountered, since pilots already were reporting that new fortified positions covered the hills and rugged valleys south of Belgrade.

Therefore GdI Kövess decided to first bridge the Sava and Danube and bring over the heavy artillery before continuing the attack.

In the night of 9-10 October, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army received orders from GFM Mackensen that were wholly consistent with this plan. They were instructed to exploit the success won thus far without being over-hasty, and to open the attack in the intended direction after careful artillery preparation. A well-planned offensive and continuous pressure would open the Danube as soon as possible so that the urgently needed bridging equipment could be conveyed to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. XIX Corps would first pin down the enemy on their front, and later cover the right flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The German 26 ID, as the Army's reserve, would move to Semlin and Surcin on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

#### 10 October

The enemy in front of XXII Res Corps was still holding the Dedinje Heights early on the 10<sup>th</sup>, and reinforced the garrison with two newly-arrived howitzer batteries. The German corps commander, GdK von Falkenhayn, intended to attack on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> after a methodical artillery bombardment. The military bridge over the northern arm of the Sava had been completed, but needed to be strengthened to support heavy guns. Because of the bombardment of the German field artillery, the Serbs already evacuated the Dedinje Heights on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>. Both divisions immediately thrust ahead and by evening reached the line Zarkovo-Banjica. This success allowed their neighbor on the left, 9 Mtn Bde, to advance a bit also. 18 Mtn Bde wasn't content to await the arrival of the heavy artillery, and as darkness fell attacked some withdrawing enemy troops on the Zeleno Heights.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> the Serbs in front of 57 ID were still holding fast on the Vk. Vracar ridge. Since artillery support was available from the north bank of the Danube and from the monitors, FZM Scheuchenstuel believed he could advance his left wing, and gave 57 ID the objective of reaching the heights southeast of the Slancebach. The Serbs however anticipated this plan by attacking the left wing of 6 Mtn Bde where it lay on the Danube north of the Vk. Vracar Heights. Although the enemy thrust was well supported by artillery, it came to a halt around noon and finally ended with a retreat to Lipar; during their withdrawal the Serbs again came under flanking fire from the monitors and suffered substantial casualties. In the afternoon 6 Mtn Bde closed in upon the enemy troops still entrenched on the Vk. Vracar ridge and stormed their well-built fortifications.

During the day General Zivkovic had already decided to pull his troops back to a line running from the heights on both sides of the Slancebach through Point 279 (Ekmekluk), the heights at Jajince, Petlovobrdo and Zeleznik to Ostruznica. This new position would be occupied early on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The General demanded new reinforcements from the high command. In moving words he stated:

"It is absolutely necessary to immediately send a whole division, because less help or the commitment of troops in driblets would be insufficient. It is already impossible to pull a regiment from the front as a reserve, since the foremost line is all too thin. Several regiments have sunk to half or even a third of their authorized strength....It shouldn't be forgotten that they have been engaged in hot actions for five days and defended the soil of our fatherland step by step. All this is occurring within range of the German heavy guns and the Austrian monitors, whose devastating fire has damaged the nerves of officers and men to an almost unbearable level. Therefore you must believe me that a whole division must be sent immediately to support us. At places where our troops weren't subjected to the ravages of the German batteries they have repulsed attacks successfully, and even launched energetic counterattacks against larger enemy forces."<sup>126</sup>

General Zivkovic's call for help did not go unanswered. When his right wing pulled back in the night of 10-11 October to their new positions, they were joined there by two regiments drawn from the components of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

#### 11 October

For 11 October the commander of the k.u.k. VIII Corps, FZM Scheuchenstuel, instructed 57 ID to first thrust to the Lipar and then to the heights south of the Slancebach. However, he received an explicit order from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to spend the day making further preparations for the upcoming attack. Meanwhile in the night of 10-11 October the Serbs had pulled back their front from VIII Corps. Next morning FML Goiginger with his 57 ID followed the retreating enemy to the heights northwest of the Slancebach. When he learned this, FZM Scheuchenstuel decided to also let 59 ID advance. This Division should take Heights # 279 (Ekmekluk); while maintaining contact with XXII Res Corps, its right wing would be the pivot for the intended change of direction by VIII Corps from east to southeast.

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126 Serbian official history, Vol. IX, p. 149

As the north wing of VIII Corps turned direction on the 11<sup>th</sup> it gained a rather substantial amount of ground. Col. Panzenböck's 2 Mtn Bde advanced under weak Serbian artillery fire and reached the heights on both sides of the lower Slancebach, and Col. von Hellebronth's 6 Mtn Bde reached the east slope of the Ekmekluk. The left wing of 59 ID had already climbed these heights in the early afternoon without resistance; the right wing of the 59<sup>th</sup> pushed ahead to the Strazara Heights, which were occupied by the Serbs, and awaited the intervention of the neighboring German XXII Res Corps. That Corps was stationed between Banjica and a point north of Zeleznik. To increase the pressure here, the 26 ID (which had come over the Sava) was placed under GdK Falkenhayn.

By taking the line on the heights by the evening of 11 October, the main body of Kövess' Army had won a bridgehead position that ensured the secure possession of Belgrade and simultaneously barricaded the Sava-Danube confluence toward the south. The losses in killed and wounded had been held to reasonable limits thanks to careful preparation and the outstanding cooperation of infantry, artillery, pioneers and Danube monitors. 59 ID had suffered the most - they reported that by 9 October they had lost more than 1000 men, which was as much as the losses of the entire XXII Res Corps. Enemy casualties were no doubt very substantial, but there are no precise statistics. They had lost more than 1700 men as prisoners. The Serbs also left 22 guns and much military equipment in the hands of the attackers.

There is no question that the Serbs were greatly outnumbered and outgunned by their opponents. To detect and exploit the enemy's weakness was an accomplishment for the officers at every level. Thus from the beginning the allies were able to exploit their advantage in artillery (including the guns of the gallant Danube flotilla). However, they couldn't prevent the dilemma of the first infantry echelon of the k.u.k. VIII Corps, who fought for 24 hours against a rather much larger enemy force whose physical and moral strength still hadn't diminished. The situation improved for the attackers hour by hour on 9 October, since they were now able to also exploit the numerical superiority of their infantry. Then the issue was no longer in doubt.

In summary it can be said that history will record that in preparation and implementation the river crossing was one of the finest examples of this type of operation. For the Austro-Hungarian armed forces in particular - whose favorite song "Prinz Eugenius dem edlen Ritter" had in the last year reminded them not only of the the glorious deeds of their great army

commander, but also of the catastrophe in the first Serbian campaign of the World War - the recapture of "Belgrade city and fortress" was a much-needed compensation for their earlier undeserved setback.

#### **d. 11<sup>th</sup> German Army crosses the Danube, 6-12 October**

While 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was conquering Belgrade, GdA Gallwitz's Army was forcing its way over the Danube between Ram and Semendria.

The feint operation of FML Fülöpp's Group at Orsova began as ordered on 6 October under lively artillery and infantry fire. At the same time, near Palank some patrol boats brought the first infantry from the German X Res Corps over to the Serbian shore. The main body of this Corps crossed the Danube the next day on both sides of Ram without meeting serious resistance. By evening they occupied the Orljak massif to serve as a bridgehead and staging area for the further offensive. IV Res Corps, which was ready to cross through the Temes Island on the 8<sup>th</sup>, managed to ship some small groups over already on the 7<sup>th</sup>; they were pinned down by the Serbs on the northern foot of the Kostolac Heights. On this day the III Corps prepared for its difficult crossing opposite the fortified town of Semendria only with artillery fire.<sup>127</sup>

On 8 October the X Res Corps enlarged its bridgehead at Ram. IV Res Corps managed to bring all of its infantry to the south bank and secured a firm footing on the Kostolac Heights in heavy fighting. Early on the 9<sup>th</sup> the III Corps was ready to cross the Danube. Besides their German bridging equipment they had 4 Aus-Hung. military bridging groups, 100 Danube barges, 6 motor boats, 50 Aus-Hung. pontoon parts and 1 steamer with a train of 6 more barges. The troops embarked north of Semendria Island under the cover of entrenched infantry, machine guns and mountain batteries. The pioneers, whose pontoons were sent around the southwest tip of Semendria Island, had an especially difficult struggle against the rising water of the river, which was swollen by strong rain storms. Only eight pontoons with 150 men from 25 Res ID were able to reach the Serbian bank upstream from Semendria. The others were driven away and landed on the north side of the island under fire from Serbian batteries. The German 6 ID, which crossed downstream from the northern tip of

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127 Jochim, "Der Feldzug in Serbien" (in Schwarte's "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 335 ff). Gallwitz, pp. 379 ff.

the island, was more fortunate. They reached the other side without great difficulty, drove away some weak Serbian security detachments, and took Kulic. GdI von Lochow, the commander of III Corps, now diverted 25 Res ID to the landing spots of 6 ID and then sent them west against Semendria. In the night they were able to succor the small detachments which had landed west of Semendria, which had fought hard to maintain themselves on the south bank throughout the day. Despite increasing Serbian resistance, the center and left wing of the German 11<sup>th</sup> Army meanwhile were pushing farther south. In the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>, IV Res Corps reached the line Dubravica-Petka-Klenovik; at this time X Res Corps was fighting in the Klicevac-Zatonje area.

On 10 October the III Corps slowly gained ground toward the south between the Jezava and Morava. IV Res Corps fought their way ahead to Batovac and Bradarci, while X Res Corps stormed the Anatema Heights and reached a line between Klicevac and the heights north of Popovac. On the extreme left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, the heavy artillery fire of Fülöpp's Group forced the Serbs to evacuate their positions on the river bank opposite Orsova, but they held onto the edge of the adjacent heights. On 11 October, 25 Res ID of III Corps (on the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army) forced their way over the Jezava, took the old fortress of Semendria despite a brave defense by the Serbs, and pushed farther toward the west and south. In hard fighting the 6 ID drove the enemy on the 11<sup>th</sup> back through Lipe; on the 12<sup>th</sup> their left wing reached the Morava opposite Brezani. 11 Bav ID of IV Res Corps had already pushed into this town on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Here the fighting became very intense on the 12<sup>th</sup>, because the inhabitants also threw themselves passionately into the defense. The advancing 105 ID encountered very stubborn resistance an hour's march north of Pozarevac, and still wasn't able to break through on the 12<sup>th</sup>. 107 ID conquered the enemy positions at Bubulinac. X Res Corps reached the road from Pozarevac to Popovac on the 12<sup>th</sup> after further fighting.

On 8 October the Serbian high command already was compelled to reinforce their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army by Sumadija Div I, which since the 6<sup>th</sup> had been with the Timok Armeegruppe in the Knjazevac area as the strategic reserve for the eastern front. This Division would be sent to the left wing in front of Semendria, to secure the east flank and rear of the Belgrade Defense Group. Moreover a new battle group (or cavalry brigade) was formed with six companies plus the squadrons of Divisions Sumadija I and Drina I; it was also inserted in the front in front of Semendria.

**e. Actions at Visegrad, Bijeljina, Jarak and Progar, 7 to 11 October**

While the 11<sup>th</sup> Army and the east wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army won ground south of the Danube in hard fighting, the Aus-Hung. units on the Drina and middle Sava didn't have any success. The crossing of the Drina at Visegrad by FML Kalser's 62 ID, planned for 7 October, had to be postponed to the 8<sup>th</sup>. The first wave that crossed over were able to establish themselves on the Serbian bank; however, it proved impossible to bring over any further troops because of the enemy fire. FML Kalser correctly recognized that the operation had no prospect of success, and allowed the Landsturm soldiers who had landed to pull back to the western bank in the morning fog, which they accomplished after suffering very heavy losses.

After this misfortune the commander of 62 ID, which still wasn't fully assembled, decided to temporarily refrain from further attempts. He lacked heavy artillery, which was needed to successfully overcome the well-constructed Serbian positions on the river, and also needed more bridging equipment. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, which didn't know the deficiencies of this Division, at first ordered that the Drina should be crossed as soon as possible because of the demands of the general situation; then, however, they had to grant FML Kalser the necessary postponement.

GM Streith's Group, which despite a sudden rise in the river level had bridged the eastern arm of the Drina in the Megjasi area, was able to repulse new Serbian thrusts from Badovinci on 7 and 8 October. However, the Group's attempt to widen the bridgehead met with little success. On the 9<sup>th</sup> the weak Landsturm detachments on the right wing which had crossed the Drina were hit by some Serbian troops from Dunav Div II who hastened to the scene; they were pushed back to the river and almost wiped out. On the left wing of Group Streith two battalions meanwhile worked their way forward a way toward Crnobarski salas. However, this battle group also was assaulted by the Serbs (on the 10<sup>th</sup>) and had to be content with the positions they had reached. At the same time (8 and 9 October), FML Sorsich's Group was attacked by detachments of Dunav Div II. However, despite flooding and insufficient supplies the Group hold onto the bridgehead they'd established at Jarak on the south bank of the Sava.

Under XIX Corps, on 8 October GM Reinöhl's 205 Lst Inf Bde, GM Pongracz's 17 Mtn Bde and Schwarz's Lst Inf Bde were supposed to win the line Obrenovac-Skela and thus secure the bridges at

Boljevci and Progar. Neither the attack through Zabrez nor through Krtinska broke through. Although the Drina Div II could only oppose relatively weak forces to the k.u.k. XIX Corps, both of these villages were good sites for stubborn resistance, while the extensive swamp in the bend of the Sava opposite Progar also aided the defense. Moreover, sudden gusts of rain flooded the land along the Sava and endangered the bridges. On the west wing of GM Pongracz's battle group, Lst Inf Bde Schwarz couldn't move forward in the swamp. The east wing had more favorable conditions for an attack. On the 9<sup>th</sup> GM Pongracz concentrated his forces on this wing for a new thrust. Meanwhile Reinöhl's Brigade south of Boljevci suffered so heavily under growing pressure from the Serbs that it had to be relieved by the newly-arrived 21 Lst Mtn Bde. At the urging of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, FML Trollmann continued to attack on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Col. Hugo Fischer von See's gallant 21 Lst Mtn Bde stormed the Zabrez railroad station, but couldn't wrest the town from the Serbs. Similarly, the toilsome and costly attempts of GM Pongracz to break out of the bend in the Sava at Progar gained just a little ground in the direction of Krtinska. On 11 October the rising high water forced XIX Corps to remain almost fully inactive.

XIX Corps engaged in new and bitter fighting on 12 October. 21 Lst Mtn Bde attacked Zabrez in the early afternoon, but was defeated. Troops from 20 Lst Mtn Bde pushed through the swamp in the river bend at Progar and broke into the Serbian trenches northwest of Krtinska. At the same time two battalions of GM Schwarz's Brigade worked their way into the town from the northeast. FML Trollmann now wanted to continue the attack on Krtinska, but 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ didn't agree. They wanted to send more forces to Belgrade, so XIX Corps had to be content with the ground it had already taken.

The Landsturm battalions which had halted in front of Krtinska were attacked in the night of 12-13 October and in the following morning by the last reserves of Drina Div II. They halted the enemy assault, but their own losses were so significant that they had to withdraw to the points where they'd started their offensive on 12 October. The enemy also thrust against 21 Lst Mtn Bde, but they didn't seem to have received any significant reinforcements.

## **6. The main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army fights its way out of the loop in the rivers at Belgrade, 12-17 October**

### 12 October

The high water that had brought the attack of XIX Corps to a standstill was bad enough. Now the Serbs, who so badly wanted help, received a much needed ally in the form of a "Kossava." This storm grew to typhoon force and endangered the connection between the units of the Central Powers fighting near Belgrade and the north bank of the rivers. Alongside the floating bridge at the Great Zigeuner Island, which had been captured intact, a bridge of pontoons had been constructed on 10 October. A second military bridge was to be built over the north arm of the Sava at the island on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The storm, however, made traffic over the bridges temporarily impossible, so that supplies could be shipped over the Sava and Danube only by steamships. The main striking force of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army nevertheless won fresh successes. The German 26 ID, which had come over the Sava to XXII Res Corps, took Zeleznik late in the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup>; 44 Res ID captured the heights of Petlovo brdo, and 43 Res ID advanced as far as the northern part of Jajince.

The right wing of the k.u.k. VIII Corps also joined the attack of the German troops: 9 Mtn Bde, after heavy fighting, advanced its foremost line up to the center of the town of Vrka. Mokriliug. Then 18 Mtn Bde gained some ground from Ekmekluk toward the southeast. 57 ID was held fast by Serbian artillery along the northern slope of the heights south of the Slance valley. The fire of the Danube flotilla might have struck the battalions of General Zivkovic engaged south of the Slance in the flank, but this proved impossible because the high water and the Kossava had delayed the process of clearing the Danube shipping channels. For the same reason it was impossible to carry out Mackensen's order to move barges from Pancsova to join 11<sup>th</sup> Army at Dunadombo.

### 13 October

For 13 October the commander of XXII Res Corps, GdK Falkenhayn, intended to continue the attack with just 43 Res ID, which would break through east of the Topcidarska Brook toward the south. In coordination with this operation, VIII Corps would have 59 ID attack the heights one km east of Kumodraz while 57 ID thrust through the Serbian front south of the Slance Brook. After the end of a quiet night, it was discovered that the Serbs had

pulled back their western wing from the German front. Therefore on the 13<sup>th</sup>, contrary to the original plan, XXII Res Corps had 26 ID advance to the outskirts of Ostruznica and the heights south of Zeleznik; farther east the 44 and 43 Res ID sent their leading troops to the heights of Resnik. Timok Div II renewed the fighting on the heights north of Pecani, Sremcica and Rusanj.

Early on the 18<sup>th</sup> the enemy were still holding their old positions in front of VIII Corps. That morning GM Hrozny sent 9 Mtn Bde, to the left of 43 Res ID, into a frontal assault on the heights east of Kumodraz, while 18 Mtn Bde was to advance on the flank through Vk. Mokrilug if possible. Although all available forces were committed, the objective wasn't achieved; only the northern part of Kumodraz was secured toward evening. From here the front ran through the southern end of Vk. Mokrilug and south of Ekmekluk until it joined that of 57 ID. The latter Division had supported the attack on Kumodraz with its artillery, which also bombarded the strong enemy fortifications along the ridge south of the Slancebach. Twelve heavy batteries were engaged against these heights in the afternoon. Parts of GM Mrazek's Brigade, which was guarding the Danube, intervened in this fight with flanking artillery fire. Despite the frightful effect of this bombardment the Serbs didn't withdraw from their positions. Therefore the gallant 57 ID again had to resort to the tactics of siege warfare; only one trench was taken on the western part of the contested ridge. It wouldn't be necessary to continue the attack, since the Serb positions at Vk. Mokrilug and farther northeast were already outflanked by XXII Res Corps. Therefore in the night of 13-14 Zivkovic pulled back his entire group - which meanwhile had been reinforced by one regiment apiece of the Timok Div I and Morava Div I (from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army) - to a line running along Heights # 294 and 337 (southeast of Sremcica), then through Avala and the forested hills southeast of Lestani to Grocka. To support his left wing, Zivkovic assembled Morava Div II which had joined him from 1<sup>st</sup> Army (where it had been stationed at Ub on the eastern bank of the Morava).<sup>128</sup>

#### The role of XIX Corps

On 9 October the k.u.k. high command had already directed 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to shift XIX Corps, which couldn't move forward in the flooded land along the Sava toward Obrenovac, through Belgrade to deploy on the eastern wing of the Army. Although Mackensen, who met with Kövess at Neusatz on the 12<sup>th</sup>, completely agreed

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128 Serbian Official History, Vol. X, p. 4.

with Conrad's assessment, the transfer was only placed under consideration because of the enormous traffic problems which were besetting 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ. Mackensen's instructions of the 13<sup>th</sup> indicated that if the Army did decide to carry out the plan of the AOK, they should still hold onto the crossing points which XIX Corps had already captured. Moreover, the Corps' mission still included the security of the Army's western flank. In case the enemy evacuated the line of the Drina, all troops west of the Kolubara would immediately advance. The groups of Streith and Sorsich would then combine against Sabac and would continue to advance in the direction Ub-Lazarevac along with parts of XIX Corps.

On 13 October, XIX Corps received instructions from GdI Kövess that they should leave only enough troops to retain possession of the conquered ground at the bends in the Sava River at Progar and Boljevcici. The others would use the military bridge on the Zigeuner Island to shift to the western wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The enemy should be deceived into believing that there were still strong forces at Skela and Zabrez, for which purpose the transfer was to be secret. Furthermore, Streith's and Sorsich's Groups, as well as the units of XIX Corps which remained west of the Kolubara, were ordered to thrust to Ub-Lazarevac in case the Serbs evacuated or weakened the Drina front; this was consistent with the intentions of the Army Group HQ. It was believed that the Serbs would continue to guard the crossing point at Visegrad in order to cover Uzice; 62 ID was supposed to pin down the enemy units here so they couldn't be used elsewhere.

All these measures were based on the consideration that the enemy would also transfer troops from northwest Serbia to reinforce the armies south of Belgrade and Semendria. XXII Res and VIII Corps were reminded that they should reach the line Arangjelovac-Kovacevac as soon as possible. As the troops of XIX Corps moved through Belgrade they would deploy behind the right wing of the main body and take over the task of guarding the flank on the line Obrenovac-Lazarevac.

#### 14 October

Despite these urgent orders, and the fact that in the night of 13-14 October the Serbs pulled back their front opposite the entire eastern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, no substantial ground was won on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Kossava still hadn't subsided, so the flow of supplies over the Sava was at a standstill and XXII Res Corps couldn't move. VIII Corps advanced somewhat toward the south in the morning and scouted the enemy. The Belgrade Armeegruppe

held the heights southeast of Sremcica and had strong forces occupying the 200-meter high summit of Avala, which dominated the surrounding hills, as well as the heights between Lestani and Grocka. The Serbs used artillery fire in an attempt to keep their opponents away from these new positions. GdI Kövess decided to make his main thrust with three divisions (44 and 43 Res ID plus 59 ID) in the direction through the Petrov grob and Vrcin. He designated a line between the Avala heights and the railroad east of Ripanj as the border between the XXII Res and VIII Corps as they advanced. Kövess ordered that careful artillery preparation should precede the attack on the Avala hill, and stated that if necessary 43 Res ID should take part in the assault. The German 26 ID wasn't available for this operation because it was needed to guard the right flank until the arrival of XIX Corps. On the left wing of VIII Corps the 57 ID would only move closer to the enemy for the time being.

Army Group HQ approved this plan, but added that a detachment should also thrust along the Danube to Grocka to open a water route to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. This was because Gallwitz's Army still didn't have secure bridges to link them with the northern bank and the Serbs still dominated the Danube between Semendria and Belgrade. The bridging equipment which had been collected at Pancsova couldn't be moved down the river. Meanwhile, because of the Kossava storm only three small steamers were able to carry supplies to 11<sup>th</sup> Army, and this was insufficient.<sup>129</sup> Army Group HQ was watching the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with growing tension.

#### 15 October

Kövess began the assault on the Avala line on 15 October. The Kossava still hadn't subsided; it whipped up such high waves on the Danube that the monitors couldn't intervene in the fighting on the east wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Traffic on the Sava was also interrupted almost completely on the 15<sup>th</sup>; the military bridges were flooded and the ferry boats endangered. Although GM Reinöhl's Group of XIX Corps (20 Lst Mtn and 205 Lst Inf Bdes) had meanwhile come to Surcin, for the time being it was impossible for them to move south of the Sava.

Despite these enormous difficulties, both the troops and their commanders were confident. Word had arrived on the 14<sup>th</sup> that the Bulgarians had begun to attack. Therefore the Serbian north

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129 Schwartz, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 344 ff.  
Regenauer, p. 1103

front could look for further reinforcements only from the troops still stationed west of the Kolubara. 26 ID at Zeleznik was guarding the attacking front against this danger. On the right of 26 ID, the 44 Res ID pressed back some advanced Serbian units over the heights at Rusanj in light fighting on the 15<sup>th</sup>; 43 Res ID took Pinosava in the morning. Meanwhile the infantry of the k.u.k. 59 ID was involved in a toilsome offensive. The heavy batteries of VIII Corps couldn't be deployed in position against the Avala Heights in time to help out, because continuous rain had soaked all the roads; part of the artillery had to make a time-consuming detour through Belgrade. Although the heavy guns weren't operating on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 9 Mtn Bde advanced under Serbian flanking fire to the northern foot of the Avala Hill and the southern edge of Beli Potok by the afternoon. GM Hrzony intended to storm the Avala position at dawn on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

On the east wing of 57 ID, 2 Mtn Bde was supposed to capture the heights 1 ½ km southwest of Ripotek and scout toward Grocka on the 15<sup>th</sup>. 6 Mtn Bde would initially commit just one battalion to maintain a link with 59 ID. When 2 Mtn Bde encountered only weak resistance at Ripotek, FML Goiginger decided to continue the attack to Heights # 300 (north of Zalopaca), and to shift the entire 6 Mtn Bde into the area which separated 2 Bde from 59 ID. However, 6 Bde didn't reach Lestani until evening; since the left flank of 2 Bde was unprotected they had to remain content with the ground they had already won.

When Kövess' Army began to attack the Avala line on the 15<sup>th</sup>, General Zivkovic still hoped he could hurl his opponents back to Belgrade. He intended to pin down the attackers with a thrust by Morava Div II (which had already joined the left wing of the Belgrade Defense Group) through Zeleznik into their west flank; simultaneously Timok Div II and the other troops would exert pressure from the front.<sup>130</sup> However, he couldn't implement this plan. For one thing, the German XXII Res Corps had still held back some distance from the main Serbian positions on the 15<sup>th</sup>; then (in the night of 15-16 October) Zivkovic received an order to immediately send Morava Div II to the Timok Armeegruppe because of the situation on the Bulgarian front.

#### 16 October

The German XXII Res Corps began to attack the next day. 44 Res ID stormed the forested heights of the Petrov grob, while 43 Res ID pushed forward on the western flank of the Avala. This

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130 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, pp. 45 ff.

advance benefitted the widely-stretched 26 ID, because the enemy facing them pulled back to the south. The Division followed them through Sremcica and on the heights northeast of Pecani. GM Reinöhl's Group was able to move to the southern bank of the Sava early on the 15<sup>th</sup> when the Kossava subsided, and followed behind the right wing of XXII Res Corps. GM Mrazek's Brigade, which was no longer needed to guard the Danube, was shipped over the river at Belgrade, and GM Haustein's Brigade was placed behind VIII Corps. Thus both wings of the attacking front could be safely extended when the Army moved out of the sector bounded by the bend in the Sava and Danube. For the immediate future the eastern wing could anyway count on support by the flotilla, which had already stationed a group of monitors in front of Pancsova.

On the right wing of VIII Corps, GM Hrozny sent 59 ID to storm the Avala Hill on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> after giving the artillery some time to carry out their destruction of the strong Serbian position. After hard fighting, 9 Mtn Bde seized an outlying summit and the ridge southeast of Beli Potok from the enemy in the afternoon. On the other hand, 18 Mtn Bde farther to the left was unable to move past the northeastern edge of Zuce because of fire from the flank and rear. Now the 9 Mtn Bde, supported by the rest of the Division's reserve, strove to take the southern summit of Avala; however, they were unsuccessful. The attached heavy mortar battery wasn't as effective as expected because too many of their shells turned out to be duds when they hit the soaked ground.

#### 17 October

However, the loss of Petrov grob and heavy pressure from 43 Res ID west of the Avala forced the Serbs to also evacuate the position on this height, as well as the front farther east, during the night. On 17 October, during the pursuit of the defeated enemy, 26 ID reached Vk. Mostanica, 44 Res ID the Heights # 294 and 337, and 43 Res ID the Ripanj railroad station. As dawn broke, VIII Corps first followed the Serbs over the Avala Hill and the adjacent line of heights which stretched north of Zaklopaca. A squadron was sent to scout along the Danube through Grocka, but found the road still blocked southeast of the town. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, which around noon ordered the pursuit to commence, had believed that the enemy would next renew their resistance on the Ralja. However, during the day new positions were spotted between Grocka and Ripanj, where the Serbs were hastily entrenching. Since it was believed that this front was occupied in force, the tired divisions were

halted when darkness fell so that night-time combat was avoided.

By reaching this line, Kövess' Army had forced their way out of the ground surrounded on three sides by the Sava and Danube south of Belgrade. During these seven days of bitter fighting on the easily-defended hills facing the rivers, the Serbs had intended to strike their opponents' open western flank, but had to cancel the plan at the last moment because of the menace on their eastern front. The Serb troops facing 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had offered stubborn resistance, but many of them were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The losses of the victors were also significant. Thus the k.u.k. VIII Corps reported 658 dead and 6299 wounded, the XXII Res Corps 524 dead and 2320 wounded.

### **7. Gallwitz's Army advances on both sides of the Morava, 13 to 17 October**

Meanwhile Gallwitz's Army south of Semendria and Pozarevac was engaged in costly fighting, in which they were hampered by the logistical problem. There still was no bridge over the river; the process of shipping over the numerous supply trains and munitions columns with all their horses and carts was extremely difficult because of the heavy Kossava storm. Thus, for example, early on 13 October the IV Res Corps still had several heavy batteries, all of its ammunition and supply trains, the horses of the commanders, and some of its artillery horses on the north bank of the Danube. The guns of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army were therefore insufficiently mobile and lacked adequate ammunition, while the Army's units were engaged in combat against a usually stubborn enemy. On 13 October GdA Gallwitz agreed that III Corps on his right wing could postpone the advance which he had originally ordered. On the same day the tired troops of IV Res Corps couldn't advance much past the trenches in front of Pozarevac, although they had gained a tactically advantageous position, and the Serbs had already evacuated the city. The enemy also withdrew from the Germans' eastern wing. Only Sumadija Div I, which had moved from the Bulgarian border to the western wing, continued to offer stubborn resistance to cover the flank and rear of the army detachment engaged south of Belgrade. Although III Corps could advance only slowly against this determined foe in difficult terrain, in the following days they stormed the heights southwest and south of Semendria and pushed the Serbs back to the heights on the northern edge of the Ralja valley. The Army's center, IV Res Corps, also thrust through Pozarevac after the enemy, who were slowly withdrawing to the south. The Serbs in front of X Res Corps evacuated their positions on the heights of the Lipovaca on 14 October, and were

driven from their fortifications south of Smoljinac on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

On 17 October the withdrawal of the Serbs in front of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army also affected the right wing of Gallwitz's Army. Sumadija Div I was retreating to the heights south of the Ralja. III Corps followed up to that river; the neighboring IV Res Corps reached a line south of Pozarevac while X Res Corps, protecting its left flank with side columns, reached the area south of Makci after stubborn fighting.

By pulling their right wing away from the Danube and by the latest advances on other parts of the front, 11<sup>th</sup> Army had created a roughly straight line facing south. Since the Kossava was dying down the logistical situation became satisfactory. Thus the tactical and technical conditions were finally ripe for a coordinated advance by the entire Army, and GdA Gallwitz didn't hesitate to summon his troops to open a general offensive. The German thrust on both sides of the Morava was extremely threatening to the Serbs' general situation, as was demonstrated on 13 October when their high command decided to again support the north front at the cost of the east and west fronts - the Cavalry Division of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and an infantry regiment from the Uzice Group were ordered to Aleksandrovac (south of Pozarevac), and on 16 October they entered the line in the sector of the newly-formed Cavalry Brigade. This weakening of the eastern front would be exploited by the Bulgarians.

## **8. Intervention of the Bulgarians, 14-17 October**

On 11 October the Bulgarians engaged in a border skirmish with Serbian security forces in the northwest corner of their country. This was the grounds for opening hostilities, two days after Serbia had broken off diplomatic relations with Bulgaria. The government in Sofia now declared that Bulgaria had been challenged, and found itself at war with Serbia. Therefore the two Bulgarian Armies began to attack on 14 October. G.Lt Boyadiev's 1<sup>st</sup> Army, under Mackensen's control, was ordered to take the fortified town of Zajecar with the main body of 6 ID, while a smaller group advanced through Negotin to begin opening the Danube by securing the river bank. 8 and 9 ID would thrust through Knjazevac to Nish. 1 ID would initially take the fortified town of Pirot, then cooperate with the Army's main body. General Todorov's 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, which remained directly under the Bulgarian high command, would advance into the Vardar valley to sever the rail line to Salonika as soon as possible.

The first actions took place on the high border ridges of the Stara and Vidlic planina, where the southern wing of the Timok Armeegruppe (Sumadija Div II) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army conducted the defense. On 15 October the main body of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army secured the passes through the ridges southeast of Knjazevac (Sv. Nicolai # 1444) and southeast of Pirot. In the following days, however, they moved forward only a slight distance, hampered by rain, snow and fog. The brigade of 1<sup>st</sup> Army on the extreme northern wing wasn't able to cross the swollen waters of the Timok at Negotin until 16 October, and on the 20<sup>th</sup> still hadn't broken the stubborn resistance of the Negotin Group south of this town. The two other brigades of 6 ID remained on Bulgarian soil, pinned down by the Serbian Combined Div east of the Zajecar fortress. On the other hand, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army gained significant ground in the Macedonian border areas, which were defended by weaker Serbian forces. Already on 16 October the Bulgarians broke through at Vranje, which was on the border between the sectors of 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army and the "New Serbia" territorial command, and therefore only weakly defended. Thus the rail connection with Salonika was broken.<sup>131</sup> 3 ID was already occupying Kriva Palanka. 7 ID, operating in the difficult mountain terrain along the border, advanced into the Bregalnica valley; they reached Carevo-selo, while the main body moved through Pehcevo. Meanwhile the Cavalry Division, which had deployed east of Kustendil, advanced to Carevo-selo; after 7 ID took Kocana the cavalry thrust ahead to the Vardar at Veles.<sup>132</sup>

### **9. Situation and command decisions of both sides in mid-October**

Although the allies had made great strides in all parts of the theater of operations, the Serbs were still standing between 11<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies. While the two Armies neared each other, and although the Danube was still infested with mines, it was possible in the night of 14-15 October to send two armed steamers and a minesweeper to Semendria. Another transport followed the next night, and on the 17<sup>th</sup> a floating bridge was brought to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. However, as long as the Danube wasn't fully opened, neither the Bulgarians nor the Turks could receive ammunition and weapons on the water route, and both allies badly

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131 Feyler, "Les campagnes de Serbie 1914 et 1915" (Paris), p.

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132 Nedev, p. 7

needed these items.<sup>133</sup> VIII k.u.k. Corps on the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was engaged in stubborn fighting in unfavorable hilly terrain south of Belgrade; although the tactical situation would have been relieved by having the Corps pivot to the right, instead it had to extend its line to the left in order to reach out along the Danube to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Naturally this caused VIII Corps to lag behind, which in turn delayed the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army which had to cover its flank against enemy forces (the Belgrade Armeegruppe). Moreover, on the extreme left wing of the Danube front Gallwitz couldn't count on help from FML Fülöpp's weak group; therefore as he advanced he would have to anticipate a surprise attack from the hill country in northeast Serbia, which was favorable for such an enterprise, and this would pin down some of his units. Meanwhile the Entente were landing fresh troops every day at Salonika, and there was a chance that they might quickly intervene on the Serbian front. Therefore the Central Powers and their allies needed to gain a decision as quickly as possible.

On 13 October GdI Falkenhayn had already proposed that the k.u.k. high command should reinforce 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with troops from the Italian front. Three days later, GM von Seeckt stated that three Landsturm Brigades (205, 206 and GM Schwarz's) should be replaced by a first-line infantry division. Since GM Konopicky had already blamed XIX Corps' failure to advance on the limited capacity of the Landsturm troops, the suggestions of the German allies was anticipated at Teschen. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the high command ordered that 206 Lst Inf Bde should change places with 10 Mtn Bde, which would be brought from the Isonzo. GO Conrad refused to draw further units from the Italian front. He did consider whether to send 3 ID, which originally had been intended to relieve 17 ID, to the Balkan theater instead. Because the Russians opened new attacks in mid-October, this Division also wouldn't be available for a while. Therefore Falkenhayn, who feared any delay in the advance in Serbia, had to help himself; the Alpenkorps, which had already been sent by rail from Tyrol to the Vosges, was now diverted to Mackensen's Army Group.

Meanwhile the Serbian supreme HQ at Kragujevac was beset with serious concerns. The aged Voivode Putnik had sent a new appeal for help to his allies. On 13 October, when the Serbs were awaiting the Bulgarian attack at any hour, they learned from the French Military Attache Col Fournier that General Sarrail wouldn't agree to send his newly-landed troops north in separate parts; he would first wait until they were all assembled. He

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133 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p. 347

intended to send his French-English army against the southern wing of the Bulgarians, but this would require careful preparation because the Macedonian theater was so deficient in roads and resources. Meanwhile he recommended that the Serbs should commit all their strength to preventing Mackensen's forces from linking up with the Bulgarians.<sup>134</sup>

On the next day the Bulgarians began to attack, and won quick and decisive successes on the southern wing. The Serbian high command found themselves forced to reinforce their eastern front. On 16 October the Morava Div II was ordered to move from the western wing of the Belgrade Armeegruppe to the Timok Armeegruppe, and was reinforced by three battalions from the Sokol Brigade. The Krajina Detachment, until now part of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, left just a weak force (two battalions and half a battery) on the Danube, and was sent to guard in the direction of Tekija. The Negotin Group was dissolved - some of its troops reinforced the Krajina Detachment, and others became part of the new "Knjazevac Group." The Vlasina Group was brought up to division strength by receiving a cavalry regiment from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and an infantry regiment from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army; this command now became the "South Morava Group" directly under supreme HQ. Its mission was to clear the enemy from the Vranje area to re-open the rail line to Salonika which the Bulgarians had blocked; this would make it possible to bring up the newly-landed Entente troops. However, the units at Salonika weren't ready to fight, and presumably couldn't intervene in time to help the Danube front. Mackensen, on the other hand, was already leading his main body toward central Serbia, and Voivode Putnik would have to act promptly to respond to this critical situation. On 15 October he had already ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the Belgrade Armeegruppe that if forced to retreat they should pull back up the Morava and through Natalinci (20 km east of Arangjelovac); 1<sup>st</sup> Army would withdraw over the Kolubara to Arangjelovac and Grn. Milanovac, thus covering the west flank of the main body. The advance of the allies should be delayed by resistance at suitable points to gain time for the English and French to help. The Uzice Group would continue to stand fast in front of Visegrad.

Based on these orders from the Serbian high command, in the night of 16-17 October General Zivkovic pulled his hard-pressed troops out of the already broken Avala line to the heights south of Vranic (# 191), north of Parcani, and southeast of Vrcin (# 290). Now 1<sup>st</sup> Army could no longer tarry in northwest Serbia. Voivode Misic told the units which had been engaged in the Macva

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134 Feyler, pp. 89 ff.

and near Obrenovac (Dunav Div II and Drina Div II) to move over the Kolubara toward Lazarevac, and then to strike the enemy moving south of Belgrade in the flank. To secure the retreat, rear guards of Drina Div II would halt on the Beljanica. The Sokol Brigade would for the time being remain west of Valjevo to cover the Uzice Group, which was staying in place.

## ***B. The thrust toward central Serbia, 18 October-6 November***

### **1. Advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies to the Kosmaj and the Jasenica, 18-22 October**

#### Movement on the western wing

While Mackensen's main body pushed after the retreating Serbs, FML Sorsich had decided to attack again at Drenovac to widen his bridgehead there. The continuous floods, however, made the technical preparations so difficult that the attack had to be postponed several times. When Sorsich's group finally thrust ahead on the 17<sup>th</sup> they encountered little resistance, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> they reached Pricinovic (5 km west of Drenovac). GM Streith's group at Badovinci had to pull up the military bridge over the Drina because of the high water, so that they could rebuild it farther downstream. Nevertheless, Streith's troops - who hitherto had been completely bottled up by the Serbs - could move freely on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Following orders issued by the Army Group on the 13<sup>th</sup>, Sorsich and Streith came together in front of Sabac on the 19<sup>th</sup> and on the next day occupied the town without fighting. They had lost all contact with the retreating Serbs. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ demanded on the 20<sup>th</sup> that they should advance toward Ub "at a quicker pace", while sending a strong detachment of all arms toward Valjevo. The march however had to be postponed until the 22<sup>nd</sup>, because the troops had originally been equipped only for service on the lines of communication and were suffering considerably from inadequate logistical support. It would be possible to organize a better line of supply from Klenak and Sabac than through the Macva. However, preparations to establish this line had been insufficient and the necessary work consumed a lot of time. Moreover, in the actions at Drenovac FML Sorsich's group had lost 760 men killed or wounded, and 200 as prisoners. GM Streith's group had lost 600 at Badovinci.

The problems of XIX Corps were similar. After FML Trollmann had to divert 20 Lst Mtn Bde and 205 Lst Inf Bde, he still had GM Pongracz's 53 ID (17 Mtn Bde and Lst Inf Bde Schwarz) in the Progar bridgehead and 21 Lst Mtn Bde in the Boljevci bridgehead. 206 Lst Inf Bde had been relieved of responsibility for guarding the Sava by Sorsich's group, so that it could move to the Isonzo. The troops in the flooded loops of the Sava were ravaged by cholera, typhus and malaria. When it was recognized in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> that the Serbs were retreating, the sorely-tried Landsturm soldiers began to pursue. The enemy had evacuated Krtinska, but were still holding Skela and Obrenovac with rear guards. Because the detachments of Kövess' Army on the western wing had so little striking power, it was feared that the Serbs who withdrew from the Macva and the Drina heights would be able to move through Ub-Lazarevac and attack the flank of XXII Res Corps as it advanced south. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, Mackensen therefore ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to have the newly-arrived 10 Mtn Bde unite with 20 Lst Mtn Bde on the march; 17 Mtn Bde (through Belgrade) and 21 Lst Mtn Bde (through Obrenovac) would also draw near Kövess' main body. Only GM Schwarz's Brigade would guard the crossing points of the Sava at Progar and Boljevci.

On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the 21 Lst Mtn Bde worked its way out of the bend in the Sava at Zabrez as far as the northern edge of Obrenovac. GM Reinöhl's Group, which had been sent over the Large Zigeuner Island to cover the right wing of XXII Res Corps, reached the heights south of Obrenovac in the evening, along with 20 Lst Mtn Bde; the bridge over the Kolubara farther west had been burnt. The weaker enemy force had withdrawn over the river and toward the south. However, a battalion of 205 Lst Inf Bde found the railroad bridge west of Obrenovac, which was only partially destroyed, still occupied by the Serbs. The town finally fell into the hands of 21 Lst Mtn Bde in the night of 18-19 October.

Advance of the main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on 18 October

Meanwhile the XXII Res and VIII Corps had come up to General Zivkovic's new defensive lines. 26 German ID pushed a weaker enemy force through Bacevac, and in the evening was attacking the heights south of the town. To cover its flank, the Division had to leave troops on the road east of Vranic, because in the afternoon some larger Serb units had advanced on a height northwest of Vranic. Parts of XIX Corps were now supposed to move against this enemy. To the left of 26 ID, the 44 and 43 Res ID took the Serbs' forward positions in the area south of Ripanj.

The advance of VIII Corps was very difficult on the 18<sup>th</sup> because of Serb artillery fire; they weren't able to bring up some of their own guns until the evening twilight because the condition of the roads continued to get worse. Until then the 59 and 57 ID were engaged on the enemy main positions, which ran over the heights north of Ralja [town] through Point # 290 and then on the rising ground north of Begaljica. Since the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army had already reached the Ralja River on 17 October, while the eastern flank of the Belgrade Armeegruppe was still on the Danube at Grocka, Army Group HQ demanded that the inner wings of the two allied armies should draw together as soon as possible. Therefore Lst Inf Bde Haustein was deployed on the extreme eastern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. They were instructed to advance through Grocka on the 18<sup>th</sup>. To help this Brigade forward, the western wing of Gallwitz's Army would pin down the enemy still standing on the Danube from the rear. Haustein's Brigade was able to thrust past Grocka, and in the afternoon - brilliantly supported by the fire of the monitors - took the heights south of the town. A squadron of Landsturm Hussars made contact with a squadron from a detachment sent by III German Corps to open the way to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

19 October

FZM Scheuchenstuel intended to continue the attack on the Serbian main positions on the 19<sup>th</sup>, while Brigade Haustein exploited its success by intervening from the flank. GdI Kövess, on the other hand, planned to make the main effort on 20 October, because XXII Res Corps couldn't finish its preparations for a methodical attack any earlier. Nevertheless he left it up to VIII Corps to decide whether to attack already on the 19<sup>th</sup>. To give XXII Res Corps greater freedom to move toward the south, the entire XIX Corps was sent to guard its right flank. FML Trollmann would deploy his main body next to XXII Res Corps,

while sending a smaller group on the road through Stepojevac. 21 Lst Mtn Bde would move to the eastern bank of the Kolubara as quickly as possible, while the main body of Brigade Schwarz concentrated at Obrenovac.

On the 19<sup>th</sup>, GM Pongracz with the main body of 53 ID (20 Lst Mtn Bde plus 205 Lst Inf Bde from GM Reinöhl's former group) reached the town of Vranic without fighting and there made firm contact with 26 ID on the right wing of XXII Res Corps. The center of this Corps, 44 Res ID, moved somewhat nearer to the enemy, while 43 Res ID stayed in place. Nevertheless the commander of the next unit to the east, 59 ID, decided to capture the enemy's forward position on Heights # 316, which blocked the road to Ralja. 59 ID did begin to attack, but had to halt because of strong fire from the Serbian guns. The Serbs finally began to waver in the afternoon under bombardment from the heavy batteries of VIII Corps; toward evening the Division attacked again and took the position. Although this thrust and the simultaneous progress by the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army would have made it easier for 57 ID to advance, FML Goiginger stuck with his decision to wait until the 20<sup>th</sup>. He figured that the Serbs opposing him would have to evacuate their strong fortifications because they were already outflanked on two sides.

On 19 October the German 11<sup>th</sup> Army had III Corps force its way over the Ralja at Kolari; IV and X Res Corps were already engaged on the line Poljana-Kula. Therefore Zivkovic saw that his right flank was threatened; during the night of 19-20 October he pulled back to the line of heights south of Lisovic, Parcani, Ml. Pozarevac and Umcari.

Before midnight GdI Kövess, who'd moved his HQ to Belgrade on the 18<sup>th</sup>, received from Army Group HQ an order to have 3<sup>rd</sup> Army advance quickly. Above all the left wing of VIII Corps should be reinforced and thrust ahead so that the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army would no longer be compelled to hold back so many troops to secure its flank. This was holding up the advance of Gallwitz's Army. If possible the left wing of VIII Corps should reach Umcari on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

#### 20 October

In immediate pursuit on 20 October, the German 26 ID pushed Timok Div II back over the heights south of Lisovic. 43 Res ID drove Serbian rear guards out of Parcani and in the evening took the heights south of this village, while 44 Res ID advanced to the heights west of Parcani. This significant gain of ground

caused FML Trollmann to urge 53 ID to accelerate its advance. The leading troops of this Division mopped up the area as far as the lower course of the Beljanica during the day; their opponents were rear guards of Drina Div II. On the 20<sup>th</sup> the main body of 53 ID reached the area at and east of Konatice; the rest of XIX Corps, however, was left far behind. All the bridges over the Kolubara and the Tamnava had been destroyed by the Serbs. 21 Lst Mtn Bde, which crossed the Kolubara at Obrenovac, couldn't finish its assembly at the crossing point until evening. Schwarz's Brigade advanced to Obrenovac; 17 Mtn Bde, which had been moving through Belgrade and Jakovo, spent the night at Ostruznica. A large part of XIX Corps' artillery was still standing on the north bank of the Sava.

Under VIII Corps, on 20 October the 59 ID occupied the heights north of the town of Ralja, which had been evacuated by the enemy; the neighboring 57 ID, after a short but hot action with Serbian rear guards, had already reached heights # 290 (5 km southeast of Vrcin) in the morning. Without interference from the enemy, both divisions advanced to the upper Ralja during the afternoon; Haustein's Brigade reached Umcari. Since Gallwitz had thrown back the equally strong 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army in bitter fighting on both sides of the Morava to the line Vk. Krsna-Azanya-Golobok-Aleksandrovac-Orljevo, Kövess' HQ hoped to encounter only brief resistance on the heights south of the upper Ralja. If this was the case, the Army should reach a line from Sibnica through Heights # 313 north of Kosmaj and Vlaska to Dubona on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

#### 21 October

In the event, by the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Zivkovic's Armeegruppe moved back to a prepared position around the Kosmaj, which ran along the same line chosen by Kövess as his objective. The parts of 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army which had been ordered to leave the Macva had meanwhile already arrived behind the lower Turija (Drina Div II) and at Lazarevac (Dunav Div II). From the north, they were followed by the k.u.k. XIX Corps, whose mission was to cover the right flank of XXII Res Corps. In light fighting, the main body of 53 ID advanced to the south bank of the Beljanica in the afternoon of the 21<sup>st</sup>, and the foremost troops came to the lower Turija. The 21 Lst Mtn and 17 Mtn Bdes followed Pongracz's Division; GM Schwarz led his Brigade over the Kolubara at Obrenovac. 10 Mtn Bde had arrived at Semlin, but wasn't able to cross the Danube because of the Kossava; this storm from the southeast also forced the heavy artillery of XIX Corps to wait a long time before they could cross the Sava.

During the day the XXII Res Corps came up to the new enemy positions on the heights on both sides of Sibnica. VIII Corps crossed the Ralja valley without meeting resistance and by evening established a firm foothold in front of the Kosmaj with 59 ID. South of the Ralja 57 ID drove back Serbian outposts in light fighting. The Division's further advance, however, came under hefty artillery fire which brought the attackers to a halt on the slopes at Vlaska. The key point in the Serbian position in front of the left wing of VIII Corps was the high ground directly east of Vlaska. Farther east the enemy line ran to Point # 281; there was an excellent outlying position north of Dubona, which was taken by storm from the enemy by the Hungarian 1st IR # 1 of Haustein's Brigade before darkness fell.

#### 22 October

On the new Serbian front, the 624 meter high Kosmaj was the dominant central position, just as the Avala Heights had been the center of the Avala line. GdI Kövess ordered the attack on the Kosmaj position to begin on 22 October. XXII Res Corps would thrust from Sibnica toward Vencani with as strong as possible a force on the right wing. XIX Corps would cover the flank of this attack with its leading brigade and support the right wing of XXII Res Corps with all other available forces. VIII Corps would make its main effort on the left wing as much as possible, due to the fact that Serbian cavalry seemed to be infiltrating between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies.

On the right flank of XXII Res Corps, Pongracz's Division drove the advanced troops of Drina Div II away from the north bank of the Turija in light fighting on 22 October, and established themselves firmly on the heights directly south of this brook. The other components of XIX Corps - 21 Lst Mtn, 17 Mtn and Schwarz's Brigades - were still outside the sector where fighting occurred on this day; they were badly in need of rest and weren't able to move out of the area south of Vranic. 10 Mtn Bde was still stuck at its Danube crossing point. By any reckoning the XIX Corps was in an awkward situation. Their two leading brigades were already engaged with the enemy, but had just 6270 riflemen; the other troops were coming up only very slowly because the artillery and supply trains remained mired on roads which had been rendered impassable by continuing rains. Thus in the next few days it seemed that it wouldn't be possible to bring larger forces to bear, as was so urgently necessary. FML Trollmann asked 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to let him postpone the advance for at least a day, so that he could concentrate his Corps.

However, there could be no question of standing still; his request was denied.

On 22 October the XXII Res Corps not only seized the main positions of Timok Div II in bitter fighting, but also gained some additional ground. Action was already raging around Sibnica at noon. During the afternoon the Corps was able to exploit its success, and by evening the German front ran between Arapovac and the southern slope of the Kosmaj Heights. By this powerful thrust the German Corps lost almost all its connection with neighboring commands; to restore the link the 59 ID moved its right wing somewhat to the south, but it was still almost 4 km behind the left wing of 43 Res ID.

The enemy was still offering stiff resistance to the main body of VIII Corps on the heights east of the Kosmaj; 57 ID restricted its activity throughout the 22<sup>nd</sup> to artillery fire, although its neighbor on the left (25 Res ID on the west wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army) had already attacked as far as Azanja and a German detachment had occupied Selevac. Thus the enemy opposing the k.u.k. 57 ID were threatened on their right flank. Since XXII Res Corps had also recently made good progress, VIII Corps could hope that they wouldn't have to launch a costly infantry attack on the Serbs' strong main position along the heights, even though 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ had branded this "waiting for a neighbor's success" as a "mistake."

#### Progress on the wings of the allied front

On the extreme right wing of Kövess' Army, by 14 October FML Kalser had been able to concentrate Col. von Dominic's mobile Fortress Brigade west of Visegrad and Col. Edler von Spindler's 9 Lst Eta Bde at Rogatica. Thus he had nine battalions available for the crossing of the Drina, scheduled for the 17<sup>th</sup>. However, the newly reformed 62 ID wasn't able to deploy its allotted batteries by this date, so FML Kalser - despite the urging of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ - decided to once again postpone the operation. The heavy artillery was finally ready to fire early in the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup>. The thrust over the Drina was ordered to commence on the 21<sup>st</sup>, but high water caused it to be put back for yet another day.

The Serbian high command had already been planning to have the Uzice Group retreat from the upper Drina so that it could cooperate with the Sokol Brigade (which had been called back to Valjevo), and on 19 October they issued the necessary orders. These troops were to defend the routes leading through Valjevo

and Uzice. The Uzice Group left only a weak force to secure the crossing points at Visegrad, in addition to the Montenegrin "Donjo Vasojevic" Brigade, which was placed under the Group HQ.

Gallwitz's Army was supposed to attack the Serbian positions on the Golobok-Aleksandrovac line on 21 October, but were unable to advance on this day. In the right wing corps, 25 Res ID was drawn into bitter street-to street and house-to-house fighting in the village of Selevac, where the women also participated. While the Army's center restricted its activity to scouting, the left wing was heavily assaulted by General Jurisic-Sturm. He was reinforced by Morava Div II from the Belgrade Armeegruppe (which originally had been intended for the eastern front), and tried to throw back the east wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, but in vain. On the next day (the 22<sup>nd</sup>), German regiments stormed the positions of 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army at Golobok-Aleksandrovac-Orljevo. The III German Corps pushed ahead in vigorous pursuit, and in the evening had already taken the heights north and northeast of Palanka. The defeated Serbian troops (Sumadija Div II and the Cavalry Div) withdrew over the Jasenica. Because of this operation, and the advance of XXII Res Corps to Sibnica, the position of the Belgrade Group was once again outflanked on both sides. Zivkovic could no longer tarry on the Kosmaj position. In the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup> he ordered his Group to immediately retreat to the Kubrsnica. Voivode Misic, the commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army, pulled back the main body of his troops (Drina Div II and Dunav Div II) to prepared positions near Arangjelovac. Resistance would be renewed against the invaders here and on the Jasenica. The routes through Lazarevac to Rudnik, in the rear of the new front, were to be guarded by parts of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The Sokol Brigade, which was still in place at Valjevo, would retreat to Grn. Milanovac only when forced to do so.

Meanwhile fighting had once more flared up at Visegrad.

The thrust of the k.u.k. 62 ID over the rain-swollen Drina began early on 22 October, and took the Serbs by surprise. The 9 Lst Eta Bde was able to send two battalions safely over the river south of Visegrad. However, Col. Dominic's Brigade suffered heavy losses when it crossed by the destroyed highway bridge and farther north. By 9:00 AM Dominic had only brought over about 300 men. Then fog lifted from the valley, and heavy Serbian artillery fire made it impossible to send over further troops. During the day the 9 Lst Eta Bde, after repulsing several counterattacks, threw back the Montenegrins engaged south of Visegrad. When Voivode Misic learned that the Montenegrins had retreated, he called all segments of the Uzice Group fighting on

the Drina heights back to the town of Uzice; he ordered the Montenegrin Vasojevic Brigade to protect the line of communications running through Priboj-Nova varos-Sjenica.

## 2. Bulgarian actions from 18 to 22 October

On the north wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army, the situation of 6 ID in front of Zajecar was unchanged due to the persistent resistance of the Serbs. For the same reason the Army's main body also gained just a little ground. 8 ID wasn't able to move its main body over the high waters of the Timok north of Knjazevac until 22 October, while advancing its south wing only as far as the town itself. Its neighbor, 9 ID, was held in place east and southeast of Kamenica. Meanwhile 1 ID was engaged on the heights east of Pirot; it also sent a group toward Leskovac.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, on the other hand, won significant successes. On 18 October the 3 ID took the Serbian position on the heights west of Kriva Palanka and then thrust toward Kumanovo, which it reached on the 20<sup>th</sup>. On 22 October the 3 ID had one brigade at Vranje and one at Skopje, while its third brigade was advancing toward Bujanovac, where it could secure the passes through the Karadag. After very difficult marches the 7 ID reached Kumanovo on this day. The Cavalry Division had meanwhile reached Veles on 19 October and at Strumica made contact with an infantry regiment from 7 ID, which had sent a detachment into the Vardar valley. This Bulgarian detachment collided on 22 October at Hudova with the French 156 ID, which General Sarrail had sent from Salonika through Gjevgjeli on the 14<sup>th</sup>. In this encounter the Bulgarians failed to destroy the railroad which was serving the French as a line of supply.<sup>135</sup> However, the French 156 ID, which was widely dispersed, was equally unable to thrust further through the narrow Vardar valley. One problem was that the uncertain attitude of the Greek troops imposed caution, and the other was that the 10 English ID, which had already landed, had been forbidden to enter Serbian territory.<sup>136</sup>

The situation of the northern wing of the Bulgarians at Negotin was less favorable. Here the right wing brigade of 1<sup>st</sup> Army didn't move forward. General Boyadiev sent to Temesvar a request that the advance of Group Fülöpp at Orsova should be

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135 Nedev, p. 11

136 Larcher, "La grande guerre dans les Balkans" (Paris, 1929), p. 84

expedited as much as possible. Since it would also be to the advantage of 11<sup>th</sup> Army if the difficult forested terrain on their open east flank could be cleared of the enemy, Army Group HQ ordered that the Group at Orsova should be reinforced by two battalions from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Before this reinforcement arrived, however, FML Fülöpp tried to cross the Danube on 22 October. The attempt was shattered by Serbian artillery fire, partly because Romanian searchlights along the bank illuminated and therefore betrayed the positions of the German heavy artillery.<sup>137</sup>

### **3. Measures of the Serbian high command and of General Sarrail through 22 October**

The crossing of the Drina at Visegrad by Kalser's Division didn't fail to make a major impression on the Serbian high command. They demanded that their Montenegrin comrades-in-arms should send stronger units from the troops stationed in the Sanjak against the Austro-Hungarians who'd come over the Drina. Voivode Putnik also requested another Montenegrin brigade to secure the passes leading from the upper valley of the Western Morava to the Novibazar basin.

At the same time the weak Serbian forces in Macedonia were being hit hard by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army; the eastern front around Timok was also under strong pressure. Because of all these unfavorable conditions and because of the German breakthrough to Palanka, Putnik found himself compelled on 22 October to issue preliminary orders to his northern armies, which were already pulling back to Arangjelovac-Svilajnac, for an eventual further retreat. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and Zivkovic's Armeegruppe (the latter of which was joined by Sumadija Div II) would go back if necessary to a position north of Cuprija-Jagodina-Kragujevac. In conjunction with this movement the main body of 1<sup>st</sup> Army (Drina Div II and Dunav Div II) would withdraw through Rudnik-Grn. Milanovac to Kraljevo and the Uzice Group (with the Sokol Brigade) toward Cacak.

To defend the center of his country, Voivode Putnik therefore wanted to have most of his units give battle along a united front against his opponents pushing ahead from the north and east. This would give the Western powers a final opportunity to send their relieving army up from Salonika through the Vardar Valley and Nish to the Danube theater of operations. Thus the situation might be saved in the last minute.

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137 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p.353

However General Sarrail, commander of the just-forming Franco-English "Army of the Orient", found himself in a difficult position after his arrival at Salonika on 12 October. His original plan for a joint offensive with the Serbs toward Sofia had finally shrunk after several alterations to "securing the link between Salonika and Serbia against Bulgarian operations."<sup>138</sup> Because of the swift advance of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army and the fact that his Orient Army still only had a few troops, Sarrail couldn't even think of carrying out this limited mission. He was content to advance as far as possible up the Vardar Valley, hoping to help the Serbs by local attacks against the Bulgarians. Therefore the 156 ID north of Gjevgjeli was supposed to hold onto this area; the French 57 ID, which was still arriving, would thrust to Krivolak. The English 10 ID, which was still getting its orders directly from London, would initially advance only slightly north from Salonika to cover the rear of the French.

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138 Larcher, p. 84

#### **4. The first encirclement attempt, 23 October-6 November**

##### **a. Mackensen's plan**

On 22 October the main bodies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies were nearing the sectors which had been designated by Mackensen on 29 September as the first objectives of the offensive. The right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was within cannon range of Lazarevac. The center was a day's march in front of Arangjelovac and the left wing 12 km from Kovacevac. The right wing of Gallwitz's Army was fighting already at the doors of Palanka, and the left was about 10 km north of Petrovac. A long distance from Mackensen's main body, which was advancing toward the towns named above, was Group Sorsich, which had united with GM Streith's troops southeast of Sabac. 62 ID was still by Visegrad. In the southeastern part of the theater of operations the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was trying to drive the desperately fighting Serbs out of the Timok valley and Pirot. The infantry divisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army had already reached Vranje, Kumanovo and Skopje, while its Cavalry Division was at Veles.

Mackensen's HQ believed that the Serbian northern armies were retreating by sectors to Kragujevac. The units which had withdrawn from the Macva and from Obrenovac were believed to be in the Lazarevac-Lajkovac area. It was uncertain how long the Serbian eastern army would continue to stand in place in front of the Bulgarians. In any event, the deployment of the Serbs along three quarters of a circle made it possible that they could be completely encircled if all the allied units launched a concentric advance. For the time being there was no concern that this maneuver could be significantly disturbed by Entente forces advancing from Salonika, where reports indicated that General Sarrail had one English and two French divisions. This was because the situation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army was favorable, and thus they would be able to pull 7 ID out of the fighting at Kumanovo to send it south along the Vardar. The Bulgarian high command was guarding against a possible thrust from Salonika through the Struma valley (the shortest route to Sofia) by shifting 2 ID into the valley. Moreover the first elements of their 11 ID, formed in the Sofia area out of Macedonian refugees, were already moving by rail to Kustendil.

GFM Mackensen didn't want to miss this great opportunity for success. In the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup> he told Generals Kövess and Gallwitz: "Our goal is to push most of the Serbian forces into

the center of their country and there beat them decisively. The Armies should advance as follows: 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the line Rudnik-Satornja-Bozurnija-Natalinci, 11<sup>th</sup> Army to the line Saranovo-Svilajnac-Subotica." 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was further instructed "to keep the right wing strong so that it can encircle the enemy from the west, either at or north of Kragujevac or in the western Morava valley." XIX Corps would continue to guard the flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and advance through Lazarevac-Moravic toward Grn. Milanovac. Group Sorsich, advancing west of the Kolubara from Sabac to Valjevo, would in turn provide protection to Trollmann's Corps from a greater distance. The mission of 62 ID was still to thrust from Visegrad to Uzice. 11<sup>th</sup> Army should move its left wing as soon as possible to Cuprija so that it could reach out to the right wing of the Bulgarians. Because enemy detachments were still at large south of the bend in the Danube at Orsova, Mackensen intended to send some further units to the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army as they became available. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was ordered to push its center (8 and 9 ID) steadily toward the Morava valley, in order to help forward the divisions engaged in front of Zajecar and Pirot (6 and 1 ID).

The next actions of the allies were designed to force their way into the basin of the Western Morava; determined resistance was expected along the edge of the valley.

#### **b. Advance of 62 ID east of Visegrad, 23-28 October**

On 23 October it was possible to somewhat enlarge 62 ID's bridgehead at Visegrad, and for the pioneers to build a bridge over the swollen Drina. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, FML Kalser sent a battalion into the valley of the Rzaw as far as Dobrunj. But while the Serbs withdrew from the heights east of Visegrad toward Uzice, the Montenegrins fighting farther south were reinforced by the 1<sup>st</sup> Sanjak Division. As enemy resistance noticeably stiffened in this sector, FML Kalser decided to protect his thrust to Uzice by first taking the Suha gora, which rose to a summit of 1128 meters 6 km southeast of Visegrad, and by driving the Montenegrins away from his flank on the Lim. The commanding general in BHD, GdI Sarkotic, was also aware of the danger which threatened 62 ID from the south. Therefore on the 24<sup>th</sup> he suggested to the AOK that the groups of GM von Vuchetich and Col von Zhuber should thrust from Gorazde over the Drina toward the Lim. The AOK was concerned that these weak and insufficiently equipped units might suffer a setback, and so rejected the suggestion; they did order, however, that Col Zhuber's Group should be sent through Visegrad to Uvac and Rudo to provide

direct flank protection for 62 ID. GdI Sarkotic continued to insist that above all the enemy must be driven from the Ustipraca-Visegrad railroad and that the destroyed railroad bridge at Megjegja must be restored. Otherwise it would be difficult to supply large forces as they thrust through Vardiste toward the east. Much as GO Conrad also wished to open the light railway through Vardiste, he stuck to his order that Col Zhuber's Group should drive away the Montenegrins threatening the communications of 62 ID north of the Lim by moving through Visegrad. The commander in Bosnia shouldn't use Group Vuchetich or other troops in his sector to undertake secondary operations on the stretch of track between Ustipraca and Megjegja.

The opinion of the AOK regarding the way to employ Col Zhuber's Group was influenced by the course of events that had meanwhile unfolded. On 27 October the Montenegrins had, as expected, attacked the southern flank of 62 ID. The enemy was defeated, and 9 Lst Eta Bde took the Suha gora by storm. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, FML Kalser sought to continue the counterattack by pushing the Montenegrins back toward the Lim. Some Grenz Jaeger in front of Vardiste covered the left flank against a Serbian infantry regiment stationed north of the Mokragora. The attack of 62 ID, however, encountered stubborn resistance. In heavy fighting that lasted into the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> the Division was able to make progress south of Dobrunj, but the Montenegrins received reinforcements from Foca and established themselves firmly on the next line of heights.

Kalser's Division was held in place not only by these necessary operations to cover the right flank, but also by the inadequate supply line through Visegrad. The wagons were still west of the Drina, which had risen to such a level that the bridge had to be taken down in the night of 27-28 October. Only a towrope was available to haul absolutely essential supplies over the river at the ruins of the stone highway bridge. Thus it was impossible to provide logistical support on a regular basis. Moreover the weather was unfavorable; snow already lay on the mountains, which caused bitter suffering for the Landsturm troops who were inadequately equipped for winter.

### **c. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's actions at Arangjelovac, 23-25 October**

The k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army issued its new objectives to carry out the orders issued by Mackensen on the 22<sup>nd</sup>:

. VIII Corps would advance with its left wing along the line Vuk. Krsna-Kusadak-Natalinci,

. XXII Res Corps would move through Arangjelovac and on both sides of the road leading from Progoreoci to Rudnik, and  
. XIX Corps would operate farther west through Lazarevac and the Ljig Valley toward Grn. Milanovac.  
XXII Res Corps would make its main effort on the right wing, and be prepared after reaching the line Rudnik-Satornja to direct their three division through Rudnik toward Grn. Milanovac. GdI Kövess wanted to carry out the advance so that all three corps would reach the line Banjani-Rudnik-Natalinci at the same time, while Sorsich's Group would have reached a point a day's march beyond Valjevo.

23 October

In reality, however, these intentions couldn't be carried out. XIX Corps, which was still widely spread out, first had to be concentrated to face a possible flank attack from Serbian units which were believed to be in the Lazarevac-Lajkovac area (Drina Div II and Dunav Div II). On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, therefore, Pongracz's 53 ID (205 Lst Inf and 20 Lst Mtn Bdes) stayed on the heights south of the lower Turija; 17 Mtn Bde was in Borak, while 21 Lst Mtn Bde and GM Schwarz's Lst Inf Bde were marching south in the Stepojevac area. Since the Kossava was dying down, 10 Mtn Bde was finally able to cross the Danube and advance to Ostruznica. Contact was established through Ub with Group Sorsich, which reached the Banjani area on the 23<sup>rd</sup> after difficult marches over muddy roads, leaving its supply train behind. Scouts from XIX Corps reported that the area west of the Kolubara between Lajkovac and Slovac was free of the enemy.

The Serbs had also used the night of 22-23 October to retreat in front of the Army's eastern wing, which advanced more than 10 km to the south on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Without fighting, XXII Res Corps reached the heights of Vencani and the area farther east, and 59 ID of VIII Corps the area west of Megjuluzje. In the morning 57 ID threw back some weak rear guards, then reached Kovacevac and Vk. Krsna without further fighting. Lst Inf Bde Haustein was left on a height south of Vlaska as the Corps' reserve; Lst Inf Bde Mrazek, as the Army's reserve, moved ahead to Gjurinac. The great amount of ground covered by the main body of the Army on the 23<sup>rd</sup> while XIX Corps stood still resulted in a significant shift to the right. For the 24<sup>th</sup>, XXII Res and VIII Corps were given the line Lazarevac-Arangjelovac-Ratari as a goal, while the Army's reserve moved to Vk. Mladenovac.

24 October

FML Sorsich and his Group stayed in place on the 24<sup>th</sup> to allowed their supply train to catch up. He was ordered to then march with his main body toward Valjevo while sending a smaller column through Ub. However, he decided because of the bad roads to have only a detachment move due south to Valjevo; most of his troops would march to the town through Ub because it would be easier to move supplies on this route. This plan was also based on scouting reports which indicated that the Serbs had already evacuated Valjevo the day before.

When XIX Corps advanced on the 24<sup>th</sup>, they found that the terrain in front of Lazarevac was free of the enemy; 20 Lst Mtn Bde

marched a considerable distance along the Kolubara without fighting. Strangely, there was still no contact with the Serbs farther to the south. On the other hand, the troops advancing on Trollmann's left wing (205 Lst Inf and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes), and then XXII Res Corps as well as 59 ID of VIII Corps collided with new enemy positions running from the area west of Progoreoci and over the heights just north of Arangjelovac. Here Voivode Mistic had stationed the kernel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army (Dunav Div II and Drina Div II).

57 ID, advancing on the left wing of Scheuchenstuel's Corps, advanced on the 24<sup>th</sup> in light fighting up to its goal for the day, the line Maskar-Ratari. Their scouting parties, however, couldn't move past the southern slope of the Kubrsnica valley. Behind this front the Serbs had large supply trains at Topola and Natalinci, which were successfully bombed by planes from the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The pilots also reported that the Serbs were busy entrenching on the heights on both sides of Arangjelovac. This was a sufficient reason for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to attack the enemy before they could complete their new positions, and then to thrust ahead to the line Dudovica-Topola.

#### Logistical problems

Unfortunately, arguing against this decision by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ was the fact that the supply services weren't keeping step with the front lines. Due to a lack of gravel and special building material, the technical troops and military worker detachments weren't able to make any lasting improvement to the road net even after exhausting all their strength. Rainy weather and heavy traffic had left the roads in hopeless condition as broad bands of mud.<sup>139</sup> After each new column of trucks or wagons passed by, repair work had to start again from scratch. Vehicles of all types sunk to their axles in the mud, and horses were being lost at an alarming rate. Similar difficulties were hampering the advance of the other commands. In 11<sup>th</sup> Army the artillery could move only an average of one kilometer per hour.<sup>140</sup>

Under these circumstance, on the 24<sup>th</sup> the XXII Res Corps asked 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to permit a brief halt in the fighting. Because of the general situation, however, Kövess couldn't agree with this request. Anyway it was hoped that the enormous difficulties

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139 GdA von Berendt, "Der General von der Artillerie bei einem Armee-Oberkommando" (Artilleristische Rundschau, year 1928, Berlin; p. 203

140 Gallwitz, p. 408

involving the supply services would soon be overcome.

The rear area command of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was striving to carry out the tasks needed to solve the problem. Despite energetic repair work, the destroyed railroad bridge over the Sava between Semlin and Belgrade would still not be usable for a long time; however, three military bridges crossed the border rivers at Semlin, Zabrez and Semendria. Storms often endangered traffic on these bridges, and traffic had to be halted for hours each day when they were opened to permit steamers to pass through. Nevertheless it proved possible to move supplies over the bridges (a fourth one was to be constructed over the Large Zigeuner Island) or by steamer to the southern banks of the Danube and Sava. Because of the undescribably poor condition of the roads used to carry supplies from the river banks to the vicinity of the front, it was urgently necessary to repair the existing light rail lines as quickly as possible. XIX Corps, which was based at Zabrez, wanted to open the line in the Kolubara valley using equipment shipped over the Sava. It was hoped that the line would be ready as far as Lajkovac on 28 October. From there a horse-drawn line would be established to Lazarevac by 2 November.

A second horse-drawn line would run from Grocka to Vk. Mladenovac where it would link up with the main Belgrade-Vk. Plana railroad, used to supply VIII Corps. Traffic on the main line, using the small amount of captured rolling stock plus locomotives and cars shipped over the rivers, could for now operate only to Ripanj; south of the town the high viaducts had been blown up, so that this stretch of track would be impassable for a long time. Beyond the gap, it was possible to move just 70 tons of supplies south per day on horse-drawn trains. A locomotive was needed to increase this capacity to 320 tons; it was planned to either bring one from Semendria through Vk. Plana to Vk. Mladenovac, or to take one apart and convey it there by road. In the Arangjelovac area, the light rail line running from Vk. Mladenovac wasn't open, so it would be necessary to bring supplies up with trucks or wagons; hopefully they would be able to sustain an advance past the line Boljkovci-Rudnik-Luznice.

The German supply services were also using the main rail line from Belgrade, so that XXII Res Corps would be able to thrust 30 km beyond Arangjelovac.

25 October

Thus 3<sup>rd</sup> Army resumed its advance early on 25 October. The detachment on the right wing of Group Sorsich reached Valjevo without fighting; the main body was held up several times by destroyed bridges, and didn't move past Ub. The Landsturm Hussars of XIX Corps were sent to scout west of the Kolubara; they crossed the river on a hastily-constructed bridge east of Lajkovac and pushed ahead to Zupanjac. They found that the area farther south was free of the enemy, so GM Schwarz's Brigade was ordered to Zupanjac. Detachments moved even farther south in the afternoon without meeting resistance. After a heavy artillery bombardment, the 21 Lst Mtn Bde drove the enemy back from the heights southeast of Lazarevac. 205 Lst Inf Bde entered this action farther east. The other troops of XIX Corps reached Vreoci. 26 German ID on the right wing of XXII Res Corps spent the day in heavy fighting for the positions on the heights south of Progoreoci, which dominated the road leading to Rudnik. In the evening the artillery of 205 Lst Inf Bde, which was the Württembergers' neighbor on the right, intervened in this action. 44 Res ID captured the enemy trenches east of Progoreoci. 43 Res ID took Arangjelovac and reached the heights south of the city, where Misic had bent back his right wing (Drina Div II).

While XXII Res Corps was thus heavily engaged on the 25<sup>th</sup> in a struggle with 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army for the stubbornly defended positions in the forests and hills by Progoreoci and Arangjelovac, the k.u.k. VIII Corps was able to advance easily. On 24 October the right wing of Gallwitz's Army had crossed the Jasenica at Palanka and thrust back Sumadija Div II, fighting on the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army, toward the Raca. Thus Zivkovic found himself outflanked, and in the night of 24-25 October he pulled back from the Kubrsnica to Natalinci-Topola. In front of 59 ID of the k.u.k. VIII Corps there were still some Serbian rear guards standing east of Arangjelovac. GM Hrozny didn't wait for the anticipated advance of the neighboring German 43 Res ID, scheduled to begin at 10:00 AM. He made an early attack on the enemy and his brave troops, supported by German artillery, were able to advance to the south bank of the upper Kubrsnica. 57 ID, which maintained contact with III German Corps (already advancing toward the Raca) reached the northeast edge of Topola and the heights north of Natalinci on the 25<sup>th</sup> without any substantial fighting.

Thus the right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which was supposed to envelop the Serbs, was starting to lag behind the left wing. Mackensen's HQ demanded that XXII Res Corps should advance quickly. For 26 October, GdI Kövess ordered that the entire

front should attack, with a strong right wing. FML Trollmann was advised that he should make his main effort on his west wing as long as necessary, *i.e.* as long as danger threatened from the area south and southwest of Lazarevac. It was believed that significant forces of the 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army were still at large in this area.

#### **d. Pursuit of the Serbs through the Rudnik Mountains, to 28 October**

Voivode Misic had meanwhile ordered the Sokol Brigade back from its position east of Valjevo to the Rudnik Pass, where it could cover the road to Grn. Milanovac. He wanted his other units - Drina Div II and Dunav Div II - to attack out of the woods on the Vencac Heights (Point 675, south of Arangjelovac) against the advancing left wing of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and to drive it back. However, the situation of Sumadija Div II forced Zivkovic to retreat further, to the area around the source of the Raca. Therefore Misic also had to pull back; on the 26<sup>th</sup>, under cover of stubborn rear guards, he retreated behind the upper Jasenic on the north edge of the Rudnik Mountains.

In the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup>, GdI Kövess received an order from Army Group HQ that 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies should continue to advance. For 3<sup>rd</sup> Army the next goal was the line Vujan Heights (south of Grn. Milanovac)-Cerovac (on the Arangjelovac-Kragujevac road); for 11<sup>th</sup> Army it was a line running from Vojinovac through Brzan and the heights east of the Morava valley to Drenovac # 277. To guard the right flank, XIX Corps would deploy in echelon and follow behind and to the right of XXII Res Corps through Ivanovci. While both wings were to advance very quickly in an attempt to encircle the Serbs at Kragujevac, the center was not supposed to hold back. Sharp pressure all along the line would make it impossible for the enemy to prepare organized resistance in new positions.

#### 26 October

In FML Sorsich's Group the two leading brigades - under Col. Franz (formerly Col. Ybl's) and GM Schiess - advanced on 26 October to the Kolubara between Lajkovac and Slovac. The main body of Group Streith moved through Ub, while parts under Col. von Hausser reached the area north of Valjevo (which had already been occupied on the 25<sup>th</sup> by advanced troops). The brigades of XIX Corps also reached the goals they'd been allotted on the 25<sup>th</sup> without fighting. By the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> the 53 ID (Lst Inf

Bde Schwarz, 20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes) was on both sides of the road at Dudovica; the other troops were following in the second line - 10 and 17 Mtn Bdes plus 205 Lst Inf Bde. The badly-supplied troops suffered greatly during the advance. Some of the light artillery came up during the day, drawn by over-worked horses; the last battery of the heavy artillery was still back at Zeleznik. FML Trollmann once again asked 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to be given the 27<sup>th</sup> as a day of rest. Since by order of Army Group HQ the XIX Corps was anyway supposed to deploy in echelon somewhat behind the main body, it seemed possible to grant this request.

26 ID on the right wing of XXII Res Corps had already taken some high ground from the Serbs during the night. Early in the day this Division overran an enemy rear guard, and in the afternoon reached Kalanjevci. The enemy fought 44 and 43 Res ID bitterly; the two German divisions reached a line north of Tresnjevica.

In VIII Corps on the 26<sup>th</sup> there was a tendency to have the left wing hold as a pivot, since while 3<sup>rd</sup> Army marched in the general direction of Kragujevac it would swing toward the left. 59 ID was to capture the heights west of Topola, while 57 ID only advanced somewhat with its right wing. To strengthen the Corps' right, FZM von Scheuchenstuel united all available heavy artillery (one cannon and four howitzer batteries) by 59 ID. FML Snjaric, now recovered from his wounds, led this Division ahead to the southern edge of Topola; they were supported by the artillery of 57 ID. Farther east some scouting detachments from 57 ID also gained ground. Haustein's Brigade moved up to Zagorica, Mrazek's Brigade to Beljevac.

In the evening of 26 October, all three corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army stood together in a straight line facing south. This situation, achieved after the slow advance of XIX Corps, was an improvement over the earlier deployment. Now the Army would have to pivot to the left to carry out Mackensen's orders. The intended deployment in depth on the western wing could be achieved by giving XIX Corps the day of rest they had requested. However, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ no longer felt that such a deployment was important, because reconnaissance indicated that there was no menace to the right wing. Group Sorsich, operating still farther to the right, was anyway available to provide security on this side.

#### 27 October

According to orders from Army HQ which FML Sorsich received early on 27 October, his Group was to "first concentrate at Valjevo." Implementation of this order was already under way;

the brigades of Streith, Franz and Schiess reached their objectives on the 27<sup>th</sup> without hindrance from the enemy. Col. Hausser's detachment pushed ahead to the area north of Bacevci. Cavalry patrols found the road to Rogacica free of the Serbs through a point half way to that town; on the roads to Uzice they didn't collide with a small enemy detachment until they were south of Razana.

XIX Corps restricted its activity on the 27<sup>th</sup> to sending out patrols, which observed the Serbian lines on Rajac ridge. The other troops of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army gained considerable ground on 27 October. XXII Res Corps was supposed to advance especially quickly with a strengthened right wing in order to envelop the enemy stationed in the Kragujevac area; however, neither the Army's center nor its left (east) wing would hold back. In accordance with these orders, XXII Res Corps advanced in the northwest part of the Rudnik Mountains, fighting against Serbian rear guards up to the line Rudnik (town)-Satornja. The advance of the right wing of the k.u.k. VIII didn't begin until the morning was passing, even though the Serbs had already abandoned their positions south of Topola in the preceding night. The Kamenica had suddenly become impassable due to high water, so that 59 ID had to be diverted west toward the upper course of the river; meanwhile some troops from XXII Res Corps had wandered too far to the east in the fog, causing serious delays as the units intermingled. Finally the 59 ID, in conjunction with 43 Res ID, made progress up to the northern edge of the Rudnik Mountains. Farther east the 57 ID advanced over the highly-swollen Jasenica and established a strong foothold on the heights south of the valley; they encountered almost no resistance. In front of VIII Corps the Serbs now held strong positions in the village of Vlakca and farther east in a line running south of the uppermost course of the Raca.

Early on 27 October, as Kövess was sending his main body forward into the Rudnik mountains, it began to rain heavily again after a four day interruption. Even the smaller water courses became substantial barriers; guns and supply and ammunition wagons became stuck on the deeply-rutted roads. XXII Res Corps reported that they would have to wait for the supply columns to catch up before resuming the march over the line Rudnik-Satornja, and that this would probably take two days.

On the other hand, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ believed it was possible to keep the advance going despite all difficulties, since they hoped that thorough exploitation of the local resources would alleviate the logistical problem. In any event, though, they

didn't expect that the troops engaged on the Army's right wing could live off the land in the Rudnik Mountains. In attempting to keep the offensive in motion, HQ didn't want to tax the units beyond their strength. This became clear from the Army order issued by GdI Kövess on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The leading brigades of XIX Corps should reach the area Banjani-Slavkovic, while the other troops kept in step. XXII Res and VIII Corps should stay on the enemy's heels if possible, or at least maintain contact with scouting detachments. Sorsich's Group would stay by Valjevo on the 28<sup>th</sup>, while reconnoitering to the south.

This plan was welcomed at Army Group HQ, which had learned that the Serbian national bank and government archives had been moved from Nish to Salonika shortly before the rail connection was broken, and then had gone to Monastir where the Serbian government also planned to establish themselves. Seven English and French transport vessels had arrived at Salonika harbor on 21 October, loaded with troops. Troop trains continued to roll north toward the Serbian border.<sup>141</sup> Because of these developments it seemed that a rapid decision at Kragujevac was essential. All forces must strive to take this militarily important point. To inspire the tired troops, GFM Mackensen announced that 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies had already linked up with the allied 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army; all three armies were making excellent progress, while the Danube flotilla was in front of Orsova, ready to break through the Iron Gates. The accomplishments of the k.u.k. VIII Corps were acknowledged, but further exertions were expected of this command. XXII Res Corps was advised that a two days' pause in its operations was out of the question, and that it must surmount its logistical difficulties. XIX Corps, deployed in echelon toward the right, should advance on Grn. Milanovac. FML Sorsich should move with his main body from Valjevo through Kozjerici, so that he could make contact with 62 ID in the area east of Uzice. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ had asked Teschen for cavalry to carry out scouting missions. Three squadrons of DR # 5 had arrived at Belgrade - one was sent through Lazarevac to XIX Corps, and the other two went to Group Sorsich. Six squadrons from other units were also on their way, and would make up a combined cavalry regiment under Col. von Bolla.

#### 28 October

Because of the orders already issued by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, FML Sorsich let his group stay by Valjevo on the 28<sup>th</sup>; his troops were dispersed so that they could more fully exploit the scanty local

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141 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p. 357

food resources. In the afternoon he received the order to march on Uzice and Cacak. Sorsich wanted to avoid a complete disruption in his supply services, and hoped that the Valjevo-Zabrez rail line would soon be open to traffic. Therefore for now he just made all necessary preparations to advance, to minimize the delay in carrying out his orders.

XIX Corps was again advancing on the 28<sup>th</sup>, but rain, the bottomless roads and flooding in the valleys hampered all movement. Therefore Trollmann's Corps, although it was not opposed at all by the enemy, achieved only some of its goals for the day, after great difficulties. Schwarz's Lst Inf Bde, sent through the upper Ljig valley to Slavkovica, had to overcome the greatest obstacles on the march. The destroyed bridges had to be rebuilt in the flooded valley, and the road made passable for artillery by numerous repairs and preparations. The first detachment didn't enter Slavkovica until late in the evening, and the other battalions arrived at intervals hours later. Because the troops were exhausted it wasn't possible to occupy the Rajac Ridge to ensure a connection with 53 ID (20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes), whose advance guard had reached Boljkovci; however, a side detachment from Schwarz's Brigade reached the Suvobor. 205 Lst Inf Bde and 10 and 17 Mtn Bdes found sorry campsites for the night in the Moravci area. The artillery followed far behind.

The k.u.k. units on the right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army weren't involved in any major fighting, and recently most of them were a long distance from the retreating enemy. Therefore it is necessary to explain why in the latest orders to Group Sorsich and XIX Corps they weren't expected to accomplish very much. The lower-ranking commanders had objected that, despite operational requirements, the logistical preparations were inadequate to avoid overtaxing the strength of the troops. Their units had been required to wage mobile warfare in this hour of need, although the high command was aware that their equipment was insufficient. Many Landsturm soldiers weren't able to cope with this type of campaign; there were numerous stragglers, including some who were barefoot. Moreover the XIX Corps was traversing territory in which catastrophe had overtaken an Aus-Hung. Army the year before. The logistical problems reminded officers at all levels of this debacle; therefore they wanted to remain alert and to avoid local setbacks by properly gauging the condition of their troops.

On the Serbian side, from 23 to 27 October Voivode Misic had still hoped that he could hurl 1<sup>st</sup> Army out of the Rudnik Mountains against the right wing of Kövess' Army; the Belgrade

Armeegruppe would have to make a stand north of the upper Jasenica to cover the assembly area. Although Putnik had already prepared orders on the 23<sup>rd</sup> for an eventual retreat to the Western Morava, on 25 October he approved Misic's decisions and even postponed the transfer of an infantry regiment to the sore-pressed "Southern Morava Group." On the next day, however, the plan for an offensive was abandoned because the Belgrade Armeegruppe had to retreat over the Jasenica. Even more threatening was a setback on the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army, where Sumadija Div I was thrown over the Raca and had to be hastily reinforced by an infantry regiment from the Belgrade Armeegruppe. It would be possible to strengthen the threatened sectors only by transferring units from Misic's 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Moreover, on 27 October the Serbian high command was forced to order Dunav Div II to move to Pristina to confront the Bulgarians who were menacing the Kossovo polje.<sup>142</sup>

On the next day (the 28<sup>th</sup>), XXII Res Corps dug in firmly in front of the positions of the widely-spread Drina Div II; 26 ID and parts of 44 Res ID drove the Sokol Brigade out of the Rudnik Pass. On the left wing of XXII Res Corps, 43 Res ID managed to capture a bridge over the swollen Srebrnica at Str. Selo Maslosevo. Opposite this Division the enemy was deployed in strength on the slopes of the southern bank of the river. The Germans were suffering due to insufficient supplies. Since the condition of the roads continued to deteriorate, many pieces of artillery had to be held back so that the wagons loaded with ammunition and rations north of the Lazarevac-Arangjelovac rail line could precede them to the front.

On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the 59 ID of k.u.k. VIII Corps pushed back Serbian outposts east of Satornja. The heights southwest of Vlakca, however, remained in the hands of the enemy. In the afternoon the 57 ID crossed the swampy ground along the Raca under enemy fire on quickly constructed bridges and was able to capture the slope south of the valley. For the time being it wasn't advisable to advance beyond this line, because the Serbs were holding their ground and their artillery could hit the flank of 57 ID from the heights south of Cumic. Far behind VIII Corps' front the Brigades of Mrazek and Haustein were repairing the roads at Topola and Natalinci.

The resistance which XXII Res and VIII Corps encountered on 28 October made it seem likely that the Serbs wanted to fight a decisive battle in front of Kragujevac. In an Army order issued

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142 Serbian Official History, Vol. X, p. 340

that evening, GdI Kövess urged both corps to keep the advance in motion despite all difficulties. The west wing, however, was still to be held back. There was lingering concern that the Serbs might counterattack in this sector, even though reconnaissance had already shown that the regiments of Drina Div II and Dunav Div II were stationed in front of the Army's center and therefore such defensive measures were hardly needed. A decision regarding the next objectives of the two western divisions of XXII Res Corps beyond Grn. Milanovac would be postponed until further information was gathered about the enemy. XXII Res Corps was to hold this town until the arrival of the first troops from XIX Corps. The advance of the latter corps would be contingent on that of the Germans. XIX Corps, "again deployed in echelon," would station itself "not more than 15 to 20 km from the right wing of XXII Res Corps." A column from Group Sorsich that was advancing from Mionica over the Suvobor Ridge could stay somewhat in the rear, but XIX Corps was instructed to have Sorsich's main body move quickly to the Pozega area. The road over the Maljen Ridge should be secured and contact established with 62 ID.

XIX Corps and Group Sorsich issued orders for the 29<sup>th</sup> to carry out these instructions. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ hoped that they could still make effective use of the troops who'd been hanging back on the wing, since the Serbs apparently had decided to make a stand in the Rudnik Mountains and farther east. However, the instructions sent by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> were already being overtaken by events.

### **e. Advance of Gallwitz's Army and the two Bulgarian Armies, 23-28 October**

#### The Germans

In Gallwitz's Army, the right hand column reached the town of Azanja on 23 October and established a connection with the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. III Corps came up to a line on both sides of Palanka. Farther east the IV Corps and X Res Corps advanced through Vk. Popovac and Ranovac. Step by step, the stubbornly fighting Serb defenders had to give up the soil of their homeland while suffering heavy losses.

According to the last orders of Army Group HQ, which aimed at encircling the Serbs in the center of their country, 11<sup>th</sup> Army was to turn to the southwest; advancing on both sides of the Morava, they were first to reach the line Saranovo-Svilajnac-Subotica. In pursuit of this goal, the right wing of Gallwitz's

Army thrust over the Raca, and the center reached Svilajnac and Bobovo. The strong left (east) wing advanced on both sides of the Mlava, took the heights 12 km southeast of Petrovac, and sent a detachment east toward Majdanpek in an attempt to occupy the local copper mines.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, Mackensen ordered the Army's east wing to shift sharply through Jagodina; the center should consider thrusting to Kragujevac along with Kövess.<sup>143</sup> However, this would force Gallwitz to equally reinforce both wings of his Army, which wouldn't be feasible until he secured the massif between the Morava and Resava.

Gallwitz already decided on 27 October to thrust toward Kragujevac, because the rapid advance of the eastern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had been of advantage to his own right wing, and also because weather conditions made it impossible for the troops on the left of 11<sup>th</sup> Army to envelop the enemy. For 28 October the Army commander ordered a division from IV Res Corps to join III Corps on the western bank of the Morava for a thrust to the south. On this day III Corps crossed the lower Lepenica, while the neighboring IV Res Corps took the heights along the line Radosin-Sedlari-Covdin. The Alpenkorps, which began to arrive at Ung. Weisskirchen on the 28<sup>th</sup>, would secure the left wing; part of this division-sized "Corps" was sent under Col von Below to Orsova.

Here Group Fülöpp had been shipped over the Danube on 23 October after a powerful bombardment, for which their own artillery was reinforced by German batteries. The Group easily took the heights on the southern bank from a small enemy force, since most of the Krajina Detachment had already moved to the Timok. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Fülöpp's leading troops reached the towns of Podvrška and Kladovo, which had been evacuated by the Serbs, and on the next day they linked up with Bulgarian cavalry at Brza Palanka. Now the Danube was opened up for direct contact between the allied armies. Minesweepers immediately appeared to clear the channels through the Iron Gates for the munition transports which already stood by to supply the Bulgarians and Turks.<sup>144</sup> Russian torpedo boats were lurking in Romanian waters between Turnul Severin and Prahovo, but withdrew after protests were lodged with the Romanian government.<sup>145</sup>

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143 Gallwitz, p. 416

144 This cargo of guns, ammunition and telephone equipment was eagerly awaited by the Bulgarians as well as the Turks.

145 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p. 356

### The Bulgarians

The right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army had taken Negotin on 24 October, and pushed against the Krajina Group which was withdrawing to the southwest. In front of 6 ID the enemy's Combined Div was still holding Zajecar, but the Serbian troops who'd been stubbornly defending Knjazevac (the Knjazevac Group and the newly formed Bucjan Group) had to give up the town on the 25<sup>th</sup> to 8 ID. On the same day farther south the 9 ID suffered a substantial defeat when the main body of 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army (Sumadija Div II and parts of Timok Div I) launched a powerful counterattack toward the east to protect Nish. On the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army, 1 ID was still fighting on the 26<sup>th</sup> for the heights south of Pirot. In the adjacent sector of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army a group in division strength under GM Ribarov was advancing north from Vranje toward Leskovac, which was defended by the "Southern Morava Group" of equal strength.

Although all these advances were encouraging to the allies, it still seemed that the fighting would be decided at Kragujevac before the right wing of the Bulgarians could advance through Zajecar to Paracin to envelop the Serbs from the southeast and south. Therefore on the 26<sup>th</sup> Mackensen asked the Bulgarian high command to reinforce the center of their 1<sup>st</sup> Army with a new division which they expected to form. If the Serbs still refused to evacuate Zajecar, the Bulgarian brigade engaged at Negotin could be reinforced by troops formerly with FML Fülöpp and by the German Alpenkorps; this whole group could advance against Zajecar from the north under the command of German Col Below. Fülöpp's other troops were mopping up the area along the bend in the Danube at Orsova, which was full of Serbian irregular bands, while guarding traffic on the Danube as well as the lines of communication of Below's detachment.

Meanwhile, however, the advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies from the north was taking effect. The Serbians began to retreat along their entire eastern front on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The Bulgarians (1<sup>st</sup> Army and Group Ribarov) advanced into Zajecar and Pirot, and pushed on toward Paracin, Nish and Leskovac.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army intended to continue its rapid advance to the west, which would cut the Serbs off from retreating to Skopje and throw them back into the mountains west of Kumanovo.<sup>146</sup> By the 28<sup>th</sup>, the 3 Bulgarian Division overcame weak Serbian

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146 Nedev, p. 8

resistance and took Kumanovo and Skopje, while parts of 7 ID reached Veles. The Orient Army was in a position to become a serious menace to the Bulgarian southern flank; reports, however, indicated that the 35,000 French and 15,000 English troops who'd landed at Salonika still weren't ready for major operations. As the Bulgarian Cavalry Division rode south from Stip, some of its soldiers encountered the leading elements of the French 57 ID in front of Krivolak; the French were staying in place to await the arrival of further units. On 27 October the British 10 ID finally received permission to enter Serbian territory, and was advancing to Doiran.

Thus Sarrail's army of about 50,000 men was deploying on a front 70 km long. Behind them near Salonika were strong Greek forces (I, III and IV Corps<sup>147</sup>), which were assuming an ever more hostile attitude and could threaten the lines of communication leading to the French-English front, as well as the security of Salonika as the principal supply base.

#### **f. The Battle of Kragujevac, 29 October-3 November**

In the night of 28-29 October, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ received an order from Army Group HQ. Mackensen stated that according to the latest reports there was little danger to the right flank, and that Group Sorsich should be strong enough to provide protection. XIX Corps therefore should drive to Cacak with all its strength; the cavalry which had been made available to the Corps should be sent to its right wing. It was becoming increasingly important to envelop the enemy through the valley of the Western Morava, and the operation had good prospects for success.

##### 29-30 October

To carry out these orders, FML Trollmann advanced toward Grn. Milanovac on 29 October. 10 Mtn Bde, deployed on the right wing of XIX Corps, reached Planinica, which was also the objective of 205 Lst Inf Bde. Lst Inf Bde Schwarz and 17 Mtn Bde came up to the area of Banjani. 20 Lst Mtn Bde, in advance of the rest of 53 ID, drove a smaller enemy force back at Kalimanici while repelling thrusts by the Sokol Brigade on its left flank.

Although only a small part of XIX Corps saw action on 29 October, its supply situation was deteriorating. The troops didn't get rations. The report by GM Pongracz regarding the

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147 Ibid., p. 22

needs of his brigades held true of the other units: "It is absolutely necessary to pause as soon as possible for several days so that the supply trains can catch up, the field bakeries established, and bread distributed to the troops." FML Trollmann, who'd been ordered to reach Cacak as quickly as possible, reported this miserable situation to the Army commander. He wanted to use the 30<sup>th</sup> to concentrate his troops in this difficult terrain and bring up the supply wagons. However, when he learned that the neighboring German 26 ID had advanced from the Rudnik Pass and was already approaching Grn. Milanovac, he decided to continue his own offensive. Nonetheless, he gave the various brigades only limited goals for the 30<sup>th</sup>.

On the right wing of XIX Corps, 10 Mtn Bde advanced to the Teocin area on 30 October. 17 Mtn Bde was supposed to attack so as to cut off the line of retreat of the enemy at Grn. Milanovac from the west, but couldn't break through. 20 Lst Mtn Bde, on the other hand, drove the Serbian rear guards from the heights northwest of Grn. Milanovac and captured six guns. In the last two days of fighting the Brigade had taken a total of 10 guns and 200 prisoners.

Meanwhile the right wing of XXII Res Corps (26 ID and parts of 44 Res ID) drove the Serbian Sokol Brigade from the heights south of Rudnik back to Grn. Milanovac on 29 October. On the same day the left wing (43 Res ID) captured the positions on the heights east of Rudnik Pass. In the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup>, the right wing of XXII Res Corps took Grn. Milanovac after heavy fighting, while Drina Div II was still holding the heights east of the town. At this time 43 Res ID was 10 km northeast of the Corps' right wing, after crossing the crest of the Rudnik Mountains.

The k.u.k. VIII Corps advanced against the Serbian positions on the uppermost Raca on the 29<sup>th</sup>, but could gain only a little ground because the enemy was using heavy artillery, and our own guns couldn't make an effective preliminary bombardment due to thick fog. During the day the Serbs even counterattacked the right wing of 59 ID. FZM Scheuchenstuel ordered the offensive to continue on the 30<sup>th</sup>. 59 ID would seek the decision, for which purpose it was given all the heavy artillery of VIII Corps and also the batteries of Lst Inf Bde Mrazek (which was in the second line). 57 ID would just pin down the enemy in their sector.

Because of heavy fog, the artillery bombardment early on the 30<sup>th</sup>

had to be postponed. After 9:00 AM it was determined that the Serbs had evacuated their positions, so FZM Scheuchenstuel let both his divisions advance on the heights of Cumic. From there the Serbian rear guards were driven back by cannon fire. The left wing of 57 ID now encountered heavier resistance as it advanced on the road to Kragujevac. These troops conquered the Sobovica Heights in a joint attack together with a side detachment of III German Corps.

The right wing of Gallwitz's Army took the heights north of Vojinovac on 29 October, but couldn't move further; they were hit by flanking fire because the eastern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army wasn't keeping pace. Under IV Res Corps, 105 ID was supposed to thrust toward Kragujevac; however, it was delayed in crossing the Morava because the bridge at Markovac was damaged. X Res Corps, whose opponents had pulled back during the night, advanced to the heights at Troponje, while its left wing came to the Resava at Subotica. Gallwitz hoped to gain further ground toward the south with this Corps, either against the flank of the enemy's main position at Kragujevac or against the Serbs who were withdrawing from the Bulgarians toward Paracin.<sup>148</sup> On 30 October the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army drove the enemy on both sides of the Lepenica back into their main positions, which were located just a few kilometers north of Kragujevac. The center corps moved through Brzan. The enemy was in greater strength than anticipated between the Morava and Resava, so X Res Corps wasn't able to advance past Vk. Popovic.

#### Army Group HQ plans for the next phase

It seemed that a decision was imminent. In the east the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was driving toward Paracin and Nish. In the valley of the Southern Morava the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army was blocking the road between the Serbs and the Entente troops. From the north Kövess and Gallwitz were pushing toward Kragujevac in a concentric attack. The right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army by Cacak was already nearing the valley of the Western Morava. The Serbian Army had only two choices - either to immediately withdraw into the trackless mountains in the southwest part of their country or to seek a decisive battle at Kragujevac. Thus the situation was favorable for Mackensen's plans. Now he had to strike the Serbs with quick and destructive blows, and to encircle them. For this purpose he issued the necessary orders on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

Group Sorsich was supposed to cover the right flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

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148 Gallwitz, p. 422

at Pozega and establish contact with 62 ID east of Visegrad. The k.u.k. XIX Corps on the Army's right wing would reach Cacak, whence it could move into the valley of the Western Morava toward Kraljevo; here the Austrians would be in the enemy's rear, making it impossible for them to withdraw to the southwest. The main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (XXII Res and VIII Corps) would complete the envelopment in the west, then thrust to the southeast past a line running from Guncati (23 km southeast of Grn. Milanovac) to the west edge of Kragujevac. 11<sup>th</sup> Army would make its main effort through Kragujevac, while the left wing east of the Morava carried out an envelopment movement to Cuprija. The Alpenkorps should enter the Morava valley. Below's Group, which was still at Brza Palanka (north of Negotin) would advance through Zlot to Paracin. 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was ordered to reach the line Paracin-Krusevac and then to intervene in the anticipated decisive battle at Kragujevac; this would complete the encirclement of the Serbian Army. The left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army would advance in the valley of the Southern Morava.

#### 31 October

On 31 October, however, XIX Corps didn't advance as quickly as the situation demanded. It couldn't even carry out its minimal objective, which was to bring at least a brigade forward to Cacak. Because of the poor roads and bad weather, it became even harder to supply the troops, who were already suffering from shortages. Therefore on the 31<sup>st</sup> FML Trollmann had to be content with bringing the main body of his Corps up to Grn. Milanovac and the area farther west.

In other sectors the eagerly awaited 31<sup>st</sup> of October also brought painful disappointment. XXII Res Corps took the heights east of Grn. Milanovac and its left wing pushed through Ramaca to the road leading to Kragujevac; unlike in earlier days, there was no stubborn resistance. The lack of resistance north of Kragujevac was all the more surprising because the Serbs were allowing the attackers to come so near to the country's only arsenal.

In VIII Corps, the 9 Mtn Bde of 59 ID moved up behind the quickly advancing 43 Res ID. 18 Mtn Bde, after light actions, kept pace with 43 Res ID as it moved south. 57 ID, without any major fighting, moved through Luznice and the area farther west toward the positions north of Kragujevac. Around noon the 2 Mtn Bde, hurrying along on its left wing, stormed an enemy strong point 7 km north of the city (on the road to Raca) in a sharp attack which netted 250 Serbian prisoners. Then the Brigade

pushed on to the heights at Divostin.

III Corps, fighting on the right wing of Gallwitz's Army, took the trenches on the north front of Kragujevac on 31 October without encountering great resistance. The center of the Army reached the heights running on both sides of the Morava valley north and east of Bagrdan, while the eastern wing was unable to achieve substantial success on the Resava, where the the Serbs were hanging on stubbornly.

During the day the thunder of explosions in Kragujevac could be heard clearly. The Serbs were destroying their ammunition supplies and the buildings of the arsenal. Most pilots reported that the enemy was retreating. Thus Mackensen's HQ, which had moved to Semendria on the 30<sup>th</sup>, were already aware by noon on the 31<sup>st</sup> that their hopes for a great victory wouldn't be fulfilled. Apparently the Serbs had recognized the danger facing them and were seeking to save the units assembled at Kragujevac by quickly retreating to the south. They were standing their ground desperately only in front of the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, to cover the withdrawal of the forces pulling back from the Bulgarians toward the southwest (Timok Armeegruppe and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army). Thus Mackensen's Army Group was confronted by a new situation. In the afternoon of the 31<sup>st</sup> the commander ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies to launch the most vigorous possible pursuit.

#### 1 November

Under XIX Corps on 1 November, only 20 Lst Mtn Bde encountered resistance; they were opposed on the heights west of Brgjani by rear guards from the Sokol Brigade. This Serbian brigade had to leave behind two guns and some prisoners due to the sudden retreat, because parts of 17 Mtn Bde had arrived in their flank and rear. A detachment of 17 Bde hurried ahead; they appeared in front of Cacak toward 1:00 PM, and an hour later they were joined by 10 Mtn Bde. By this time the Serbs were already evacuating the town and breaking up the Morava bridge behind them. The pursuers began to cross the river around 4:00 PM. 10 Mtn Bde and the advancing 20 Lst Mtn Bde spent the night at Cacak. Outposts were thrust ahead to the heights south and west of the town, and into the Morava valley. During this day the main body of XIX Corps didn't move past Grn. Milanovac. Montenegrin detachments appeared alongside the Serbian units identified by XIX Corps.

On 1 November the XXII Res Corps, without encountering the enemy, reached the heights northeast of Cacak and the area

around the entrance to the Gruza valley. Next to them the 59 ID, advancing on the right wing of the k.u.k. VIII Corps, came up to Zabojnica, also without fighting. A scouting detachment sent by the east wing of 57 ID pushed into Kragujevac, and at 8:00 AM hoisted the black-yellow standard over the barracks. This led to an unfriendly dispute between the allies, because earlier in the morning a deputation of the citizens had already surrendered the town in writing to the Germans and at 4:00 AM the first troops (from 25 Res ID) had entered Kragujevac to accept the submission of the intimidated population.<sup>149</sup>

In the afternoon 57 ID drove enemy rear guards from high ground at the southwest edge of Kragujevac, after a short but intense action. To their left the western wing of Gallwitz's Army (III Corps) moved its leading troops onto the heights south of the town. In heavy fighting, IV Res Corps reached the line of heights west of Bagrdan and the town itself, which the Serbs had made the key point of their position. The Serbs offered successful resistance in front of Gallwitz's eastern wing, around the source of the Resava, since they recognized the danger that the Germans could thrust toward Paracin.

From the latest reports, Mackensen's HQ received the impression that the Serbian northern armies, pressed together from three sides, were already in full retreat toward Kraljevo and Krusevac. Pilots reported that the area of Pozega and Cacak were empty of the enemy, and that traffic jams of Serbian wagons had developed in the valleys at Kraljevo, Cuprija, Stalac and Nish. The enemy was obviously concentrating in strength at Kraljevo, Krusevac and Aleksinac; according to prisoners, they intended to offer new resistance south of these towns.

Because the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army had gained little ground, there was hardly any more hope that their right wing could join the fighting at Kragujevac before it ended. Now it seemed that a breakthrough was more desirable farther south, toward Aleksinac and Nish; therefore on 25 October Mackensen had already sought to have the Bulgarian high command send a projected new division in this direction. It was hoped that this would also force the Serbs to evacuate Zajecar.

Meanwhile, however, the success of the allied main body was also having an effect on the Bulgarian front, where the Serbs retreated at Zajecar and Pirot on 27 October. They pulled back slowly, fighting rear guard actions, so that the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian

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149 Gallwitz, pp. 425 ff.

Army didn't reach the line Osnic-Suman Topla-Izvor-Vrandol-Dol until 31 October. Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, the 3 ID was deployed in several groups on the line Vranje-Gnjilane-Varos, to keep the Serbs from breaking through to the south. 7 ID was watching in the direction of Salonika. On 30 October one of its brigades took Veles and the heights farther west; on the 31<sup>st</sup> the Division occupied Gradsko and the important railroad bridge over the Cerna. The Cavalry Division, whose detachments in front of Krivolak had been relieved by infantry, followed the retreating Serbian troops from the Vardar toward Prilep. 5 ID and the Macedonian 11 ID, whose main bodies were already at Kumanovo and Stip (respectively), were placed under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 1 November. 5 ID would thrust toward Pristina while 11 ID helped protect Macedonia from attacks by the Army of the Orient.

#### **g. The Serbian high command decides to retreat, 31 October**

On 29 October the Serbian high command was still urging General Sarraill to quickly send his French troops through Veles and the Ovce polje toward Skopje, and Putnik hoped that some of his units could thrust from the Kossovo polje to the southeast and establish contact with his allies. For this purpose he had ordered Dunav Div II (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army) and Morava Div I (from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army) to Pristina. However, he had to temporarily postpone weakening 1<sup>st</sup> Army because of the threatening situation on the northern front. The Timok Armeegruppe (with the Bucjan group) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (with the new Svodj group) were forced after hard fighting to give in to the overwhelming pressure of the Bulgarians; they withdrew fighting between the Timok and Morava toward Paracin and Nish. While the principal fronts were thus pulling back, there was increasing danger on the outer wings; on one side Mackensen was already prepared to close the most important entrance into the Western Morava Valley at Cacak, while on the other the Bulgarians threatened to cut the route to Bitolj and Durazzo by thrusting toward the Kossovo polje.<sup>150</sup>

When the allies' united front approached Kragujevac on 31 October, Putnik had to issue preliminary orders for a forced retreat. 1<sup>st</sup> Army would withdraw through Kraljevo and the Ibar valley to Raska, the Belgrade Armeegruppe through Krusevac and Kursumlija to Prepolac, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the Timok Armeegruppe through Paracin, Razanj and Ribare to Grebac (north of Prokuplje). Temporary resistance would be offered at Kraljevo

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150 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, p. 18

and the point where the two Morava Rivers come together; this would win time for the supply and ammunition columns to retreat from the valley of the Western Morava and from Nish. Voivode Putnik envisioned a bold maneuver for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Their northern wing would stay in the area west of Nish until the Timok Armeegruppe and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army reached Prokuplje. Then 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would quickly pivot to the south in order to block the route from Leskovac through Lebane to Pristina.<sup>151</sup>

For Putnik, this difficult decision meant giving up the entire central portion of Serbia, which was vital for maintaining national resistance. This was the area in which fortune had turned in favor of the Serbs eleven months earlier. Now the only chance was that resistance might be resumed southwest of the deep valleys of the Western and Southern Morava. But even this deployment of the Serbian armies on the northeast edge of the barren mountains which stretched from Pozega toward Vranje was already seriously endangered by the advance of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army on the southern flank. Only quick intervention by the Anglo-French Salonika Army could dispel this danger.

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151 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, pp. 67 ff.

## 5. The second encirclement attempt, 2-6 November

### a. The allies advance to the two Morava Rivers

As ordered by Putnik, on 1 November the Drina Div II (of 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army) pulled back from the eastern wing of Kövess' Army (57 and 59 ID, 43 Res ID); while fighting rear guard actions, the Serbs reached the heights running southwest of Kragujevac to a point south of Knic. Dunav Div II, again placed under Voivode Mistic, took up a position on the northern slope of Kotlenik Mountain. The Sokol Brigade, which had been thrown out of Grn. Milanovac by 26 ID, retreated to the heights along the valley east of Cacak.<sup>152</sup> In front of XIX Corps the Uzice Group, which had moved through Pozega, was instructed to cover the Army's flank by deploying on the heights south of Cacak with a detached battalion at Ivanjica. When the Austro-Hungarians crossed the Morava at Cacak, causing a panic among the Serbian supply trains jammed into Slatina, Mistic assembled a regiment from Dunav Div II and sent it to counterattack toward Cacak along with the Uzice Group.

To be more quickly ready for a decisive thrust in the Morava valley, FML Trollmann had meanwhile suggested to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ that he should let the two brigades which were already lagging behind (205 Inf and Schwarz's Lst Inf) stay in place; they would give up their supply support to the brigades already at the front. GdI Kövess concurred, so early on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Trollmann ordered 21 Lst Mtn and 17 Mtn Bdes to advance in the area directly north of Cacak. 10 Mtn and 20 Lst Mtn Bdes should be ready to repulse enemy counterattacks on the heights south and east of the town, where Serbian infantry was appearing. Ongoing reports from aerial reconnaissance gave 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ hope that they could intercept the fleeing Serbian supply columns in the Morava valley. On 1 November GdI Kövess had already ordered XIX Corps to have 10 Mtn and 20 Lst Mtn Bdes advance along the Southern Morava toward Kraljevo, and that the brigades farther back should move ahead as quickly as possible. XXII Res and VIII Corps would continue to advance to the line Bresnica-Grosnica. GFM Mackensen agreed with these instructions, but also ordered that the advance on Kraljevo should be carried out by the leading brigade of XIX Corps south of the Morava while 26 ID attacked north of the river. At the end of the orders from Army Group HQ he stated: "It is of decisive importance to quickly

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152 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, pp. 74 ff.

reach Kraljevo and there to cut the enemy off from his escape route to the south." 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ passed on this command to XIX Corps, with the addition that the troops should "live off the land" so they wouldn't be dependent on their supply services. Mackensen and Kövess hoped that by such measures the main body of the Serbian northern army could still be encircled around the confluence of the Western and Southern Morava Rivers.

## 2 November

However, in the night of 1-2 November XIX Corps received a report from GM Pongracz which made it seem doubtful that his brigades would be immediately available in the Cacak area. The first three battalions of 20 Lst Mtn Bde had arrived at Cacak without any vehicles, because it would be necessary to make the roads passable for artillery and wagons. Even the infantry couldn't cross the Morava until the afternoon.

Around 12:30 PM, FML Trollmann ordered that at least the cavalry which had arrived at Cacak should be pushed ahead toward Kraljevo, along with some infantry and machine guns on wagons and a mobile artillery section; they might be able to sow confusion among the Serbian supply trains massed in this area. However, even this plan couldn't be carried out, since neither cavalry nor artillery could get over the river. GM Edler von Droffa, the commander of 10 Mtn Bde, wanted to send the available parts of 10 and 20 Mtn Bdes as far ahead toward Kraljevo as possible, if their strength permitted. 17 and 21 Mtn Bdes would continue to move up to Cacak. The transfer of supply services to the front-line units from the two brigades left behind (Schwarz's and 205 Inf) did help the logistical situation somewhat, but the depots containing the necessary provisions were still a whole day's march behind the lines.

Despite these enormous logistical problems, FML Trollmann with the consent of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ ordered that the strongest available detachments, "if possible a brigade," should advance under one commander toward Kraljevo "to the extent which is permitted by the condition of the troops." Meanwhile Serbian artillery had opened fire on 10 Mtn Bde on the heights south of Cacak. The crossing of the Morava at Cacak wouldn't be open for pack-animals until 10:30 AM and for mobile batteries until almost evening. Col Günste, the Chief of Staff of XIX Corps, therefore objected against the orders he'd received. However, since Army Group HQ had indicated that the advance of the right wing to Kraljevo was of decisive importance, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ insisted that XIX Corps should make an extreme effort, even if there was a

danger that "half the troops would be left behind."

Soon after 20 Lst Mtn Bde marched toward Zablace-Slatina, leaving 10 Mtn Bde on the heights south of Cacak to guard the crossing-point, the latter unit was unsuccessfully attacked by the Serbian Uzice Group. The Serbs however, were able to bring 20 Lst Mtn Bde to a halt west of Zablace. In the evening the Brigade even had to withdraw toward Cacak, and was reinforced by parts of 17 and 21 Mtn Bdes.

Army Group HQ was still pushing the western wing to be very aggressive; in the afternoon an order arrived at 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ that Group Sorsich should unite at Pozega and the brigades of XIX Corps which had remained behind would do the same at Cacak. "The advance on Kraljevo must remain in motion." 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ could only pass this order on to their subordinates. FML Trollmann intended on 3 November to have 20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes move as close as possible to Kraljevo; 10 Mtn Bde would throw back the enemy south of Cacak and cover the flank of XIX Corps. Therefore all the heavy batteries which had arrived at Cacak were placed under 10 Bde. 17 Mtn Bde would stay at Cacak as the Corps' reserve, and would be joined by Schwarz's Brigade. 205 Lst Inf Bde should also move somewhat closer to the front.

East of XIX Corps, on 2 November the German XXII Res Corps sought to secure the Cacak-Kragujevac road, whence it would work its way into the Morava valley. South of Bresnica the 26 ID encountered the Serbian Sokol Brigade and Dunav Div II, whose resistance it was unable to break during the day. While 44 Res ID hung back somewhat, 43 Res ID came up against the positions of Dunav Div II in the area southwest of Knic. Advanced troops of 43 Res ID had fallen upon an enemy camp southeast of this town during the morning. The Serbs attempted to counterattack from three sides but were bloodily repulsed; the German brought in 350 prisoners and captured four guns. Their leading detachment moved further into the Gruza valley, but became heavily engaged with the left wing of Drina Div II, who wouldn't give up any further ground.

Under VIII Corps the leading troops of 59 ID northeast of Knic reached the road leading to Kragujevac. Covered by rear guards, the right wing of Drina Div II pulled out of this area. Stubborn fighting was meanwhile going on in the forested mountains south of Kragujevac, where Zivkovic's Group were firmly standing their ground. 57 ID attacked the left wing of this Serbian army detachment, but gained only a little ground in toilsome fighting.

The 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, now opposed by the Belgrade Armeegruppe in addition to 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army, was also able to gain just a little ground on 2 November; they even had to hold off a sharp attack against their eastern wing.

The German Alpenkorps reached the Svilajnac area; they were no longer needed in the mountainous northeast corner of Serbia, since this area had meanwhile been cleared of the enemy and a firm connection established with the Bulgarians. Therefore GdA Gallwitz no longer felt it was urgent to reinforce his eastern wing and decided to shift the Alpenkorps to the portion of his front west of the Morava; here they could push toward Krusevac and interfere with the Serbs who were retreating from the Bulgarians.<sup>153</sup>

### 3 November

In the night of 2-3 November, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ received Mackensen's orders for the pursuit into the mountains south of the Morava. Group Sorsich, which meanwhile had reached the area north of Pozega, should advance through this town to Ivanjica. Hausser's Lst Eta Bde, detached from Sorsich and sent toward Uzice to link up with 62 ID, was assigned along with the two Landsturm brigades which had been held back (205 and Schwarz) to create Group Reinöhl; they would provide security toward the west. The 10 and 17 Mtn Bdes, as GM Drofffa's Group, would thrust through the mountains to Ivanjica. GM Pongracz's 53 ID (20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes) would advance to Kraljevo, which was also the objective of 26 ID and 44 Res ID of XXII Res Corps. 43 Res ID would advance through the Gruza valley farther east. VIII Corps would envelop the left wing of Zivkovic's Armeegruppe, which was still holding its ground in front of the German III Corps. The combined cavalry regiment, which had assembled at Semlin, was sent to Cacak.

In these orders the Army Group HQ was still addressing the possibility that XXII Res and VIII Corps might be able to pin down the bulk of the Serbian forces opposite 11<sup>th</sup> Army by an advance in the Morava valley. This hope, however, wouldn't be fulfilled.

In the night of 2-3 November the 10 Mtn Bde was attacked by parts of the Uzice Group south of Cacak; therefore GM Drofffa's Group couldn't start their own offensive on the heights

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153 Gallwitz, p. 428

southwest of Cacak until 1:00 PM, after artillery preparation and re-deployment of the infantry. After a hot action the Serbs' left wing was pushed back, but they still held onto a ridge south of Cacak. Early in the day the 53 ID had already advanced its left wing in the Morava valley toward Zablace; the right wing was held back so that it could coordinate its attack with Group Drofffa. Around 10:00 AM a Serbian thrust against the parts of 20 Lst Mtn Bde which had moved down the road toward Zablace had to be repulsed with fire from all available artillery. GM Pongracz had to bring order to his scattered formations, then in the afternoon attacked along with Drofffa's neighboring group. The enemy soon halted his right wing (21 Lst Mtn Bde). Meanwhile the left wing (20 Lst Mtn Bde) had to pull back due to pressure from a larger Serbian force. The hard-pressed 20 Lst Mtn Bde was reinforced by parts of 17 Mtn Bde and was able to hold off further enemy counterattacks which lasted until the night.

XXII Res Corps also saw heavy fighting on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. On the right wing, 26 ID couldn't push into the Morava valley over the heights at Tavnik, which were defended by the Sokol Brigade. In a fierce action, 44 Res ID took the northern part of the Kotlenik Heights from Dunav Div II, while 43 Res ID moved forward in the Gruza valley behind rear guards of Drina Div II.

In front of the k.u.k. VIII Corps and the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army the Serbs (Belgrade Armeegruppe, reinforced by Sumadija Div I) pulled back in the night of 2-3 November. 57 and 59 ID pushed into the trackless mountains south of Kragujevac past the area around Grosnica without encountering the enemy.

Under 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, III Corps sent both its divisions (25 Res and 6 ID) along the road through Sabanta so that they could move faster; they reached the heights south of Sabanta which extended to Slatina. The leading troops of 11 Bav ID (of IV Res Corps) came up to the area farther northeast; 105 ID advanced from Bagrdan to Jagodina and took many prisoners. East of the Morava the 107 and 103 ID reached a point 10 km from Cuprija. 101 ID, on the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, was lagging somewhat behind, but on the 3<sup>rd</sup> the enemy also withdrew in their sector. The Serbs were still offering desperate resistance only in the mountains between the Timok and the Morava, against the advancing Bulgarians; apparently they were trying to gain time for their northern armies to retreat over the Western Morava.

In this situation, GFM Mackensen sent orders to his Armies in

the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, exhorting them again to pursue without tiring. 11<sup>th</sup> Army should advance ruthlessly from north to south up to the line Vk. Drenova-Krusevac-Aleksinac, thus cutting off the enemy who were opposing the right wing and center of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army. As already ordered, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should send XXII Res Corps quickly into the valley of the Western Morava, and then downstream into the rear of the Serbs who were pulling back from Kragujevac. As soon as XXII Res and III Corps came together, the k.u.k. VIII Corps would be squeezed out of this sector and would pull its troops behind the left wing of XXII Res Corps.

The mission of XIX Corps was still to advance in headlong pursuit from Cacak to Kraljevo, and along with Group Sorsich to move through the mountains south of the Western Morava to Ivanjica; Lst Inf Bde Schwarz, originally ordered to Uzice, was now to join this operation instead. FML Sorsich had wanted to stay by Pozega because of the condition of his troops, who were very poorly clothed and in some cases lacked shoes, but had joined the advance. Because so many bridges were destroyed, he didn't reach the area just south of Pozega until late on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. For the 4<sup>th</sup>, Sorsich wished to move ahead only to the heights north of Arilje, and there to await the arrival of XIX Corps on the Bjelicabach. The Feldmarschalleutnant commanded just 7800 riflemen, most of them Landsturm troops who'd been equipped and trained only for service on the lines of communication, plus 27 obsolescent guns; with this force he was expected to conduct a difficult mobile campaign in the mountains. Sorsich also was unaware of the situation at Cacak.

#### 4 November

The enemy was very concerned about the advance of parts of Trollmann's Corps through Cacak to the south bank of the Western Morava. To prevent possible envelopment from the west, Misic decided in the night of 3-4 November to pull 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army back over the Morava to the heights south of Kraljevo.<sup>154</sup> The Uzice Group on the heights south of Kaculice would guard the roads to Kraljevo and into the Ibar valley.

In the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>, FML Sorsich learned that the enemy had begun to retreat from XIX Corps. Naturally his decision to halt on the heights north of Arilje had been overtaken by events. Around noon Sorsich sent patrols from Lst Eta Bde Franz and two companies of picked men from Brigade Streith to cut the enemy

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154 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, p. 125

off from retreat on the road to Ivanjica. The main body of his Group (Brigades Streith, Schiess and Franz) would follow these advance guards. The operation was hampered, however, by the difficulty of bringing supplies through the flooded basin around Pozega and the surrounding mountains, so that Sorsich wasn't able to reach the Stupcevici area until the 5<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile the detachments he'd sent ahead had encountered the principal Serbian position south of Stupcevici, where it blocked the road to Ivanjica. Similarly, the scouting detachments of Brigade Hausser found the routes leading south from Uzice blocked by the enemy at Mackat and Zbojstica. On the other hand, contact was established with 62 ID over the Sargan Ridge.

Although GdI Kövess urged a rapid advance early on the 4<sup>th</sup>, on this day the XIX Corps was unable to win as much ground as desired toward either Kraljevo or Ivanjica. The Serbs had left only some weak rear guards to offer resistance, but the poorly supplied Austrian troops were exhausted after their first serious action. Therefore FML Trollmann set only limited goals for their attack. GM Drofffa's Group (10 and 17 Mtn Bdes) were hit as they advanced by Serbian artillery from the southwest, and didn't get over the Brezjak Heights during the 4<sup>th</sup>. GM Pongracz's Group (20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes) had been fighting in the valley southeast of Cacak for 36 hours. Now they could only send some detachments to follow the retreating enemy, because parts of 20 Lst Mtn Bde were no longer fit for combat due to heavy casualties; several batteries had used up almost all their ammunition, and the munition columns were empty.

## **b. The Serbs evacuate the Morava barriers**

### Heavy fighting south of Cacak

Most of Group Drofffa reached Zivica on the 5<sup>th</sup>; a column on the left advanced over the ridge of the Jelica planina, but encountered some strongly-entrenched Serbs who stubbornly held up the attack. GM Pongracz had sent two battalions and two mountain batteries from 21 Lst Mtn Bde against a height southwest of Kaculice, and 20 Lst Mtn Bde along the road toward Slatina; the rest of 21 Lst Mtn Bde and the heavy artillery were to move to Zablace as the Division's reserve. While the column on the right of Group Pongracz made its way up to the enemy positions west of Kaculice, 20 Lst Mtn Bde pushed the enemy back toward Slatina in heavy fighting. In the evening the left wing of this battle group got in trouble when it came up against freshly-deployed Serbian units.

This advance of the enemy against the left wing of 53 ID, and especially the march of an enemy column from Kraljevo which was reported in the afternoon, led XIX Corps HQ to believe that the Serbs would mount a larger counterattack on Cacak. Therefore FML Trollmann asked for the return of Lst Inf Bde Schwarz (which had been sent to Pozega), and requested the neighboring 26 German ID to place the Slatina area under artillery fire.

This fear of a setback was caused also by the very miserable logistical situation of XIX Corps. Supplies had to get to the Corps from the railroad station at Slovac (northeast of Valjevo) on wagons - some drawn by oxen - along wretched roads stretching for 100 km through the mountains. There had been nine columns of wagons, but one had already been broken up due to wear and tear, and the others had lost many horses and vehicles. A field rail line was being built from Lajkovac toward Cacak, but by 5 November it had only reached Moravci, still 50 km from its goal. Thus in the last few days the troops had been fed only intermittently as rations arrived at Cacak. It was urgently necessary to accumulate some reserve food before the units pushed further into the mountains, where it would be impossible to live off the land. It would also be necessary to immediately bring up clothing for cold weather. Recently the transport of ammunition had been given priority over rations. It is no wonder that the performance of the troops was adversely affected. FML Trollmann felt it was his duty to very urgently request that operations should be suspended until he could make good the deficiencies in equipment and supplies.

#### The allies approach the confluence of the Morava Rivers

On the Serbian side, the rear guards of 1<sup>st</sup> Army were fighting desperately against their opponents pushing down from the north, so that the bulk of their forces could get over the bridges at Kraljevo. In the afternoon the leading troops of 26 ID and 44 Res ID, advancing on the Mrcajevci-Kraljevo road, took an important height from the Serbian rear guards. 26 ID was strung out for a considerable distance along the road, and its advance guard wasn't able to push into the Morava valley on the 4<sup>th</sup>. 43 Res ID, however, stormed a position that was blocking the Gruza valley, took 1200 Serb prisoners, and in the evening was just a few kilometers from the valley.

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, the 26 ID and 44 Res ID came up to the Morava on both sides of Milocaj; they found the south bank occupied, and were unable to cross the river under crossfire from Serbian

batteries. Toward noon the first men from 43 Res ID, which was advancing through the Gruza valley and the heights north of the river, reached the banks of the Morava west of Vitanovac and farther downstream. Field howitzers fired on the Kraljevo railroad station, where there was still busy traffic.

Meanwhile the k.u.k. VIII Corps also came up to the Morava. The two divisions of Scheuchenstuel's Corps had pursued the Serbs over the low ridges south of Kragujevac on 4 November. After light fighting with rear guards, 59 ID took the heights at Godacica; 57 ID, moving cross country on rugged paths, reached the area west of Zupanjevac. On the next day (the 5<sup>th</sup>), the pursuing columns of 59 ID entered the Morava valley - 9 Mtn Bde reached the river east of Vitanovac around noon, 18 Mtn Bde at Stubal in the afternoon. Their guns opened fire on the heights south of the river, but the Serbs didn't reply. In front of 57 ID, whose tired troops reached the Prevest area, strong columns were observed marching toward Medvegje.

The majority of Gallwitz's Army moved forward in pursuit on 4 November. Some enemy rear guards tried to halt them, but most of them were driven off after brief actions. In the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army was standing roughly on the line Belusic-Obrez-Izvor (15 km east of Paracin). The area farther east was free of the enemy, so contact was maintained with the right wing of 6 Bulgarian ID.

The Serbian 1<sup>st</sup> Army had avoided the planned envelopment by XXII Res Corps by retreating in time to Kraljevo. However, Mackensen still hoped to pin down the enemy units stationed north of Medvegje-Krusevac-Razanaj (the Belgrade Armeegruppe and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army) in the flank and rear. Therefore around noon on the 5<sup>th</sup> he ordered GdI Kövess to have XXII Res Corps thrust down the valley of the Western Morava deep into the crowd of Serbian troops and wagons; only the cavalry and some small mixed detachments would continue the pursuit on the roads leading south and southwest from Kraljevo. VIII Corps would assemble behind 43 Res ID on the road to Kraljevo, so that it could again be sent to the south. The Corps would be joined by Mrazek's Brigade, which was coming up through Kragujevac.

GdI Kövess first intended to take the bridges on the Morava east of Kraljevo. He issued the necessary orders at 1:00 PM. At the same time measures were taken to direct the march of XXII Res Corps to the east and of VIII Corps to the west; they would govern the movement of the columns to avoid traffic jams and to ease the difficult crossing of the Morava bridges. XXII Res

Corps should have 26 ID and 44 Res ID advance through Kraljevo, while 43 Res ID was still moving north of the Morava. However, parts of 43 Res ID would first have to shift to the west; they would take Kraljevo and thus open the way over the Morava for the rest of XXII Res Corps.

To keep the allies from crossing the river, Misic ordered on 5 November that Dunav Div II, placed under the Uzice Group, should attack XIX Corps on the Jelica planina and drive it back to Cacak, while Drina Div II held the Morava at Kraljevo. Implementation of this plan soon became impossible, however, because the Morava bridge east of Kraljevo was stormed by parts of 43 Res ID in the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>. The Germans' advance wasn't halted by the desperately fighting Drina Div II until they were in front of the town itself. In this situation, Misic decided to defend the heights on both sides of the northern Ibar valley; the Serbian high command ordered him to also secure the routes leading southeast from Ivanjica toward Uzce with an infantry regiment.<sup>155</sup>

#### Mackensen's plans as of 5 November

Based on reports which had arrived at the HQ in Semendria in the last few days, Mackensen's staff felt that the Serbs in front of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies were already retreating south of the river barriers on the line Kraljevo-Krusevac-Aleksinac. There were many signs that the Serbian Army was starting to disintegrate.

In the first days of November, the hitherto stubborn resistance of the Serbs was also diminishing on the Bulgarian front. The northern (right) wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army reached Lukovo on the 4<sup>th</sup>. The center thrust toward the Nish basin, where the Serbs abandoned their forward positions on the north and east side of the fortress after heavy fighting. Part of 1 Bulgarian ID was also advancing toward Nish from Pirot in continuous action. The main body of 1 ID was moving toward Leskovac, and a group from 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army was already within 14 km of this town. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army advanced to Krivivir and made contact with German troops toward Paracin. The Bulgarians' 9 and parts of 8 ID occupied Nish, which the Serbs had evacuated. 1 ID, on the other hand, encountered hefty resistance east of Leskovac. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army had to repulse Serbian attacks at Prilep and Veles, as well as a French attack south of Strumica; the Bulgarian high command reported that their force in this area wasn't large enough to win a

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155 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, pp. 172 ff.

decisive success. However, it didn't seem advisable to reinforce the troops engaged at Strumica with 2 ID (stationed farther east in the Struma valley) because of logistical problems.

Mackensen's plan was to continue the pursuit and concentric advance from the north and east, by which the enemy would be cut off and destroyed in the mountains southwest of the two Morava Rivers. Army Group HQ ordered in the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> that the k.u.k. 62 ID with two brigades from XIX Corps should protect the right flank on the line Visegrad-Uzice-Pozega and push back their Montenegrin opponents to Nova varos. 53 ID (20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes) would continue its attempt to advance east in the valley of the Western Morava. The other brigades of XIX Corps and Group Sorsich would unite in the Ivanjica area and then advance to Sjenica. As already ordered, XXII Res Corps would advance through the valley of the Western Morava toward Krusevac; they would cut off the Serbian units north of the river and make contact with III German Corps. The k.u.k. VIII Corps would advance through Kraljevo to Novibazar. When Col Bolla's cavalry regiment arrived, its deployment would be decided by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ.

Under 11<sup>th</sup> Army, a division of X Res Corps would thrust to Aleksinac to intercept the enemy troops retreating from 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army. The Corps would advance with its other divisions to Aleksandrovac. III Corps and IV Res Corps, along with the Alpenkorps (which was now south of Kragujevac) would reach the Trstenik-Krusevac road.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was ordered to advance its right wing through Krusevac to Kursumlija, the center to Prokuplje, and the left-wing division to Leskovac, in order to cut off as many of the enemy as possible on the Southern Morava. Then detachments would be sent southwest toward Novibazar and Mitrovica to continue the pursuit. Most importantly, the units of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army south of Pristina and at Vranje would prevent the Serbs from breaking through south to the Entente troops.

#### The capture of Kraljevo

The first objective of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ was to quickly take Kraljevo. Therefore, despite the orders from Semendria they decided to keep up the pressure on the western flank of the Serbian Morava front by parts of XIX Corps, and allowed 43 Res ID to continue attacking toward Kraljevo. The planned switch in positions between XXII Res and VIII Corps was also running into objections

in Teschen and at the HQ of the German OHL. When Falkenhayn learned during the 5<sup>th</sup> that Nish had fallen, he exhorted GFM Mackensen to avoid any delay in the operations. Therefore in the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> Mackensen issued orders that altered his original instructions: the immediate task of XXII Res Corps was to take possession of Kraljevo and the southern bank of the Morava. The enemy in this sector should be driven back and pursued on both sides of the Kraljevo-Raska road. VIII Corps would continue to advance toward the Morava valley, and its right wing would pursue through Trstenik.

Meanwhile events were unfolding quickly at the front. The foremost troops of FML Sorsich's group occupied the heights on both sides of the Moravica at Radaljevo on the 6<sup>th</sup>. In XIX Corps' sector, the Serbian Uzice Group covered its retreat by launching a powerful thrust against the right wing of the k.u.k. 53 ID during the night. On the next day the battalions of 10 Mtn Bde climbed the heights west of the Kaculice, which had been left empty, and 53 ID moved down the Morava valley to Slatina to make it easier for XXII Res Corps to cross at Kraljevo. The many bodies which littered the battlefield of the day before bore witness to the bitterness of the latest fighting.

On the right wing of XXII Res Corps, the Serbs prevented 26 ID from crossing the Morava at Milocaj until the afternoon. However, the leading brigade of 44 Res ID had already moved forward to the northern edge of Kraljevo during the morning. German detachments took the town in stubborn street fighting; they also captured 130 guns, a great amount of ammunition and other military equipment. Although all the Morava bridges at Kraljevo had been destroyed, this brigade of 44 Res ID was able during the afternoon to set foot on the southern bank of the Ibar, which in places could be forded. Moreover, parts of the brigade had attacked toward the west, where 26 ID appeared in the evening after fighting its way over the Morava at the Milocaj bridge. The second brigade of 44 Res ID crossed the river above Kraljevo. The advance guard of VIII Corps' 59 ID had reached Stubal; during the 6<sup>th</sup> they were joined by the rest of the Division, which meanwhile fired its artillery throughout the day to support the actions of the neighboring 43 Res ID. The leading troops of 57 ID reached the Morava valley at Trstenik. The bridges in this town were blown up by the Serbs when the first patrols approached.

#### Actions against the Montenegrins

While Kövess' and Gallwitz's Armies were advancing toward the

Kraljevo-Krusevac sector, 62 ID was still pinned down by the Montenegrins near Visegrad. FML Kalser had to let the Drina bridges break up on 27 October due to high water. Therefore the reinforcements released by the k.u.k. high command (Col Zhuber's group) and the remainder of the supply wagons couldn't be brought over the river. The troops fighting on the heights along the border were issued only half their normal rations, and were already suffering from inclement weather.

Despite these increasing difficulties, FML Kalser began his thrust toward the Lim on the 28<sup>th</sup>. After stubborn actions that surged back and forth, the 9 Lst Eta Bde, which was deployed on both sides of the Dobrunj-Uvac road, drove the Montenegrins back to Bjelobrdo and the heights farther west. In the night of 30-31 October the gallant Landsturm soldiers brought repeated enemy attacks to a standstill. On the next morning, however, they were enveloped from the right. Col Spindler hoped that he could hold on until reinforcements arrived from Brigade Dominic. However, a new Montenegrin attack pushed back the right wing of 9 Lst Eta Bde, which lost four guns; around noon the entire Brigade was in retreat after conducting a stubborn defense. The Montenegrins claimed that the Hungarian Landsturm battalions they'd defeated lost 800 dead and wounded plus 300 prisoners.<sup>156</sup>

Now FML Kalser threw all available units in the Visegrad bridgehead against the advancing Montenegrins. Col Zhuber's Group could finally begin to cross the Drina on 31 October. In the next two days (1 and 2 November) all the enemy thrusts at Drinsko and south of the town of Vardiste could be repulsed.

After this failure the Montenegrins pulled back toward the Lim in the night of 2-3 November. Thus the troops of 62 ID, though hard pressed, had been able to hold their ground; with the restoration of the military bridge they were able to receive adequate supplies from across the Drina. The offensive was scheduled to resume on 7 November, but had to be postponed because the eagerly awaited arrival of more heavy artillery didn't take place.

As of 6 November, the Montenegrin Sanjak Group had three brigades apiece at Rudo and Priboj, and one apiece at Kokina and on the Javor. Two more brigades were stationed in reserve around Plevlje.<sup>157</sup>

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156 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, p. 139

157 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, p. 220

Continuing advance of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army and the Bulgarians

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, the III German Corps of 11<sup>th</sup> Army advanced to Zalogovac. IV Res Corps had stormed Varvarin during the night, then thrust back the Serbian units south of the town; the Corps reached the Morava valley north of Krusevac. X Res Corps reached Stalac and held its left wing in echelon to oppose the Serbs who were withdrawing from the Bulgarians; the parts of the Bulgarian north wing who were advancing here from the east were still much further to the north (at Paracin and Cuprija).<sup>158</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> Below's Group (which consisted of parts of the Alpenkorps, temporarily under 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army) was also told to march to Paracin where it would again come under 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Group Fülöpp was suppressing Serbian partisan bands south of the Danube bend.

On 6 November the divisions of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army were ordered to continue to advance to the Southern Morava; here they would dig in and prepare themselves for a further offensive according to the latest orders from Mackensen.<sup>159</sup> The 1 Bulgarian ID at Leskovac was getting ready to transfer to the Macedonian theater of operations.

In the northern sector of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, GM Ribarov's Group (from 3 ID) was standing in place for the time being at the southern edge of the Leskovac basin.<sup>160</sup> The other brigades of 3 ID were supposed to thrust through Gnjilane and Ferizovic toward Pristina, where they could cut off the Serbs who were withdrawing from the north. There was no action on the Army's southern front, where 7 ID, parts of 11 ID and the Cavalry Division faced Sarrail's Army. A newly-arrived brigade of 11 ID came to Veles, and a brigade from 5 ID reached Kocana.

***C. From the Morava Rivers to the Albanian mountains, 6 November to 1 December***

**1. The pursuit through the Kopaonik and Jastrebac Mountains, 6-24 November**

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158 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 367 ff.

159 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, p. 204

160 *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 205

**a. Decisions of the opposing commanders**

On 5 November GdI Falkenhayn had achieved his most important strategic goal, the opening of the route down the Danube and establishment of a connection with Turkey by land. On this day the first munition transports arrived at Sistov and Rustcuk. The Serbs had been pushed back into the mountains south of the Western Morava, but the campaign wasn't over. Because the right wing of Mackensen's Army Group hadn't managed to seize the routes into the Morava basin quickly enough, while the Bulgarians were still engaged at the crossing-points of the Southern Morava, the Serbian army hadn't been encircled either at Kragujevac or along the Morava. The bulk of the Serbian units had already reached the mountains farther south; to destroy them it would now be necessary to launch sharp thrusts to Novibazar, Mitrovica and Pristina. During this concentric advance, however, it would soon be necessary to limit the size of the attacking force, because large bodies of troops wouldn't be able to maneuver in the barren and trackless Kopaonik Mountains, and it wouldn't be possible to supply them with enough ammunition and rations.

On 6 November, Conrad and Falkenhayn exchanged views at Pless, and decided that "after Serbia is overthrown, along with the Bulgarians we will continue the Balkan offensive against the Entente troops who've landed at Salonika."<sup>161</sup> Although Falkenhayn had concurred in this plan of Conrad's, he added a qualification. It would be carried out only "if the Serbian Army is completely finished off in the immediate future, and if the enemy landing at Salonika doesn't turn into a major Entente campaign in the Balkans."<sup>162</sup> Falkenhayn was sensitive about any situation in which strong forces might be tied down in what he considered "secondary theaters of operations." Because of the general situation he wanted every one of his men returned to the German fronts as soon as they were no longer needed in Serbia.<sup>163</sup> Otherwise the allies agreed that Montenegro and Albania should be occupied and the attitude of Romania should be clarified. It was understood that because of the precarious situation of the Greeks they would have to let the Army of the Orient continue to use the harbor of Salonika after they were forced to retreat

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161 This is from a letter which Conrad wrote later to Falkenhayn, dated 19 November.

162 See also Cramon (pp. 37 ff.), Schwarte ("Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 391 ff.) and Förster (pp. 175 ff.)

163 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", pp. 154 ff.

onto Greek territory.

On the Serbian side, Voivode Putnik on 5 November ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to defend the routes to Prepolac, Kursumlija and Prokuplje. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, covered by the Timok Armeegruppe which was tarrying in the area west of Nish, would withdraw to Prokuplje; then 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would shift south to cover the route through Lebane to Pristina. Meanwhile, however, the northern armies, slowly withdrawing from the line Aleksinac-Krusevac-Kraljevo, would have to offer the most stubborn resistance to their advancing opponents in the Jastrebac Mountains as well as on the heights on both sides of the Rasina and Ibar valleys. The Serbian high command was still hoping that the Army of the Orient would launch a relief offensive. On 6 November Prince-Regent Alexander again approached Sarraill with a request that he attack the Bulgarian front in Macedonia, while two Serbian divisions thrust from the Kosovo polje toward Skopje. Morava Div I was already available for this operation, and Morava Div II was instructed to transfer from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the south wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army for the same purpose.

## **b. Actions in the valleys south of the Morava, 6-11 November**

### XIX Corps

To continue the offensive, in the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> GdI Kövess ordered FML Trollmann to unite Group Sorsich (Lst Eta Bde Schiess and Group Streith) with his own XIX Corps (10 and 17 Mtn Bdes, 20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes, and Lst Inf Bde Schwarz) in the direction of Ivanjica, and then to led them to Sjenica. GM Reinöhl's new Group (made up of Group Hausser at Uzice, 205 Lst Inf Bde, and parts of Lst Eta Bde Franz at Pozega) was placed under 62 ID.

As instructed by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, Group FML Sorsich set out on the 7<sup>th</sup> up the Moravica while Group GM Drofffa (17 Mtn Bde and parts of 10 Mtn Bde) advanced through Kotraza. Neither encountered the enemy, because the Serbian battalion detached from the Uzice Group had withdrawn toward the Javor. On the other hand, the main body of 10 Mtn Bde and Group GM Pongracz (20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes) were halted by strong Serbian positions north and northeast of Kaona; they were held by Dunav Div II, which now commanded all Serbian units west of the Ibar. On the 8<sup>th</sup> FML Trollmann stopped his right wing at Ivanjica because Group Reinöhl, which was supposed to advance to Nova varos, still hadn't assembled. Group Pongracz [53 ID] captured the enemy

positions at Kaona on the 8<sup>th</sup>, after some locally heavy fighting.

In the morning of the next day (the 9<sup>th</sup>), FML Trollmann received through 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ an order from Mackensen that 10 Mtn Bde should thrust over the heights at Mlanca to Usce; this would cut off the retreat of the enemy forces in the Ibar valley. However, Voivode Misic had meanwhile moved two regiments to Usce and into the mountains north of Studenica to cover the flank and rear of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Moreover, the Montenegrins at Priboj were supposed to send a brigade toward Ivanjica, while the Serbian battalion which had withdrawn south of the town took up a position on the heights to the southeast. On 9 November, however, this battalion was driven from the heights south of Ivanjica by Brigade Schiess. 10 Mtn Bde, which FML Trollmann had wanted to send through Ivanjica to Usce, was drawn into an engagement on the march, and finally brought its scattered battalions together on a height south of Dubac. Meanwhile, under Group Pongracz the 21 Lst Mtn Bde drove the Montenegrin brigade from the Uzice Group (which had deployed on the left wing of Dunav Div II) back through Kaona; farther east a very costly attack by 20 Lst Mtn Bde against the enemy's new positions on the heights was unsuccessful.

On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Group Sorsich's Brigade Schiess, covered toward the west by Group Streith, set foot on the crest of a 1221 meter height southwest of Ivanjica. In this sector the war-weary Montenegrin Lovcen Brigade had ignored an order to thrust toward Ivanjica, and had pulled back. The last Montenegrin reserve, the Kolasin Brigade, therefore had to be sent from Prijepolje to Javor as reinforcements.<sup>164</sup> On the other hand, logistical problems prevented Sorsich's isolated Group from continuing their advance into the trackless mountains; for the time being they stayed in place at Ivanjica.

On 10 November the 10 Mtn Bde established themselves firmly on the northeast part of the Cemerno ridge, where Serbian troops had been sent from Studenica. The enemy facing the left wing of XIX Corps withdrew to the ridge of the Troglav planina; Group Pongracz however still had to deal with the resistance of Serbian rear guards, and couldn't advance past Kaona on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The Montenegrin brigade engaged in these actions refused to fight any further, and was brought under control on the Troglav only with difficulty.

17 Mtn Bde, followed by Lst Inf Bde Schwarz, had come up behind

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164 Serbian Official History, Vol. XI, p. 315

the right wing. Because of the enormous logistical problems only four of Trollmann's seven brigades (Schwarz, 17, 21 and 10) were capable of movement. FML Trollmann wanted to continue to advance toward Sjenica with the first three brigades; 10 Mtn Bde would thrust into the flank of the enemy who were still opposing XXII Res Corps at Bogutovac.

#### XXII Res Corps

This Corps was to pursue the enemy on both sides of the Kraljevo-Raska road and then to advance to Novibazar. Immediately south of Kraljevo, however, Serbian rear guards defended the routes leading into the Ibar and Ribnica valleys; it wasn't until the afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> that they began to pull back to the positions held by 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army (on the line Kaona-Bogutovac and the area farther east). In the next two days (8 and 9 November), XXII Res Corps made its way up to these new enemy positions, fighting part of the time. GFM Mackensen let them know on the 10<sup>th</sup> that "the final success of the whole campaign depends on a swift thrust through Raska to Novibazar." Meanwhile, however, the Corps was unable to win any substantial ground on this day. The right wing did drive parts of Dunav Div II back on the Troglav planina, but the Germans couldn't break the Serbs' stubborn resistance at Bogutovac. Misic finally gave up this town, the gateway into the Ibar, in the night of 10-11 November; he took his right wing back to the Stolovi planina in order to keep step with the main body as they retreated. XXII Res Corps thrust ahead to the heights south of Bogutovac; in the Ribnica valley their left wing reached the village of Cerovak ahead of Drina Div II.

#### VIII Corps' difficult crossing of the Morava

In the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup>, GdI Kövess ordered the k.u.k. VIII Corps to pursue with its right wing through Trstenik through the Morava valley toward the east. This order, however, was overtaken by events. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the leading troops of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army were already entering the valley of the Western Morava. The enemy was retreating from the Germans through Krusevac and Kaonik toward the south, and also southwest into the mountains. A thrust by VIII Corps through Trstenik to the east would now come too late to cut off substantial parts of the Serbian Army. Therefore in the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> GFM Mackensen ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to just send parts of VIII Corps down both banks of the Morava; their advance would continue only until the neighboring III German Corps was able to leave the mountains. 59 ID would immediately move south through Rugjinci to Paklenik; their

objective was to block the routes through Brus and (in the upper Toplica valley) at Blazevo.

This Division had already been vainly trying to bring a battalion over the Morava at Stubal in the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup>. The river was greatly swollen, and the rising waters thwarted every crossing attempt. FML Snjaric's 59 ID was finally able to bring three companies over in the afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup>. These scouting detachments found no enemy troops still on the southern slopes of the valley. By noon on the 7<sup>th</sup> the 57 ID had concentrated on the northern bank at Medvegje. This Division was also able to send some small patrols to the southern side. However, the bridge at Trstenik had been thoroughly damaged by the Serbs; it proved impossible to repair it quickly enough to support guns and wagons, so the troops had to await the arrival of bridging equipment.

On the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, III Corps reached the Morava at Vk. Drenova on 7 November. The leading troops of IV Res Corps (105 and 107 ID) crossed the river north and northeast of Krusevac; they pushed into the town, which had been evacuated by the Serbs, and took thousands of prisoners. The two divisions of X Res Corps reached the Southern Morava upstream from Stalac. In the evening of this day an order arrived from Mackensen directing III Corps (6 ID and 25 Res ID) and IV Res Corps with 11 Bav and 105 ID to move back to the southern Banat. This order essentially broke up the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, since the Alpenkorps was transferred to Kövess' Army.

To resume the advance, which was partly bogged down on the Western Morava, in the night of 7-8 November Mackensen again urged 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to pursue energetically. "The right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army has reached the valley of the Western Morava today, captured Krusevac, and begun to pursue through Krusevac toward the southwest. Therefore VIII Corps' former goal - to thrust farther east in the valley of the Western Morava - is no longer in effect. Now the first priority of this Corps should be to reap the harvest of our successes to date by quickly reaching the objectives assigned yesterday (the crossroads at Brus and Blazevo) and cutting off the fleeing Serbian units."

However, on the following day the advance of VIII Corps was again held up by several adversities. 57 ID could send some small detachments over the Morava on rafts, but this was possible only at Trstenik because elsewhere the land along the banks was completely flooded. Meanwhile the approach of the bridging equipment, drawn by exhausted horses on wretched roads,

was slow. In the Gruza valley, VIII Corps' only supply line, its columns got mixed up with those of the German Alpenkorps which was moving from Kragujevac to Kraljevo. Wood which was needed to construct planking over the ruins of the bridge at Trstenik first had to be floated down the Morava from Kraljevo. Although pontoons from two sets of VIII Corps' bridging equipment were being shipped by the same method, the rest of the material had to be moved by wagon on the long road through Kraljevo.

Operating under such difficulties, 57 ID finally had five companies on the south bank by evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>. On the next day the plank bridge was completed at Trstenik, allowing four and a half battalions to cross. By the 11<sup>th</sup>, the 59 ID shipped its 9 Mtn Bde over. The military bridging equipment arrived that evening, and now construction of a real bridge at Trstenik began. The pursuit was scheduled to resume on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>. The advance guards of 57 ID meanwhile reached the crest of the heights south of the Morava, but had lost all contact with the Serbs. The area in front of 59 ID was also free of the enemy, since Drina Div II had already pulled back to the Stolovi planina and the heights reaching farther east to Goc [Goz].

Under 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, the 103 and 107 ID entered the mountains south of Krusevac on 8 November. 101 ID made contact with 6 Bulgarian ID on the east bank of the Southern Morava, and was instructed to concentrate on the 9<sup>th</sup> through Stalac since a thrust toward Aleksinac would now be superfluous. On this day the other divisions reached Aleksandrovac and Stitari. GdA Gallwitz thereafter sent most of X Res Corps toward Kursumlija, in order to block the way of the Serbs who were withdrawing from the Prokuplje area. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, the 103 and 107 ID were standing on the heights southeast of Aleksandrovac opposite the rear guards of the Belgrade Armeegruppe. 101 ID had moved through Krusevac and had concentrated the groups which it was sending through Kaonik south toward Ribare, from which the 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army had begun to retreat to Prokuplje. Eleven guns were taken by the Army, and all the German divisions captured many prisoners.

The Serbian Belgrade Armeegruppe was supposed to stay on the heights southeast of Aleksandrovac, guarding the routes to Kursumlija long enough to allow their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to reach Prokuplje.

### **c. Events in Macedonia through 11 November**

While Mackensen's main body (the Armies of Kövess and Gallwitz) had already pushed the Serbs into the mountains south of the Western Morava, the anticipated pressure from 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army hadn't developed. The majority of Boyadiev's troops had in fact reached the Southern Morava between Aleksinac and Nish on 7 November, but there had stopped due to lack of bridging equipment and to opposition from the Timok Armeegruppe. Parts of 6 Bulgarian ID were finally able to cross the river on the 10<sup>th</sup>, while 9 ID forded it at Cecina. On the other hand, on 8 November the 1 ID had already reached the left bank of the Morava at Leskovac, where they engaged the 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army.

The northern part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army had GM Ribarov's Group standing guard toward Leskovac while one brigade each of 5 and 3 ID were stationed at Gnjlane and Kacanik (respectively) to hinder the Serbs from breaking through to the Army of the Orient. On the 6<sup>th</sup> these units were ordered to begin a concentric attack toward the Kosovo polje. The Serbian Bregalnica and Vardar Divisions, reinforced by Morava Div I, defended themselves on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> with the courage of lions and then launched their own counterattack. The Bulgarians were forced onto the defensive. To reinforce the troops battling at Gnjlane and Kacanik, Ribarov's Group shifted to the south. GM Ribarov himself took command of the entire northern portion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army.

No less ominous were the reports from the Bulgarian high command regarding events in Macedonia, where General Sarrail opened an offensive at the start of November to bring help to the Serbs.

His original plan was to have three French divisions attack in the Vardar valley and four English divisions thrust toward Skopje; the latter units, however, wouldn't even begin to arrive at Salonika until 5 November. Meanwhile the 10 English ID would guard the area between the Vardar and Lake Doiran. Since the events in central Serbia were unfolding so rapidly, the planned relief offensive couldn't take place in time; the full force wouldn't even be available until the start of December when the English had completed their arrival. Therefore Sarrail restricted his operation to a thrust toward Veles by the left wing of the French troops already available (57 ID and 122 ID; the latter began to land on 1 November). This would at least give the Serbs some moral support.<sup>165</sup>

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165 Ministère de la guerre, "Les armées françaises dans la

In fighting which lasted until 9 November the French were able to secure the crossing points on the Cerna River at Gradsko and to establish a firm foothold on the western bank. This encouraged Sarrail to believe that he could advance to the Veles-Prilep road and establish contact with the weak Serbian units who were opposing the Bulgarian cavalry north of Prilep.

9 November, however, marked the high point of the French offensive, which didn't provide relief to the Serbs in their desperate situation. Now strong detachments from the Bulgarian 7, 5 and 11 ID were deployed in a half-circle around the Frenchmen fighting at the confluence of the Vardar and Cerna. Moreover the Bulgarian high command, acting on a suggestion from Falkenhayn, were transferring 8 ID from 1<sup>st</sup> Army to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Other parts of 11 ID were guarding the border heights south of Strumica, and were being hastily reinforced by 2 ID.

The French government was receiving accurate and gloomy reports from Sarrail. They also heard that a Turkish army of 100,000 men under GFM Freiherr von der Goltz was assembling in Thrace. Therefore a serious discussion about the situation in Macedonia was held in Paris on the 11<sup>th</sup>. It led to the decision that the Army of the Orient could no longer do anything to prevent the catastrophe that was overwhelming their Serbian allies. On the next day General Sarrail received an order to halt his offensive. At the same time he began to prepare to retreat behind the Serbian-Greek frontier, although this operation hadn't yet been authorized by the French government.<sup>166</sup>

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grande guerre" (Paris, 1923), Vol. VIII, Text, pp. 225 ff. Hereafter this source will be cited as "French Official History."

166 French Official History, Vol. VIII, Text, p. 273, and Document # 478

#### **d. Differences of opinion between Teschen and Pless**

While the Entente had already abandoned the plan of an offensive by the Army of the Orient, a difference of opinion had arisen between the allies regarding the ultimate goals of the Balkan campaign. GO Conrad agreed that the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army should give up units to reinforce the front in Macedonia. However, on the 7<sup>th</sup> he had already learned from the Aus-Hung. liaison officer in Semendria that Mackensen had been ordered to take substantial German forces out of the line. They would move to the Banat and Sylvania, where they would be at the disposal of the German OHL for shipment to the Western theater of operations. This involved 11 Bav ID and 25 Res ID, then the 6 and 105 ID with the staffs of IV Res and III Corps. Moreover, on the 7<sup>th</sup> Mackensen had initiated the relief of XXII Res Corps by the Alpenkorps, which was coming up through Kragujevac to Kraljevo. 26 ID was to be made available immediately and as soon as possible would move through Belgrade to the assembly area by Indjija and Ruma. The other troops of XXII Res Corps (43 and 44 Res ID) would for now continue the pursuit to Raska without delay, but they would later also be sent to Sylvania and placed under the German OHL.

GO Conrad immediately raised objections to these plans. On the 7<sup>th</sup> he telegraphed Falkenhayn to remind him that they had decided at Pless the day before that divisions wouldn't be taken from the campaign until Mackensen had fully overcome the Serbian Army. This goal, however, had yet to be achieved. To Conrad it seemed likely that the Serbs intended to reach the Kosovo polje between Mitrovica and Pristina, where they would recover their strength and again offer battle.<sup>167</sup> The allies therefore had to reach the basins of Nova varos, Sjenica and Mitrovica-Pristina with forces strong enough to ensure that the Serbian Army "was certainly and completely defeated." In the final sentence of his telegram Conrad referred to the agreements reached in September, under which important orders wouldn't be issued to GFM Mackensen without prior consultation between the allies.

In the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>, Falkenhayn responded that he hadn't given Mackensen a definite order about the number of troops to be withdrawn or about the timing; he had simply "informed him of

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167 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - From this point forward, the original text often uses the German "Amsfeld" in lieu of "Kosovo polje." The English translation of both names is "Field of Blackbirds." This location is holy ground to the Serbs, who consider it the cradle of their nation.

our conversation of yesterday and left its implementation fully up to him." Falkenhayn went on to say that for the time being the General-Feldmarschall was only pulling two divisions out of the front because these units couldn't be employed anyway for the pursuit into the mountains. Two more divisions would follow after the situation east of the Kopaonik Mountains was clarified. XXII Res Corps would stay until the allied armies reached the line Raska-Pristina. However, one of the divisions in the latter Corps would be replaced by the Alpenkorps, which was trained for mountain warfare.

#### The Germans begin to withdraw

On November 8 the 11 Bav, 6 and 26 ID left the front and began to march back to the Sava and Danube. For the time being the HQ of IV Res and III Corps, with 25 Res and 105 ID, stayed in the valley of the Western Morava under the control of GFM Mackensen. The withdrawal of the German units gave GO Conrad an opportunity to enquire of GdI Kövess whether the Serbian Army was already so weak that it could no longer mount counterattacks. Conrad also wanted the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to provide a frank analysis of the physical and moral condition of his troops, as well as of their armament and other supplies and the possibility of meeting all their logistical requirements.

In his reply, GdI Kövess estimated the Serbs' casualty rate since the allies crossed the Danube at 30 to 35%. The number of prisoners was increasing, and many enemy soldiers were deserting to return to their homes. He cautioned, however, that it was too early to say that the Serbian forces in front of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were disintegrating. At least there was no danger that the Serbs could launch a major counterattack in the near future, since their units had undoubtedly become disordered and intermingled during the retreat. Kövess was confident that any Serbian attack would be shattered by the strength of his own troops. There was sufficient ammunition available, since it hadn't been substantially expended in recent fighting. However, it was very difficult to bring supplies through the sparsely settled mountains to the troops, who were 80 km from the railheads.

Mackensen's Army HQ analyzed the situation similarly. The Serbian troops who'd survived the costly battles to date would fight on as long as they still had food and ammunition. However, they couldn't get any more ammunition because their connection with the Salonika harbor was broken. Many prisoners stated that the Serbian high command intended to withdraw to

Scutari. This would indicate that the Serbs were determined to push through Albania and Montenegro to the Adriatic. There were also rumors that the Serbian Army would be evacuated to Italy.

The k.u.k. high command, however, didn't put credence in the prisoners' reports. They thought it more likely that the Serbs would try to break through to the French and English in the south. On 9 November Conrad wrote Falkenhayn that the allies apparently had lost contact with the bulk of the Serbian Army, which thus had gained a significant head start in its retreat toward Novibazar and Pristina. This advantage of the Serbs would only become greater as the concentric pursuit from the Western and Southern Morava brought the allies into mountains that were difficult to cross in an area with few roads. Strong enemy rear guards would be able to offer prolonged resistance. Snow could be expected at this time of year, and would cause further delay. All these circumstances could assist the enemy's attempt to break through to the Entente troops; if successful, this would provide the Serbs a secure base at Salonika for further operations. Presumably they would try to break through in the general direction Pristina-Veles.

Therefore it was believed that the Serbs could concentrate most of their units on the Kosovo polje; while protecting their flank and rear they would break through toward the line Kalkandelen-Skopje-Kumanovo. Most of the terrain in this sector was passable. GO Conrad estimated that the Serbs still had 150,000 riflemen whom they could hurl against the 32,000 Bulgarians in the northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army. He didn't think it would be possible to reinforce this group by transferring men from the part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which was facing the Entente forces (with 80,000 riflemen). Therefore Conrad suggested that at least two of the German divisions which were becoming available as the front contracted should be shifted through the valley of the Southern Morava to the area between Nish and Leskovac; here they'd be available to intervene in fighting that could develop south and southeast of Pristina. At the end of his letter he declared: "Besides the overthrow of Serbia, our goal in the current Balkan war should be to thoroughly discredit the Entente among all the Balkan states. It seems to me that it is of decisive importance to secure these objectives before moving on to other worthwhile goals. Only thus can we prevent Greece and Romania from joining our enemies and tipping the general balance of forces against us."

Falkenhayn, however, felt that the Serbs were no longer capable of mounting a great sortie to reach the Entente troops. In his

response to Conrad on the 9<sup>th</sup>, he stated that an enemy thrust through Pristina to Veles couldn't be prevented by German divisions, because these units would first have to march from the valley of the Western Morava (north of Krusevac) through Nish, and couldn't arrive in time to intervene. The roads leading from the line Kraljevo-Krusevac-Nish-Leskovac to the Kosovo polje would all be needed by XXII Res Corps, VIII Corps, X Res Corps and the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army; it was questionable whether the road network would be sufficient to provide supplies even for these HQ. The best way to keep the Serbs from breaking through was to continue a ruthless pursuit to Pristina. It was more probable that the Serbs would retreat through Novibazar and Ipek. There was only one way to counter this move - by the most energetic possible attack by strong units coming through Raska toward Mitrovica. Falkenhayn went on, "Even if this operation should fail to pin down the enemy's main body, I don't believe that the Serbian Army could escape over the Montenegrin border. At most they could save only remnants of their troops with hardly any artillery or supply trains. Under the current circumstances we would never be able to prevent some such remnants from getting out."

On 9 November, the HQ at Teschen also learned that the German OHL had ordered Mackensen not to make any final decisions at this point. There was no end to the debate between the allies, which would flare up again in a few days.

## **2. The allied encirclement operation toward the Kosovo polje, 12-24 November**

### **a. Situation of the Serbian Army on 11 November**

On 11 November Putnik, after leading the Serbian Army slowly back over the Morava, saw that he wouldn't be able to hold out until he could get any help from the Entente troops. At this time the Serbian high command felt that 62 ID at Visegrad was threatening to thrust to the southeast and to cut their lines of communication through the Sanjak of Novibazar to the east coast of the Adriatic. XIX Corps had reached Ivanjica and apparently was advancing on Javor. Here and at Visegrad the oncoming Austro-Hungarians were opposed only by Montenegrin troops (the Sanjak Group). The 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army (Drina Div II with the Banja Group on the right wing, Dunav Div II with the Uzice and Studenica Groups on the left wing) was withdrawing from Kraljevo

on both banks of the Ibar; it was under heavy pressure on its front and on both flanks. The enemy was already in its rear, pushing toward the Studenica and through the Ribnica valley toward Usce. The situation was even more unfavorable in the area between the Western and Southern Morava. Here the Belgrade Armeegruppe (Sumadija Div II and Timok Div II) were holding off pursuers as they withdrew from Krusevac up the Rasina valley. Therefore the 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army (Branicevo Group, Drina Div I and Dunav Div), still farther northeast, found themselves enveloped on the left as they retreated over the slopes of Jastrebac Mountain. Protecting the rear of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was the Timok Armeegruppe (Krajina Group and Combined Div), which was defending the positions at Mramor with the courage of despair.

Meanwhile the pursuers were pressing the Serbs ever harder in the south. The Bulgarians crossed the Morava at Leskovac on the 8<sup>th</sup>; in the next two days they pushed the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army (Timok Div I, Sumadija Div II, Morava Div II, Cavalry Division and South Morava Group) back over the Pustabach. The situation of this Army was made even more difficult because its supply trains couldn't use the route through Lebane to Pristina, and were caught in a traffic jam along with masses of wagons from the Timok Armeegruppe and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the Toplica valley. The Serbian high command ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to hold out to the bitter end, and to send three divisions (Timok I, Sumadija II and Morava II) in a powerful counterattack to keep the Bulgarians away from the vital escape route from Prokuplje to Kursumlija. However, the northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army was also trying to advance through the Leskovica valley and through Kacanik into the Pristina basin. Therefore, after the thrust to Leskovac the Morava Div II would move immediately to reinforce the troops who were fighting in the "New Territories" (Bregalnica Div, Vardar Div, Morava Div I and a combined group that was joining them); this force would attack south through Lebane and drive the Bulgarians back to Vranje and Kumanovo.

The Army of the Orient, along with weak Serbian units belonging to the Bitolj Divisional Area, was still fighting the southern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army at Izvor-Gradsko and on the heights east of the Vardar and south of Strumica. On the 11<sup>th</sup> they reported a setback. Thus the Serbs could no longer hope that the Entente troops would mount a relief attack through Veles to Skopje. Their high command drew the necessary conclusion from this development, and decided that their northern armies would pull out of the mountains between the Western and Southern Morava and back onto the Kosovo polje. The Serbian Army would

then break out of this historic field toward the southeast, and through Skopje to join General Sarrail's Army. The orders for the difficult retreat were already issued by the end of 11 November. As hitherto, 1<sup>st</sup> Army was ordered back toward Raska-Mitrovica. The Belgrade Armeegruppe would retreat through Kursumlija-Prepolac, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army through Kursumlija and along the Kosanica into the Pristina basin. The Timok Armeegruppe at first would cover the rear at Prokuplje. Then they would move back to Pristina ahead of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, while the Krajina Group held on at Kursumlija until the main body had crossed the Toplica. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would fall back through Lebane to Pristina while fighting rear guard actions.<sup>168</sup>

### **b. Mackensen's Army Group drives further into the mountains, 11-18 November**

While the Serbs were already withdrawing toward the Kosovo polje, the k.u.k. VIII Corps had finally overcome the obstacles which kept them from crossing the strongly swollen Morava. Also, on 11 November the Drina was bridged at Visegrad. In the last few days the k.u.k. 62 ID had received its mountain equipment, and its artillery was reinforced. Therefore the general advance of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army toward Nova varos, Sjenica and Raska proceeded rapidly on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### On the right wing

Under 62 ID, the brigades of Dominic, Spindler and Zhuber were released from positional warfare; they drove back the foremost Montenegrin troops at Drinsko and south of Vardiste. On the next day the Division attacked the enemy's main position and gained some more ground. FML Kalser intended to continue the attack toward the Lim on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but the Montenegrins were already gone. Nevertheless in the next few days 62 ID could only move slowly ahead toward the Lim and Uvac through snow-covered mountains.

GM Reinöhl's Group had been ordered to secure the right flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army by advancing to Nova varos. On the 7<sup>th</sup> they had already sent scouting detachments south from Uzice and Pozega. The main body didn't advance until the 11<sup>th</sup> because Sorsich, despite urging from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, had first wanted to await the arrival of Col. Bolla's Cavalry Regiment. Reinöhl and his troops were located on the heights of Mackat and south of Zbojstica on the

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168 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, pp. 18 ff.

13<sup>th</sup>.

Kövess' Army advances on both sides of the Ibar valley

The advance guards of Brigade Streith, on the western wing of XIX Corps, had already cleared the enemy from the Mucanj but on the 12<sup>th</sup> were forced back a little to the north by Montenegrin reinforcements. On the heights farther east the Brigades of Schiess and Schwarz were opposed by a Serbian detachment which was still blocking the road to Javor. After a very difficult march the 17 Mtn Bde reached the Ivanjica area; the leading troops of this Brigade threw weaker enemy detachments back into the mountains southeast of Ivanjica. In the afternoon 10 Mtn Bde stormed the Kosutica Heights (south of the Troglav). The exhausted soldiers weren't able to advance further toward Usce because of inclement weather. The main body of 21 Lst Mtn Bde followed 10 Mtn Bde. The Serbs in front of 20 Lst Mtn Bde pulled back from their positions south of Kaona to the Kom (the northern part of the Troglav). The enemy were expected to soon evacuate these heights also, since they were already enveloped from the south by 10 Mtn Bde. Although GM Drofffa hadn't reached Usce, the advance of 10 Mtn Bde apparently also was forcing the Serbs to retreat in front of XXII Res Corps. Therefore it seemed to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ that it was no longer necessary to have XIX Corps support XXII Res Corps directly; they ordered FML Trollmann to unite 20 and 21 Lst Mtn Bdes at Ivanjica. Thus Trollmann brought his main body together at Ivanjica on the 13<sup>th</sup>; he had Brigade Schwarz and most of 17 Mtn Bde thrust ahead on the road to Javor, where the enemy renewed their stubborn resistance after losing the high ground at Kosovica. 10 Mtn Bde was again unable to continue its attack toward Usce on the 13<sup>th</sup>. In the last two days of fighting the Brigade had lost 675 riflemen, and was in an isolated position half-surrounded by a circle of enemy troops.

During 12 and 13 November the XXII Res Corps (44 and 43 Res ID) advanced only slowly into the Ibar and Ribnica valleys, fighting continuously against the rear guards of Dunav Div II and Drina Div II. The Alpenkorps followed them in both valleys. The k.u.k. VIII Corps on the 13<sup>th</sup> continued the advance they had started the day before; 59 ID reached Ploca, after encountering only brief resistance at Paklenik. 57 ID advanced its left wing on the 13<sup>th</sup> to Brus, to guard the flank of the German X Res Corps, which had already advanced deep into the mountains.

11<sup>th</sup> German Army and the Bulgarians on 11-13 November

X Res Corps of 11<sup>th</sup> German Army had been directed to move with both divisions (107 and 103 ID) through Stitari to Kursumlija, where it would cooperate with the Bulgarians advancing from the east and encircle the Serbian units still in the Jastrebac Mountains and at Mramor. But Zivkovic's Group resisted bitterly on the road to Kursumlija to make it possible for 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army and the Timok Armeegruppe to retreat through Prokuplje. X Res Corps came up to Blace by the 13<sup>th</sup> in heavy fighting. Mackensen had meanwhile sent 101 ID to thrust out of the Morava valley toward Ribare. On the 12<sup>th</sup> they encountered and immediately attacked the enemy in the Jastrebac Mountains.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> the main body of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army (Divs Timok I, Sumadija II and Morava II) defeated the parts of 1 Bulgarian ID which had advanced to the Pusta. In the next morning, according to a report from Sofia, "at least four Serbian divisions under the command of the King and the Crown Prince" (in fact just three divisions) fell upon the main body of 1 Bulgarian ID and forced them to retreat to Leskovac. The 8 Bulgarian ID, which had reached Nish on its way to Macedonia, was now hastily sent to the area where the breakthrough had occurred. At the same time 9 ID was urgently ordered to finally cross the Morava, so that they could thrust into the flank of the enemy units advancing toward Leskovac.

The Bulgarian high command didn't believe that the situation was threatening because of the setback at Leskovac; they thought that the Serbs had undertaken this offensive to secure their rear while they broke through at Vranje. GdA Gallwitz had the same opinion. "The action can make it easier for the Serbs to transfer further forces to the south." Therefore "we must work harder on the wings of our combined armies and allow the Bulgarians to build a stronger barrier in the south."<sup>169</sup> However, it was primarily GO Conrad who had the impression that the blow against the Bulgarians was just the opening act of a great Serbian sortie to the south. Also it seemed to him, as he told Falkenhayn in a wire on the 12<sup>th</sup>, that "the Serbian main body has by no means lost all of its power to attack." He suggested that the two divisions still stationed behind 11<sup>th</sup> Army in the Western Morava valley (25 Res ID and 105 ID) should again be deployed against the Serbs.

Developments had meanwhile already led 11<sup>th</sup> Army to use part of the forces that it had pulled from the front because they weren't needed. 101 ID was reinforced by a regiment of 105 ID;

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169 Gallwitz, p. 445

the 101<sup>st</sup> was supposed to break through as quickly as possible to Prokuplje and thus cut off the Serbs (Timok Armeegruppe) who apparently were still standing their ground in front of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army southwest of Aleksinac and Nish. The rest of 105 ID would move through Krusevac to follow X Res Corps, which was fighting a difficult action at Blace.

#### Developments on 13 November

On 13 November GO Conrad learned from Falkenhayn that parts of 105 ID had already returned to the fighting. Because Conrad had meanwhile been approached by the Germans' Chief of Field Railroad Transport regarding the departure of 11 Bav, 6 and 26 ID, Conrad also had an opportunity to ask Falkenhayn for information regarding the future use of these divisions which were now moving north out of Serbia. Falkenhayn concealed his thoughts, and told his ally that "We don't yet know what we will do with the three German divisions which have become available."

In Teschen it was still believed that the Serbs wanted to break through to the Entente troops, although the situation of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was already improving surprisingly on the 13<sup>th</sup>. On this day German pilots reported that all the roads from Prokuplje and Kursumlija to the south and southwest were jammed with many Serbian supply trains and columns of troops.

To exploit this favorable situation, after 101 ID overcame resistance south of the Grebac Ridge they continued their pursuit as far as the heights north of Prokuplje, although the field artillery was left behind and only a few mountain batteries were able to follow. The main body of 6 Bulgarian ID, which had sent strong forces over the Morava at Aleksinac on the 12<sup>th</sup>, reached Kulina; therefore in the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> they were still behind the German 101 ID. 9 Bulgarian ID had now finally crossed at Cecina; two of its brigades were advancing on Prokuplje; its third brigade was operating along with 1 ID from the heights southwest of Leskovac toward Bojnik-Lebane. The Bulgarians' left wing was able to push the Serbs back toward the west even before 8 ID arrived.

In the northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, one brigade apiece from 3, 5 and 7 ID were held in readiness in the Gnjlane area, so that on the 14<sup>th</sup> they could thrust west through this town. A fourth brigade at Kacanik would meanwhile stay in place.

GFM Mackensen was informed by continuing aerial reconnaissance reports that the mass of the Serbian Army was retreating toward

Pristina. Meanwhile he had decided to shift the main effort of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies more toward the left wing, so that they could intervene with strong forces in the action of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army.<sup>170</sup> Therefore XIX Corps would advance over the Javor Mountain and the Golija planina to Novibazar, XXII Res Corps through Raska to Mitrovica, VIII Corps over the Kopaonik Mountain to the line Mitrovica-Babinmost (northwest of Pristina), and 11<sup>th</sup> Army through Kursumlija to Pristina. 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was ordered to have 9 and 1 ID advance in cooperation with X Res Corps and to thrust toward Pristina from the east. The northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army would attack Pristina from the south out of the line Gnjilane-Kacanik.

#### Renewed discussion of the logistical problems

These orders, issued by Army Group HQ on the 13<sup>th</sup>, caused serious problems for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ. Neither XIX nor VIII Corps would have usable roads behind them for the artillery and supply trains when they moved toward their new goals farther east. The situation of XXII Res Corps, advancing from Raska to Mitrovica, would be more favorable.

GdI Kövess was already making Army Group HQ aware on the 13<sup>th</sup> of these almost insuperable difficulties threatening XIX and VIII Corps: "The only viable alternative is to first let the corps continue to advance on their current paths and later shift them to the left toward their new goals. In the second part of this march they will have Montenegro on their flank, so they will have to take measures to guard in this direction." The Army commander also pointed out that with their current number of vehicles they couldn't move more than 60 km from their railheads. In more favorable circumstances, if trucks were able to move forward, the distance would increase to 80 km. The food supplies available in the Western Morava valley had been used up, and little nourishment would be found in the mountains. Therefore 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ believed that it would barely be possible to feed the troops in their current strength on the line Nova varos-Mitrovica, even if the rail line from Stalac into the Morava valley could be placed in service as far as Cacak or Uzice, and a field line constructed through Grn. Milanovac to Cacak. This problem would be all the more difficult if parts of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were to advance toward Pristina.

At the HQ in Semendria, the staff paid some heed to Kövess' concerns; they decided that on the 14<sup>th</sup> the XIX Corps should

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170 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 376 ff.

advance on the road from Ivanjica through Javor toward Sjenica. At the same time, Army Group HQ declared that they preferred to then have the Corps move from Sjenica to Novibazar, because this was the sector where they anticipated major fighting to occur. If it was necessary, however, to guard against Montenegro the Corps would be in the right place to do so at Sjenica. At this point (14 November) it was neither possible nor necessary to decide how XIX Corps would be further employed. The first goal of XXII Res Corps was to quickly take Raska; from there the Corps could move either into the Ibar valley or through Novibazar to Mitrovica. VIII Corps couldn't use the Kursumlija-Pristina road, which was needed by 11<sup>th</sup> Army. The only alternative for the Corps, after it reached the road through Blazevo, was to march through the Ibar valley to Mitrovica. Presumably VIII Corps would reach the road earlier than XXII Res Corps, and then would seek to link up with 11<sup>th</sup> Army on the left. The basis for the orders issued on the 13<sup>th</sup> was the plan "to carry out the envelopment movement toward the Kosovo plain wherever possible." Therefore Army Group HQ intended to send XIX Corps from the west and Kövess' main body (XXII Res and VIII Corps) from the north and northeast toward the line Mitrovica-Pristina, while 11<sup>th</sup> Army advanced from the north toward Pristina and the Bulgarians came from the east and south. The advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army into the Nova varos-Mitrovica area shouldn't be delayed by the difficulty of providing rations; if necessary parts of the Army would hold back so that their provisions could be given to the troops on the front line who were on the enemy's heels.

#### The difficult advance on 14-18 November

Now the pursuing columns pushed ahead in heavy fighting, despite the grim cold of the snow-covered high mountains and the periodic interruption of supplies; because there was insufficient shelter, most of them camped in the open air. Their goal was the historic Kosovo polje, where Army Group Mackensen still hoped to encircle their gallant and stubborn enemy despite the failure of the two previous attempts.

Under XIX Corps, FML Sorsich's Group attacked the strong Montenegrin positions southeast of Presjeka on the 14<sup>th</sup> and again on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but couldn't break through. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, however, they were able to take the heights south of Javor after toilsome fighting. Because the troops were tired, this success couldn't be exploited; the Brigades of Streith and Schwarz, and 17 Mtn Bde, spent the night in the conquered positions. 20 Lst Mtn Bde had meanwhile come up through Ivanjica, behind the left wing of Group Sorsich. 21 Mtn Bde was making a difficult march through

the snowy heights between Bratljevo and Cecina. 10 Mtn Bde, which had been sent toward Usce, had already made contact on the 14<sup>th</sup> with the right-hand column of XXII Res Corps, and was placed under that HQ.

Advancing along with a regiment of the German Alpenkorps, 10 Mtn Bde reached the Studenica by 16 November, behind a group from Dunav Div II. In heavy fighting, the leading troops of 44 Res ID pushed through other parts of Dunav Div II through Usce to the heights south of Bagasi. The main body of the Alpenkorps advanced over the high ridge east of the Ibar and on the 16<sup>th</sup> took a crossing point over the Josanica from rear guards of Drina Div II. 43 Res ID left the front and was assembled at Kraljevo.

The k.u.k. VIII Corps advanced toward the Kopaonik Mountains. 9 Mtn Bde drove detachments of Drina Div II from the heights southwest of Ploca on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The main body of 59 ID moved on this day into the area southwest of Brus; 57 ID advanced toward the Toplica without fighting. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the 59 ID passed the eastern slope of the 1783 meter high Siljaca without meeting resistance. 57 ID, occasionally hit by Serbian artillery, reached the Toplica valley; around noon its advanced guards took the 1152 meter high Lucak after a brief action.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 59 ID sent 18 Mtn Bde forward to Blazevo; to guard the west flank, 9 Mtn Bde stayed in the area it had reached on the 15<sup>th</sup> and awaited the arrival of Group Below, which was coming up in echelon on the left rear of the Alpenkorps. 57 ID sent a scouting party down the road toward Kursumlija; they encountered an enemy force which they drove back somewhat, but then were brought to a halt by Serbian reinforcements.

FZM Scheuchenstuel intended to stay in place on the next day (17 November). His artillery and supply trains were still far behind and hadn't been able to follow the infantry through Brus into the Kopaonik Mountains. Ammunition and rations had to be brought forward by pack animals on mountain paths. It seemed that an adequate supply line could be established only through the Ibar valley and Raska. FZM Scheuchenstuel was obliged to pull Brigade Haustein, which was following VIII Corps, back into the Morava valley. In the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, HQ of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - as instructed by Mackensen - ordered VIII Corps to send 59 ID or at least its 18 Mtn Bde to Kosutica in the Ibar valley; this would prevent the enemy fighting XXII Res Corps at Raska from escaping through Mitrovica.

After hard fighting the German X Res Corps (103 and 107 ID) had taken some of the positions of Armeegruppe Zivkovic on the 14<sup>th</sup>; on the following day they reached the heights half way between Blace and Kursumlija. 101 ID had already stormed the heights south of Prokuplje on the 14<sup>th</sup>, causing the rear guards of 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army to fall back. On the 15<sup>th</sup> they thrust up the Toplica valley and threw back some enemy troops who tried to defend Belonjin, capturing many prisoners and guns with much military equipment. On the 16<sup>th</sup> the German 105 ID (which had advanced through Blace) and 101 ID had already arrived north of Kursumlija, where Serbian units again offered fierce resistance to cover the retreat to Pristina.<sup>171</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army (6, 9, 1 and 8 ID), advancing from the Southern Morava, began to pursue toward Pristina on 14 November. On the 15<sup>th</sup> they were opposed by the Serbian Timok Armeegruppe and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army south of the line Prokuplje-Lebane and farther southeast. 6 ID was squeezed out of the line as the front contracted, and in the next few days prepared to transfer to the south. Parts of 8 ID advanced in the Southern Morava valley through Vranje.

The northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army (parts of 3, 7 and 5 ID) was engaged south of Pristina; on the 15<sup>th</sup> they drove back the Vardar Div and Morava Div I at Gnjilane. However, they weren't able to break through to the Skopje-Pristina railroad at Kacanik. The Serbian Bregalnica Div here defended the approaches to Pristina and Prizren with great stubbornness.

### **c. Actions in Macedonia, 12-16 November**

In Macedonia the main body of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army sent a detachment of about five battalions into the Kalkandelen (Tetovo) basin. On the 16<sup>th</sup> they reached Gostivar and then advanced toward Prizren. Also on the 16<sup>th</sup> the reinforced Cavalry Div, after several days of fighting an envelopment action toward the west, pushed back troops of the Serbian Bitolj Divisional Area from Prilep to the south.

There was hotter fighting on the western bank of the Cerna, where the Bulgarians started to attack after Sarrail went over to the defensive on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The main body of 5 ID, with parts of 7 and 11 ID, took Gradsko from the French and pushed them

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171 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p. 378

back closer to the Cerna.<sup>172</sup> There was no change to the front running east of the Vardar to a point southwest of Strumica, which was held by parts of 7 and 11 ID. Farther east the 2 ID guarded the border south of Strumica and in the Struma and Mesta valleys against the English 10 ID and the Greeks. King Constantine had deployed strong parts of his army at Drama, at Seres and north of Salonika; the ambiguous attitude of these units caused serious concern to the Entente troops. This may have been one of the reasons why the English 22 ID, which arrived at Salonika on 10 November, didn't march ahead to the fighting front.

The Bulgarian high command was aware of the very miserable situation of the Army of the Orient. Therefore it was easy for them to state that their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could continue to fend off all attacks by the English and French as long as they received the promised reinforcements - mainly heavy artillery - from the Germans. The logistical situation, however, was very difficult because the rail line through Pirot and Nish hadn't been restored yet. For the same reason it wouldn't be possible to send strong German units to Macedonia in the foreseeable future.

#### **d. The allies reach the line Uvac-Nova varos-Sjenica and the edge of the Kosovo polje, 17-19 November**

We have mentioned that substantial German forces left the front after the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies came closely together in the Western Morava valley. This led GO Conrad to propose on 15 November that one of the available German divisions should be sent to Galicia to relieve k.u.k. troops. Falkenhayn refused. In a conference with Mackensen at Semendria on the 16<sup>th</sup> he had learned that the Aus-Hung. VIII Corps was encountering ever greater logistical problems in the Kopaonik Mountains, and therefore answered Conrad's request with a proposal that one of the divisions of VIII Corps could be sent to Galicia.

GO Conrad disagreed completely. Later on the 16<sup>th</sup> he responded to GdI Falkenhayn that only the current advance of the mountain-trained VIII Corps would make it possible to free German and Bulgarian troops for the south wing, "where we cannot be strong enough south of Pristina." Since his request for a German division for Galicia had been turned down for unstated reasons, he would now have to pull units from the Volhynia-east Galicia

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172 French Official History, Vol. VIII, Text, pp. 275 ff.  
Nedev, p. 15

front without replacements and sent them to the Isonzo, where the Italians at this point were threatening Görz and the Doberdo plateau with a much larger army in the IV Battle of the Isonzo.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> Conrad had learned from the intelligence section of Mackensen's Army Group that strong parts of the Serbian Army, retreating to Pristina, had already gained a large head start on their pursuers. Thus the Serbs might be able to once again build up a striking force. The Army Group HQ also believed that the Serbs wouldn't try to march over the mountains to Montenegro because of the enormous logistical difficulties. Apparently they would instead make a last desperate effort "to break through from Pristina to the south in a united formation."

#### The situation of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

Despite the great exertions of a six-week war of motion, the casualties of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to date weren't very heavy. By the reckoning of its HQ, the Army - without XXII Res Corps - had lost 12.4% of its personnel through death or wounding since 1 October; 2.4% were missing. The figures for the various units certainly varied quite a bit. VIII Corps had the greatest battle casualties, with nearly 27%, but only 3% of its personnel had become sick. This was quite a small figure considering the time of year and the Corps' arduous service. The XXII Res Corps reported 26.5% killed or wounded and 1.85 % missing. However, the Aus-Hung. troops of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in mid-November had just 79,123 infantry and 2121 cavalry out of a total strength of 156,037 men. This ratio of fighters to support personnel, already quite unfavorable, was now about to become worse.

On 17 November there was a heavy snowfall, which made the few roads and paths impassable. This was followed by cold, so that while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army maneuvered in the barren mountains it lost hundreds of combat troops to frostbite in the next few days.

Consistent with Mackensen's order of the 14<sup>th</sup>, GdI Kövess decided on the 15<sup>th</sup> that if necessary he would leave the following units behind: Bde Haustein and parts of Bde Mrazek of VIII Corps, 43 Res ID of XXII Res Corps, and Bdes Streith and Schiess of XIX Corps. Group Reinöhl and 62 ID could decide for themselves which troops to leave back; they were instructed by Army Group HQ to thrust to Nova varos to cover the right flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. GdI Kövess asked FML Kalser on the 15<sup>th</sup> whether the improvement in his supply services would permit him to advance over the Lim and thus secure the rail line from Ustipraca to Uvac.

On the western wing

The k.u.k. high command was also interested in opening up the rail line in eastern Bosnia. On the 16<sup>th</sup> they told GdI Kövess that after driving the Montenegrins back over the upper Lim he should again place Col. Dominic's Group under the commander of BHD. As 62 ID advanced to Nova varos, Dominic would guard its lines of communication on the lower Lim as far as Uvac; if possible he would also help by throwing back the Montenegrins entrenched at Megjegja. GdI Sarkotic wanted several battalions to thrust over the Drina on the 20<sup>th</sup> above Gorazde and up to Cajnice and the Metalka Pass.

Now, however, 62 ID was stuck on the Lim because of the sudden deterioration of the weather on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Because of the high waters, the military bridge at Visegrad had to be temporarily broken up. The Montenegrins had destroyed the foot-bridge at Uvac, where it was only possible to send over two companies of 9 Lst Eta Bde by evening of the 17<sup>th</sup>. Reinforcements were sent to the south bank of the Uvac River on a newly-built plank bridge on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and it was possible to occupy Priboj. From here 62 ID made contact with Group Reinöhl, which reached the area north of Nova varos on the 18<sup>th</sup> without fighting, but after a very difficult march. On the same day, revised orders from Army Group HQ instructed Group Reinöhl and 62 ID to hold the Lim as far as Nova varos to protect the right flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Thus 62 ID now could take part in the planned thrust to Cajnice. The miserable logistical situation already made it very urgent to secure the Ustipraca-Uvac rail line. However, Kalser's Division was unable to thrust further south on the 19<sup>th</sup>, because there weren't enough barges to ship even small patrols over the rising waters of the Lim. Reinöhl's Group had meanwhile reached Nova varos and Bistrica; his right-hand side column (Brigade Hausser) had been living strictly off the land for the last three weeks, and its troops were only getting half their allotted ration of bread.

XIX Corps

The Montenegrins in front of XIX Corps were moving steadily back since 17 November; even their rear guards hardly offered any resistance. With great exertion, the Landsturm brigades of Trollmann's Corps hastened after the enemy, hoping to reach the Sjenica basin as soon as possible. In relentless pursuit the Corps reached the Javor on the 17<sup>th</sup> and the area around Kukovica (10 km north of Sjenica) on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The column on the left (21 Lst Mtn Bde) came up to Crce and on the 19<sup>th</sup> was already at

Dugapoljna, while Brigade Schwarz entered Sjenica.

XIX Corps was extremely distinguished in these days. In glorious fashion they had laid to rest the concerns, expressed mainly by the Germans, regarding the fighting capabilities of the Corps' mostly inexperienced Landsturm troops. GFM Mackensen expressed his full appreciation. Now, however, for the time being there could be no question of their advancing further south into the mountains, because the lack of rations was becoming a crisis. The units also had to wait for new issues of footwear and winter clothing.

#### XXII Res Corps

The difficulty of forwarding supplies was also an issue for XXII Res Corps, which could advance only with great toil in the snow-covered mountains on both sides of the Ibar. To keep the pursuit to Novibazar going, the supply columns of 43 Res ID were diverted to the divisions in the front line (44 Res ID and the Alpen-korps); 43 Res ID pulled back from Kraljevo to Kragujevac, which was the terminal of the main railroad.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> the 10 Mtn Bde and a German Jaeger regiment reached the area north of Krusevica, while the advance guard of 44 Res ID and main body of the Alpenkorps reached the area north and east of Pavlica in the Ibar valley. Col. Below's group, following them, came to the upper reaches of the Josanicabach. On the next day the right column of XXII Res Corps was east of Krusevica. The leading troops of 44 Res ID in the Ibar valley were nearing Raska. The Alpenkorps reached the heights southeast of Pavlica. On the 19<sup>th</sup> the XXII Res Corps had its center column at Raska, while 10 Mtn Bde was striving to reach Novibazar and the Alpenkorps was moving down into the Ibar valley east of Raska.

#### VIII Corps

In the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the k.u.k. VIII Corps, which as already noted had reached the upper Toplica, received an order to send 59 ID to Kosutica (10 km southeast of Raska) to cut off the enemy who were standing in front of XXII Res Corps. To carry out these instructions, FML Snjaric planned to march with 18 Mtn Bde from Blazevo to Kosutica early on the 17<sup>th</sup>; the 9 Mtn Bde, still stationed in the area southwest of Brus, would cross the northern part of the Kopaonik Mountains to intervene in the battle that 18 Mtn Bde expected to develop at Kosutica. However, neither Brigade was able to reach its assigned goal.

On 17 November the weather turned colder, and an icy storm brought thick snow. Many of the soldiers, lightly clad and poorly fed, couldn't withstand this development. 9 Mtn Bde suffered a miserable eleven-hour march in a valley on the eastern edge of the Kopaonik Mountains, seeking shelter from the snow storm and the grim cold. The condition of 18 Mtn Bde was no better; marching on an ice-covered path, the brigade reached the area 5 km east of Kosutica after unspeakable toil. Most of the troops spent the night in the open; some of those who fell asleep in the harsh cold never awoke. Thirty men died in the snow. About a thousand more had to be brought back to hospitals, afflicted by frostbite or illness. Meanwhile other men fell off the icy slopes of the Kopaonik Mountains.

The storm didn't have such a harsh effect on 57 ID, which stayed in place. FML Goiginger took 2 Mtn Bde off the barren heights and into the protection of the Toplica valley. Scouts from the Division encountered Serbian outposts for the first time at Lukovo on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Thus far VIII Corps had been able to supply itself tolerably well because its logistical services were equipped to cope with the mountains; whether they could also handle a further advance over the deep snow which covered the terrain farther south was doubtful. Because of the unfavorable turn in the weather, both the division commanders asked their corps commander to give the exhausted troops a pause to rest. FZM Scheuchenstuel took their extraordinary difficulties into account and allowed 57 ID as well as 9 Mtn Bde to stay on the 18<sup>th</sup> in the areas they'd already reached. Both divisions would shift their mobile batteries and ammunition columns into the Western Morava valley. Brigade Haustein, which had been following 57 ID, was to march back into the area west of Krusevac.

Despite all the problems, 18 Mtn Bde continued to advance on the 18<sup>th</sup>. They drove back a regiment of Drina Div II and reached the area east of Kosutica. In the morning pilots had spotted Serbian columns heading south in the Ibar valley. In the night of 18-19 November the 18 Mtn Bde repulsed two Serbian attacks from the south and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. By these thrusts, however, the Serbs at least were able to keep their pursuers off their heels. GM Skvor continued his advance in the next morning and reached the Ibar valley at Kosutica. 18 Mtn Bde captured 200 supply wagons with much military equipment; 2000 Serbian soldiers laid down their weapons.

11<sup>th</sup> German Army and the Bulgarians

As X German Res Corps advanced toward Kursumlija, their opponents (Armeegruppe Zivkovic) had already retreated to Prepolac on the night of 16-17 November. 103 ID occupied Kursumlija the next day. On the 19<sup>th</sup> the 103 and 101 ID took Prepolac and the heights farther east.

1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was sent toward Pristina with 9 and 1 ID plus a brigade of 8 ID; on the 18<sup>th</sup> they fought the desperate defenders of 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army on the northern slope of the Goljak planina. The northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army was still at Kacanik and Gnjlane. Two brigades of 8 ID were advancing through Vranje; one of them was sent toward Gnjlane, and the other was to march through Kumanovo to Skopje.

The situation on 19 November

Thus by 19 November the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies, in their relentless pursuit through the mountains, had reached the line Rudo-Priboj-Nova varos-Sjenica-Raska-Prepolac. The Bulgarians were approaching Pristina from the northeast and south. According to Serbian prisoners, the only units west of the Ibar were Montenegrins plus several Serbian battalions of the III Ban, all withdrawing through Nova varos and Sjenica. In front of the other units of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army was retreating to Novibazar and Mitrovica. Based on these reports, GFM Mackensen was certain that the main body of the Serbian forces (the Belgrade Armeegruppe, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Timok Armeegruppe and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army) had moved from Kursumlija and Leskovac to Pristina. Moreover, Army Group HQ had learned - from the assertions of Serbian prisoners taken by 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army - that the Serbian high command now intended to break through from Pristina to join the Entente troops in the south, through the valley of the Crni Drin and through Dibra-Ochrida and Monastir. The allied armies should therefore do everything possible to pursue the dwindling enemy force sharply into the Kosovo polje. By striking a death blow they would prevent the Serbs from reaching shelter with Sarraill's Army, and later recovering their strength and reappearing in the enemy's order of battle.

However, the operations against the Serbs couldn't be carried out with all the troops of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies. By now the distance from the railheads (Valjevo, Jagodina and Kragujevac) had widened to 130 km, although a field line to Grn. Milanovac would be ready on 21 November. It wouldn't be possible to build a line from Visegrad to Uzice in the foreseeable future, and it

would take at least two and a half months just to rebuild the bridge over the Drina at Megjegja. Moreover, the stretch of track at Ustipraca was still within the range of Montenegrin guns; only a tunnel could be used to get over the Sargan Ridge, and it would be impossible to restore the line from Uzice, which ran through high mountains. The alternatives - establishing a rail connection from Uzice to Mitrovica or through Kraljevo to Mitrovica - were equally impractical due to construction difficulties. It was even necessary to abandon the plan of building a horse-drawn railway from Uvac to Nova varos. The idea of constructing a military line from Krusevac to Brus was given up because only a path led over the Mramor Heights. It was feasible to build a field line from Kraljevo to Raska, although the road into the Ibar valley was also very narrow; for the time being, however, it wasn't possible to send the necessary equipment up to Kraljevo. The only immediate hope for improving the logistical situation was that the railroad in the Western Morava valley could be restored between Stalac and Cacak. The military line between Lajkovac and Grn. Milanovac could then be extended to Cacak.

So that the troops still in contact with the enemy could be supplied, on 19 November the XIX Corps ordered the Brigades of Schiess and Streith to pull back to Cacak. At the same time two Landsturm brigades that weren't equipped for mountain warfare (Bde Franz of Group Reinöhl and Bde Mrazek of VIII Corps) were dissolved. The entire 57 ID of VIII Corps would have to stay in the area southwest of Brus, so that its mountain logistical supply services could be diverted to 59 ID.

GFM Mackensen had already started to pull 44 Res ID and 105 ID out of the line on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The divisions which had marched back into the Banat and Sylvania (6 and 26 ID plus 11 Bav ID), along with III Corps HQ, would take trains to the Western Front. The divisions in the Western Morava valley (43 Res, 25 Res and 107 ID) would take the place of these units in the quarters in south Hungary. The HQ of IV Res Corps would replace that of X Res Corps in command of the German divisions still at the front (101 and 103 ID). 105 ID would move to Nish, from which it was going to Varna and Burgas; in accordance with a German-Bulgarian agreement, the Division would guard the Black Sea coast, where bombardment by Russian naval vessels was causing great uneasiness.

**e. New agreements between Conrad and Falkenhayn, and growing dissension (19-23 November)**

In the summer, GO Conrad had hesitated before agreeing to attack Serbia as urged by Falkenhayn. However, as the gigantic campaign unfolded for him there was only one goal - to sweep the enemy from the Balkans. He had expressed this firm opinion to his ally orally on 6 November and three days later in writing. The allies should deal energetically not only with the Serbs, but also with the Entente's Army of the Orient which had landed at Salonika. Conrad urged that the blow against the Serbs as they withdrew into the Kosovo polje should aim for complete success, and that the strongest possible forces should assemble southeast of Pristina for the attack to the northwest. His advise was heeded in part when it was decided to reinforce the wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army in this sector with two divisions (6 and 8 ID) from 1<sup>st</sup> Army. 6 ID, however, wasn't able to start its march from the area southwest of Nish until the 20<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, Falkenhayn turned a deaf ear to Conrad's wish that two German divisions from 11<sup>th</sup> Army would also take this route. To his displeasure, Conrad learned that his Imperial German colleague had pulled four of his divisions (11 Bav, 25 Res, 6 and 26 ID) out of Mackensen's front and led them behind the Danube without advising the Austrians of the intentions behind this measure. Although in the conference on 6 November Falkenhayn had reacted positively to the operational goals outlined by Conrad, as the month of November wore on the latter justifiably began to believe that the German Chief of Staff was no longer supporting the campaign wholeheartedly. When Falkenhayn suddenly traveled to Mackensen's HQ in mid-month without advance notice, Conrad's apprehension was strengthened. The k.u.k. liaison officer at Hindenburg's HQ, General Staff Capt. von Fleischmann, reported that Conrad expressed his concern to the German generals in the East that the Balkan campaign, like those on the Western and Eastern fronts, would degenerate into indecisive trench warfare.

Conrad expresses his concerns

In a memorandum to Falkenhayn on 18 November, Conrad discussed his worries. In the introduction he once again emphasized the urgent necessity of driving from the field not only the Serbs, but also the Entente troops, who according to the latest reports were developing an operation "in grand style." This would have a decisive effect on the decisions of the wavering neutral states, Greece and Romania. The relative strength of the contending forces was still favorable for the allies. The enemy side had 150,000 Serbian and 17,000 attached Montenegrin

riflemen; at the moment there were also 84,000 French and English troops, although intelligence estimated that this total would rise to 250,000. Our side had 264,000 Bulgarian plus 116,000 German and Aus-Hung. combatants; also "apparently there were available" 80,000 Turkish troops who could fight the Entente if necessary.<sup>173</sup>

Conrad went on to state that although the allies had a substantial numerical superiority, the deployment of their units on the battlefield wasn't designed to exploit this advantage. He predicted correctly that the Serbs intended to try to break through to the Entente troops who'd reached the area south of Veles; only rear guards of varying size would be left facing the north. The allies, on the other hand, were bunching most of their units in the mountains on the southern border of "Old Serbia"<sup>174</sup>. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, after the intervention of the divisions arriving from 1<sup>st</sup> Army, might be strong enough to halt the Serbs when they tried to attack through Prizren and Pristina, but was probably too weak to mount a successful offensive of its own to hit the enemy in this most sensitive area. With regret, Conrad referred to his proposal of the 9<sup>th</sup>, which hadn't been adopted, to also send German units into this important area. However, it was still possible to partly make up for this omission; XXII Res Corps, which had been pulled from the front and sent to Kraljevo, could still join 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army and thus free two more divisions of this Army for the area southeast of Pristina.

If the Serbian army could thus be decisively beaten at the eleventh hour and separated permanently from the Entente troops, then Conrad believed that the allies should immediately form a front against the latter. This line could be established either on the Tetovo-Skopje-Kumanov-Kriva Palanka road or - if the Entente army meanwhile advanced through Skopje - in the basin of Prizren, Vranje and Kustendil.

Before Conrad could send this letter, most of which he had

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173 At this time negotiations were apparently under way at Constantinople regarding the eventual deployment of this Turkish force, which most likely would have been composed of troops stationed in Thrace. Additional details about this matter aren't available in either the primary or secondary sources.

174 Here "Old Serbia" referred to the area of the Kingdom prior to 1913; the Serbs themselves used the phrase to designate "Serbian Macedonia."

written with his own hand, he learned that two further divisions from Mackensen's Army Group (43 Res ID of XXII Res Corps and 107 ID) had gone north. Conrad hastened to add a postscript deploring this latest weakening of the Balkan forces. He reminded Falkenhayn that on 6 November<sup>175</sup> they had explicitly decided that strong German forces would remain until the Serbian army had been completely overthrown. Moreover, in the spirit of this agreement it would be necessary to keep the Balkan armies strong so that they'd be ready to deal with the Entente troops, who were being substantially reinforced.

#### An exchange of notes between Teschen and Pless

Falkenhayn at first restricted his response to pointing out that the withdrawal of divisions from the Balkans was necessary because of the difficulty of supplying them so far from the railroads. However, he couldn't help adding a sarcastic remark: "The operations which Your Excellency proposed for the German troops in your note of 18 November are completely impractical, unless Your Excellency has found a special solution to the logistical question. I beg you to describe this solution before I can respond to Your Excellency's ideas."

In reply, Conrad was content to tell his German colleague that he couldn't "address specific details about the feasibility of further operations and the necessary logistical support" since he "didn't have any idea" which units Falkenhayn was willing to commit for this purpose. Meanwhile he learned that besides the six divisions which were already departing and the 105 ID (which would guard the Bulgarian coast at Varna and Burgas) the 44 Res ID had also left Mackensen's front. On the next day (the 20<sup>th</sup>) Conrad again addressed the issues he'd raised in the memorandum of the 18<sup>th</sup>. At the same time he complained bitterly that the German OHL was leaving him in the dark about their plans. He had no intention of interfering in Falkenhayn's decisions more than was necessary in pursuit of the common cause. However, the gradual departure of eight divisions from Serbia impinged on his joint responsibility for directing the war and on the fate of his own troops so much that he had to demand a clear explanation. Conrad answered Falkenhayn's rather caustic comment regarding the implementation of their original agreements by stating that he had been familiar "with conditions in the Balkans since his youth" and hadn't forgotten the problems of operating in the area. However, his suggestions

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175 In a copy of this memorandum in the military archive this date is shown - apparently in error - as "9 November."

were intended to draw out Falkenhayn's own ideas regarding the current situation.

#### The Chiefs of Staff meet at Teschen

The discussions which Conrad wanted took place the same day at Teschen. They covered all theaters of the war. Regarding the Balkans, Falkenhayn had already asserted that the Serbs didn't intend to break through to the south, but were turning toward the west and northwest. Because of this conviction he didn't think it was necessary to reinforce the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, even aside from the logistical problems which such reinforcements would entail, which would take a long time to surmount. Regarding the further goals of the campaign he agreed with Conrad's suggestions, but declared that it wouldn't be possible to attack the Entente army prior to 20 December because the railroads would first have to be rebuilt. Falkenhayn wasn't concerned about this timetable, because the restricted port facilities at Salonika made it impossible for their opponents to send much stronger reinforcements in the meantime.

Apparently Falkenhayn proposed that the enemy's Orient Army should be attacked by three groups. On the right wing, four Aus-Hung. divisions (62 ID, XIX Corps, one division of VIII Corps) would provide protection in the direction of Montenegro and Albania, and against any Italian forces which might land at Santi Quaranta or San Giovanni di Medua. Four German, one or two Aus-Hung. and three Bulgarian divisions would deploy in the Ovce Polje and three Bulgarian divisions at Kustendil; however, Falkenhayn wasn't sure that their Bulgarian allies would agree to advance against the Entente. On the other hand, the two Chiefs of Staff were still considering if, with some reservations, they could employ 80,000 Turks. Conrad seems to have suggested that the attack by the left wing at Kustendil should be reinforced by German divisions taken from Mackensen's front and sent through Sofia. Falkenhayn reported that Greece had given an assurance that an advance by the allies wouldn't be considered a *casus belli*, if the Entente had first attacked Bulgaria.

#### The disputes continue

Thus in the conference on the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> it seemed that harmony between the two Chiefs of Staff had at least been outwardly restored; however, there was still a residue of ill feeling on both sides. This became evident two days later when, for no particular reason, Falkenhayn sent Conrad a note to once

again defend himself against the points which the latter had raised in their recent meeting. If Conrad had asked that one of the German divisions taken from Mackensen's front should be sent to Galicia, Falkenhayn declared that "unfortunately no relief could be offered" because this issue was completely outside the "area of responsibility" of his Austrian colleague. Regarding the units sent back into the Banat, the German OHL was not obliged by its earlier agreements to leave their troops longer than necessary "to starve in Serbia and...to suffer exposure to typhus." Once again Falkenhayn questioned the feasibility of the plan proposed by Conrad on the 9<sup>th</sup> to send German divisions into the area southeast of Pristina because of the distance involved, the logistical problems, and the fact that the road from Leskovac to Vranje couldn't bear the increased traffic. Falkenhayn ended his assertions with an apology: "If here or there I have sounded academic, please forgive me. I wasn't able to make all these subjects clear in any other way."

In a short response, Conrad assured his colleague that his earlier arguments weren't intended as a polemic, but only to help clarify the discussion. Anyway, a further exchange of opinions was pointless, since the decisions were already in the past. He agreed with Falkenhayn on one point - an eventual advance against the Entente units at Salonika couldn't begin for about four weeks.

No doubt differences in character and temperament played a large part in causing these unpleasant disagreements, as G.Lt Cramon has so vividly described in his book.<sup>176</sup> However, the dispute between the two Chiefs of Staff was also caused by important objective factors, such as always arise in coalition warfare. After the line of communication to Constantinople was open, to Falkenhayn the Balkan peninsula had again become a secondary theater of operations.<sup>177</sup> As the campaign continued he asked himself whether it was in the interest of Germany and the situation on the Western front to expend further troops and supplies in the mountainous wastes of Macedonia. For Conrad however a radical solution of the Balkan problem, which after all was the immediate cause of the World War, was a central objective of his fatherland. This of course made it easier for him to see the importance of this theater for the general course of the war, even though this wasn't apparent to everyone until the final collapse in 1918. Thus the two leading generals of

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176 Cramon, pp. 22 ff.

177 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", pp. 152 ff. Zwehl, "Erich von Falkenhayn" (Berlin, 1926), p. 161.

the Central Powers saw the events in the Balkans from entirely different perspectives. Along with their scarcely compatible personalities, this created the danger of deep-seated and ongoing disagreements.

### 3. The Battle of the Kosovo polje, 19-24 November

#### a. Putnik plans to break through to the south

On 15 November, when Mackensen's Army Group had reached a line running roughly from Javor through Usce and Kursumlija to Lebane, Voivode Putnik had ordered the Serbian armies to retreat immediately to Mitrovica and Pristina. He could no longer postpone his planned breakthrough to the south, because the opposing forces were hemming him in ever closer in a half circle and he could no longer feed his concentrated troops in such a narrow area. In reports from the "New Territories", Putnik learned that Morava Div I and the Vardar Div had suffered very heavy losses while being driven back from Gnjilane. The Bregalnica Div was hanging onto the pass at Kacanik only with difficulty. South of Prizren, the new location of Serbian HQ, the Tetov Group was falling back through Gostivar in front of the advancing Bulgarians. Rightly fearing that he could be completely encircled, Putnik sent Morava Div II from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army toward Gnjilane. The Timok Armeegruppe had hastily retreated from Kursumlija to Pristina; when it reached the Kosovo polje it was immediately ordered to support the hard-pressed Bregalnica Div near Kacanik. It was followed by the Cavalry Division from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

Now Putnik planned to have the troops at Gnjilane (Morava Divs I and II plus Vardar Div) capture the crossing points through the Kara Dag Mountain. The Timok Armeegruppe, Bregalnica Div and Cavalry Div would open the pass at Kacanik, then push through Skopje to the Orient Army. To hold off the opposing troops in the north and northwest and gain sufficient time and freedom of movement for the thrust to the south, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies were placed in defensive positions along the heights on the edge of the Kosovo polje. Putnik wanted to pull Zivkovic's Armeegruppe from the northern front so it also could join the thrust through Kacanik.<sup>178</sup>

Thus because of the decisions of the Serbian high command the historical battlefield of the Kosovo polje, where the Serbs had fought unsuccessfully against the Turks on 28 June 1389, would again witness a trial of arms. This time also victory would be denied to the Serbian heroes. For the power of resistance of the gallant Serbian Army had already been broken by six weeks of

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178 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, pp. 143, 193 and 247.

costly fighting, in which the troops had fallen back under very unfavorable conditions without any prospect of success while they tried to gain time for the French and English to come up. Thousands had fallen away during the excruciating retreat through barren mountains - some had lain down their weapons and others had perished miserably. Typhoid fever had started to break out in the hungry columns. The roads on which they retreated were littered with the bodies of horses and other beasts of burden, by discarded military equipment, and by countless wagons. Although rear guards sacrificed themselves to hold off the enemy, Mackensen's pursuing columns were pushing inexorably toward the Kosovo polje, where they would deal the Serbs a deadly blow.

### **b. Advance of Kövess' and Gallwitz's Armies to Novibazar and Mitrovica, 19-22 November**

To reach this goal as soon as possible, GFM Mackensen wanted the first units which had reached the vicinity of the Kosovo polje to push ahead. On 19 November he ordered GdI Kövess to have VIII Corps advance without losing time through the Ibar valley to Mitrovica, while sending a side detachment on the left to Dren. After reaching Raska, XXII Res Corps would send a detachment to Novibazar. The Alpenkorps would deploy so that it could intervene if the enemy offered strong resistance on the Kosovo polje. HQ of XXII Res Corps and 44 Res ID should be sent back to Kraljevo as soon as they were no longer needed in the foremost line. Gallwitz's Army would send X Res Corps (101 and 103 ID) along the Kursumlija-Pristina road. The Army commanders were particularly instructed not to let up the pursuit. 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was ordered to cooperate with the northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (advancing through Gnjilane and Ferizovic); they would pin the Serbs at Pristina and keep them from retreating to the southwest through Prizren and to the west through Rudnik-Ipek. If the enemy offered resistance on the heights on the western bank of the Sitnica, the Bulgarians were to attack and tie them down long enough for 11<sup>th</sup> Army to intervene from the north.

#### The k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

In front of Kövess' Army, the 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army on 19 November was withdrawing south on both sides of the Ibar; its main body (Drina Div II and Dunav Div II) reached the Socanica, where they were ready to renew their defense. To cover their flank, the parts of the Montenegrin Sanjak Group who'd withdrawn through

Sjenica were sent to Osanica, while the Uzice Group took up a position east of Novibazar. To protect the Army's right flank, forces had to be diverted into the Lab valley, since the left wing of Zivkovic's neighboring Armeegruppe had already pulled back to the heights south of Prepolac Pass.<sup>179</sup>

For 20 November, GdI Kövess ordered XXII Res Corps to send 10 Mtn Bde to Novibazar and the Alpenkorps to Mitrovica. 59 ID of VIII Corps would also advance to Mitrovica. Because of the logistical problem, other units of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were held back - 57 ID at Brus and 44 German Res ID at Raska. The latter, along with the HQ of XXII Res Corps, would now march back to Kraljevo.

The right column of XXII Res Corps (10 Mtn Bde, reinforced by a Jaeger Regiment of the Alpenkorps) advanced in the Dezeva valley; on the 20<sup>th</sup> they came within an hour's march of Novibazar without encountering the enemy. The German Jaeger Regiment, hurrying ahead, entered the city at 5:00 PM. In the arsenal they captured 50 old mortars, 8 cannon and much military equipment. The Montenegrin units that had been stationed at Novibazar had meanwhile moved back to Ribaric and Rozaj in order to secure the roads to Berane and Ipek.

18 Mtn Bde of 59 ID thrust ahead in the Ibar valley on the 20<sup>th</sup> through Dren and threw back Serbian patrols. Following them were the Alpenkorps, which advanced only around 5 km past Raska, and the tired 9 Mtn Bde, which reached Blazevo.

In the night of 20-21 November, the German Jaeger regiment which had rushed ahead to Novibazar drove the Serbian Uzice Group from the heights south of this town. During the day, 10 Mtn Bde entered Novibazar; G.Lt von Krafft also sent the main body of the Alpenkorps, which 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had ordered to Mitrovica, to Novibazar. The Serbian Uzice Group again made a stand at Han Rogozna (southeast of Novibazar); G.Lt Krafft wanted the Alpenkorps to attack this enemy force on the next morning (21 November) and drive them back into the Kosovo polje, while 10 Mtn Bde (now placed under his command) guarded in the direction of Ribaric. GdI Kövess, however, didn't want the Alpenkorps to move past Novibazar, since he preferred to have it deploy closer to 18 Mtn Bde.

The 18 Mtn Bde was heavily engaged on 21 November. GM Skvor threw back to Socanica the parts of 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army (Dunav Div II) that were operating in the Ibar valley. Then, however, he

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179 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, p. 246

encountered new resistance because the Serbs were fighting desperately to gain time to salvage the military supplies at Mitrovica.<sup>180</sup> However, in the night of 21-22 November the Magyar troops of II Bn/IR 60 and of FJB # 15 overran the enemy's new position. They took 200 prisoners, with 6 guns and 4 machine guns. Misic attempted to hurl back the two gallant Hungarian battalions, whose advance was ever more threatening, but they repulsed all the enemy counterattacks. Early on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the 18 Mtn Bde was already standing on the flank of the Serbian group at Han Rogozna which the Alpenkorps was supposed to attack. Although 9 Mtn Bde was still far behind and there was no news about the enemy east of the Ibar, FML Snjaric decided to have 18 Mtn Bde, which had already quickly won so much ground, move ahead toward Mitrovica. After bringing order to its components, the Brigade reached Kolustovo around noon without fighting. An advanced detachment, which did encounter the enemy, came to a farm 7 km north of Mitrovica. 9 Mtn Bde followed 18 Bde on the 22<sup>nd</sup> in the area of Socanica.

GdI Kövess had only scanty information regarding the Alpenkorps. In the afternoon he instructed G.Lt Krafft to also thrust from Novibazar toward Mitrovica. Also, he ordered the Germans not to send strong units south toward Rudnik unless they received definite reports that large Serbian forces were moving out of Mitrovica on the road to Ipek. Army Group HQ agreed with Kövess, because an advance through the barren mountains to the south couldn't be accomplished quickly enough to prevent the enemy at Mitrovica from retreating.

G.Lt Krafft had meanwhile already sent parts of 10 Mtn Bde from Novibazar toward the south; they found that the enemy was occupying the heights west of Jablanica. The main body of the Alpenkorps drove the enemy from the heights at Han Rogozna on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. G.Lt Krafft wanted to continue to advance toward Mitrovica on the next day, so that he could eventually take part in the actions of 59 ID. However, pilots were unable to determine whether the enemy intended to defend or to evacuate the town.

#### The 11<sup>th</sup> German Army

Meanwhile important events were unfolding in the sector of Gallwitz's Army. The departure of units from the front made the task of regulating traffic ever more difficult, and the transfer of authority from the HQ of G.Lt Kosch's X Res Corps to that of

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180 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, p. 299

G.Lt von Winckler's IV Res Corps during the most important phase of the pursuit couldn't be advantageous<sup>181</sup>. Nevertheless, the combat soldiers still won successes. 103 ID continued its pursuit with three battalions of select troops, each battalion armed with twelve portable machine guns, and took the Prepolac Heights. 101 ID kept pace farther east. The two divisions took almost 1000 prisoners from Armeegruppe Zivkovic. At the same time, 9 Bulgarian ID on the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army threw back the 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army to the heights on the northern edge of the Brvenica basin, and thus was also threatening Zivkovic from the rear. This occurred at the very hour when Zivkovic received an order from the Serbian high command to withdraw from the northern front at an appropriate time so that his Armeegruppe could move south toward Kacanik. Thus Voivode Putnik was still hoping that he could successfully break through to the south. On the next day Zivkovic launched a desperate stroke against the right wing of X Res Corps (103 ID) west of Prepolac, but suffered casualties of almost 2000 men killed or taken prisoner. 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army suffered a similar fate at the hands of 9 Bulgarian ID, which was supported by 101 ID. Already on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Zivkovic's Armeegruppe had to fall back in the upper Lab valley; 3<sup>rd</sup> Serbian Army had to pull back to the Brvenica because of the very critical situation of the neighboring 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. On the next day, X Res Corps drove south in the Lab valley, meeting little resistance from the Serbs; 103 ID occupied Podujevo and 101 ID the plains north of the lower Brvenica. The German battalions encountered stiff resistance along this river on 22 November, and at first advanced just slightly forward. However, by evening the 101 ID reached the heights at Sarban (10 km north of Pristina), while 103 ID to its right rear advanced in the Lab valley. 105 ID pulled back from Nish to Krusevac where it could more easily be supplied.

In the last few days of fighting, Armeegruppe Zivkovic (Timok Div II and Sumadija Div I) had been badly defeated by X German Res Corps; reduced to just 2500 riflemen<sup>182</sup>, the Group was no longer able to block the most important route into the Kosovo polje. The Germans' surprising thrust into the Lab valley had endangered the entire Serbian army; its units south and southeast of Pristina, already under heavy pressure, were now also threatened from the rear.

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181 Orders to transfer authority were issued on 19 November, but it actually didn't take place until 23 November.

182 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, p. 303

### **c. The Serbs try to break through southeast of Pristina, then decide to retreat to the Adriatic, 19-24 November**

In his attempt to break through to the south and east, Putnik had sent the Timok Armeegruppe (Bregalnica Div, Combined Div, Krajina Group and Cavalry Div) toward the Kacanik pass and the Zegovac planina, and the troops of the New Territories Command (Morava Div I, Vardar Div, Morava Div II and a combined group) toward the Velika planina. Most of these units were already engaged on 19 November on the heights just southeast of the Kosovo polje, which were defended by General Ribarov's northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army. The Serbian troops, recognizing the desperation of their predicament, expended their last strength. They won some success, despite very heavy casualties. However, the main body of 8 Bulgarian ID quickly came up through Kumanovo to Gnjilane. After two days of bitter fighting, the Serbs were pushed back on 21 November. Farther north, the inner wings of the two Bulgarian Armies also gained ground on 21 and 22 November on both sides of the Leskovica. However, the Bulgarians couldn't advance an inch on the Pristina-Skopje road at Ferizovic. Their attempt to send a group from Tetovo through the Sar planina toward Prizren also failed, due to unfavorable weather. The Serbs, on the other hand, were equally unsuccessful when they tried to open the road through Kacanik toward the south.

#### Putnik's decision to retreat

While General Popovic, commanding the Serbian troops in Macedonia, was still fighting to take the Zegovac planina and the pass at Kacanik, the Serbian high command had already been forced to give up their plan of breaking through south to the Army of the Orient. For some time there had been no hope that the Entente troops would intervene. Sarrail hadn't advanced past the mouth of the Cerna, and on 12<sup>th</sup> already received an order from Paris to halt the offensive.

Now, however, the Serbian high command was compelled to retreat behind the Sitnica. Their opponents were already approaching Mitrovica from the north, forcing their way into the Lab valley, and threatening the rear of the Serbian troops trying to break through to the south, as well as the principal avenue of escape west through Prizren.

On 21 November Putnik was already issuing orders to retreat over

the Sitnica to the heights west of the Kosovo polje. The Serbian leader emphasized that the breakthrough to the south had been shattered by the counter-measures of the allies.<sup>183</sup> The commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Army would immediately send Drina Div II through Ipek to Rozaj to guard the road from Novibazar to Andrijevica (since the Montenegrin troops in the Sanjak had gone back to the Tara and thus uncovered the Serbian flank). The other troops would withdraw as follows:

- . The rest of 1<sup>st</sup> Army (Dunav Div II and the Uzice Group) to the heights southwest of Mitrovica,
- . Armeegruppe Zivkovic to the heights southwest of Vucitrn,
- . 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the Cicavica planina,
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to Goles brod,
- . The troops of the New Territories Command to the Nerodimka planina, and
- . The Timok Armeegruppe to the Hodza Balkan.

At the same time detachments were sent to Ipek, Djakova and Prizren. Thus the Serbian high command had clearly decided to avoid complete destruction on the Kosovo polje by retreating through the mountains of Albania and Montenegro to the eastern coast of the Adriatic. This was their only chance to eventually return with the remnants of the Serbian army to the side of Entente troops and to renew the battle for their dearly-beloved homeland.

The first goal was to reach Andrijevica; orders for this purpose were issued on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> Army and Armeegruppe Zivkovic would march on the road through Ipek, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army through Rugova and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army through Plav. The troops under the New Territories Command would take the road through Djakova and Prizren to Skutari, and those of the Timok Armeegruppe would retreat through Prizren, Kula Lums, Dibra and Elbasan to Durazzo. Since only mountain paths led from Prizren through the Albanian mountains, all of the artillery which was still in service would be sent on the road through Ipek to Andrijevica. The mountain artillery would stay with the infantry as long as possible, then the guns would be either buried or wrecked.<sup>184</sup>

Finally Putnik notified his Montenegrin allies, whom he no longer fully trusted, about his decisions.

#### The allied advance to Mitrovica and Pristina

Thus on 23 November the Battle of the Kosovo polje wasn't fought

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183 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, p. 320

184 Serbian Official History, Vol. XIII, p. 27

to a conclusion. There was no encirclement of the Serbian Army, but rather a series of bloody actions with rear guards who were covering the retreat over the Sitnica against the pursuing allied columns as they appeared in front of Mitrovica and Pristina from the north and east.

The Montenegrin Javor Group, fighting on the Serbian left wing, pulled back on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to Rozaj in front of 10 Mtn Bde, which had been sent from Novibazar toward Rudnik. GM Drofffa's leading troops pursued the retreating enemy to Ribaric. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the main body of the Alpenkorps reached the area of Izvori on their way to Mitrovica; their opponents, the Serbian Uzice Group, had already pulled back the night before. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, G.Lt Krafft wanted 10 Mtn Bde to thrust through Cecevo to Rudnik, while the main body of the Alpenkorps moved through the upper Ibar valley to Pridvorica; according to his original plan, this would put them in position to strike the Serbs' northern flank.

GdI Kövess now agreed with this plan, since Mitrovica had meanwhile been captured by 59 ID. In the night of 22-23 November the Division had already reported that the town had been evacuated, but this was premature. Advanced battalions of 18 Mtn Bde had encountered enemy troops on the heights which covered Mitrovica toward the north. A group of houses in the Ibar valley northwest of the town was stormed around 10:00 AM. 18 Mtn Bde quickly decided to follow the retreating enemy; as they advanced they saw Serbian detachments to their right (on the western bank of the Ibar) moving in the same direction. Dunav Div II, however, offered new resistance on the hills north of Mitrovica, so FML Snjaric postponed the continuation of the attack to the next morning. He felt that it wasn't advisable to move sooner while his western flank was totally exposed.

Meanwhile, however, the Serbs fell back over the Sitnica. The III Bn of IR # 31 was able to enter Mitrovica around 10:30 PM. The rest of 18 Mtn Bde marched in early on the 24<sup>th</sup> and were soon followed by 9 Mtn Bde; the booty included 13 guns, 6 machine guns, all kinds of ammunition, 7 partly destroyed locomotives, and 130 intact railroad cars. The town's Albanians and Turks welcomed the victors. Unfortunately the exhausted troops didn't secure any food, because the Serbs had destroyed the rations which they weren't able to carry away.

In the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup>, the 59 ID established a bridgehead position south of Mitrovica; its 9 Mtn Bde had to drive away Serbian rear guards. A battalion of 18 Mtn Bde advanced in the Sitnica valley and reached Vucitrn without fighting. Contact

still hadn't been established with either of the neighboring corps.

On the same day 10 Mtn Bde, after a difficult advance on icy paths, was only able to reach Tabalijska in the Ibar valley; by evening the leading brigade of the Alpenkorps was in Pridvorica.

The German IV Res Corps (103 and 101 ID) was advancing over the Brvenica. They were opposed by some troops whom the Serbs had hastily scraped together to cover their dangerous retreat, but 101 ID nonetheless pushed relentlessly forward. In the afternoon the Division occupied the last hills in front of Pristina, while advance guards of 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army approached from the east. The Serbs were everywhere in retreat. A German cavalry patrol reached the city around noon, and German infantry entered Pristina in the evening. Here the pursuers took another 7000 prisoners (2000 of whom had been wounded), 6 guns, and a great amount of military equipment, wheat, oats, and crude and refined petroleum. Also a large number of Aus-Hung. prisoners were liberated.<sup>185</sup> On the next day IV Res Corps advanced west to the Sitnica and sent patrols toward the Cicavica planina and the Gole brdo. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the Serbs were still shelling the Pristina railroad station with artillery, but only a few isolated infantry detachments were stationed in front of the Germans.

XIX Corps, which reached Sjenica and Dugapoljana on the 19<sup>th</sup> (and originally was supposed to move from the west toward Novibazar) had to halt because they lacked provisions. The Landsturm Brigades of Schiess and Streith were ordered back from Ivanjica to Cacak, but this measure didn't provide much relief. Weak Montenegrin units were withdrawing through Sjenica toward Bijelopolje while plundering one village after another, but FML Trollmann couldn't pursue them into the trackless mountains in the south, which reached 1600 meters in height. It wouldn't be possible to bring up supplies by wagon. The only solution was to leave the troops for now at Sjenica (17 Mtn Bde, Lst Inf Bde Schwarz, 20 Lst Mtn Bde) and Dugapoljana (21 Lst Mtn Bde), while columns of bearers were assembled. Meanwhile FML Trollmann sent scouts ahead toward the Montenegrin border. On the 24<sup>th</sup> they came upon Montenegrin outposts at Tresnjevic, which were driven away the next day by a mixed detachment of the advanced guard. However, the enemy soon established a new position in the area.

#### Mackensen's further intentions

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185 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p. 386 ff.

With the capture of Mitrovica and Pristina, Mackensen had reached the goal he set his Armies on 18 November. Now it was urgently necessary to suspend operations. The troops had been moving without a break for more than a month and a half and needed some rest. The supply services had to be brought into order, since the Armies continued to struggle with great logistical problems. The troops had used up all the food they were able to scrounge during their pursuit through the barren mountains, and there was hardly anything left to feed the many thousands of Serbian prisoners who'd been taken.

Mackensen's Army Group HQ didn't intend to pursue the Serbs into the Albanian mountains. Reports from pilots indicated that there was only a weak enemy force in front of the Alpenkorps, and that they were retreating to Rudnik. On the road from Strimlja to Prizren, however, there were numerous columns of troops and wagons. According to captured Serbian officers, their Army still consisted of 20,000 to 30,000 men, an estimate which later was proven to be much too low. The Bulgarians would continue to chase these remnants.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, GFM Mackensen ordered General Boyadiyev to pivot with his right wing through Vragolija toward Prizren; thus he would fall upon the rear of the enemy units which were still opposing the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army at Ferizovic. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, Army Group HQ told GdI Kövess not to move the Alpenkorps over the Ibar valley, but to send them to Mitrovica. After the end of the current operations by 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies in the Kosovo polje, the IV Res Corps (101 and 103 ID) and Alpenkorps would assemble in the Southern Morava valley around Leskovac. When this movement began the Alpenkorps would come under the command of 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

In detail, the new orders of Army Group HQ prescribed that:

- . 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army would send its right wing in pursuit from Pristina to Prizren; they would take over responsibility from IV Res Corps for guarding the Sitnica valley; then they would also relieve the k.u.k. VIII Corps and cover the Rudnik-Ipek road.
- . IV Res Corps would advance to the line Priluz-Vragolija.
- . 59 ID would continue to thrust through Mitrovica and Vucitrn until they linked up with German and Bulgarian units in the Sitnica valley, and then would pull back to Mitrovica.
- . 57 ID would stay in their current position southeast of Brus and east of Blazevo.
- . The Alpenkorps would halt as soon as they were no longer opposed by the enemy northwest of Mitrovica; then they would

stay between Novibazar and Mitrovica until ordered to leave the theater; they would advance toward Rudnik only to the extent necessary to ensure their own security.

#### 4. The thrust to Plevlje, 30 November-2 December

The Aus-Hung. troops entrusted with the security of the right flank of Mackensen's Army Group (62 ID including GM Reinöhl's Group) reached the Lim between Rudo-Priboj and Nova varos on 19 November. On this day GM Seeckt instructed 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to have them advance over the Lim to the line Boljanic-Plevlje-Prijepolje; this would provide greater protection for the rail line between Sarajevo and Uvac, and simultaneously increase pressure on the Montenegrins.

GdI Sarkotic, commanding the troops in BHD, had already decided earlier to have GM Blechinger's new Group (3 ½ battalions and 2 ½ batteries drawn from the Bosnian garrison) cross the Drina at Megjegja. After the arrival of Col. Zhuber's Brigade, which 62 ID was returning to him, he intended to thrust from Gorazde through Canice to the Metalka Pass. To cooperate with this operation, GdI Kövess ordered on 18 November that 62 ID - guarding his Army's flank - would occupy the rail line from Ustipraca through Megjega to Uvac and support the crossing of the Drina by GM Blechinger's Group which was scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup>.

After a brisk exchange of ideas between the HQ of the Army Group, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, 62 ID and the BHD Command, the final plan was that:

- . A new group under FML von Rollinger (four to five battalions of troops from Bosnia) would thrust from the west through Gorazde and Cacinje to the Metalka Pass;
- . 62 ID with Col. Zhuber's Group would advance from the Rudo-Uvac sector on the Lim toward Boljanic-Plevlje; and
- . GM Reinöhl's Group (205 Lst Inf Bde and Lst Eta Bde Hausser) would move from Nova varos toward Prijepolje, then if necessary west toward Plevlje.

On 21 November, GO Conrad declared that he agreed with this plan. He anticipated that a thrust into northern Montenegro would open the road in the Lim valley, the Ustipraca-Uvac railroad and the Gorazde-Plevlje-Sjenica road, which would substantially relieve the serious logistical problems. However, this two-pronged attack against the Montenegrin units between

the Drina and the Lim couldn't be carried out simultaneously with the great encirclement attempt against the Serbs, since it would be necessary to make careful preparations for fighting in the barren mountains in this late season. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would have to send a pioneer company and three bridging trains to Group Rollinger for the crossing of the Drina at Gorazde. Also, GdI Sarkotic asked the k.u.k. high command for more troops to replace the units which had been drawn from Sarajevo, Mostar and Castelnuovo to build FML Rollinger's group. Finally, FML Kalser reported that he wouldn't be able to thrust over the Lim to Plevlje until he had established a secure supply line.

Meanwhile on 20 November GM Blechinger's weak group crossed the Drina at Megjegja, meeting little resistance from the Montenegrins; on the next day they occupied the area at the confluence of the Lim and Drina. The enemy abandoned the front on the Drina in front of Blechinger and farther south. Fires observed opposite Gorazde and even opposite Foca indicated that the Montenegrins were beginning to retreat.

In an order issued on 22 November, GO Conrad now demanded quick action; he didn't want GdI Kövess to wait for the thrust from Gorazde. If the attack over the Lim was powerful enough, it could secure the rail line to Uvac and the Gorazde-Plevlje road by itself. A thrust from Gorazde could have only limited effect anyway because of the lack of logistical support and because the units available to the commander in BHD were already stretched to their limit. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, on the other hand, had available the brigades which had left the front (Streith's, Schiess' and Haustein's). If 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ felt a more substantial thrust over the upper Drina was necessary, they should move these units through Visegrad to the Drina.

GdI Kövess replied that the three brigades in question had given up their supply columns to XIX and VIII Corps, and therefore weren't mobile for the time being. The k.u.k. high command, however, didn't want these units to remain completely idle; on 22 November they proposed that at least some of the troops should carry out a surprise attack against Mount Lovcen. This operation wouldn't require supply trains, since it was easy to bring supplies to the Bocche di Cattaro by sea and by rail.

## **5. The decision to attack Mt Lovcen and invade Montenegro**

On 23 November, GO Conrad informed the HQ of the Military Harbor at Castelnuovo and GdI Sarkotic that the pressure of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on

the Sanjak of Novibazar might force the Montenegrins to transfer troops from their border with Herzegovina and Dalmatia to the north. Perhaps this situation could be exploited by a surprise attack from Cattaro against the Lovcen. For this purpose the AOK could supply a Landsturm infantry brigade with mountain artillery, two 30.5 cm mortar batteries (plus a 42 cm howitzer if necessary) and an air company for observation missions. FML von Weber, the commander in the Bocche, responded that there were at least 6000 to 8000 Montenegrin troops in the Lovcen area; according to a report from Cetinje there might be as many as 10,000. To date none of the enemy had left this sector. To attack Mt Lovcen the mobile garrison forces would have to be reinforced by ten battalions armed and trained for mountain warfare. If the Montenegrins did weaken their force in the Lovcen positions, only half of the requested reinforcements would be needed. The best time to start the operation would be the moment when 3<sup>rd</sup> Army advanced over the northern border into Montenegro. Because of the advent of winter, however, the attack should commence as soon as possible.

While GO Conrad was thus planning to conquer the Lovcen, the thrust into northern Montenegro was again postponed. On 21 November the 62 ID had one brigade apiece at Nv. Rudo, Uvac and Priboj, plus Group Reinöhl at Bistrica and Nova varos. South of the Lim the Montenegrin Sanjak Group was standing its ground with several brigades. Priboj and the road in the Lim valley still lay under the fire of Montenegrin artillery. Col. Hausser's Brigade at Bistrica therefore couldn't receive their urgently needed rations. This Brigade hadn't gotten supplies for three weeks and was living only off the land; for two weeks the troops received only half their daily allotment of bread.

Therefore FML Kalser wanted to first drive the Montenegrins from the Lim area south of Uvac. In the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, when it was learned that the enemy had pulled back from Priboj, FML Kalser ordered 9 Lst Eta Bde to immediately cross the river, even though only an inadequate amount of bridging equipment was available at Uvac.

GM Blechinger's Group on the Drina, which had been attached to 62 ID, also advanced south on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and didn't encounter the enemy. A detachment of GM Vuchetich's Drina security forces from the Bosnian side occupied a height south of Gorazde without opposition from the Montenegrins. Small groups from 62 ID crossed the Lim on the 23<sup>rd</sup> at Priboj and Uvac; the troops at Nv. Rudo had to wait through the day for the arrival of some boats. Group Reinöhl sent scouting detachments toward Prijepolje, where

the enemy had burnt the bridge.

#### FML Kalser's plans

This was the situation when 3<sup>rd</sup> Army gave FML Kalser overall responsibility for the invasion of northwestern Montenegro (the former Sanjak of Novibazar). The commander's primary concern remained the lack of rations and insufficient equipment. Restoration of the Visegrad-Uvac railroad and the ferry at Megjegja wouldn't be finished until 29 November at the earliest. FML Kalser therefore intended to start the thrust to Plevlje on 1 December. In the meantime he wanted to establish small bridgeheads south of the Lim at Rudo, Ustibar, Priboj and Prijepolje; they would cover the railroad workers, Reinöhl's supply line, and the bridge construction. He also ordered that supplies of rations should be established at Rudo and Uvac, and that the troops should be given winter equipment and shoes. Then the offensive would begin on a broad front - Group Blechinger would move toward Cajnice, Brigade Zhuber from Rudo to Bojanic, and 62 ID and Group Reinöhl from Ustibar and Prijepolje to Plevlje.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> FML Kalser had to modify his plan of attack, because GdI Sarkotic ordered GM Blechinger's Group to move from Megjegja to Gorazde. Here they would join security troops from GM Vuchetich (under FML Rollinger) and advance toward Cajnice on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The enemy had left the Gorazde area, so GM Blechinger could move from this town to Cajnice on a good road. Although this measure interfered with the unified command structure for the Plevlje offensive, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ approved it, primarily to avoid drawn-out negotiations.

When Pristina and Mitrovica fell on 24 November, the k.u.k. high command again urged FML Kalser to quickly move his troops. The latter now scheduled the start of the offensive for the 30<sup>th</sup>. An earlier date was hardly possible, since 62 ID and Group Reinöhl were living off the land. Meanwhile the Montenegrins were already retreating from the Lim toward the Tara, and toward Hum, Nefertara Mojovac, and Bijelopolje.<sup>186</sup> Strong rear guards, however, were still holding the heights north of Plevlje and Jabuka. Pilots from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army noticed these movements on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and reported that the road from Gorazde to Cajnice was free of the enemy. Advanced troops from GM Blechinger's Group moved along this road and on the 27<sup>th</sup> reached the Metalka Pass without fighting. The main body followed them and occupied Cajnice. In

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186 Serbian Official History, Vol. XII, p. 319

the next few days scouts discovered only weak enemy units southeast of Metalka Pass (at Boljanic) and south of the Cehotina (at Celebic).

On the 27<sup>th</sup>, scouting detachments from 62 ID encountered entrenched enemy troops on the northern edge of the Plevlje plateau. This force didn't seem to be strong, since the available reports indicated that the two Montenegrin brigades from Prijepolje and Plevlje had already pulled back to Jabuka. Therefore FML Kalser decided to begin the advance to Plevlje.

#### The advance to the south

Four battalions moved ahead on the 28<sup>th</sup> from Ustibar, in a snow storm and grim cold. The route to Plevlje led through mountains 1400 meters high, covered with ravines; the path could be used only by men on foot. The leading troops of 62 ID moved slowly forward through deep snow toward the border of the Land of the Black Mountain; here on the 30<sup>th</sup> they encountered stiff resistance as they began to climb up the northern edge of the Plevlje plateau. The enemy positions were stormed in fighting that in some places lasted until darkness fell. The Montenegrins took up a new position right in front of Plevlje.

Meanwhile four other battalions were tirelessly working to clear deep snow from the road in the Lim valley to Prijepolje so that it would be passable. On the 29<sup>th</sup> some bridging equipment arrived at Prijepolje; on the same day the first railroad train arrived at Uvac. Now 62 ID and Group Reinöhl could finally expect some rations. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, Reinöhl crossed the Lim at Prijepolje on a military bridge. He was instructed to send his advance guard toward Jabuka. Kalser had sought to have the commanding general in BHD move Group Blechinger to Boljanic; however, on the 30<sup>th</sup> the envelopment attack by the two flanking groups had yet to take effect. At Mackensen's suggestion, Group Blechinger was now placed under FML Kalser rather than Sarkotic. Thus all units involved in the concentric advance to Plevlje were again under unified command.

On 1 December, Col. Dominic's Fortress Brigade (advancing through Ustibar) was supposed to join the main body of 62 ID. On this day GM Blechinger reached Boljanic without fighting; after light skirmishes he took the Montenegrin barracks in Gotovusa. The parts of 62 ID which had been sent against Plevlje were still meeting resistance in front of that town and near Jabuka. In the afternoon, however, Group Reinöhl took the heights south of Jabuka. In the evening the Montenegrin rear

guards near Plevlje, who had been covering destructive activities in the town, were driven away. By the end of 1 December, patrols from 62 ID were sent quickly ahead to the Cehotina, where all the bridges had been destroyed. On the next morning Kalser's Division occupied Plevlje, which had been fully looted by the Montenegrins. The troops were greeted in friendly fashion by the inhabitants, who remembered that Austria-Hungary had occupied their town from 1879 to 1908.

The Cajnice-Boljanic-Plevlje-Jabuka road was now firmly held by 62 ID. Montenegrin rear guards were still stationed on the heights south of the Cehotina. Therefore it was decided to send troops across the valley in the night of 2-3 December and to set up a bridgehead on the other side to defend Plevlje. This plan was successfully implemented. Thus the reinforced 62 ID had won its first objective. Brigade Zhuber now returned to Bosnia and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> headed for Gorazde. They were followed on the 5<sup>th</sup> by Group Blechinger; the latter was replaced by 209 Lst Inf Bde, which just had been created from troops in BHD and was equipped for mountain operations.

## **6. Collapse of the Serbian Army and its retreat to the Adriatic**

On 25 November 1915 the remnants of the Serbian Army, in their final action, pulled back to the heights west of the Kosovo polje and east of Prizren. For two days the supply trains and most of the artillery had been crowding into the towns of Ipek and Djakova in the Metoja basin. The Serbs were threatened from the direction of Novibazar by Germans and Austrians; in the south, they were more gravely menaced by the Bulgarians on their flank and rear. Now it was time for Voivode Putnik to carry out the bitter task he had planned more than 48 hours previously. There was only one salvation for his Army, which was disorganized, hacked to pieces and bleeding from a thousand wounds - they would have to reach the coastal plains by Scutari, Alessio and Durazzo. The main body (1<sup>st</sup> Army, Group Zivkovic, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies) would pull back through the Metoja basin as well as through Andrijevica and Podgorica to Scutari; the troops in the New Territories would move through Dajkova, Prizren, Spas and Scutari to Alessio. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was already covering this movement toward the north. In the south the Timok Armeegruppe, while retreating through Dibra to Tirana and Elbasan, would also provide protection to the flank. This would entail offensive thrusts by some units in the direction of Gostivar, where the

Serbs' Albanian and Tetovo Groups were still stubbornly standing their ground. In coordination with the latter groups, detachments sent to Bitolj would maintain contact with the French through Prilep. The high command informed the troops in stirring words that the only alternative to an extraordinarily difficult retreat (which at least offered the possibility of safety) was shameful surrender in the open field.

This exhortation, however, had only a limited effect. The soldiers were worn out physically and spiritually, and there were signs that the Army was disintegrating. As the retreat began, there were hundreds and thousands of miserable men, clothed in rags, who stayed behind. Driven by hunger, they either fled into the mountains or surrendered to their opponents, who thus could have broken through the Serbian lines. Putnik was still able to assemble a substantial number of troops from his main body in the basins of Ipek and Djakova, from where they could continue their retreat. This was possible only because the allies were no longer pushing forward.

#### The allies halt their advance

Kaiser's group, on the allies' extreme right wing, was advancing toward Plevlje and not in a position to interfere with the Serbian line of retreat. In the center, on 25 November the Alpenkorps' main body was at Pridvorica in the upper Ibar valley, 59 ID at Mitrovica and the German IV Res Corps at Pristina; all had been ordered to pause for a well-earned rest. Only small detachments remained in contact with the enemy. Scouting groups from XIX Corps collided on the Montenegrin border south of Sjenica with outposts of Drina Div II, which 1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Army had sent to the Rozaj-Berane area; these Serbs held onto the chalk ridges until the end of the month. Under the Alpenkorps, a battalion of 10 Mtn Bde climbed the Suha planina, from which infantry fire could still hit the Serbian columns hurrying back from Mitrovica toward the west. On the next day advanced detachments of the Brigade skirmished in this area with Dunav Div II. 59 ID mopped up the heights just south of Mitrovica on the 25<sup>th</sup> (driving away rear guards from the same Serbian division), scouted south toward Klima, and established contact with IV Res Corps in the area west of Pristina.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> the Alpenkorps marched back toward Kraljevo. On the same day 103 ID moved through Kursumlija to Leskovac. 101 ID followed on the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the same day the 10 Mtn Bde reached Novibazar, with outposts on the upper Ibar. 59 ID stayed at Mitrovica, 57 ID at Brus. Although Mackensen had ordered on the

24<sup>th</sup> that the k.u.k. VIII Corps should be relieved by Bulgarian troops, the AOK had refused to concur; they wanted the area along and north of the line Mitrovica-Ipek-Scutari to be retained as an Aus-Hung. sphere of influence. Informed of this by Conrad on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Falkenhayn instructed Mackensen to countermand his order.

The planned relief of VIII Corps would have been impossible for the moment anyway, since 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army was finding it difficult to move; they had been unable to keep the troops properly fed while the Army's right wing had pursued the enemy toward Pristina. However, 3 ID of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army struck a heavy blow against the southern wing of the Serbian forces at Prizren and Djakova, and in the valley of the White Drin<sup>187</sup>. Between 28 November and 3 December the Bulgarians several times broke into the mass of troops, guns, wagons and refugees, smashing any resistance and taking great numbers of prisoners and much military booty. Finally on the 4<sup>th</sup> they halted further retaliation against their hated enemy; following the orders of their high command, they turned to the south to fight the Army of the Orient.

#### Progress of the Serbian retreat

The aged and weak King of Serbia, the Prince Regent, Minister President Pasic, Putnik and the Russian Ambassador Prince Trubetskoy went on ahead of the fleeing army. They were following the same short but difficult path through the mountains which a Serbian column had taken in October 1912 to reach the Adriatic in six days, destroying and burning all before them. On 7 December the King and the mortally ill Voivode Putnik arrived at Scutari, the former in an ox-drawn wagon and the latter in a litter carried by his soldiers.

Communications between the civilian and military officials and their Army commanders had been interrupted since the Serbs had left the Kosovo polje. At Ipek, Generals Stepanovic, Jurisic-Sturm, Misic and Zivkovic watched in shock through long, bitter days and nights as the ghostly remnants of their forces marched by. The columns were melting like snow in the spring sunshine. Desertion, weakness and frostbite, along with typhus and other diseases, tore new holes in the ranks. The largest regiments contained just several hundred men apiece. Many soldiers were

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187 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: According to the situation map, one brigade of 8 Bulgarian ID operated alongside 3 ID in this successful operation.

barefoot. All were dressed in rags, seeming more naked than clothed. Their wasted faces expressed deep discouragement and bitter anger; the anger was directed against their hard fate and especially against the powerful allies who had so completely left Serbia in the lurch in its hour of greatest need. An exasperated French liaison officer noted in his diary that he was constantly the target of bitter comments, often addressed in German, during this miserable retreat. A few weeks later, a Serbian emigre complained: "Our allies, especially the English, to whom we appealed so much and from whom we expected so much, have abandoned us in the most difficult and darkest moment, when we needed help and they could have successfully provided it. This alliance doesn't help us or our interests; each of the western nations keeps only itself and its own agenda in mind, while trying to exploit the other one as much as it can."<sup>188</sup> This was the feeling of the entire Serbian Army.

When the troops of the Central Powers didn't advance beyond Novibazar and the Kosovo polje at the end of November, and the Serbs held a council of war in Ipek, there was one man who was willing to defy fate. This was General Misic, the victor at Arangjelovac in 1914, who wanted to lead a counterattack with hastily assembled units against their exhausted pursuers, similar to the one he had launched the year before. However, he remained alone in his opinion. On 3 December, when the Bulgarians reached Djakova, the generals assembled at Ipek had no further hope that they could still avoid retreating at the last minute.<sup>189</sup> Therefore the Serbian rear guards abandoned their positions on the border facing Novibazar.

The torments which afflicted the remnants of the Serbian Army in

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188 Wendel, "Der Kampf der Südslawen um Freiheit und Einheit" (Frankfurt, 1925), pp. 688 ff.

189 The Montenegrins had not only left the Serbs' flank more or less exposed; they also didn't hesitate to treat them with scorn. The Serbian generals at Ipek responded angrily to these gibes from their kinsmen. The Montenegrins failed in their attempt to keep the flood of retreating soldiers from moving through their country, because the Serbian commanders held fast to the plan to retreat through Andrijevisa. (Serbian Official History, Vol. XIII, p. 163).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - It should be remarked that this passage, and all those which accuse the Montenegrins of failing to do their part in the war, are based on Serbian sources. No doubt if there were any Montenegrin sources to be consulted they would have a different tale to tell.

these fearful weeks multiplied when they entered the interior of the mountains, just as winter was approaching. By mid-December the burden had become almost too much to bear. In this period the Drina Div II lost 981 men within 48 hours; on 19 December its commander furiously demanded that measures be taken to immediately end this "vicious martyrdom." The bodies of thousands of women, children and old people also littered the road. People who fell along the way were butchered by Albanian Arnauts seeking revenge for what happened in 1912.<sup>190</sup>

During the fall campaign of 1915 the Serbian armed forces (including replacements) had consisted of 340,000 troops; the total losses were estimated as 94,000 dead and wounded.<sup>191</sup> The majority of the 70,000 wounded men were taken prisoner. By the end of November the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies of the Central Powers had taken 120 officers and 124,000 men as prisoners; the Bulgarians had taken about 50,000 more. The booty was enormous. The two former Armies had captured 397 guns, 48 machine guns, 12 trench mortars and 208 ammunition wagons. The Bulgarians took about 200 guns.<sup>192</sup> The Serbs also destroyed many weapons of all types, plus military equipment. Other items were buried since the Serbs hoped, correctly, that they would eventually return.

Allied casualties had been moderate; more losses were caused by the toil and privations of the troops than by hostile fire. An exact figure cannot be compiled from existing sources. The Aus-Hung. forces may have lost 18,000 men (dead, wounded and missing).<sup>193</sup>

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190 Serbian Official History, Vol. XIII, pp. 339 and 346. Many Aus-Hung. officers and soldiers who'd been taken prisoner in 1914, and already suffered a year of privation, now shared the fate of the Serbian Army. The majority had already been sent through Albania prior to the Serbian retreat and then been shipped to Italy. A substantial number had also escaped to the allied lines. See (*inter alia*) Weiland, "In Feindeshand" (Vienna, 1931), Vol. II, pp. 51 ff.

191 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, p. 390

192 The number of captured guns does not include numerous old pieces, stemming perhaps from the Turkish era, which the Serbs had abandoned in the towns conquered by the allies.

193 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Reliable casualty figures for this campaign still aren't available at the end of the century. Randal Gray ("Chronicle of the First World War", Volume I, p. 285) simply repeats the figures shown above for Serbian casualties, and makes no attempt to estimate losses of the Montenegrins. He adds that about 24,000 civilians perished in

#### ***D. Strategic Summary of the Campaign against Serbia in Fall 1915***

In a note to Conrad on 31 October 1915, Falkenhayn correctly called himself the "author of the Serbian operation and especially of the Bulgarian participation." He was also responsible for setting the campaign's first goal - to relieve the threatened city of Constantinople. This goal influenced the deployment of the allies against Serbia. Two armies of the Central Powers - the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> and German 11<sup>th</sup> - marched up to the northern border; the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army deployed on the eastern border of Old Serbia. Thus a pincers operation was directed against the two end points of the Belgrade-Caribrod railroad. After a series of actions, in which the Bulgarians suffered some setbacks, the Serbs were driven from the banks of the Danube between Belgrade and Prahovo by 25 October. Fourteen days later (on 9 November) they were also pushed back from the railroad itself. It was now possible to send military supplies down the Danube to Bulgaria and Turkey. Work began immediately to restore all the railroad tracks, many of which had been destroyed. The main line was open on its entire length on 14 January 1916, and rail service to Constantinople began.

Taking the railroad, however, was insufficient to secure even the limited goal of Falkenhayn. The Serbs continued to stubbornly defend every foot of their homeland, striving to inflict heavy losses on the invaders. It was recognized that their intention was to hold on until the promised help could arrive from the Entente. Thus under all circumstances the attack must continue so that the Serbian Army could be destroyed before it linked up with the Franco-British Army of the Orient.

Important steps to meet this goal had already been taken, thanks to the decisive operations of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, which under its energetic commander Todorov was maneuvering in Macedonia south of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. They took Vranje on 16 October, Veles on the 19<sup>th</sup>, and Kumanovo on the 20<sup>th</sup>, severing the connection between the Serbs and Salonika. However, an effective thrust by Todorov's

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the retreat. The French lost 4965 men and 6 guns, the English 1189 men and 8 guns. Gray gives no overall estimate of Aus-Hung. losses; he states the Germans lost more than 8000 men. Bulgarian casualties are available only for the units facing Salonika (they lost 6277 men).

units to the north (*i.e.* into the rear of the Serbian Army) couldn't be carried out - first because of the distance involved, but primarily because the Bulgarians also had to guard against the Entente divisions which were advancing slowly toward Gradsko. Moreover, after the Serbs pulled back to the center of their country around Kragujevac the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army no longer threatened the enemy flank; this Army and the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army crowded together on a narrow front as the battle moved south. Another disadvantage of setting limited goals for the campaign was that the armies of Gallwitz and Kövess pushed together simultaneously south, following the Serbs' main line of retreat through the Morava and Ibar valleys, without exploiting the possibility that their right wing could also attack the flank and rear of the enemy. Only the 62 ID from Visegrad was in a position to menace the Serbs in the extremely vulnerable area around Uzice. However, this division consisted of rear-area Landsturm troops and wasn't able to overcome the high waters of the Drina or a numerically superior enemy.

Thus Mackensen's Army Group didn't win a decisive success in the last days of October, when - before the railroad was fully conquered - they first tried to encircle the Serbian army at Kragujevac, the chief arsenal in the country. The Serbs similarly avoided another deadly stroke a week later south of the confluence of the two branches of the Morava. Crunched together and with their units colliding, the allied columns attacked frontally, pushing the enemy back into the barren mountains on the border between Old Serbia and Macedonia. From day to day the number of troops actually fighting declined as detachments were left behind. Because of the difficulty of feeding the men, the units had to be deployed in depth.

#### Failure to launch a flank attack from Bosnia

During the Battle of Kragujevac, Falkenhayn complained to Conrad that the enemy's escape was due primarily to the failure of 62 ID to exert the anticipated pressure through Uzice and Pozega. Not without some satisfaction Conrad used this remark by his Reichs-German colleague to point out the weakness of the entire plan of campaign, which didn't fully utilize the favorable geographical situation. The deployment areas - Bosnia, Sylvania, the Banat and Bulgaria - lay around the enemy position along three quarters of a circle. Falkenhayn's order of battle had only exploited this advantage to a limited extent. In the eastern part of the theater, the flank attack by the Bulgarians rather quickly turned into a frontal assault (as noted above),

at least in the sector of Mackensen's Army Group.<sup>194</sup>

From the comments of the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff, it is clear that although he agreed that the main effort should be made on both sides of Belgrade, he would have committed more troops to the flank position in Bosnia. Thus he had watched reluctantly as Mackensen, on his own authority, moved XIX Corps from the Drina to Syrmia during the initial deployment. In his response on 29 October to the complaint from Falkenhayn mentioned above, Conrad reminded him forcefully that one of the affected units of this Corps, 53 ID, had originally been stationed at Visegrad:

"Despite my reservations, I permitted [the Division] to move to the area chosen by Mackensen's Army Group, consistent with our military convention [of 6 September] and to avoid if possible any disagreements with Your Excellency. I would have preferred to have strong units available for an attack through the important Valjevo-Uzice area if the situation on the other fronts had permitted. I still intend to do so as soon as the current third Battle of the Isonzo....is successfully ended.<sup>195</sup> In the meantime, by fully denuding Bosnia and Herzegovina of troops, I have made available for field operations the improvised 62 ID and created Sorsich's Group from border troops. Their participation in the offensive wasn't originally planned. In my opinion the German Alpenkorps, which Your Excellency has brought from the front in Tyrol, would have been best employed by sending it through Valjevo or Uzice. Instead it deployed between 11<sup>th</sup> Army and the Bulgarians, in an area where the Serbs were already being forced by events to pull back from the northeast corner of their country."

Conrad's reference to the unfortunate deployment of the Alpenkorps was certainly correct. It was a result of the impatience of the German OHL to drive the enemy away from the Danube on both sides of Orsova as quickly as possible. Falkenhayn didn't hesitate to frankly admit, in his reply of the 31<sup>st</sup>, that "When Your Excellency states finally that the

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194 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The point here is apparently that more troops should have been deployed under 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army, farther south, than under 1<sup>st</sup> Army. This is stated more clearly by Max von Hoffmann. ("The War of Lost Opportunities", English translation, Nashville, 1999, pp. 123-124).

195 The German military archive reported in a note dated 5 January 1932 that the documents they have at Potsdam indicate that the transfer of the k.u.k. 53 ID from Visegrad to Syrmia at Mackensen's order was the result of a "very regrettable misunderstanding."

Alpenkorps should have been sent to Bosnia, I agree." The staff at Pless had considered whether to send this division-sized "corps" from Bazias to Visegrad, but dropped the idea because the German OHL reckoned that the movement would take 17 days.

If the Alpenkorps - or at least 10 Mtn Bde, which arrived very late at the front under XIX Corps - had been deployed initially at the end of the Bosnian eastern railroad to Visegrad, these units specially trained and equipped for mountain warfare could have secured a substantial success. Assisted by 62 ID, they might have won a decisive victory. But the course of the fighting on the Isonzo, which made it impossible to weaken Boroevic's Army, also forced the sector beyond Visegrad to remain a stepchild to the high command, despite its importance. The faulty initial deployment couldn't be made good because of the insufficient railroad net and the poor condition of the roads.

#### Attrition strategy in the Balkans

However, there is no doubt that the ultimate reason why the units weren't deployed in a position to destroy the enemy was the attitude of the German Chief of Staff to the goals of the campaign. Falkenhayn was always inclined to favor a strategy of "attrition" rather than "annihilation", and considered the Balkans anyway to be a minor theater of operations in which he could be content with limited goals. This approach to the basic planning for the war lurked in Falkenhayn's subconscious even when (around 6 November) he was officially agreeing with Conrad's two objectives of reckoning with the Serbs and with Sarrail's Army of the Orient. This was the cause of the continuing disputes about this "disgusting" campaign (as Falkenhayn once described it to Conrad), when the German opposed the ideas of the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff in specific questions such as whether the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army should be directly reinforced by German troops from 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

Meanwhile, as the Serbs retreated into the historic Kosovo polje their high command suffered painful disappointment when Sarrail's Entente troops, despite all their promises, suddenly halted their advance at Gradsko. This left the Serbs only the desperate option of attempting themselves to break through to their untrustworthy allies. However, the strength of their already decimated divisions was insufficient to carry out this bold plan. The last act of the tragedy was the Serbian retreat to the Adriatic coast of Montenegro and Albania; thus their opponents' third attempt to encircle them was thwarted at the

last minute.

Before the Serbian Army reached the swampy plains along the coast, it suffered a fearful Calvary. And perhaps it still could have been destroyed, if Austria-Hungary had opened its attack on Mt Lovcen - which actually occurred at the start of January 1916 - several weeks earlier. This was feasible. The Montenegrins' will to keep up the fight was already shattered when they saw the Serbs in retreat. A comparatively small force of infantry and artillery would have sufficed to completely overthrow Montenegro, if the units could have been pulled from the Serbian front in time. An offensive through Scutari might have dealt the Serbs a death blow as they emerged from the mountains. However, King Peter's gallant army was spared this final disaster. Weakened, hungry, and smashed to fragments, they had lost their homeland. However, they still lived and by calling on their will power would be able to return to the common front of the Entente after a period of recuperation. Serbia remained part of the multi-state coalition facing the Central Powers.

#### The situation at the end of November 1915

Although the victory had been incomplete, the troops of the allies had reason to be satisfied with their achievement as they briefly halted on the conquered territory south of Novibazar and in the Kosovo polje. This campaign had been one of the most difficult of the World War, but this was due less to casualties inflicted by enemy arms than to the fearful toil and deprivation which the terrain and weather imposed on the combatants. From the viewpoint of the high command the advantages couldn't be underestimated. The Central Powers had opened the road to their Bulgarian and Turkish allies. They had also permanently severed the enemy's line of communication between Salonika and Prahovo, which was more important to Russia than was recognized at either Teschen or Pless. Falkenhayn's expectations had been completely fulfilled.

However, an alert observer of the situation at the end of November 1915 couldn't fail to notice that the Balkan problems, in their entirety, had become more complex rather than simple since the attack on Serbia had begun. The Central Powers were no longer so concerned about the Dardanelles as they had been in August, but it was by no means certain that the enemy had fully given up their operation in this area. Meanwhile the Entente had acquired at Salonika a second sally port in the Balkans. At the moment their troops stood deep within Macedonia, where they

threatened Bulgaria and exerted a strong influence on both of the Balkan states that were still neutral. Romania had again become very cautious because of the defeat of Serbia, and its interest in joining the Entente was considerably weakened. Nevertheless it was still far from becoming a completely trustworthy neighbor to Hungary or Bulgaria. In Greece, the ruthlessness with which the Entente had violated the country's neutrality had caused the people and Army to rally to the policy of the King, but Venizelos and his party were still working busily in the service of the Entente. There might still be some unpleasant surprises in this area. Moreover, it was possible that Italy would try to expand its foothold in the western Balkans from its base at Valona.

Thus the Central Powers and their allies faced some difficult choices in the Balkans when the eventful month of November 1915 came to an end. The situation was complicated by poor relations between the allies, caused by objective as well as personal factors. Bulgaria openly coveted some of the western coast of the Adriatic and this awakened mistrust in Conrad, who sought to place this area under the sole control of Austria-Hungary. Tension between Conrad and Falkenhayn might lead at any time to an open break. This was hardly a favorable atmosphere in which to address some of the most difficult problems raised by the war.

## IV. The Autumn Battles on the Italian Front

### A. On the Eve of New Fighting

#### 1. Prospects for the Italian high command at the start of September 1915

The first Italian battles of the World War had severely disappointed not only the Italians themselves, but also their allies. Instead of delivering a death blow to the Danube Monarchy and striking against the rear of Germany from a flanking position in upper Italy, Victor Emmanuel's fresh armies had been stopped cold by an opponent weaker in both numbers and arms. They were held either at the border or a few kilometers into Austrian territory; despite two major battles and a series of costly actions in the mountains they had gained no success worth mentioning. At the same time their opponents, together with the Germans, had been able to deliver blow after blow against the Russian colossus. And now, as autumn spread over the land, both of the Central Powers together with Bulgaria were preparing to upset the balance of power in their favor despite the threat against their flank from Italy.

At this unfavorable moment - the start of September 1915 - the French Generalissimo Joffre paid a visit to the Italian headquarters, where he wasn't greeted with much joy.<sup>196</sup> He was about to open the first attrition battle in the West. The Entente didn't want Italy to stand aside during this great offensive; while the British and French hammered at the German front in Artois and Champagne, they wanted Italy to rally its forces for a new action against the Habsburg Army. Lieutenant General Cadorna, however, restricted his response to vague reassurances. His army had been so shaken in the recent Second Battle of the Isonzo that a new offensive would require new and far-reaching preparations. This could take several weeks. The Italian Chief of Staff's concern about securing Trieste as soon as possible drove all other thoughts into the background. Ambition to take this city took precedence over any common interest with the Entente and its military leadership.<sup>197</sup>

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196 Callvell, pp. 134 ff.

197 Callvell (p. 134) quotes FM Wilson, who learned from Joffre that when the latter visited Italy he and Cadorna had

Moreover, Cadorna didn't think it was impossible that Austria-Hungary could withdraw troops from Russia and hurl them against Italy. Therefore, unlike the Italian Minister President he refused to send Italian detachments to secondary theaters of operations.<sup>198</sup> Attacks would continue only in the mountains surrounding Venetia, since they would have to be finished before the onset of winter.

Thus in September and the first half of October the flames of war rose in the Julian Alps and the mountains of south Tyrol (and for a few days on the Carinthian crest). Only some ashes smoldered along the middle Isonzo and between the rocky ridges of the Doberdo. The defenders naturally welcomed this dearly-bought period of rest. It gave them a much-sought opportunity to improve the condition of their hastily assembled and armed forces, so that they could face a much larger enemy army as well as forces of nature that were hardly less dangerous.

## **2. Development of the Aus-Hung. Isonzo front**

The Isonzo front was naturally the main concern of the Aus-Hung. leadership. Retention of the south Tyrol bastion and the routes leading into the Puster and Drava valleys was also certainly important, but the first fighting had proven surprisingly that it was much easier for the defenders to hold the danger down in these areas. This was mainly because the enemy had to deploy in confined ravines in the mountains or on narrow ridges; this deprived them of the advantage of using their great advantage in numbers and weaponry. The only exception was on the plateaus south of the Sugana valley, which however were crossed by mighty mountain chains. In most areas nature had also provided the defenders with second and third positions; thus even if the enemy was initially successful their thrusts could subsequently be neutralized easily. Although the Drava valley, one of the Italians' operational objectives, lay close to the border, Bozen lay farther back. Even Trent, which was menaced from the east, south and west, was protected by permanent fortifications connected by strong field works; the first encounters showed that it was in no immediate danger.

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discussed the possibility that Italian troops might be sent to the Dardanelles. It is unclear whether Cadorna really entertained such a plan. At any rate, he went ahead without heeding any of Joffre's ideas.

198 Cadorna, "La guerra alla fronte italiana" (Milan, 1921), Vol. I, p. 144.

The prospects for the defenders were less encouraging at Görz and along the lower Isonzo. Trieste, the principal Italian objective, was only 30 km from the center of the Karst front, and just 21 km from the southern wing of the Aus-Hung. positions. The loss of this city would not only damage the morale of the defenders. If Trieste were in Italian hands, the southern flank of the entire position of the Central Powers facing west would be turned. The enemy's larger force could push into the Laibach basin and over the plateaus of Croatia. The fate of the principal military harbor, Pola, and its irreplaceable naval facilities would be more or less sealed.

These geographical factors restricted the choices available to the defense. To fully overcome the problem a major offensive was necessary, but this was simply impossible throughout 1915; the only remaining alternative was to exert all our strength and make the attackers pay a heavy price for every foot of the battleground. However, this couldn't be achieved by purely defensive tactics. Limited relief attacks in selected parts of the front could damage the enemy's offensive capability and create better conditions for the defenders. As Archduke Eugene had already reported to the high command at the end of July, there were several reasons why such tactics should be adopted on the Doberdo plateau.

In this part of the battlefield the defensive positions were situated in a very unfavorable location, because they were enfiladed by enemy artillery on both flanks and in the rear. In the further course of the fighting the line was straightened somewhat by giving up the advanced position between San Martino and Vermeigliano. The front now ran from the mouth of the Wippach over the western slope of Mt San Michele and through San Martino west to Height # 118 (Mt dei sei Busi). Fewer troops were needed to hold this line, and it lay behind the slope leading down from the Karst to the plain in the valley, which had been an easy target for the enemy. However, in places Italian fire could still envelop the new positions; moreover, the Italians now held some observation points on the edge of the plateau from which they could direct the bombardment by their artillery back in the valley.

The defensive positions lying farther to the rear, which were still incomplete, were in even more unfavorable locations. The second line could be enveloped from Mt S Michele. The third line was dominated by this hill and also by the western edge of the Vallone valley; moreover, it didn't cover the approaches to

Görz. Therefore it was necessary to hold onto the first line. This task couldn't be performed indefinitely unless we could bring up artillery (and ammunition) equal to that of the enemy, and unless we could keep replacing all the men who were falling in the murderous fighting on the Karst. Neither condition would be met in the foreseeable future.

Therefore the commanders studied whether they could create a better front by an offensive with limited objectives. In August the HQ of VII Corps had already suggested such an operation, which would have advanced the defenses up to the line Ronchi-Bestrigna. Now the HQ of Southwest Front returned to this idea, and asked 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to report what units it would need to mount thrusts to improve the configuration of the front on the Karst and around the Görz bridgehead.

Three scenarios were considered. A thrust in the south, through Monfalcone, might drive away the enemy artillery that outflanked the Karst, extend our own front, and make it possible to entrench the southern wing in the wide plains, on the flank of any enemy forces attacking farther north. An attack toward Sagrado-Sdraussina could perhaps drive the Italians from the edge of the Karst into the Isonzo. An operation out of the Görz bridgehead could put an end to enemy flanking fire from the hills and give the defenders of Görz more breathing room.

A thrust through Monfalcone would be the most advantageous in terms of the general situation. To carry it out, besides the necessary artillery and 8 ID (which was available at the time), one other full-strength division was needed. However, despite the advantages listed above, GdI Boroëvic had objections against extending his left wing into the plains. He was concerned that in the thickly cultivated Italian farmland, where it was difficult to observe troop movements, his control over operations would suffer. He favored only a thrust out of the Görz bridgehead, but it would have to be carried out by at least five fresh divisions - which of course weren't available. Anyway, this strict, stubborn and ruthless commander felt that an elastic, mobile defense was less effective than holding on bitterly to every foot of ground.<sup>199</sup> Therefore the fighting would be waged in general along these lines until the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo.

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199 See Glaise-Horstenau, "Svetozar Boroëvic von Bojna" (Neue Österreichische Biographie, Vienna 1923, Vol. I, pp. 110 ff).

### **a. The soldiers and their battlefield**

Boroevic had fought the Second Battle of the Isonzo with 125 battalions and 143 batteries (including 25 heavy) against the Italians' 290 battalions and 209 batteries (47 heavy). Casualties were extraordinarily high; the battalions came out of the "Hell of Doberdo" and went to their rest areas as shrunken, mutilated remnants. With great concern, commanders at all levels had to ask whether 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and indeed the entire armed forces and the peoples of the Monarchy, could bear frequent repetitions of this frightful sacrifice.

The most important priority was to provide a great number of replacements for the officers and men lost by the units on the Isonzo. The divisions entrenched north of the Wippach, whose front had not been so heavily engaged, were filled up by March battalions relatively quickly. On the other hand, the replacements sent to the Doberdo plateau weren't able to completely fill the defenders' ranks. 20 Hon ID in particular had suffered very heavy losses. In this hotly-contested part of the battlefield the units were still nearly 27,000 men under their authorized strength when the third Isonzo battle started.

#### The new order of battle

Besides rebuilding the force already on hand, there was naturally an attempt to alter the relative balance of strength between friend and foe by bringing up new units. This good intention, however, was overcome by the great demands made upon the high command by a war waged on three fronts. III Corps arrived at the end of August with 22 LW ID<sup>200</sup> and 28 ID, and was followed at the start of September by 106 Lst ID; the latter, since it included 60 Inf Bde, had six regiments. These units represented a considerable increase in strength. However, the situation was adversely affected when other units were called away. 93 ID, which had been rebuilt in mid-August when the three Landes-Schützen Regiments had been inserted into its thinning ranks between the remaining original battalions, was dissolved at the end of that month.<sup>201</sup> The Landes-Schützen and artillery from the division were sent to Tyrol. Similarly, the Kaiser Jaeger 8 ID was supposed to transfer to GdK Dankl's

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200 However, the 44 LW Inf Bde of 22 LW ID was retained by GdK Rohr's Armeegruppe.

201 The March battalions from III Corps District which had made up 185 Inf Bde were sent to their parent regiments; the Brigade's HQ, like the divisional HQ, was dissolved.

command. At the start of October the Division began to move to Tyrol - the main body got on trains in the Wippach valley, while 56 Mtn Bde (which had taken part temporarily in the fighting at Tolmein) entrained at Podmelec<sup>202</sup>. Even before they left the Isonzo, orders had been issued that the Tyrolean troops weren't to be used at the front except in dire emergencies.

Moreover, in September the high command sent 57 and 59 ID to the Balkans. The cavalry of the infantry divisions in Carinthia and on the Isonzo were reduced to one squadron apiece; half of the other twelve squadrons were sent to Serbia and the other half to the Bukovina. Thus at the start of October there were fewer units on the Isonzo front than when the Second Battle ended in mid-August.

It was therefore all the more important to make the best defensive dispositions possible under these circumstances. First it was necessary to group the units in the areas where the enemy were most likely to launch their main attack. III Corps was inserted in the southern part of the Karst plateau to replace 57 ID<sup>203</sup>. This removed half of the burden borne in Sector III by VII Corps HQ, in whose zone the 59 ID was relieved by 106 Lst ID. The sector between the Wippach and the sea was divided into Sectors III.a (VII Corps) and III.b (III Corps). Farther south the city commander at Trieste, GM Alexander Ritt. von Wasserthal, took over Sector IV from the HQ of 94 ID, which was sent (without any troops) to Carinthia.

XVI Corps strengthened the garrison of the Görz bridgehead with 60 Inf Bde (which had come to Italy with 106 Lst ID). 14 Mtn Bde, which hitherto had been held in reserve by VII Corps, was sent to replace the Kaiser Jaeger who were leaving XV Corps.

Undoubtedly the different sectors of the Isonzo front were of varying importance. More troops had been sent to the Karst, where stronger defenses were needed. At the start of October, III Corps had 187 Inf Bde, 28 ID and 19 Lst Mtn Bde at the front, with half of 22 LW ID in reserve. Thus Sector III.b, which was 16 km long, was defended by 29 battalions; each meter of the front was covered by 1.8 riflemen. Sector III.a (VII Corps) was covered even better; 106 Lst ID, half of 17 ID and 20

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202 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - 8 ID had to move to Tyrol to replace the German Alpenkorps.

203 III Corps' IR # 27 (of 28 ID) had to be sent to Carinthia. As a replacement, IR # 96 of the five-regiment strong 17 ID was transferred to 28 ID.

Hon ID were in the first line, with a reinforced brigade in reserve. Thus a front of just 9 km was guarded by 37 battalions - there were 3.2 riflemen per meter. XIV Corps with 26 battalions had to protect the longest sector (33 km), deploying 0.8 riflemen per meter. However, in the two key sectors on the central Isonzo, Görz and Plava, there were 1.8 riflemen per meter. XV Corps held 25 kilometers with 25 battalions, and therefore had 1 man for each meter. GdI Borojevic's only Army-level reserves were half of 61 ID (the 16 Lst Mtn Bde) at Schön Pass. 10 Mtn Bde of this Division was sent to Serbia on 18 October.

#### Strengthening the defensive positions

Although the high-level HQ were in agreement about the troop deployment, both the AOK and Southwest Front HQ criticized the heavy casualties incurred in the first battles. They issued several orders directing the adoption of new tactics designed to gain equal success at a lower cost. The principal bone of contention was the technical preparation of the defenses, which had been difficult from the start due to the harsh landscape of the Karst. This area hadn't been fortified in peacetime, partly due to lack of money and partly due to consideration for our Italian "ally" (even though neither partner had refrained from fortifying the mountainous parts of their frontier). While Italy was arming during the first year of the war, the Ballhausplatz had sharply rejected any attempt to make good this neglect. In the first battles, and often thereafter, the defenders of the Isonzo had to fight behind hastily assembled barriers of stone.

GM Pitreich, who at the time was Chief of the General Staff Detachment of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, has written about the first phase of the development of the Isonzo front.<sup>204</sup> "The defenses of the Karst were based primarily on the lay of the land, in which there were many depressions of varying size and depth. A row of these shallow depressions in the rock were strengthened by breastworks and connected with each other by a wall of loose stones about 60 to 80 cm thick. Usually the wall was crowned with sandbags and thus reached a height of about 1.2 meters. This was the battle line. Whenever the wall was hit by a shell it was thrown down, releasing a rain of stone splinters. To avoid this danger, most of the troops sought cover in the depressions, leaving just a few skirmishers along the connecting walls. Some of the low areas were covered with planks or roofing felt to provide some protection from the weather. There were attempts to

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204 Pitreich, "Der österreichisch-ungarische Bundesgenosse im Sperrfeuer" (Klagenfurt, 1930), pp. 239 ff.

create advance lines of stone to cover the main line, but they provided little help. Behind the line, it was also necessary to build loose walls of stone to protect the reserve troops and their routes to the front, in place of the usual communication trenches. Thus troops and supplies moving forward were scantily covered. Behind these inadequate walls, many soldiers' lives came to an unexpected end. Such was the "stony sea" of Doberdo, the gateway to the inferno."

Fighting for a prolonged period behind inadequate breastworks in deadly danger severely damaged the morale of the troops. This was evident in the second Isonzo battle, when Italian high explosive shells began to rain death onto the thin stone walls, smashing the rocks into fountains of deadly splinters. Moreover, the location and extent of the first positions, which had been established in such haste, left much to be desired. Many had been constructed by Landsturm technical troops with inexperienced commanders; they had come to the Isonzo from the interior, rather than from other fronts, and were using peacetime methods that had already been proven outmoded by the bloody experiences of the war.

Commanders at all levels agreed that the front line had to be the main line of resistance. At the time this belief was an elementary doctrine on all fronts, but it was most especially true on the Karst because the battlefield was so narrow. Moreover, since any construction was so difficult, it was best to devote all efforts to strengthening one position. The next conclusion was that the troops on the Karst should be protected not by loose piles of stones, but by trenches which could be carved out of the unyielding ground by explosives and boring machines. Naturally the combat troops themselves could participate in preparing such positions only to a limited extent. The work would be the responsibility of technical troops and worker detachments, and many times - in hours of greatest need - also of brave Russian prisoners of war.<sup>205</sup> The equipment included electric boring machines, explosives of all types (including liquid air, which could be brought nearly up to the front line), mobile electric lighting gear, and other technical innovations.<sup>206</sup>

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205 The use of prisoners of war for such labor was undoubtedly against international law. However, such measures were taken by all the powers involved in the war.

206 In this period electricity was also used to charge the barbed wire in certain sectors by Tolmein and Görz; however, the experiment assisted the defenders less than had been hoped.

The question of how the technical groups and equipment were to be deployed caused the long-simmering opposition between the commander of 5<sup>th</sup> Army and the Chief of Staff of Southwest Front (FML Krauss) to escalate into an open feud. Front HQ, with a good deal of justification, wanted to attach the technical groups directly under the leadership of the local commander who were most interested in strengthening their positions. Boroovic felt that this preference, and especially the desire of the HQ at Marburg to set up its own office to oversee the construction, was an intrusion into the prerogatives of his Army HQ. The AOK was able to paper over this argument only with difficulty, and even then mostly on the surface.

The process of building positions also encountered significant resistance from the troops themselves, which had to be overcome gradually. The troops resented any work which reduced their already insufficient hours of daytime or nighttime rest, when they weren't needed to fight or to guard outposts.<sup>207</sup> It is clear that despite all efforts the project developed much more slowly than the situation warranted. In the latter half of October, when the enemy began to storm the Aus-Hung. positions for the third time, only the most necessary improvements had been completed.

Preparation of the foremost line was naturally not enough. It would be necessary to construct shelters for the reserves, artillery positions, and communication trenches. For this purpose the workers didn't neglect to take advantage of the caves and "Dolinen" in the Karst.

GM Pitreich writes: "Even in this stony desert, there were some oases that performed an important function for the defenders of the Karst. These were cavities in the rock, of varying size, which were called "Dolinen." By huddling against the sides of these cavities which faced the enemy, troops could find some shelter from the hellish fire. In some of the holes there was even soil which supported the precarious existence of some plant life. The Dolinen made it possible to carry out normal functions with a measure of safety. Above all, in the holes in the rear areas - in contrast to the fearful wasteland closer to the front - the troops could find "life." From the Dolinen the lower-level commanders and staffs could oversee the defense and supplying of their battle zones in the day and night. Supplies delivered to the holes at night made it possible to provide water, rations, ammunition and equipment to the front-line fighters. Here wounded troops could get emergency help, which would either make it

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207 Veith, "Die Isonzovertheidigung bis zum Falle von Görz" (Mil. wiss. Mitt. for 1931, 1052)

possible for them to recover later in hospitals farther to the rear, or at least provide some comfort in the agony of their last hours...Naturally the occupants of these holes dug deeper into the surrounding rock to make them larger and more secure. Here men hammered, drilled and set off explosions with particular energy. However, it was still very difficult to create shell-proof defenses with such methods. At the start of the next battle [the third], only 2000 men were able to take advantage of such shelters (including those provided solely by nature) on the entire Karst plateau. All the others had to entrust their lives to simple barricades of planks reinforced with earth and sandbags, which were scarcely secure against either rain or shell splinters."

Still farther to the rear were villages which served as rest centers; barracks were built in areas where there no villages. The troops were very, very seldom able to take advantage of these facilities for long. The shortage of manpower made it necessary for them to soon return to duty in the defenses.

## **b. Weapons of the defenders**

Besides building fortifications on the battlefield, the defenders sought strength and support from the weaponry which the age of technology was contributing to the bloody war of nations. The most important weapons were the guns of all types, from the small caliber trench pieces up to the heaviest mortars and naval ordnance. Borojevic in particular reacted to the enemy's overwhelming artillery by constantly placing demands for more guns ahead of all his other needs. His superior officers didn't dispute the correctness of his requests. As a memorandum from Army Group HQ pointed out, 15 cm howitzers were the most in demand, followed by medium flat-trajectory pieces. The defenders also needed as many modern field howitzers as possible, but there was no significant demand for more field cannon.

The high command planned to move the majority of the modern artillery that became available on other fronts to the southwest as soon as possible, along with newly-produced guns. However, the mobile heavy batteries were needed in summer 1915 to bombard the great Russian fortresses, so the only immediate help for 5<sup>th</sup> Army consisted of three 10.4 cm cannon batteries and one 30.5 cm mortar battery. At the same time, negotiation began to purchase heavy guns abroad, and the k.u.k. naval command was asked to transfer marine and other heavy guns which weren't needed at Pola to the Army.

The naval authorities responded willingly to Southwest Front's call for help. They made one 12 cm and eight 15 cm batteries available as long-range artillery, and in August these pieces were mounted on concrete. Thus 5<sup>th</sup> Army had created the kernel of a force that could provide flanking fire next to the Hermada heights; in an entire series of later battles they assisted the defense against major Italian offensives on the southern wing with great success.

Older but still usable guns were brought out of fortresses and sent to the Isonzo, where they provided a welcome reinforcement by firing against enemy infantry and the Italian artillery stationed nearby. Finally, numerous 9 cm field cannon and M.99 mountain cannon were given to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which used them for close support or flanking fire from support positions.

Besides artillery from other fronts and the factories, the Army received some new models; many batteries were rearmed with the latest mountain cannon, field howitzers and heavy M.15 field howitzers, which were being produced in large numbers for the first time.<sup>208</sup> This rearmament involved major organizational measures and was time consuming, since the troops had to be trained to use the new guns. The process was finally complete in spring 1916.

Although the artillery on the Isonzo had been substantially reinforced by mid-October, the much prized high-trajectory guns still weren't available in sufficient quantities.

The total number of available pieces at the end of the second battle was 462 (including 62 medium and heavy)<sup>209</sup>; by the start of October there were 604 (including 108 medium and heavy), which was an increase of about 25%.

The successes of the artillery in the summer battles and in the fighting on the upper Isonzo indicated that they had learnt how to operate in close coordination with the infantry. In the Carpathian campaign there had often been a lack of understanding between the two arms; here on the Isonzo, under the frightful

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208 The Army had earlier begun to use the modern guns which had been produced before the war for foreign states, but which couldn't be delivered when the fighting broke out; they made up the "China" and "Turkey" batteries.

209 Of the artillery on the Karst after the second Isonzo battle, 44 of the 106 field cannon (more than 40%) and 15 of the 44 mountain canon (about 33%) were no longer usable.

pressure of events, they developed a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation. The artillery had adapted fully to the peculiar situation of this battlefield. They withstood attempts to uncritically adopt the tactics which had proven to be worthwhile under the different conditions prevalent on the Western front. Thus, although in the West the use of flanking barrages had long been superseded by frontal bombardments, the former tactics were used with overall success on the Isonzo.<sup>210</sup>

Despite the Italians' advantage in the number and quality of their guns, and their greater ammunition supply, our own artillery proved equal to the task. Their accomplishments included:

- . The effective suppression of troublesome enemy batteries with accurate fire;
- . The destruction or dispersal of enemy infantry assembling for an assault (which often prevented the attack altogether); and
- . First-rate flanking bombardment by light caliber guns, which repeatedly broke up Italian offensives at close range.

Besides the mutual understanding between the combat arms, the observation of enemy targets, followed by the direction of powerful fire on the selected points, was well organized and brilliantly carried out.<sup>211</sup>

Great emphasis was laid on appropriate assembly of units, close communication with the infantry, and caution in the use of ammunition, which was available in restricted quantities<sup>212</sup>. The high command was constantly reminding everyone to conserve ammunition and to keep reserve supplies for times of great need.

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210 The Army didn't have enough batteries to carry out effective frontal bombardments; moreover the terrain of the Karst and along the middle and upper Isonzo, with its steep precipices, was favorable for the use of flanking bombardments.

211 The preceding three paragraphs are based on Veith, "Die Isonzoverteidigung", p. 1053

212 On 3 September the high command sent all Army and Corps HQ some information regarding the Monarchy's capability of producing ammunition; the purpose was to convince all high-ranking commanders of the necessity of conserving their supplies. Wasteful fire would be pointless and self-defeating. Every day about 40,000 to 50,000 rounds of all calibers were produced, so that each gun could fire an average of 10 to 12 shots per day.

Other modern weapons kept pace with the artillery. The addition of a second machine gun detachment to each battalion in the field was initiated in 5<sup>th</sup> Army in September. At the same time each company was issued a number of rifles with telescopic sights. The number of useful trench and grenade mortars was increased, and new models introduced. The troops in particularly sensitive positions were provided small caliber infantry guns, flamethrowers and improved hand and rifle grenades, as well as light portable steel shields. In the beginning, at least, the soldiers didn't trust all the new equipment. Nevertheless, they provided a significant increase to the arsenal of the Karst defenders, even though still puny compared to the enormous resources of the attackers.<sup>213</sup>

One of the Italians' greatest advantages was their preponderance in the air. Beginning in May, Italy could deploy all of its air units, with various types of land and sea planes as well as several dirigibles, against our Southwest Front and especially in the main theater on the Isonzo<sup>214</sup>. The few available Aus-Hung. Flieger Companies were very active and until the beginning of the Italian fall offensive still maintained air superiority, but

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213 In August 1915, the 91 ID in Tyrol made 1000 dragoons' and firemen's helmets available to its personnel as protection against splinters thrown up by artillery fire. The fighters on the Karst of course needed similar protection. However, it was more than a year before Reich-German engineers finally designed the steel helmets which became standard gear in the latter years of the World War and thereafter. These helmets were both practical and smart-looking.

214 When the war started, Italy possessed over 15 squadrons of land-based planes, a number of seaplanes, and 8 dirigibles. At that time the Italian high command deployed 12 squadrons, all the seaplanes, and 4 dirigibles on the Isonzo. On the other hand, the Austro-Hungarians by mid-October had just 4 Flieger Companies on the Isonzo, 1 in Carinthia, and 2 in Tyrol; each company had 4 manned planes plus 2 more in reserve. The Aus-Hung. naval air corps (of about 30 planes) was based in many stations between Trieste and Cattaro, along a 600 km coastal front.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Further details on the deployment of the Flieger Comps is available in Peter Grosz, "Austro-Hungarian Army Aircraft of World War I" (Mountain View, 1993), pp. 542-553. An exhaustive description of the deployment and operations of the sea-planes (down to individual planes) is given in several chapters of Hans Sokol, "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (in two volumes, Vienna, 1933).

they weren't able to carry out all their necessary duties because of their small numbers. To help out, and in particular to support the artillery observation mission, 5<sup>th</sup> Army received several fixed balloon detachments in August and September.

### **c. Logistical support for the Isonzo front**

The theater of operations on the Isonzo was one of the poorest areas of the former Danube Monarchy. Only the lower Wippach valley south of Görz displayed a trace of the richness of the Venetian plains, which stretched toward the west from the lower Isonzo. The Karst north of Görz, and even more obviously on the Doberdo plateau, lacked resources which could support the troops. Even wood and water had to be brought to the Doberdo Karst. Providing water was one of the most difficult technical problems which had to be solved. It was of decisive importance for the health and combat-readiness of the Isonzo fighters. On the medical front, in summer 1915, cholera temporarily was a dangerous guest in the defensive positions and camps; however, it never became an epidemic and was stamped out in a few weeks.

More time was available to prepare for winter than was available on the mountain front (which will be described next), and the scope of the problem wasn't as great. However, the Isonzo sector experienced its own fall and winter storms including the "Bora", a wind which raged with biting cold over the Karst plain. Therefore it was necessary to provide warmer uniforms and to take special measures to ensure the health of officers and men.

The successful provision of water to the Karst fighters was an achievement of the greatest importance. The most pressing issue was to supply the Doberdo plateau. In the southern part this was accomplished by pumping water from a small lake in the area; in the northern part supplies were obtained from the Wippach valley. At the same time, construction was started on water piping on the Comen plateau (based on a project which had been planned in peacetime). Water for this system came partly from natural sources, partly from cisterns. Eventually the network of pipes had arteries leading to Brestovica, Nova Vas, Opacchiasella, and even toward Mt S Michele, which was also supplied with water from the pumping works at Merna. Later a large system was constructed to lead from Nanos through Batuje-Dornberg, from which pumps sent the water onto the high plateau. This project wasn't completed until 1916.

The principal supply route behind the front at Görz and the Karst plateaus was the Südbahn rail line from the interior of the Monarchy. At Opcina, just north of Trieste, it crossed the state railroad running from Görz to Trieste. From this junction the Südbahn led through Nabresina toward Monfalcone; before it reached the front which ran along the bluffs at the edge of the Karst, it was within the range of the enemy's naval guns stationed on the lagoons at the mouth of the Sdokka [Isonzo]. Despite the danger of bombardment and aerial interdiction, the trains supplied the southern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army; in the night they came forward as far as Duino-Sistiana.

The state railroad led north from Opcina straight over the Karst plateau into the Wippach valley and finally to Görz. It provided supplies to XVI Corps and, from the stations at Reifenberg and Dornberg, to the northern part of the Karst. Traffic usually stopped when it reached the station at Ovcja Draga [Volcja Draga] in the Görz basin, but in times of great need some trains would often travel at night to the main station in Görz itself.

The troops who were most difficult to supply during the summer battles were those stationed on the Doberdo plateau where it jutted far ahead of the rest of the front. To make it easier to bring supplies to this sector from the end of the railroads, the Quartermaster Detachment decided to construct a light rail line for trucks which would start at the station of the government line at Duttoule-Skop, cross the Karst plateau from Comen, and end somewhat west of Kostanjevica. Construction of this line started on 10 August, immediately after the end of the second Isonzo battle. The first stretch (up to Comen) was already finished on 5 September, and the line was finished up to Kostanjevica by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month. The line used standard gauge rails, but each train consisted of one car powered by gas and electricity plus ten cargo cars; the loading capacity of a train was 60 tons. This was the most important supply line for the troops on the Karst in all the remaining Isonzo battles, and until the Italians were thrown back in fall 1917.<sup>215</sup> Farther north, by XV Corps, trains originally could move through Wocheiner Feistritz to St. Luzia. From 22 September, however, enemy artillery fire made it necessary to unload them back at Podmelec.

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215 It was planned to build another field line for trucks from Ovcja Drag through Biglia into the Vallone valley, but its construction was never started.

### 3. Development of the Alpine front

#### a. The soldiers and their equipment

Austria-Hungary's armed forces, thanks in no small part to the work of their Chief of Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf, were better prepared than any other army in the world for warfare in mountains, and particularly in the Alps. Instructors in the Aus-Hung. Army had long ago thrown away the maxim of earlier periods, that in times of war mountains were merely "areas to pass through." Many soldiers trained in this spirit were among the hastily assembled troops who in spring and summer of 1915 fought the first actions in the Julian-Carnic Alps, in the Dolomites, on the Vielgereuth-LaFraun plateau (Folgaria-Lavarone) and on the gigantic glacier-crowned mountains on Tyrol's western border. However, each day spent in the ravines, between the peaks of the Dolomites, or in eternal snow offered new experiences and lessons to the troops and their leaders, which had to be taken to heart and analyzed. Moreover, winter was approaching; as Archduke Eugene had already pointed out in July with urgent orders, this season would create new and difficult challenges.

#### The need for trained units

The Alpine mountains didn't witness great battles involving masses of troops and equipment, such as were occurring on the lower Isonzo or in northern France. Although the fighting in the mountains was on a smaller scale, it was equally difficult because it involved powerful natural forces which hindered the deployment and supply of the troops. These elemental forces (such as storms and landslides) couldn't be completely contained and often would break through to cost many lives.

The unique nature of the battlefield made special demands on the troops. The Habsburg Monarchy had soldiers available in the regiments and battalions from the Alpine lands who were fully qualified for war in the high mountains, their dearly-loved immediate homeland. As soon as war broke out with Italy, the high command was always trying to keep as many as possible of these units on the Alpine front or at least on the Isonzo, which corresponded to their own desires. However, the tense situations on other fronts and the need to keep them strong set some limits on this redeployment. Anyway, there weren't enough local troops to occupy all 500 kilometers of the Alpine front, no matter how thinly they were spread. Therefore it was

unavoidable that troops from other parts of the Monarchy had to be inserted among the regulars, Landsturm men, Stand-Schützen and special volunteers of the Alpine lands. Men from the flat plains and industrial cities, as long as they met the basic physical requirements to be soldiers, could face the special demands of mountain warfare as long as they were properly instructed and prepared. An officer who had much experience of Alpine warfare wrote<sup>216</sup>: "Most of the troops who operated in the mountains needed only to be made resistant to the unfamiliar terrain, and to be instructed about its typical dangers and how to avoid them...In most parts of the mountains (including the high plateaus, the passes and valleys), little special equipment or training was required for every day purposes, including major fighting."

The situation was different for Alpine warfare in the strictest sense of the word.<sup>217</sup> This was the specialty of specially-formed High Mountain and Mountain Guide Companies, which were composed almost entirely of natives of the Alpine provinces who were already familiar with the mountains.

"Only tough, morally and physically strong men were capable of carrying of the Alpine war. These were complete soldiers, hard and mostly stemming from the area; they were men who loved the mountains, but were also aware of their malicious tricks and knew how to overcome them. Soundness of body and soul were both necessary. The Alpine fighters had to be strong both in will and achievement, willing to bear all adversities...The necessary qualities which we have listed for our Alpine fighters were often possessed in peacetime by the brilliant Kaiser Jaeger and Landes-Schützen regiments. However, due to emergency situations these soldiers mostly were far from the mountains [in 1915], and many had been laid to rest in military cemeteries in Russian Poland and the Pripyat swamps... Therefore when the Italian war began we almost had to start from scratch. Nevertheless the High Mountain and Mountain Guide Companies performed deeds in the Alps which will be remembered for all times."<sup>218</sup>

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216 Reserve 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Dr Rudolf Freih. von Saar, in "IR # 14 - Ein Buch der Erinnerung an grosse Zeiten 1914-1918" (Linz, 1919), pp. 346 ff.

217 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The reference here is to fighting which involved scaling mountain peaks, which of course required much special gear and training. In the Austrian Army the "Mountain Brigades" were prepared for operations in "ordinary" mountain terrain, but not for the highest peaks. Special companies or (occasionally) battalions were needed to tackle the most difficult terrain.

218 Lempruch, "Der König der deutschen Alpen und seine Helden"

The principal task of the High Mountain Companies was to wage war in the areas of eternal snow. The Mountain Guide Companies existed mainly to serve as mentors to the ordinary troops. Alpine courses were held at several points behind the front; great emphasis was laid on training as many men as possible to use skis.

"Hand in hand with other measures, there was a wide-ranging Alpine education program. Pamphlets, leaflets and other instructions made officers and men aware of the A-B-C's of Alpine operations. The educational results of all these measures was striking - men from the plains, cities and lower mountains all learned what they needed to survive in the Alps, losing their superstitious fear of the environment...Fearful and hidden danger lurked in the mountains. It could take the white form of an avalanche, or the thunderous form of a destructive landslide, or the blazing form of lightning in the midst of an ice storm which suddenly erupted in a blue sky. Danger also lay in the icy breath of the wind whipping over the snowfields, or on the slopes where a mis-step could send a climber helplessly into the depths. These dangers were never immediately apparent to their victims. They lurked under cover, waiting to spring upon their prey. Woe to him who wasn't careful! Everyone had to learn this lesson. Keeping the troops alive was the most important mission of the mountain guide units."<sup>219</sup>

#### The defensive positions

Besides training the troops for mountain service, officers of all grades paid particular attention to constructing fortified positions. At the end of the summer, the technical preparation of the battlefield was not advanced much farther than on the Isonzo. In sectors where constant fighting left the defenders no time for careful preparations, they had to get by with very

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(Stuttgart, 1925), p. 33. His comments regarding the Kaiser Jaeger and Landes [Kaiser]-Schützen naturally apply also to the other regiments and battalions from the Alpine lands.

219 "IR # 14 - ein Ehrenbuch der Erinnerung", p. 347. This work was the source of all quotations in this section, unless otherwise noted. There are also impressive literary descriptions of the Alpine war, such as Schöpflin, "Ich bin gesund - es geht mir gut" (Weidlingau-Vienna", 1931), and Trenker, "Berge in Flammen. Ein Roman aus den Schicksalstagen Südtirols" (Berlin, 1931). TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The title of Schöpflin's work ("I am healthy and doing fine") refers to the one sentence which appeared (in nine languages) on the official post cards which the Army issued the troops to send home to let their families know they were still alive.

little protection - "a rather shallow trench blown into the granite, with a breastwork of sandbags, covered in front by barbed wire."<sup>220</sup> In several places the enemy was so near that our men could see the whites of their eyes.

Now the construction of improved positions was undertaken with determination; as the tempo increased from month to month, the ordinary riflemen and Landsturm workers played as large a part as the trained sappers and engineer officers. Deep trenches were carved in the mountain ridges and plateaus. Observation posts built of stone were located on the summits or dug into the eternal snow. Caves which faced the enemy were covered with embrasures, behind which artillery and machine guns were placed. Caves behind the lines provided shelter for the troops and their supplies, and were made as habitable as possible. Barracks were carved out of the rock faces, or constructed in quiet valleys away from the view of the always-vigilant enemy. Deep communications trenches or dugouts connected the mountain positions with each other and with their rear area bases. Small steps were cut in the cliffs surrounding the valleys; connected with ropes, they served as passages up to the heights. Thus the daily life of the Alpine fighters involved toilsome, exhausting, dangerous work. There were only a few days of rest in the mountain villages or in barracks lying below the fronts. Sometimes troops were able to enjoy a longer rehabilitation in the Drava valley or in the sun-drenched Adige [Etsch] valley, surrounded by vineyards. Often such rehabilitation periods, when the inhabitants of hell could again become men, were followed by even more difficult days at the front.

The defensive and offensive weapons, including the artillery, on the mountain front were the same as those described already in connection with the Isonzo front. Naturally, however, the number of weapons available in the mountains lagged behind that on the Isonzo. Moreover, in the high mountains the new technology was used alongside methods from much older eras; troops started avalanches and landslides, threw stones at their opponents, etc. There was extensive use of underground mines, in which modern explosives played a large role.

#### Logistical support

The most common methods of sending news and orders were the telephone, teleprinter, and lamp-signal equipment; also occasionally involved were runners (with or without skis) and,

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220 Hoen, "Geschichte des IR # 59", p. 392

in areas where roads were available, automobiles. Supplies were brought as close to the front as possible by motor vehicles of all types. Good roads were constructed in many places behind the lines, and continued in use after the war. Deeper in the mountains, wagons, carts, sleds and pack-animals took over from the trucks. When all else failed, men had to bear the burdens. "Endless columns of bearers stamped along at a monotonous pace, carrying their loads day in and day out up the serpentine paths leading from the valleys to the heights. They moved step-by-step like a machine, without a will of their own, up and down the mountains. They operated in snow and rain, stormy weather or blinding sunshine, and in stinging storms of ice." The troops involved in this quietly heroic operation, which cost countless casualties through enemy fire or natural disasters, were assigned to special bearer detachments. They were joined by some local people and also by Russian prisoners of war, whose melancholy singing echoed here and there in the mountains when they paused for a short rest.

Early in the mountain campaign, the cable-railway became the most important means of bringing supplies up the mountains. The area behind the front was soon covered with an ever-growing network of cables. The railways were of many types. The smallest were powered by human muscles, and used to move light loads up crags. There were medium-sized motorized systems which could bring supplies up the steep sides of ravines and often stretched for kilometers into the mountains, and heavy systems which could carry loads of any size. As the war progressed and more resources were devoted to their construction, the lines increased in number and capacity. "Millions of horsepower were saved by these mechanical constructions...And they could carry enormous burdens into the air! They moved cannons and machines as well as food and ammunition. The heavy systems also transported men. They operated in all weather; although they occasionally came under enemy fire they were seldom hit. They made it possible to wage war continuously in the mountains."

"Despite this mechanical support, it was impossible to avoid some reliance on animals to bear burdens. Moreover, a large number of men were needed to keep the supply system operating. Although technical support simplified the logistical problems, it was never possible to do without a large number of workers in proportion to the actual fighters. It is safe to estimate that in the mountains at least five men were needed to supply each rifleman."<sup>221</sup>

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221 This 5:1 ratio of support personnel to first-line fighters,

**b. The fight against the Alpine winter**

Particularly in winter, the cable railways seemed to be a special gift of fate. Alpine winter came early; often it reigned over the mountains and valleys for long months starting in October and creating a snow cover that was six to eight meters deep. The positions were covered, the course of paths could be made out only by tall stakes used as markers, and the entrances to caverns and barracks were barricaded by high walls of snow. In place of trenches carved for the riflemen in the snow, there were trenches in snow that kept the men out of sight but didn't provide any real protection from weapon fire. Paths to the front lines were dug in the ice and snow. The number of men needed to garrison the positions on the heights diminished considerably, but some small garrisons were always necessary. The troops themselves didn't want to abandon the high ground, because they feared that enemy ski patrols might easily take the ideal observation points.

The Alpine winter was itself a grim enemy to the thousands and thousands of soldiers who held the long lines from the Krn to the Ortler in positions 2000 to 3000 meters above sea level. Sometimes winter showed its power with gruesome cold plus snow and ice storms; then a warm wind could cause an overnight thaw, bringing mountain torrents and floods which swept away everything in their paths. Sometimes the mountains and valleys were encased in ice, other times they were convulsed with avalanches of snow, stones and earth. Often the troops were cut off during the night from all outside contact and left to fend for many hours or even days entirely on their own resources. It was necessary to begin early to provide winter clothing of all types, and to bring ammunition, rations, technical equipment and medical supplies right to the front lines or as close as possible. This enabled the garrisons to maintain their existence while they were isolated from the rear areas and from their neighbors.

The most dangerous and pitiless natural enemy facing the Alpine fighters were certainly the avalanches, which could bring certain death to entire detachments in a minute. Here too it

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or an even larger imbalance, sometimes was also the case in other theaters of operation. Thus when the k.u.k. XII Corps pushed far ahead to Baranowicze, at times it had 8 to 10 men on its long supply line for every combat soldier.

was necessary to make some preparations. Considerable resources were expended in studying the terrain to identify the areas most likely to produce avalanches; weather observers issued strict rules for traffic making its way through such zones. Some units and individuals heeded these warnings more than did others. Many soldiers paid a bitter price until the majority listened to the warnings of the mountains' inhabitants. "Now the men were learning...The barracks were in secure places, and traffic stayed on the roads. Signs were posted to warn men unfamiliar to the area, protective fences were erected, some roads were temporarily blocked, and cross country travel forbidden. Patrols on skis and snowshoes scouted the terrain, while mountain guides accompanied untrained troops. Emergency shelters with medical supplies were available. Both training and technology were used with some success against the 'white death'."

Despite all these measures, it was naturally impossible to strip the Alpine winter of all its toil, traps and deadly dangers. However, the damage was held to a reasonable limit. This preserved the troops' ability to fight, which they needed to hold the front in this difficult time against an enemy who was equally prepared and trained for mountain warfare. The Italians' Alpini were excellent troops, capable of operating in the most difficult parts of the Alps, and in their technical detachments they had the best miners in the world.

## ***B. Mountain Fighting in Early Fall 1915 (from the start of September to mid-October)***

### **1. Fruitless Italian attacks at Tolmein and Flitsch**

According to Cadorna's plans, it would take time to prepare a resumption of the large-scale offensive on the lower Isonzo. The Italian commander emphasized that this attack should be preceded by the capture of the area farther north at Tolmein and Flitsch, to give the left flank more room to maneuver. On 2 September he therefore urged the generals in the area to seize the two positions (as had long been planned), as well as the mountains which lay between them.

#### The fighting at Tolmein

Following the instructions of the commander, scouting troops from 7 ID had already mounted thrusts at night on 4 and 5 September against the positions of the k.u.k. 1 ID at Tolmein, but without success. The Italians also struck at Dolje in retaliation for a surprise attack the day before by parts of the k.u.k. 3 Mtn Bde, but this thrust was also shattered.

Around noon on the 9<sup>th</sup> the south wing of IV Italian Corps mounted the main attack against the Tolmein bridgehead; it was carried out by 7 ID, reinforced by an infantry regiment from 33 ID plus eight Alpini and four Bersaglieri battalions.<sup>222</sup> The charges continued into the night, but were almost entirely fended off by the XV Corps' 8 Mtn Bde, reinforced by two battalions of KJR # 1; as in earlier actions, they were effectively supported with flanking fire from batteries on the Lom plateau. Hundreds of dead or wounded Italians covered the battlefield in front of Heights # 588 and Sv. Maria.

After an artillery bombardment of hitherto unprecedented strength that lasted for 24 hours, the Italians attacked the Tolmein hill a second time on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Led by gallant officers, they ran against the position five times, but all their toil and sacrifice was in vain. They were unable to move the two Kaiser Jaeger battalions or Battalions IV/53 and IV/58 (Croats and east

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222 Ministero della guerra, "L'esercito italiano nella grande guerra (1915-1918)" - hereafter referred to as Italian official history - (Rome, 1927), Vol. II, Text, pp. 311 ff.

Galicians).

#### The fighting at Flitsch

Meanwhile the Italians had also begun to attack with the inner wings of their IV Corps and Carnic Group. Here, in the Flitsch area, their commander wanted to first capture the Javorcek and the Rombon. This would give them entry into the Koritnica and Soca valleys. If this thrust succeeded, the Bersaglieri Division then would capture the heights between these two valleys. General Giardina's command, which was now on the right wing of the Carnic Group, would advance along with troops from Nevea toward the Predil Pass.

The start of the offensive was delayed to await the arrival of reinforcements and a reorganization of the heavy artillery. For several days the positions of 44 LW ID and the fortifications in the area were the target of artillery fire in varying intensity. The Hermann Work, along with two batteries of guns taken from the Work and deployed outside the walls, had been under fire from artillery of the heaviest caliber since mid-July, and since the start of September this fire became especially intense. Although hit several times, the Work and the batteries remained combat-effective. The bombardment in the Rombon-Vrsic area increased in the second half of September; along with enemy movements and concentration at the front, this indicated that the Italian attacks would soon resume.

As anticipated, the Italian infantry advanced on 11 September in the Rombon-Lipnik sector; they had 21 battalions deployed in four groups against 6 ½ defending battalions.<sup>223</sup> The Italians who made their way with difficulty into the jumbled rocks in front of the Rombon position were checked by the combined fire of our batteries; the advance against the Rombon slope and the valley at Flitsch immediately stalled. However, Bersaglieri detachments were able to dig in on the southern slope of the Javorcek, below the defenders' lines. By evening the distinguished LW IR "St Pölten" # 21 repulsed three very heavy assaults against their forward position on the Vrsic, in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. Only Italian scouting detachments felt their way forward against the left wing of 44 LW ID.

On the next day all the Italians' attempts to thrust against the Rombon and the positions on the slope were also in vain; by the

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223 This is based on Major Heydendorff's unpublished study of the actions of 87 LW Inf Bde on the uppermost Isonzo.

evening of the 12<sup>th</sup> the offensive against this mountain was considered to be shattered. The attacks along the southern edge of the Flitsch valley and against the forward position at Vrsic failed as well.

On 13 September the Italians who'd dug in on the Javorcek slope tried to take the mountain, but were defeated. In the next night, on the north wing of 183 Inf Bde<sup>224</sup> (south of the Lipnik) the LW IR "Linz" # 2 made two thrusts which forced back the Alpini who'd climbed into the area in front of the slope position.

On 14 and 15 September the Flitsch basin echoed with a hurricane of noise from another massed bombardment by the Italian guns. All the Austrian positions on the heights, and the approach routes behind the front, stood under a hail of shells from the powerful artillery which the enemy had deployed in a half circle from the Nevea Pass through Saga to Ravne. The heavy fire continued at the same rate until darkness fell.<sup>225</sup>

Covered by this concentrated bombardment, in the next day the Italian infantry moved out of the Slatenik valley and nearer to the positions on the Javorcek and Vrsic. Everything indicated that after their recent defeats on the Rombon, which was so difficult to climb, the Italians had chosen to make the Javorcek their next objective. By taking this point they would cut off the Vrsic forward position and also make the Lipnik untenable. The enemy did attack in the afternoon of 15 September and into the evening, but they were thrown back in fighting which involved hand grenades, and won no success. However, it was apparent that our artillery was inadequate; the enemy had more guns, and their pieces had longer ranges. The few heavy guns available - four 15 cm howitzers and two 24 cm mortars - couldn't compete effectively against so many heavy Italian batteries. The infantry stood fast, but paid for the artillery imbalance with unusually high casualties. Because of the danger of further attacks, 44 LW ID received a battalion from the Army's reserve for use in emergencies, but received no response to their appeal for heavy guns.

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224 The 183 Inf Bde doesn't appear in the order of battle for this volume, because it had already been dissolved by 15 October 1915 (the date chosen to show the organization of the units in the southwest).

225 On this day alone, the mountain gun on the Lipnik was the target of more than 100 fifteen-centimeter shells.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> the northern wing of IV Italian Corps, which had been reinforced, once again advanced from the low ground of the Flitsch basin in a general assault against the Ravelnik-Javorcek-Vrsic front. During the day they gained just a little ground against the positions in the valley east of Flitsch. Italian detachments on the western slope of the Javorcek were halted in front of the positions in the afternoon. Bersaglieri companies from the Slatenik valley attacked toward evening east of the Javorcek summit, after a bombardment destroyed the obstacles and trenches. They established a small foothold in the forward position (roughly large enough for a platoon), but couldn't continue their thrust toward the main position on the ridge itself.

After a short pause at night, the fighting resumed in the morning hours. Strong Italian thrusts against the positions in the valley and on the western slope of the Javorcek collapsed. Three Austrian attempts at dawn to recover the lost forward position also failed, but at least forced the enemy to temporarily halt their own offensive.

Since the operation against the Javorcek heights had failed, on the 17<sup>th</sup> only the Italian group in the valley continued to seek a breakthrough. The heavy fire increased against the valley positions and the batteries of the fortifications. In the afternoon thrusts were mounted against the Ravelnik and against the foot of the Rombon farther north; in places the attackers almost reached the obstacles, but the attempt was shattered by the defenders' fire. The Italians hurried back to their starting points, pursued by Austrian fire.

Once again the enemy artillery thundered with great intensity against the Javorcek for several hours, but there was no further infantry attack. The only indication that the Italians intended to continue the battle was the assembly of units at the front.

The critical situation of 44 LW ID made it necessary to at least temporarily attach some heavy and long-range artillery. On 17 September one heavy howitzer and one cannon battery were sent from 5<sup>th</sup> Army, a heavy mortar from 48 ID was deployed in the Rabil area, and the scheduled movement of a howitzer battery from the sector was temporarily canceled. However, the artillery sent as reinforcements wasn't operational until after the fighting ended.

The last offensive was launched at daybreak on 18 September by a group of elite Italian troops under steadfast leaders; they

hoped to at least capture the valley positions and the Ravelnik in the Flitsch basin. The thrust was in vain. Repeated heavy attacks during the morning broke down with very heavy losses; 400 prisoners (including many officers) remained in the hands of the heroic defenders of the Ravelnik.<sup>226</sup>

In the afternoon the enemy artillery directed a destructive fire against the Rombon and the Javorcek for several hours. A surprise attack against the Vrsic position in the evening fog was shattered. Italian sappers, taking advantage of the terrain, had advanced a wall of sandbags toward our lines at the Vrsic, but in the night of 18-19 September our own sappers brought their work to a halt with a large explosion.

Early on the 19<sup>th</sup>, the attacking Italian troops pulled back from their jumping-off points and the enemy artillery fire died down; this indicated that the offensive had run out of steam. The Italians' late summer operation in the Rombon-Krn-Tolmein sector, which had started in mid-August with wide-ranging goals and strong units, was thus shattered. None of their objectives were achieved. The only minute gains of the entire offensive were the occupation of the Flitsch basin and the Canin massif (which lay in front of the Austrian front) and tiny lodgments on the south slope of the Javorcek and of the Rombon. On the other side, the defending troops (especially the heavily engaged 44 LW ID) gained new confidence by their successes for the actions which lay ahead.

After the fighting ended near Flitsch, it seemed that the Italians might shift forces north out of the basin against 92 ID. In this area the enemy infantry had inched forward slowly in the last few weeks and were in contact with advanced outposts of the Raibl Sub-Sector. These small Landsturm detachments had fallen back in front of the much larger enemy force to the main position on the line Rombon-Mozenca-Schlichtel-Krumbach-

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226 This small hill a kilometer east of Flitsch looked like a cratered desert after four days of heavy bombardment. Its garrison - a company of LW IR # 21 and a half company of FJB # 20 - performed prodigies of valor. All but one of the machine guns had been destroyed by artillery; nevertheless the massive enemy attacks were repulsed with rifle fire and hand grenades. According to the captured officers, the Italians had lost 500 to 600 dead and wounded in front of the Ravelnik on 17 and 18 September alone. The assertion by the Italian Official History (Vol. II, Text, p. 318) that LW IR # 21 made powerful counterattacks is incorrect.

Wischberg to avoid being encircled and cut off on the threatened high mountain peaks. However, after 25 September the advent of bad weather (rain and snow storms) prevented any combat activity on these barren heights.

#### New actions by Tolmein

Meanwhile the fighting had once more intensified in the Tolmein area in the last days of September. The Italians thrust against Dolje, the Vodil vrh and Mrzli vrh but were thrown back, partly by artillery and partly in man-to-man combat. Only a stretch of trench on the southwest corner of Dolje remained in their hands. Various attacks launched by the enemy in the first half of October were also shattered. It appeared that these operations might be precursors of a larger offensive. Therefore XV Corps HQ sent the excellent 14 Mtn Bde, which had been in the Corps' reserve, into the line of 50 ID at Dolje (between 3 and 8 Mtn Bdes) by 11 October. 58 Mtn Bde, which had been replaced in the Corps by 14 Mtn Bde, assembled with its two Kaiser Jaeger regiments at Podmelec on 4 October to move by rail to Tyrol. Because of the increasing storm clouds over the middle and lower Isonzo, in the first half of October the only additional reinforcements sent to XV Corps were two field cannon batteries and a heavy mortar.

Meanwhile the defenders of Tolmein had undertaken several raids to discomfit the attackers; to ensure surprise these raids were mounted without artillery preparation and all resulted in the capture of prisoners and some booty.<sup>227</sup> Since the end of August, XV Corps had planned to recapture the foremost positions on the western slope of Heights # 588, but this was postponed several times, principally at the start of October (because FML Schmidt-Fussina succeeded FML von Bogat in command of 1 ID). The third Italian offensive on the Isonzo opened before the plan could be carried out.

On the other hand, the neighboring troops in Carinthia won a significant success by an attack in September.

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227 The enemy exaggerated the size of our raids, as is proven by Cadorna's daily report of 10 October. He spoke of an "attack by strong units on the Mrzli vrh and at Dolje" which was fended off "with heavy losses." In reality, this operation on 10 October was carried out by just a company of IR # 80, a platoon of IR # 30, and a patrol of IR # 18. Total Austrian casualties on this day were 5 dead and 4 wounded on the Mrzli vrh and 1 wounded at Dolje.

## **2. Actions on the Carinthian crest**

### **a. Capture of the Findenigkofl**

In the first days of September, Colonel Prince Schwarzenberg's 12 Mtn Bde, which was so eagerly awaited by GdK Rohr, arrived from the Isonzo in the Gail valley. By 6 September it entered the line between the Köder Heights and the Straniger Summit, relieving 57 Mtn Bde which pulled back to Rattenberg. Col. Schwarzenberg's brigade now made up the left wing of 48 ID, to which it was normally assigned in the order of battle.

The arrival of 12 Mtn Bde made it possible to carry out a plan, under consideration since the war started, to improve the front east of the Plöcken Pass by taking the border heights occupied by the enemy. From these heights the Italians not only could observe the Plöcken road. They also could see the entire Angerbach valley, with its vital supply line; the trenches south of the valley were exposed from the rear to Italian artillery. Enemy observers on the border heights directed the fire from the heavy guns which endangered the workers who were building the rail line from Hermagor to Kötschach.

Because of the terrain, a frontal assault against the most troublesome position - the sector Promos-Hoher Trieb - would be difficult and promised little success. It would be easier to take the Findenigkofl, which is surrounded by the valleys which make up the source of the Chiarso. Victory here could lead to the capture of the entire Carinthian crest. Here, on the eastern wing of 48 ID (Sector I), there were forests to cover the preparations of the troops and to aid the envelopment of the first objective. Moreover, it would be almost impossible for the enemy to endanger the southern flank of the operation from Mt. Zermula, whose northern slope was a sheer precipice.

By 13 September it was possible to reinforce the artillery and mass the infantry in their jumping-off points without attracting the enemy's attention. After careful preparation by the guns and trench mortars, parts of 12 Mtn Bde attacked the Italian fortifications sharply on the 14<sup>th</sup> with full success. While our artillery suppressed the batteries or forced them to change position, the attacking lines of 12 Mtn Bde moved ahead around 9:00 AM. They consisted of seven companies from four different battalions, all covered by artillery and trench mortar fire

directed against the enemy trenches. By 3:00 PM they drove the Italians from Lodinut Pass, the Findenigkofl, the Cm. V. di Puartis and the ridge farther east, and secured the entire mountain complex. About 100 Italians, including 3 officers, were taken prisoner. Casualties of the attackers were 38 dead and 129 wounded. Our garrison on the Findenigkofl now had a clear view into the valley of the upper Chiarso from where it turned south below the mountain slope; this valley could no longer be easily used as an assembly point for enemy troops. On the day after our thrust the Italians plugged the hole in their line with reserves hastily brought up between the Hoher Trieb and the upper course of the Chiarso, but they didn't counterattack. In the next few days their artillery fired on the newly-captured positions.

GM Fernengel's Sector II wasn't disturbed during this period. However, Sector III (92 ID), was involved on the edge of the fighting which had flared up on the upper Isonzo. The heavy bombardment which the Italians directed against 44 LW ID in mid-September also affected the positions of 92 ID and the Malborgeth fort. Tarvis was shelled for the first time on the 16<sup>th</sup>; the 200 shots caused a panic among the inhabitants. The town was evacuated with wild haste; the general confusion affected the military headquarters and supply trains in the affected neighborhoods. There was no opportunity to observe and then suppress the Italian long-range batteries since the last border heights southwest of Malborgeth had been lost, as well as an observation point on the Jof di Montasio [Bramkofel] which hitherto hadn't been detected by the enemy. Therefore the Italians were able to bombard Tarvis and the neighboring villages on an almost daily basis.<sup>228</sup>

### **b. New organization of Armeegruppe Rohr and some unsuccessful attacks**

For a long time, GdK Rohr had wanted to have a whole division for each of his four defensive sectors. He had asked for the locally-recruited 6 ID, but wasn't able to get it. On 25 September, at the suggestion of Southwest Front HQ, he had FML

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228 It wasn't practical to use airplanes for scouting and observation because there was a lack of models which could fly high enough to operate over the mountains. Newer models in fact were introduced in September, but they weren't fully effective until October when they were equipped with wireless sets.

Kuczera's unemployed 94 ID HQ take over all the Landsturm battalions which had been assembled to guard Sector II, hitherto in little danger. 92 ID - now under GM Fernengel - guarded the important sector on both sides of the Kanal valley with 59 and 57 Mtn Bdes. The HQ of 184 Inf Bde was dissolved. Also dissolved was 183 Inf Bde HQ, which had been stationed in the southern sector of 44 LW ID (on the northern slope of the Krn); its place was taken by 44 LW Inf Bde HQ from 22 LW ID, which commanded the two mountain-trained LW IR (# 4 and 27).

So that GdK Rohr's wish to obtain troops recruited in Inner Austria would be met in part, at the end of September he received line IR # 27 from Graz (transferred from 28 ID of VII Corps). It swapped places with the Hungarian IR # 39 from Debreczen, a unit from the plains which was less adept in mountain warfare; the 39<sup>th</sup> rejoined its original command (17 ID) in VII Corps.

During the reorganization of the Armeegruppe, almost three quarters of the battalions and a substantial part of the artillery were in motion at various times. Moreover, many mountain batteries were pulled for the offensive against Serbia and others had to leave the front - if only temporarily - to be rearmed with new guns. Nevertheless, the enemy's inactivity plus the advent in the second half of September of cloudy, rainy weather that hampered visibility made it possible for Rohr's Armeegruppe to complete the necessary unit switches and marches by the start of October without any noteworthy interference. The area covered by the Armeegruppe was somewhat reduced on its extreme right wing; because of the decreased importance of the Lienz area the western border was moved to the Steinkar Summit, the starting point of the Tyrol-Carinthia border. On the other flank, the Armeegruppe's eastern wing was glad when the road through the Mojstrovka Pass was opened on 26 September, because they now had a safe route to 44 LW ID (Sector IV).

Although Rohr's HQ was concerned that the Italians might eventually attack toward the end of September, the situation on the enemy's side remained unchanged. The Italian XII Corps, or Carnic Group ("Zona Carnia"), had 26 ID in its western sector, commanding one infantry and one Alpini brigade plus Bersaglieri and Finance Watch battalions. 24 ID in the eastern sector also had a brigade apiece of infantry and Alpini. 44 LW ID was opposed by parts of 33 ID and by the reinforced Bersaglieri Division. For the most part, all of the Italian troops stationed between Mt Peralba and the Seebach valley had been instructed to just hold their positions. Therefore their

activity was limited.

In the dark and rainy nights of the last two days of September, Italian detachments began to inch ahead against the positions of the Carnic front north and northwest of Pontafel. This was followed from 1 to 6 October and on 9 October by some locally heavy attacks in the evening and at night by storm troops of up to battalion strength, directed against the eastern sub-sector of 94 ID. However, here the volunteer riflemen who were at the front for the first time, along with some other troops, were able to drive back the enemy with just small-arms fire. The Italians suffered substantial casualties.

In front of 92 ID, the enemy was forced by the snowstorms and cold of the approaching winter to evacuate several of the summits and ridges they had occupied in August and the first days of September on the the southwest slope of the Wischberg. Here they pulled back to the pre-war border.

#### Some failed and canceled Austrian attacks

On the Austrian side, the plan to follow up the conquest of the Findenigkofl by attacking the Hoher Trieb had to be postponed until the start of October because of the troop re-deployment, particularly the late arrival of IR # 27. By this time, however, the most opportune period for operating in the high mountains was past. The thrust against the Hoher Trieb was to be mounted by three small groups (totaling five companies from 12 Mtn Bde), covered by advanced outposts, but it suffered from adverse weather. The artillery preparation on 9 October had to be interrupted when fog developed. Thus the chance of surprising the enemy, usually an essential requirement for success in Alpine warfare, was lost. The bombardment was resumed two days later, and on 12 October parts of 12 Mtn Bde finally attacked. Both the troops assaulting frontally and those in a group enveloping the enemy from the south met stiff resistance from the warned and ready Italians. Fighting lasted until night, but the enemy lines weren't broken. Gusts of rain and the resultant melting of the snow turned the ravines in front of the enemy lines into brooks full of swollen, wild water. Because of these obstacles the commander of 48 ID (FML Gabriel) decided to break off the offensive and pull the troops back. After leaving small outposts in contact with the enemy, the three attacking groups withdrew in the night of 12-13 October to their original positions, with minimal losses.

An operation which 92 ID had planned since June met a similar

misfortune. Its objective was the capture of the advanced Italian position which stretched in an arc along the pre-war border from the Zweispitz through the Mittagskofel to Köpfach. Observers on these heights could look over much of the Dogna and Fella valleys.

Because of continuing rain, the operation was postponed until mid-October. It finally began on the 18<sup>th</sup>, when the weather temporarily cleared up. However, at the same time Cadorna had started his great fall offensive on the Isonzo and the Tyrol front was also under attack. These events hindered 92 ID from energetically carrying out its plans.

The plan was anyway somewhat ambitious considering the forces involved. One battalion advanced from the Fella valley (in the north) against the Granudaberg-Marcilla heights to pin down the enemy. Three columns, each of one battalion, meanwhile thrust through the Seiseratal (in the east) against the line of heights from the Mittagskofel to Köpfach. However, this main attack came under flanking fire from Italian machine guns posted to the south, which were dug into the almost impregnable Bramkofel. This was one of the reasons why the attack was unsuccessful. The other unfavorable circumstances included a lack of sufficient artillery to support the entire attacking group, and the fact that the advancing infantry had just a slight numerical superiority. Meanwhile the HQ of Southwest Front had already informed GdK Rohr on 19 October that it would be necessary to send reinforcements to Boroevic's Army. This was yet another reason to stop 92 ID's unpromising operation. To prevent unnecessary losses, the troops stopped the fighting on the night of 19-20 October.

As in the earlier battles, Armeegruppe HQ responded unselfishly to the appeal to give up its troops. Naturally it was necessary to do everything possible to ensure victory on the Isonzo. On the next day several battalions were already reported ready to move. By 24 October, three battalions and two heavy batteries were on their way to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and one heavy howitzer battery to Tyrol. The operation against the Zweispitz and Mittagskofel heights was finally abandoned.

### **3. The defense of Tyrol in early fall 1915**

At the end of August and start of September, the Italian high command had urged their two armies deployed around the Tyrolean bastion to achieve before the onset of winter the objectives they'd been assigned when the war began. The objective of 4<sup>th</sup>

Army in the Dolomites was to break into the Puster valley and to cut this major supply artery of the Tyrol Land Defense Command. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was supposed to take the plateau of Vielgereuth [Folgaria] and Lafraun [Lavarone], from which the road led to Trent and eventually to Bozen [Bolzano].

While the enemy would take the offensive to meet these goals, the mission of the Tyrol Defense Command under GdK Dankl was still to stubbornly defend its own territory.

The relative strength of the two sides was roughly the same as it had been in the summer.

### **a. The second Italian offensive in the Dolomites**

As the first week of September went by, the commander of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army (General Nava) showed little inclination to send his soldiers into major new attacks in the Dolomites. On 8 September, the impatient Cadorna demanded a report regarding the operations planned for the month. Five days later, Nava replied that the approaching cold season would make it impossible for his Army to achieve the objectives they'd been given when the war started. The Army commander didn't believe he could promise to achieve even more limited goals. Nevertheless, he ordered Ist Corps to threaten the fortifications at Sexten, while taking Mt Piano, the northern slope of Mt Cristallo, and the outlet from the Gottres valley at Rufiedo [Rufredo]; this could pave the way for a breakthrough to Toblach. IX Corps would capture the heights along the Travenanzes valley and the mountain complex Col di Lana-Mt Sief-Setsass, thus opening the way into the Abtei valley and further on toward Bruneck.<sup>229</sup>

The prelude to this broadly-conceived offensive was a thrust which 10 Italian ID launched in the dark and stormy night of 5-6 September and at dawn on both sides of the Kreuzberg road. The attack collapsed everywhere with heavy losses because of the sharp defense by the Austrian and Bavarian troops deployed in this sector by 56 Mtn Bde.<sup>230</sup> By noon the action was already

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229 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, pp.362 ff.

230 The defenders lost 6 officers and 41 men (dead or wounded), the Italians lost about 1000 men and another 450 were taken prisoner according to Tosti, "La guerra Italio-Austriaca 1915-1918" (Milan, 1927), p. 121. See also the Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, pp. 38 ff. and Czernin-Morzin, "Dolomitenwacht" (Innsbruck, 1917), pp. 52 ff.

decided in favor of the defenders.

In the main offensive which followed, IX Corps struck before Ist Corps; between 16 and 28 September they sought mainly to gain ground in the Travenanzes sector; farther west they were content for the present to just move closer to the Col di Lana position. Parts of 17 Italian ID were able to capture the Tofana I on 18 September; however, all attempts to advance deeper into the Travenanzes valley were unsuccessful. The sector was defended by 51 Mtn Bde.

Under Ist Corps, Alpini from 2 ID tried in vain to capture Mt Cristallo between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. On the 19<sup>th</sup> a general attack was directed against this position, as well as against Mt Piano. Again all the enemy's efforts were without success; after a final attempt to storm Mt Piano was thwarted on the 26<sup>th</sup> by 56 Mtn Bde, the offensive was called off. This was the end of the completely unsuccessful Dolomite operation. Equally futile was a bombardment of the Pustertal railroad, which the Italians started on 17 September. The main target was the station at Sillian. Although the enemy fired 1000 rounds by 7 October, the damage was minimal and rail traffic wasn't affected.

On 25 September Genera Nava was removed from his position; his successor was General Robilant, hitherto commander of IV Corps in the Krn sector.

The period of quiet through mid-October, which Region IV (90 ID) had already enjoyed for all of September, made it possible for the Kaiser Jaeger to relieve the Alpenkorps without any difficulty.

"The Austrian troops were sad to see the departure of the comrades alongside whom they had shared good times and bad through four months of fighting...Many plain crosses on the steep slopes of the Dolomites today remind travelers of the heroic deaths of German soldiers."<sup>231</sup>

The components of 8 ID relieved the Alpenkorps. KJR # 4, with the HQ of 58 Mtn Bde, deployed in the Pordoni area; 96 Inf Bde (KJR # 1 and 3) went to the upper Abtei valley and KJR # 2 to the eastern sector of the Dolomites. GDI Roth's XIV Corps HQ, which had come from Volhynia to Brixen, took control of Regions IV and V. However, to avoid disrupting the command structure which was already functioning effectively in southeast Tyrol,

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231 "Das Stand-Schützen-Bataillon Dornbirn im Weltkrieg" (Dornbirn, 1927), p. 54

FML Fabini's 8 ID HQ was sent without its own troops to Calliano; here it was placed under Region III (south Tyrol) and given command over 181 and 180 Inf Bdes plus Col. Ritter von Ellison's Group. Already on 23 September the Land Defense HQ had moved from Innsbruck to Bozen, to avoid the danger that in winter it might be cut off from the front on the other side of the Brenner Pass, which was often buried in deep snow. The German-speaking citizens of Bozen, once the home of Walter von der Vogelweide, enthusiastically welcomed the commander of Tyrol within their walls.<sup>232</sup>

### **b. Actions in front of Vielgereuth**

The increasing Italian artillery fire against the Vielgereuth plateau, which had already started in the first third of September and then continued, indicated that the enemy intended to attack. It was directed chiefly against the considerably advanced outpost on the Coston, which was still held by just one company of the Upper Austrian Battalion X/14. This tiny group could hardly withstand the assault which was opened by two Italian battalions from 9 ID on 14 September. Moreover, the Italians first enveloped the garrison, which was also suffering from lack of water. However, on the 18<sup>th</sup> the Austrians repulsed another attack. Because observation and communications were difficult in this terrain, which was covered with shrubs, the HQ of 180 Inf Bde didn't learn until the 21<sup>st</sup> the Coston was beset on all sides. No reserves were immediately available, so the counter-attack wasn't launched until the 22<sup>nd</sup>; it failed against the larger enemy force. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the remnants of the encircled garrison of Coston were taken prisoner after an unsuccessful attempt to cut their way through about three Italian regiments.<sup>233</sup> If orders had been given to evacuate this completely exposed outpost had been issued in time, the heroic defenders would have been spared this tragic fate.

Ten days after the fall of the Coston, the Italians attacked the works along the line Mt Maronia-Plaut-Durer; although the forts hadn't been constructed as a continuous front, they were capable of sustained resistance. The pause had given the defenders a chance to take precautionary measures, and especially to have reserves available. A rather constant bombardment of the position was followed on 3 October by a powerful rain of fire,

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232 Pichler, "Der Krieg in Tirol 1915/1916" (Innsbruck, 1924), p. 64

233 Tosti, p. 115

and soon afterward by an infantry attack. However, the enemy reached the barbed wire only on the Plaut Heights. On the next two days the Italians renewed their costly assaults, but again in vain. On the 7<sup>th</sup> they directed a thrust against the Pioverna Heights, and broke into the position. A small reserve force threw the intruders out once more. A second attack suffered the same fate, and a third was broken up by defensive fire. The gallant defenders (mainly detachments from IR # 14, the Landes-Schützen and Tyrol Landsturm) had to prove their mettle one more time, on the 8<sup>th</sup>, before the enemy gave up their useless assaults.

There was less activity in front of the works at Lafraun, where the 34 Italian ID restricted their activity to some probes by sappers.

In the Val Sugana and farther north up to the Kreuzspitz the 15 Italian ID remained totally inactive.

### **c. Operations west of the Adige**

In the Adige valley it was completely quiet from the start of September through mid-October. Farther west, in the valleys of the Ledro and Chiesa, considerable movement by the Italians made it seem possible that they intended to attack the western side of Riva and the fort at Lardaro. Because of the shortage of troops in Tyrol, the only counter-measure taken by Region III was to reinforce the artillery on Mt Nozzolo # 2034 (southeast of Lardaro). These guns could interfere with an enemy attack in the Val dei Concei, because they could bombard any troops who assembled at and east of Tiarno and in the Chiesetal.

Operations planned by both sides on the Tyrolean west front would have to be carried out soon because of the advancing seasons.

In their offensive against the Tonale Pass at the end of August the Italians had captured the Pt. di Albiolo, which gave them a commanding position overlooking the northern flank of the Pass defenses. On 23 September, five small Landes-Schützen detachments attacked successfully to recover this summit. A counterattack on 3 October placed the heights temporarily in Italian hands once more, but in the following night the Tyroleans launched a surprise assault that drove the enemy away for good.

In the Ortler sector, the garrison of Mt Scurluzzo withstood Italian attacks, preceded by strong artillery preparation, on 20 and 21 September. On the other hand, an attempt by the Austrian garrison of the Stilfserjoch to take the Italian positions was shattered by unfavorable weather.<sup>234</sup>

At the same time there were sharp actions in the high mountains between the Königs- and Zufall-Spitze, which made extraordinary demands on the special skills of the Alpine troops. Here the Italians had deployed a gun on a stony ridge within the Cedehe Glacier and opened fire against the Halle and Schaubach Chalets, which were important mountain observation posts. To deal with this troublesome situation, small climbing parties of 53 Half Bde scaled a 3600 meter high ridge and reached the rear of the artillery position. The Italians withdrew the gun on 21 September.

HQ of 53 Half Bde planned an even bolder operation against the Capanna Cedehe (in the uppermost Val Furva), because they feared that this area could be used as a base for Italian thrusts. In 36 hours, two small-caliber guns were brought to Gomagoi and then were lifted by cable railway to the Cevedale Pass in another 12 hours. Thanks to their fire and to a gallant attack by a Stand-Schützen detachment, on 24 September the Italian garrison was driven from the Capanna Cedehe and their hut was set on fire. From now on the Austrian guns dominated the upper Val Furva.

### ***C. The Third Battle of the Isonzo (18 October-4 November)***

#### **1. Cadorna's plan of operations for the fall offensive**

After more than four months of costly warfare, the government and people of Italy were becoming impatient, and urgently demanded a significant military success. This was needed not only because the Socialist Party, which was opposed to the government and the war, demanded that the Italian parliament should reopen on 1 December.<sup>235</sup> Also the enthusiasm for war,

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234 Lemprich, pp. 18 ff.

235 In September and October there were several large-scale work stoppages in the Italian industrial areas.

originally evident in wide circles, was being replaced by tired, almost hopeless indifference.

September came to an end. Since there was no sign of the Aus-Hung. offensive feared by Cadorna, and since the process of greatly reinforcing and equipping the Italian units had meanwhile nearly been completed, the high command decided at the start of October that they would open a renewed general offensive in the middle of the month.

The military resources of the Aus-Hung. Monarchy were stretched very thin on the Eastern Front and in the Balkans, where the attack against Serbia had begun on 8 October. This strengthened the conviction of the Italian leaders that now was a favorable moment to fall upon the k.u.k. units with a greatly superior force. The Aus-Hung. commanders were hardly in a situation where they could find sufficient reinforcements quickly.<sup>236</sup> Once the offensive started, Cadorna intended to continue without interruption until reaching a decision; for this great trial of strength he would use all of the Kingdom's available units and resources.<sup>237</sup> In the eleven weeks since the second Isonzo battle, very extensive armaments were prepared for the new operation. First the divisions which had been worn down in the summer battles had to receive fresh troops and to be trained in rest areas regarding the latest military techniques. All of the latest equipment, including some of French and English origin, was brought up to the front in great quantities. Of special importance was the increase in automated weapons, the formation of many heavy-caliber trench mortar detachments, and the introduction of steel helmets. Then the infantry was issued portable steel shields and improved hand grenades. Finally the expansion of the air forces was accelerated.

In August and September the Italian artillery was reinforced by many heavy and very heavy batteries. For this purpose the high command removed a great portion of the fortress and coastal guns from the works at Verona and Venice, as well as from the permanent fortifications on the Tagliamento. The enormous artillery force of the Italian armies on the Isonzo also received heavy batteries from the Tyrol front, French 26 cm howitzers, and numerous large-caliber naval guns. At the same time the necessary ammunition supplies were being accumulated

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236 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 462

237 Ibid., Vol. II, Text, pp. 466 ff. Cadorna, "La Guerra", Vol. I, pp. 147, 152 and 155

for the offensive.<sup>238</sup>

The lines which the Italians had reached in the summer battle were converted into a continuous trench system, behind which strong back-up positions were constructed (some with concrete) and made impermeable to artillery fire. Between the battles, the Italians on the middle and lower Isonzo restricted their combat activity to small storm-troop operations and the methodical construction of sap trenches closer to our positions. Apparently the heavy losses they'd suffered in their attacks had convinced them that their troops should have as much cover as possible.

#### The plan of attack

Although Paris and London were urging the Italian Army to attack the Austrian front as soon as possible to provide relief for the Serbs in their hour of need, Cadorna wouldn't agree to strike before all the necessary ammunition was available.<sup>239</sup> When this had been achieved, the Italian high command ordered that the offensive would start on 18 October.

About two thirds of the Italian armed forces would strike the main blow against the Isonzo front. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies, behind which strong strategic reserves were stationed, would first capture Görz; its conquest was one of the most popular war aims in Italy. Simultaneously with the start of the operation in the coastal lands, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies would energetically attack Tyrol from the south and east. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was once again ordered to secure the plateaus of Folgaria and Lavarone, while 4<sup>th</sup> Army broke into the Puster valley. These attacks, along with secondary thrusts on the Carinthian front, were supposed to hinder the transfer of Aus-Hung. units to the Isonzo.

Two consecutive phases were envisioned in Italian planning for the main offensive on the Isonzo. In the first phase the sector of the Aus-Hung. front which jutted ahead like a bastion north and south of Görz would be outflanked by powerful attacks at Plava and on the Karst; the front would be pushed back east onto the plateaus of Bainsizza and Doberdo. Thus the Görz bridgehead would be enveloped on both sides, while preparations for the main offensive in front of the city went forward. After the

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238 By 17 October a million artillery rounds were ready; many of them came from French and English firms. There were 725 rounds available for each gun in the sector.

239 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 153

success of the operation on the wings the second and decisive phase of the fighting would commence - a powerful frontal assault would break through the defenders' thin line between Mt Sabotino and the mouth of the Wippach, and cross the Isonzo downstream from Görz.<sup>240</sup> On the upper Isonzo, the left wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army would support the main attack by energetically resuming the offensive which they had broken off in September

#### The deployment in Friauli

To carry out this plan, the Italian high command assigned the following tasks to the main body of their forces in Friauli.

At the start of the general offensive the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, the reinforced IV Corps<sup>241</sup>, would attempt for a third time to carry out its separate task of conquering the basins on the upper Isonzo and the Krn massif which lay between them. They were also responsible of guarding the main body on the middle and lower Isonzo against any Aus-Hung. units which might attack from the Carinthian fortifications or be sent by rail to Tolmein.

The center of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army consisted of VIII Corps (newly deployed on the west bank of the Isonzo between Doblar and Anikova) and the II Corps farther south. They would first force their way over the river between Auzza and Canale and seize the heights that made up the western edge of the Bainsizza plateau. Simultaneously, II Corps was instructed to thrust out of the narrow bridgehead at Plava and especially to take the Kuk Heights # 611, which dominated the entire bend in the valley. Then they would strike southeast through Mt Santo and Mt S Gabriele into the flank and rear of the Görz sector. During this operation the left wing of II Corps would meanwhile be covered by VIII Corps, which would establish a foothold on the Bainsizza plateau.

The Army's right wing consisted of 4 ID, the reinforced VI Corps, and the reserve forces which were concentrated in this area. Their first mission was to prepare for the main attack on Görz by scouting and artillery bombardment. After the Army's

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240 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 417

241 IV Corps consisted of 7, 8 and 33 ID, the Bersaglieri Division, the Aosta Brigade, and the Alpini Groups A and B (each a brigade in strength). Total strength was 77 battalions. (Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 152)

center had moved forward at Plava and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had advanced on the Karst plateau they would begin to break through in the Mt Sabotino-Podgora sector at a date which was still to be determined.

On its northern wing, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would hold back its forces west of the Isonzo until they could strike simultaneously with the start of the attack on Görz.<sup>242</sup> Then these units would cross the river next to the mouth of the Wippach and cover the left flank of the Army's main body on the Karst.

Before the offensive started, this main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was tightly concentrated on the edge of the Karst from Peteano to the coast at Monfalcone. The reinforced XIV Corps on the left was to take Mt S Michele; the reinforced VII Corps on the right would mount an envelopment attack from the south and take the edge of the Doberdo plateau between Mt Cosich and the Debeli vrh. Then the Army's center, X Corps, would carry out its attack in close cooperation with the two flanking corps through the Vallone valley to the heights of Oppacchiasella and the Hermada.

The four infantry divisions at the disposal of the high command (under XI and XIII Corps) were stationed in the Palmanova area; they were ready to deploy either at Görz or on the Karst. Farther back, G.Lt. the Count of Turin's Cavalry Corps was stationed partly on the Tagliamento and partly on coast defense; however, his Bersaglieri battalions, batteries and machine guns had been split up and sent to the front.

G.Lt. Frugoni's 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army had 263 battalions and 654 guns, the Duke of Aosta's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had 125 battalions and 564 guns, and the reserves of the high command had 49 battalions and 172 guns. There were also 305 pieces of heavy and medium artillery (of which 35 were opposite the k.u.k. XV Corps, 100 at Plava and in front of Görz, and 170 supporting the the attack against the Karst bastion). Thus opposite the Aus-Hung. front between the Rombon and the sea there were about 25 infantry and 4 cavalry divisions, with 338 battalions and 1372 guns.<sup>243</sup>

## **2. The prelude to the major fighting on the Isonzo**

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242 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Per the situation map, the units in question were part of XIV Corps - 29 ID and half of 26 ID.

243 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 418

### a. Preparations through 17 October

It was already clear at the end of September, as shown in guidelines issued by the high command to the Southwest Front HQ, that the Italian army would make one more attack on the Isonzo in great strength before winter. The enemy General Staff had remained inactive while the battle raged in the West, but it was expected that the Italian offensive would start - at the latest - soon after the opening of the new allied campaign against Serbia.

The intelligence service confirmed this supposition in the next few days. Enemy wireless messages which they intercepted at the start of October left no doubt that a major Italian offensive was imminent. The messages spoke of high level staffs deploying, of command posts moving forward in the area of Aosta's Army, of machine gun detachments and bridging equipment leaving the Cavalry Corps for the front, and of strong reserves of men and equipment building up. At the same time, reconnaissance indicated that new heavy batteries were appearing west and southwest of Görz. Watchers in the lookout posts on Mt S. Michele, Mt Sabotino and the Kuk, which provided a wide view into the plains, reported that there was very heavy traffic on the rail lines and roads leading to the front. This picture was further confirmed by the unanimous testimony of prisoners, and also of deserters who came over in ever increasing numbers because they didn't want to take part in the scheduled attack.<sup>244</sup>

As a deception measure, the Italians prepared an order, ostensibly from the HQ of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, stating that the attacks would be suspended until spring 1916. This order was passed by the embassy in Berne to the k.u.k. General Staff, which immediately recognized that it was bogus. Because of all the other evidence, and the general military situation, the "order" was clearly unbelievable.<sup>245</sup>

On 8 October the enemy sent a strong force of planes on a scouting mission. Other planes, serving as artillery observers, directed the fire of the many new heavy batteries. On the same day air units attacked high-level Aus-Hung. HQ, especially those of III and VII Corps. The first probing attacks by infantry took place toward the middle of the month. Weak Italian detachments felt their way forward opposite XV Corps at Tolmein

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244 In three days, 54 Italians came over to us at Tolmein.

245 See also the Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 461

on the 13<sup>th</sup> and on the Mrzli vrh on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The north wing of XVI Corps noted that the enemy was preparing to cross the Isonzo. Firing from the mass of guns assembled in the Mossa-Moraro-Mt Fortin area gradually indicated that the main attack would be directed against Mt S. Michele.

On the south wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army, whose HQ had moved on 14 September to Adelsberg, enemy infantry began probing attacks on 14 October against the forward position on the right of 20 Hon ID, which was defending Mt S. Michele. These patrols, accompanied by strong artillery fire, continued on the 15<sup>th</sup>. They expanded on the 16<sup>th</sup> into an attack by three or four regiments against Mt S. Michele. The three-day operation brought the Italians no success, because they weren't able to take the hastily-constructed forward position, guarded by several Honved companies. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the enemy restricted their activity in this sector to artillery bombardments, aimed especially at Mt S. Michele. After darkness fell, about six companies launched a surprise assault against Peteano, which was brought to grief by our fire in front of the defensive obstacles.

These events on the north wing of VII Corps were probably connected with the movement of bridging equipment to the stretch of the Isonzo opposite the mouth of the Wippach. The enemy preparations to cross the river at this point and farther north at Ronzina (4 km northeast of Canale) were reported to 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which therefore instructed XVI and XV Corps to place these eventual crossing points under concentrated fire and to station reserves in the threatened areas.

Already in the first two weeks of October, as signs were multiplying that the enemy would soon begin their offensive, the front-line positions were provided with emergency rations. Based on the experiences on the German Western front, several days of destructive artillery fire were anticipated, which would disrupt the normal flow of supplies.

The general bombardment of our positions began at Tolmein in the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup>, and lasted throughout the night. The fire relaxed in other sectors. In the evening the Italian units along the front from Rombon to the sea were mostly at their allocated jumping-off points, in places very close to the Aus-Hung. troops. There were wider spaces between the fronts only where the Isonzo had cut a deep gorge (between Selo and Descla and between Zagora and Mt Santo), and in the sector downstream from Görz to the edge of the Karst, where the river ran through

a broad bed of gravel.

The various Aus.-Hung. HQ were in general well informed about the deployment of the Italian units. Only the appearance of VIII Corps on the middle Isonzo would be a surprise.

The enemy units on the Isonzo were opposed by 5<sup>th</sup> Army plus 44 LW ID, a total of 12 infantry divisions (137 ½ battalions and 634 guns). They had 128,600 riflemen to oppose an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 Italians.

### **b. Events during the 70-hour artillery bombardment, 18-21 October**

On 18 October, punctually at noon, the mighty hurricane of massed Italian artillery fire suddenly began to thunder on the entire Isonzo front from the snow-covered summits of the Krn to the Adriatic coast. Now there could be no doubt - the third battle had begun.

#### 18 October

Soon all of the positions and the area to their rear were covered in smoke and flames. The Italians fired primarily against the fortifications that covered the troops. However, heavy and lasting fire was also directed against the resting places of the reserves, the approach routes, the HQ of the higher commanders (up to corps level) and finally the Aus-Hung. batteries. The powerful bombardment on the first day didn't do much damage to the defensive works and obstacles; only the advanced portion of the front on the Karst was considerably hit. Although there were no major infantry attacks during the three days of artillery preparation (through 21 October), already on the 18<sup>th</sup> some small thrusts gave the defenders insight into the outline of the Italian battle plan. While the enemy didn't make attempts against any part of Sector II [XVI Corps], there were already infantry actions on both wings of 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

The first of these actions broke out on the Karst plateau. Italian troop concentrations were already noted in front of VII Corps in the early hours of the afternoon. Shortly thereafter strong detachments, backed up by artillery deployed in a flanking position between Mossa and Mt Fortin, advanced several times against the advanced positions of 20 Hon ID on the northern slope of Mt S Michele. By evening all the enemy's attempts here had been in vain, as were surprise attacks

undertaken by many Italian battalions from the west against the summit of Mt S Michele and the positions at and near Kote 111.

After these actions died down, in the night of 18-19 October the 106 Lst ID (on the south wing of VII Corps) relieved its 111 Lst Inf Bde with 110 Bde, as planned.

Also on the upper Isonzo, after a very heavy bombardment there were several weak infantry thrusts in the afternoon and evening hours against the Krn and the western slope of the Vodil vrh. The enemy had no success; meanwhile the fire of our mortars and trench mortars on the Italian assembly areas in the folds in the mountains in front of our lines inflicted substantial casualties. The Alpini battalions which inched forward at Tolmein also soon returned to their starting points. The enemy artillery fire against 7 Mtn Bde downstream from Selo was ineffective; no serious attack was anticipated in this area.

During the entire day, our pilots reported that there was lively traffic going on behind the Italian front. Strong units were marching in the Recca valley toward Plava; large troop encampments were discovered on the prewar boundary west of this town and back toward Cividale.

The enemy fire died down during the night of 18-19 October. The Italian guns continued to hammer away only on the Doberdo plateau, which greatly hindered efforts to improve the already damaged trenches. At Ronzina, where XV and XVI Corps came together, loud noise betrayed the approach of pontoons and bridging equipment to the river.

#### 19 October

As day broke, the enemy's destructive fire again mounted to a heavy intensity. It was concentrated against the same four battlefields where the Italians had devoted their attention in the preceding actions - the hills in the Tolmein basin, Plava, the Görz bridgehead, and the edge of the Karst. Here the greater part of the defensive positions were destroyed.

For the first time the Italian air units entered action according to a definite plan. Ground support and bomber planes, and also some dirigibles, often intervened directly in the fighting both by day and night. Thus on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> a strong air attack was directed against our airbase at Aisovizza (east of Görz). In two hours the Italian squadrons hurled more than 100 bombs; they inflicted few personnel

casualties, but the damage to the costly and scanty equipment was considerable.

From now on the Italian air attacks were continuous. They were directed not only against the first-line and reserve positions, higher HQ, marching columns and supply trains. Their objectives also included many railroad stations (especially at Nabresina and Opcina) and some towns and cities such as Görz and Trieste. For lack of sufficient means of defense, the Austro-Hungarians had to suffer these operations patiently. The few flak batteries, dispersed on a wide front, weren't enough to make a difference. The planes of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's four Flieger Companies were designed mainly for reconnaissance missions rather than for air battles.<sup>246</sup>

On the 19<sup>th</sup>, the second day of the battle, the Italian infantry was even more cautious than on the day before. From noon until about 3:00 PM the artillery fire halted on almost the entire front. During this time there was hefty but rather fruitless rifle and machine gun fire from the Italian positions. At Mainizza our alert artillery broke up an attempt by Italian detachments to bring pontoons to the river under cover of the meadows along the bank.

#### 20 October

The defenders in their scanty and damaged positions had hoped that the third day of the battle would herald the opening of the general infantry attack, and thus terminate the long and nerve-racking ordeal of standing under Italian artillery fire. However, this hope remained unfulfilled. On 20 October the enemy infantry still didn't start the expected - and even desired - offensive. The bombardment went on, and in some places escalated to short bursts of drum-fire. Mt Sabotino and the Podgora Heights were also hit now by heavy trench mortars, which significantly damaged the trenches and obstacles. Most

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246 Another factor which impaired the operations of our outnumbered air units was the "Bora", a strong wind that blew from the northeast over the steeply falling edge of the highlands down to the plains and the sea. In these areas it stormed through the air just over the ground, and struck planes as they were trying to take off. This often made flight difficult or impossible. The Italian pilots, from bases farther away, were already operating at heights of 1000 meters when they reached the area of the Bora, and thus could carry out their missions without obstruction.

dangerous, however, was the cross fire maintained by heavy Italian batteries from the area of the Sdobba lagoons against the Mt S Michele sector.

Prisoners indicated that the general offensive would start in the next morning. To prepare for this, in the evening many Italian troops supplied with steel helmets and shields, plus grenades, stalked forward to remove the obstacles in front of our trenches, which the enemy artillery had been unable to destroy because the positions of the two sides were so close together.<sup>247</sup> Almost everywhere, however these storm troops were prevented from doing harm. In the night the Italians had finished half of a military bridge in the river meadows at Mainizza, but then it was destroyed by the artillery of XVI Corps. In 17 ID, the brigade at the front was relieved by 33 Inf Bde, which came up from its rest position to the line.

Although our casualties on the first and second days of the bombardment had been relatively light, the destruction of the defensive positions that continued on the 20<sup>th</sup> robbed the troops of much of their cover. Unprotected, they lay under fire in shell-craters or depressions in the ground; on the Karst, where the defenders were concentrated relatively heavily, there were some substantial casualties. The night hours were used to repair the damaged works, even while the enemy's bombardment continued.

From the positions and intensity of the Italian artillery in various sectors, it seemed quite probable that their main attack would be directed against VII Corps. Therefore Army HQ, had the reserves of III Corps at Selo (half of 22 LW ID plus IR # 96) prepare a force that would be ready to intervene quickly.

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247 Vogelsang, "Das steirische Infanterie-Regiment 47 im Weltkrieg" (Graz, 1932), p. 346. Some of the troops in the Italian patrols appeared almost like foot soldiers of the Middle Ages. They wore large steel helmets that weighed 2 ½ kg and heavy gray-green breast armor that consisted of several interlaced plates, and more armor to protect their upper thighs.

### 3. Defensive actions between Flitsch and Plava, 21-24 October

#### Mountain fighting south of Flitsch

When it seemed that the Aus-Hung. positions from Flitsch to Plava had been completely destroyed as planned by the three days of bombardment, the Italian infantry stormed ahead around noon on 21 October. On the extreme northern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, an attack group of three to four battalions from 33 Italian ID tried in vain to climb the granite summits and ridges that formed a half circle east of the Krn peak. In the defenses, the Magyar battalion II/34 (from Kaschau) was once again particularly distinguished. Farther south, on the much more accessible slopes of medium elevation at the Mrzli vrh, parts of 8 Italian ID and Alpini battalions tried to get over the barriers which covered our trenches. The battalions of 15 and 3 Mtn Bde drove the enemy back everywhere with their fire; in some places there were counterattacks and hand-to-hand fighting.

In the afternoon the Italians repeated their thrusts next to the Krn, while their storming columns on the Mrzli and Vodil vrh exhausted themselves in bitter fighting which lasted until evening. The defenders everywhere held onto their positions.

Also in the sector north of Krn, held by 44 LW ID on the left wing of Armeegruppe Rohr, the reinforced Bersaglieri Division attacked on the uppermost Isonzo between the Rombon and the Vrsic; despite great bravery they were unable to gain any ground. A weak thrust against the valley positions by Flitsch had already been shattered on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Early on the morning of 20 October the Italians broke into the forward position on the Vrsic in a surprise attack, but in man-to-man fighting were thrown out again by LW IR # 21, already often distinguished in earlier actions. The stubborn enemy didn't give up after this setback. After a powerful bombardment, they attacked the Javorcek slope at noon on the next day (the 21<sup>st</sup>), but couldn't break through. In the afternoon they tried a second time, with the same result. The Italians did manage in these actions to dig in very close to our obstacles. In the night of 21-22 October the very active defenders strove to drive back or at least pin down these Italians with hand grenades, rolling bombs, trench mortars and grenade launchers, as well as by starting landslides.<sup>248</sup> This prevented the enemy from making a night

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248 Here the defenders hurled heavy mines down the slopes.

attack, which would have been very dangerous because of their large numerical superiority. As morning dawned, all the Italian batteries concentrated their fire on the hotly-contested Vrata and Vrsic heights. Soon the positions were enshrouded in a cloud of smoke, which was periodically convulsed by fire that resembled lightning. On the western slope, which extended so far toward the enemy that they were able to bombard it from the rear, an Italian detachment broke into the line. Reserves from the Carinthian LW IR # 4 threw themselves against the intruders and cleared out our trenches in bayonet fighting, after which it was quiet until evening. Then in the darkness, between 9:00 PM and midnight, the persistent enemy launched three more thrusts, which were also fended off. Now the arrival of a snowstorm and the exhaustion of the attackers caused them to break off their attacks for a long time.<sup>249</sup>

#### The fighting at Plava and in front of Tolmein

The Italian infantry began to attack the Tolmein bridgehead at noon on 21 October. As always, the main objective here was the hills in the Tolmein basin. Until nightfall, about 15 infantry and Alpini battalions made four attacks, which were repulsed by 8 Mtn Bde after heavy fighting, parts of which took place in our positions.

While everything was quiet in front of 7 Mt Bde between Selo and Auzza, parts of VIII Italian Corps tried to cross the Isonzo in boats at Loga, Ajba and Bodrez. At 1:00 AM on 21 October a regiment of 27 ID pretended to attack over the river at Bodrez; at the same time the main body of the Division hoped to make a surprise thrust to the other bank at Loga and Ajba, without artillery preparation. The noisy preparations for this operation, however, had long betrayed it to the defenders; the attackers were caught in fire from 13 Mtn Bde, as were their comrades still on the western bank, and defeated. The crossing attempt had been completely shattered by dawn. A second attempt was made in the following evening, this time after several hours of plentiful artillery preparation, but it was also thwarted by

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Rolling bombs were an old defensive weapon to the Austrian army in this area. Already in the year 1809 they had been part of the armament used by the garrisons in the forts at the Predil and at Malborgeth. (Veltze, "Österreichs Thermopylen 1809" (Vienna/Leipzig, 1909), p. 40.)

249 Details about these costly and destructive actions are recorded by a participant, Benito Mussolini, in "Mein Kriegstagebuch" (German translation, Vienna, 1930), pp. 68 ff.

the fire of the already-alerted defenders.

Further attempts to cross the river here were called off. HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army instead would have VIII Corps cross over to the eastern bank at the points already in their hands at Plava as soon as II Corps had gained ground there. According to Cadorna's plan of attack, this small bridgehead on the eastern bank at Plava would be the base for an envelopment attack against Görz from the north.<sup>250</sup> A great number of Italian batteries, which outnumbered our artillery many times, had opened their bombardment on 18 October.<sup>251</sup> At 7:00 AM on 21 October they concentrated their fire on the positions that jutted forward from Descla through Globna and on the hotly contested Heights # 383 at Zagora. Here the II Italian Corps wanted to break through the iron ring which the defenders had erected around the bridgehead; with 32 ID thrusting through Paljevo and 3 ID through the Kuk # 611, they would secure the heights that dominated the Isonzo valley. However, the thrusts by many battalions from three regiments were hit by accurate defensive fire and won no success; they weren't repeated on this day.

Thus all attacks against the north wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army failed on the first day.

#### 22 October

On 22 October some weak thrusts in the high mountains against GM Edl. von Wieden's 15 Mtn Bde soon broke down, but there was heavy fighting on the Mrzli vrh. On its summit the IV Bn of the east Galician IR # 80 flung back all the attacks in front of its position (even though it had already lost a third of its personnel on the first day of fighting). Detachments of Alpini Group A did manage to enter the defenses on the slopes of the Mrzli and Vodil vrh; they had to be overcome by reserves from GM Gerabek's 3 Mtn Bde and parts of Col. Heinrich Hausser's 14 Mtn Bde in a bitter melee before the enemy finally gave up and

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250 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 377

251 According to the Italian Official History (Vol. II, Text, p. 418), there were 100 medium and heavy guns deployed in a wide arc around Plava between the heights at Kambresko and the hill at St Florian; the majority of them could fire effectively into the Plava area. In the same area, on our side the 18 ID had 1 heavy and 18 medium guns between Auzza and Mt S Gabriele, and only about half of them could fire against Plava.

withdrew to their trenches. In the Tolmein basin the reinforced 7 ID also opened new attacks against the Sv. Maria Heights and Point 588 after several hours of very heavy artillery fire. Supported by some of our batteries which could fire effectively on the flanks from the high ground south of S Luzia, GM Wossala's 8 Mtn Bde was able to stand fast against enemy units that enjoyed a numerical superiority of almost 3:1.

The VIII Italian Corps remained totally inactive after its misfortune of the day before. On the other hand, at Plava the bombardment by II Corps began again as dawn was breaking; it was supported by numerous bomb attacks from the air, which were directed primarily at the area behind the front. Then regiments from 32 and 3 ID attacked the Globna-Zagora sector for many hours. The enemy suddenly broke into the lines at Zagora during their third attack. However, the Viennese troops of IV Bn/IR 4 struck the Italians before they could catch their breath; after a short but costly action they threw all of the enemy out of the trench.<sup>252</sup> The Italians were prevented from repeating these thrusts because our artillery effectively bombarded the assembly areas of their troops at Plava. In retaliation the enemy's heavy artillery on the west bank of the Isonzo combined their fire on our lines, but the their infantry remained quiet.

### 23 October

Fighting flared up again at 5:30 AM on 23 October in the sector between the Isonzo and the Mrzli vrh, which was always the most sensitive zone held by XV Corps. The Vodil vrh and Dolje were defended by 14 Mtn Bde plus a battalion apiece from 3 and 15 Mtn Bdes. Here the enemy sought to break through at any price; the eight battalions initially engaged gradually received further reinforcements. The fighting lasted all day and all night, surging back and forth, and mostly involved bloody hand-to-hand combat. Finally it was resolved in our favor on the morning of 24 October, after the last battalion of the Corps' reserve was committed; the enemy were expelled from all the works they had entered. The heroic action had caused large casualties on both sides.

The Italian operation against Sv. Maria on 23 October was a failure. On the other hand, at noon the Italian guns destroyed the last obstacles and shelters on Heights # 588, after which our positions were occupied by several battalions. The reserves

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252 Hoen, Waldstätten-Zipperer and Seiffert, "Die Deutschmeister", pp. 578 ff.

of 8 Mtn Bde counterattacked immediately, and the enemy were unable to stand their ground; once again they gave up the hotly-contested hill. However, with astounding perseverance their troops moved forward again several times against the heights in the evening and night; the exhausted battalions of FML Schmidt-Fussina's 1 ID were able to hold the first line, which was now reduced to a pile of debris.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> it was quiet in the Isonzo valley between Selo and Descla, but at Plava the II Italian Corps continued its attempts to break through. On the flanks of the bridgehead, which lay on the Isonzo, deeply-massed storm troops tried in the morning to gain ground by striking southeast at Zagora and northeast at Globna. They were never able to break through the wall of defenders, but our casualties grew significantly higher. Beginning at 3:00 PM all the Italian guns roared for hours against the hardly-recognizable positions of 1 Mtn Bde and its rear areas. There were several more massive infantry attacks in the evening, and until midnight. On the Brigade's northern wing the Italians broke into part of the position at Globna, but the area was recovered by an immediate counterattack. Meanwhile, until night fell our artillery pounded the reinforcements and bridging equipment on the river west and north of Globna.

#### 24 October

On the 24<sup>th</sup> the enemy stubbornly continued their thrusts aimed at the valley at Tolmein. On the previous day they had restricted their attacks to the area of Dolje and the Vodil vrh, but now the fighting spread north to the Mrzli vrh and lasted the whole day. Around 9:00 AM and again at 11:00 AM the enemy hurled masses of troops to storm the hotly-contested heights. In very stubborn hand-to-hand fighting, however, the men of 3 and 14 Mtn Bdes finally won the upper hand, threw the attackers from the slopes, and sent back many prisoners. After this latest misfortune, which had cost the Italians heavy casualties, they unleashed a sharp bombardment of the area they'd attacked in vain and destroyed all the trenches. By constantly firing on the routes to the front, they also tried to cut off the area where they hoped to make a decisive thrust. Defying death, the Italian 8 ID and battalions of Alpini Group A (reinforced by reserves) again climbed the blood-drenched slopes in the late afternoon and took the destroyed positions by storm. However, the defenders were able to once more drive back their brave opponents in fearfully bitter man-to-man combat.

Luck was also against the Italian 7 ID in front of the Tolmein

bridgehead, where it was engaged from morning until evening. The battalions of Alpini Group B, a Bersaglieri regiment and an infantry brigade were unsuccessful in their new attempt to capture the Heights of Sv. Maria and # 588, as well as the strong point on the wing at Selo.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> the positions of 7 and 13 Mtn Bdes between Selo and Descla were bombarded, but weren't attacked by infantry; however, GM Novak von Arienti's 1 Mtn Bde was heavily engaged during the day. After firing against the Brigade's sector until afternoon with artillery and trench mortars, Italian infantry striking in thick masses temporarily broke into our positions at Zagora. Once again the Deutschmeister battalion [IV/4] threw the Italians out in a spirited counterattack as night was falling; they were supported by the brigade reserves and by the Dalmatian Bn III/22, which hurried from a neighboring sector which wasn't assaulted. An enemy thrust at Globna was frustrated in the night, after which there was a brief pause in the fighting along the entire front between Plava and the Rombon.

Although the forces engaged on the upper Isonzo were smaller than those on the Doberdo plateau, nevertheless the fighting here was also a glorious page in the story of the Aus-Hung. troops on the Southwest Front. The accomplishment was accompanied by a heavy casualty list. By 24 October the k.u.k. XV Corps had lost 650 dead, 2000 wounded and 260 missing. The attackers, who had fought with just as much determination, suffered substantially higher losses.

#### **4. The struggle on the Karst plateau, 21-27 October**

##### **a. Fighting on 21-22 October**

From all the information available by early on 21 October, the Aus-Hung. leadership had determined that a general offensive by the assembled Italian divisions against the Karst bastion of Doberdo was imminent. Intercepted telephone traffic showed that the enemy was confident, and our final observations confirmed that the period of preparation was over.

##### 21 October

At 9:00 AM the Italian artillery fire increased to its greatest intensity; at the same time our own batteries opened a heavy and

destructive fire against the points where the enemy was gathered to our front. In the wreckage of the damaged foremost outposts, the surviving observers were waiting in tortured suspense for the first waves of enemy troops amidst the unnerving, hellish fire and the choking smoke produced by the exploding shells. Finally the Italian infantry opened their attack along the entire Karst front shortly after 10:00 AM.

According to the general plan, the Duke of Aosta undertook the operation against the Doberdo plateau with strong wings; they struck the Mt S Michele-S Martino area from the north, and the edge of the Karst between Vermeigliano and the hills at Monfalcone from the south.

The first lines of riflemen who approached our forward position on the northern slope of Mt s Michele were soon driven back to their trenches. Then, however, the garrison of this foremost position were pulled back to the main fortifications; they had accomplished their mission of observing the enemy's preparations, and there was no point in leaving them so far ahead where they were completely exposed to Italian fire and would only suffer needless casualties.

While several air strikes were launched against the villages which the enemy had identified as command posts, the main body of XIV Italian Corps (28 ID and the reinforced 30 ID) attacked. Four brigades packed closely together on a front of just two kilometers advanced against Mt S Michele and on both sides of the road to S Martino. They believed that hardly any of the defenders could have survived the powerful bombardment, but as they advanced they were completely surprised to receive heavy infantry and machine gun fire from the ruins of the village and the smashed fortifications. The unexpected resistance, which was accompanied by accurate curtain-fire from our artillery, limited the advance of the attacking regiments. The first wave of Italian troops were only able to temporarily penetrate the positions of 20 Hon ID on the western summit of Mt S Michele and the slope leading down toward S Martino. Here there was an extremely bitter fight, into which the enemy sent significant reinforcements. By afternoon a counterattack by reserve units threw the Italian detachments off the heights, except for 20 officers and half a thousand men who were taken prisoner. Late in the afternoon several Italian battalions, who'd occupied Peteano after it was abandoned by the Hungarian outposts during the morning, moved slowly closer to the main position on the northern slope of the mountain and dug in several hundred paces in front of our line.

This first action on Mt S Michele had already caused enormous casualties. Hundreds of dead and wounded Italians covered the battlefield. However, 20 Hon ID had also suffered; two of its regiments (Hon IR # and 17) had borne the burnt of the fighting and had been reduced to half-strength. This was not a small price which they paid to hang onto the main position.

The Italian divisions elsewhere on the Karst front struck at the same hour as the attackers at Mt S Michele. Under 17 ID, the brigade at the front (Col von Soos' 33 Inf Bde) fended off all attacks by the Italian 19 ID; storm troops who'd penetrated the position at two points were wiped out in hand-to-hand combat.<sup>253</sup> The left wing of this Division suffered especially from heavy fire on the flank, which caused heavy casualties and completely destroyed the obstacles and protective works.

106 Lst ID, stationed farther south as far as Mt dei sei Busi, almost completely shattered the offensive by the Italian 20 ID in a bloody melee. Small enemy detachments were only able to penetrate the front of two battalions in the center. Some of the lost trenches were soon recovered, but fighting in the others lasted into the night. This was the first time the k.k. Landsturm regiments had been involved in a major engagement on the Karst front; their relatively heavy casualties were caused by their unfamiliarity with this theater of operations.

In the first day of fighting the k.u.k. VII Corps had already lost 800 dead, 3000 wounded and 800 missing.<sup>254</sup>

Fighting died down in front of VII Corps in the afternoon. To ensure that 20 Hon ID would continue to hold its important sector, it was reinforced by the Banat IR # 43 from the Corps' reserves.

While the northern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army thus attempted to

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253 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This passage infers that only 33 Bde was in the line, and is consistent with a preceding statement that 33 Bde had just relieved 34 Bde in the hours before the attack. However, the situation map for the evening of 23 October shows both brigades in line. Perhaps 34 Bde returned to the front on the 23<sup>rd</sup> after a brief absence, but this isn't mentioned in the text. Another possibility is that 34 Bde in fact never left the line completely.

254 Archduke Joseph, "The World War as I Saw It" (in Magyar; Budapest, 1928), Vol. II, p. 485

gain entry to the Vallone sector by capturing Mt S Michele, the southern wing was engaged on the line Mt Cosich-Debeli vrh-Height # 121. They wanted to capture the edge of the Karst, the heights at Monfalcone, and the area farther east. This would have developed into a pincers attack from the south and forced the Austro-Hungarians to abandon the Doberdo plateau.

Under the Italian VII Corps, the 14 ID (reinforced by a combined brigade and an infantry regiment) was ready to advance along the Selz-Doberdo road. The Division's main body was supposed to break through the Aus-Hung. positions in a frontal assault, while the combined brigade took the Mt Cosich-Debeli vrh height with a flanking thrust into the southern edge of the Karst. To support this operation, one brigade of the 16 ID farther to the right was ordered to assault the Mt Cosich-Debeli vrh line frontally from the south. The right wing of 16 ID would take the positions on the heights east of Monfalcone (Point 121) and the advanced outpost blocking the road at Point 21 by Bagni.

Here also the general assault began at 10:00 AM. On the extreme southern wing and in the center of III Corps, the Landsturm troops of 187 Inf Bde and of 19 Lst Mtn Bde repulsed all thrusts without difficulty through the evening. At the bend in the road north of Selz (Point 45), the first very sharp attack broke into our position, but then collapsed thanks to a counterattack which was launched at the right moment. Soon thereafter the 14 ID repeated its attack with strong forces, but was thrown back with heavy losses by the Styrians of GM Hugo Schmid's 56 Inf Bde. In the early afternoon the combined Italian brigade which had advanced into the valley east of Selz was pinned down by our artillery crossfire and had to pull back. The enemy's eagerness to attack seemed temporarily exhausted after this setback. A Bersaglieri battalion tried to take our position at Point 121 with a surprise attack, but it was thrown to the ground by concentrated artillery fire. On this day and afterwards, the batteries on the Hermada Heights and at Duino played a large role in fending off all the attacks against the center and southern wing of the k.u.k. III Corps because they laid down an extremely effective flanking fire.

In the twilight, considerable traffic was observed at and behind the front, as long columns marched from the plains toward the Isonzo bridges. According to a captured officer, the Italians intended to seize our Karst positions in the night of 21-22 October. Therefore the HQ of VII Corps sent their reserves ahead: the k.k. Lst IR # 25 to 106 Lst ID, IR # 46 to the Marocottini-Devetaki area, and k.k. Lst IR # 6 to

Oppacchiasella-Nova Vas. In an order to the divisional commanders, Archduke Joseph expressed his will that the positions which had been constructed and held with so many sacrifices should be held at any price; if any sector was lost it was to be recaptured.

GdI Boroevic, who'd watched the heavy fighting in the morning from the forward HQ of VII Corps, recognized that an all-out battle had begun for possession of the Karst plateau. Therefore in the afternoon he instructed the Army's reserves to move to Selo, behind the most-endangered sector of VII Corps. Moreover, in the evening of 21 October the 206 Lst Inf Bde began to arrive at Opcina.

The hard fighting on the first day had caused high casualties. The defenders of the Karst had lost 950 dead, 3800 wounded and about 800 men missing.

#### The night of 21-22 October

There was heavy fighting throughout the night of 21-22 October. Only 20 Hon ID enjoyed a period of relative quiet, and used it to relieve its most heavily damaged units with IR # 43, which arrived in the evening.<sup>255</sup> Hon IR # 4 moved to Cotici in the Division's reserves. Under 17 ID, storm troops from IR # 39 and FJB # 24 cleared out a trench which the enemy had penetrated in the evening. Thus the positions in the center and on the north wing of VII Corps were firmly in our hands.

Under 106 Lst ID, a counterattack at night by battalions from k.k. Lst IR # 25 and 31 led recovered part of the positions lost during the day. By morning, they were unsuccessful only north of Mt dei sei Busi, where the enemy had taken a sector about 200 paces long and brought up many machine guns to hold it; heavy fire from these weapons made it impossible to advance against the lost position over the open plateau.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, at 4:00 AM strong Italian units thrust ahead in an attempt to widen the sector they controlled; all available reserves of the Division had to be committed to repulse these attacks.

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255 Hon IR "Budapest" # 1 was temporarily reduced to just one combat-ready battalion, which assembled during the night at the north end of the Vallone.

256 "Das Lst IR Teschen # 31 im Weltkrieg", Mitteilungen des Kameradschafts-Verbandes des ehemaligen Lst IR Teschen # 31 (4<sup>th</sup> Issue, 1928)

Although the Italians opposing FML Ritter von Krautwald's III Corps had been unable to break through during the day, they hoped to reach their goals for 21 October by a vigorous night attack. Soon after darkness fell, there were several strong thrusts on the road north of Selz, which were broken up by midnight.

The commander of VII Italian Corps felt it was especially important to take the heights east of Monfalcone. This would not only make it easier to carry out the flank attack against Doberdo and the Vallone valley; it would also facilitate a later envelopment of the western slope of the Hermada, which would be difficult to secure by frontal assault. When night fell, Italian troops who'd been held in readiness on the western slope of Heights # 121 and near the Monfalcone railroad station immediately attacked the lines of 19 Lst Mtn Bde. After four failed attempts, the enemy broke into the trenches directly north of the station on their fifth assault. Col. Drennig, the heroic brigade commander, personally led a counterattack in which he fell mortally wounded. The fighting lasted the entire night without reaching a decision.

#### 22 October - VII Corps

On 22 October the battle on the Karst grew to an unprecedented size and intensity. From the first hour of dawn, the area from the immediate trenches to points far in the rear were covered with fire and smoke; thousands of heavy and very heavy guns pounded distant targets on the Karst. On many clear and wind-still autumn days the thunder of these barrages was refracted into the higher layers of the atmosphere, so that a dull roar could be heard in certain places hundreds of kilometers from the front. Some of the citizens in their homes on lonely heights or in quiet valleys were unnerved to hear this distant and uncanny sound.

To continue the offensive, the Duke of Aosta had sent another brigade to XIV Corps. Moreover, the Corps' commander had brought up 29 ID from reserve during the night to the eastern bank of the Isonzo; they were deployed in depth at Peteano on a very narrow front, and ready to attack. The three reinforced divisions between the mouth of the Wippach and S Martino stormed against Mt S Michele in the morning. On the northern slope and summit of the hill, Hon IR "Debreczen" # 3 and the newly-arrived IR # 43 repulsed this massive attack by 11:00 AM in hand-to-hand combat involving hand grenades and counterattacks; they were supported by batteries which laid down interdiction fire.

Around noon the Italians were observed to be preparing a second great attack in the broken terrain at the foot of the hill; this thrust also failed.

On the other hand, in the first onset several enemy battalions drove into the positions of 81 Hon Inf Bde northwest of S Martino. Hon IR # 17, supported by parts of IR # 43, counter-attacked but was stalled. Toward noon the remnants of the 17<sup>th</sup> Honved, who had suffered tremendous casualties, gave way to overwhelming enemy pressure and fell back to the second position on the western edge of S Martino. This forced 17 ID, which had successfully repulsed all attacks thus far, to also pull back its right wing to the second line. To close the gap which had developed on the left wing of the Honved Division, Hon IR # 4 was thrown into the front; Hon IR # 1 (which had just been pulled into reserve) was assembled in the Vallone valley and took the place of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment at Cotici. 17 ID received another battalion from IR # 46 (which was in the Corps' reserve); this battalion was supposed to keep the front from collapsing at the point of junction with 20 Hon ID, regardless of what happened.

During these events the 106 Lst ID also endured heavy attacks from X Italian Corps. All assaults in the Mt dei sei Busi area were broken by the firm stand of the Landsturm troops and concentrated defensive fire; however the attackers were able to once again establish themselves in the center of the Division's sector. By bending back the line and mounting several counterattacks, it was possible to keep the front from being rolled up, and to hold the position until reinforcements arrived.<sup>257</sup> The Division commander reported on the situation and the condition of the troops, whose power of resistance was almost exhausted; therefore FML Kletter was given control over Lst IR "Eger" # 6. The Corps commander expected that with this excellent regiment Kletter would not only hold his positions, but also recover the trenches which had been lost.

Soon the key southern position of the k.u.k. VII Corps, Mt dei sei Busi, was again the goal of massive Italian attacks. However, the Moravians of Lst IR # 25 repulsed them, while cross fire from the batteries of III and VII Corps tore bloody holes in the attacking battalions as they fell back.

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257 "Das Lst IR Teschen # 31 im Weltkrieg", Mitteilungen des Kameradschafts-Verbandes des ehemaligen Lst IR 31 (Issues 4/1928 and 1/1929)

In the afternoon the exhaustion of both sides led to a short pause. The k.u.k. VII Corps prepared for an evening counter-attack. Only the hurricane of artillery fire roared on.

The intensity of the fighting, the casualties, and the growing exhaustion of our troops were making it necessary to commit the majority of the available reserves. These factors also urgently required that reinforcements should be sent to the especially endangered sector of VII Corps, opposite which the enemy's already larger force was noticeably growing.<sup>258</sup> Already in the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the HQ of 5<sup>th</sup> Army had ordered 16 Lst Mtn Bde to move from Schön Pass to Ranziano, and given the Corps permission to bring up fully-trained March battalions and incorporate their personnel into the parent regiments.

Shortly after noon the commander of 20 Hon ID, GM von Lukachich, urgently asked for three battalions stationed in reserve in the Vallone valley. He justified his request by stating that otherwise his troops, who'd suffered very heavy losses, might not be able to hold out during the night in the area where the Italians had broken into the line at S Martino. The Archduke in turn got Army HQ to send 16 Lst Mtn Bde to relieve 81 Hon Inf Bde, so that the latter unit could recover the foremost line at S Martino. The HQ of 61 ID stayed at Ranziano, at the disposal of Army HQ.

In the relatively quiet afternoon hours, the Italians in front of the north wing of VII Corps continued to bring strong forces over the bridges from Gradisca. This concentration at the foot of the Karst indicated that in the foreseeable future parts of the enemy's strategic reserve would become engaged. 17 ID repulsed several assaults in the afternoon, and the artillery of 106 Lst ID broke up groups of enemy troops.

#### 22 October - III Corps

III Corps reinforced 19 Lst Mtn Bde (now led by Colonel Pilar) with Battalion II/47 from the reserves<sup>259</sup>, and sent it against the enemy units which had established themselves on the hills south

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258 By the afternoon of 22 October, VII Corps had taken prisoners (20 officers and over 600 men) from 18 different Italian units.

259 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The original states that Bn II/47 had been in the reserves of 28 ID, but from the context and a clarification two paragraphs later it's clear that the Bn was being held directly under III Corps HQ.

of Heights # 121 during the night. By 10:00 AM the position had been recovered, and prisoners were brought in from five Italian regiments.<sup>260</sup>

III Corps had observed the enemy preparing for an attack against their entire front; the anticipated thrust began around 1:00 PM. The Italian troops advanced in deep waves with noteworthy bravery, but collapsed under concentrated fire from all arms before they reached our obstacles. At the bend in the road east of Ronchi, on the stony heights at Selz and in front of Heights # 121 the lines of enemy troops broke apart; some men fled back to their trenches and beyond in uncontrolled panic, while our artillery wreaked havoc in the retreating ranks.<sup>261</sup> There were hand-to-hand actions only in a few sectors, such as on Heights # 121 where the defenders stood up to hurl stones and blocks of granite on the attackers like ancient heroes.

Two more attacks were launched in quick succession against FML Edl. von Schneider's 28 ID, but both failed. Finally an Italian attacking group broke into the trenches south of Heights # 121 after darkness fell. Here the Styrian Battalion II/47 intervened with a brilliantly conducted counterattack and threw the enemy back down the stony slope. After this success the entire front of III Corps enjoyed quiet. The command had again earned its old nickname, the "Iron Corps." The defenses had been badly damaged and the casualties substantial, but the troops were in good spirits. The Carniola (Slovene) March Bn X/17 refused to leave the foremost line, even though it had been engaged in very heavy fighting for several days. III Corps HQ hadn't needed to intervene very much in the operation, and only had sent one battalion (II/47) from its reserves. A whole reserve regiment (IR # 96) was still in place behind the southern wing. III Corps passed the following days quietly and without any noteworthy events, while the neighboring VII Corps was engaged in very strenuous actions.

Army HQ wanted to keep the half of 22 LW ID at Segeti as a "fire brigade" for the higher level commanders. The newly-arrived 206 Lst Inf Bde, on the other hand, was much less combat ready (except for two of its battalions); therefore 5<sup>th</sup> Army sent 206 Bde to the coastal sector held by 187 Inf Bde. The best four battalions of the 187<sup>th</sup> in turn were sent to Selo and placed in the Army's reserves. At the same time, Southwest Front HQ at

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260 Vogelsang, pp. 346 ff.

261 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 457. 16 ID, involved in this attack, lost 4000 men on 21 and 22 October.

Marburg authorized the transport of two battalions which had been left behind by their regiments on the Carinthian front - IV/39 and IX March Bn/LW IR 3 - to the Isonzo.

The situation by the night of 22-23 October

The results of the two days of all-out Italian attacks were meager. Except for penetrating the foremost line on the left wing of 20 Hon ID at S Martino at a breadth of about a kilometer, the enemy had only been able to dig into three small pieces of the front of 106 Lst ID.

To date, troops from eight and a half Italian divisions had been identified on the Karst. It was likely that the enemy would also commit their strategic reserves - another three or four divisions plus several brigades, whose presence had been identified. Despite the casualties inflicted on the Italians, the k.u.k. generals had to reckon that the latter would make their decisive effort in the next few days toward their principal objective, Mt S Michele, where they had achieved several very limited successes. Aerial reconnaissance reported that the camps behind the enemy lines were empty or barely occupied, which also indicated that all units had been sent to the front for the decisive combat.

During the night of 22-23 October, the 20 Hon ID and 106 Lst ID were supposed to clear the enemy out of the areas where they'd broken in. At S Martino it was planned to carry out this counterattack with the help of parts of 16 Lst Mtn Bde. However, the situation of 20 Hon ID wasn't altered by the morning of 23 October. There were delays in preparing the troops who were to carry out the operation. Finally the Honved and Landsturm battalions opened their difficult advance at dawn, but couldn't overcome strong enemy resistance. On the other hand, under 106 Lst ID the distinguished Lst IR # 6 (from Eger) was able to recover part of the trenches which the enemy had occupied. Fighting around the other points held by the Italians continued all night; around 5:00 AM some enemy attacks were finally fended off on Heights # 118. During this night-time action an Italian dirigible dropped many bombs on the defenses and on the villages lying behind them.

When informed that the great battle had started on the Isonzo, the Aus-Hung. high command had serious concerns and asked Southwest Front HQ whether the units already available would suffice against the new Italian offensive. However, they were relieved when a confident reply arrived from Marburg. GdI

Boroevic and the Front commander both believed that they would successfully contest the attacks on the Isonzo and in Tyrol. Neither general would prophesy whether this would be the case if the battle dragged on for a long time. They both agreed that the Isonzo was the only point on the Southwest Front where decisive fighting was expected, and therefore felt that it was very necessary to reinforce 5<sup>th</sup> Army. The high command concluded that the Italian front would be able to withstand the storm. Because victory here was of such great importance, and despite the difficulty of finding units from other fronts, on 22 October the HQ at Teschen told 7<sup>th</sup> Army to initiate the planned transfer of 6 ID to the Isonzo. It was hoped that this additional unit was all that would be needed to make good our casualties and master any crisis that could arise.

Archduke Eugene wanted to have at least a small reserve force available in case of urgent need. Therefore on 18 October he had already told the units in Tyrol and Carinthia to find some good battalions which were available on quiet parts of the front and move them to railroad stations where they could quickly be moved to 5<sup>th</sup> Army if necessary. Because the reserve units of the corps on the Isonzo had already been committed on the second day of the battle, which was expected to be lengthy, these battalions were now sent toward the Görz area, where they would arrive on 24 and 25 October.

## **b. Crisis on Mt S Michele, 23-24 October**

### 23 October

On 23 October the first phase of the battle reached its highest intensity in the fighting around Mt S Michele. The Duke of Aosta had reinforced his corps with new divisions released from the reserves of the high command, and let the offensive continue. 21 ID joined the XIV Italian Corps, and 31 ID joined VII Corps. Initially both of these corps, on the two flanks, were supposed to carry on the attack. However, after the Duke's HQ learned about the complete defeat of VII Corps and its extraordinary casualties on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, he altered his orders on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> - on this day only the northern and center corps would attack.

XIV Italian Corps sent 29 ID against Boschini, 30 ID (reinforced by half of 23 ID and several Bersaglieri battalions) against Mt S Michele, and 28 ID against S Martino. X Corps, however, was supposed to play the decisive role. They would break through

the center of the Karst front in the area between Ruins # 143 and Mt dei sei Busi; this would permit the stalled southern wing of the Army (VII Corps) to also advance. 21 ID was stationed by the Isonzo crossings at Gradisca and Sagrado, ready to intervene.

In general, the Aus-Hung. troops were successful in holding their positions and repulsing the repeated Italian attacks on the morning of 23 October. The Banat Romanians of IR # 43 were especially distinguished; they fended off mass attacks by much larger enemy forces on Mt S Michele. Bersaglieri detachments which appeared on the western summit were hurled back in a counterattack that was brilliantly supported by our batteries. Northwest of S Martino the enemy tried to break through from part of our first position which they'd captured, but their powerful thrusts were stopped by Hon IR # 4 and the k.u. (Hungarian) Lst IR # 17. There was a momentary crisis when a heavy bomb knocked the HQ of 81 Hon Inf Bde out of action. The commander of Lst IR # 17, Colonel Fiebich-Ripke, took over the Brigade in place of the fallen commander Col. von Weeber. The battle raged back and forth without a decision for hours on the Sdraussina-S Martino road. Next to Hills # 111 and 197, the 17 ID was hard pressed by stubbornly attacking Italians from 28 and 19 ID; although outnumbered two to one, the Hungarians hurled back the attackers in bitter bayonet and hand grenade fighting, inflicting heavy casualties. The last reserves were committed to this bloody conflict. 106 Lst ID was fighting under especially difficult conditions. Countless enemy guns and trench mortars concentrated against their advanced front, raining tons of shot upon the already scanty and ruined defenses. At noon the enemy came out of their own trenches and stormed the Division's entire line. Their attack in front of Mt dei sei Busi broke down in the fire of our batteries. In the center, however, enemy troops entered the Division's positions at two points. Here also the last reserves had to be committed to the battle. The k.k. Landsturm troops of 106 ID hitherto had stood up to the greatly larger enemy force, despite very heavy casualties. Now the situation was critical, since the regiments had been reduced to half strength; their power of resistance was diminished to the point where a catastrophe might occur if the enemy kept up their pressure. To avoid overtaxing the units, the Archduke urgently requested to be given half of 22 LW ID [43 LW Inf Bde] so that he could start to relieve the exhausted 106 Lst ID.

At 4:00 PM the Italians began a new general assault on the front between S Martino and Mt dei sei Busi. At the latter point,

fresh reinforcements stormed four times against our positions, which were vulnerable to flanking fire and had been fully demolished. The desperately fighting Landsturm men were able to withstand these prolonged thrusts only thanks to the strong support of our batteries and their effective fire. Farther north around Kote 111 the 17 ID was also involved in hot actions, which lasted into the morning of 24 October.

To carry out its mission, in the evening the X Italian Corps resumed unsuccessful attempts to break through their opponents' front. Thus the entire k.u.k. VII Corps was again engaged in very heavy fighting by the time darkness fell.

Until they were relieved, the Landsturm men exerted their last strength in contesting part of the lost trenches with the larger enemy force in hand-to-hand combat which lasted for hours. Italian reserves came up, hoping to achieve a breakthrough in this shaken part of the front; however, the approach of these troops was noted in time and accurate artillery fire broke up their attempt.

Due to casualties, most of the regiments of VII Corps had been reduced to half strength. As in earlier battles, the sector which had used up the most men was Mt S Michele; here it would be crucial to relieve and replace the exhausted troops. There was no doubt that despite their own casualties the Italians hadn't given up, and would use their last available reserves to continue their efforts to secure their tactical goal, the capture of Mt S Michele.

#### New deployment of the k.u.k. forces

In the night of 23-24 October the 43 LW Inf Bde of 22 LW ID relieved the troops of 106 Lst ID who'd been fighting in the foremost line. Between 17 and 28 ID, the Styrian Landwehr were able to create a firm and defensible front along the line of foremost trenches still in our possession on Mt dei sei Busi and on the northern wing of the divisional sector. Most of 106 Lst ID went back to recuperate at Segeti, Lokvica and Hudi Log; Lst IR # 6, which was still combat-effective, was placed in the Corps' reserve in the Vallone valley.

By sending all of 16 Lst Mtn Bde to 20 Hon ID and half of 22 LW ID to the southern wing, VII Corps had carried out the most urgent troop relief, while retaining at least some combat-ready reserves. Battalion IV/39 had arrived from Carinthia, and on its own initiative the XVI Corps had made Battalion III/69

available for the hard-pressed Karst front; these battalions were sent to 17 ID. 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ had used up all of its own reserves; it didn't seem advisable to bring other units even temporarily from XV or XVI Corps because of actions in their own sectors, and because the situation in the Görz area was still unclear. Therefore Army HQ at Adelsberg awaited the arrival of 6 ID, which was being sent by the AOK, with great anticipation. On 24 October, the four battalions from 187 Inf Bde became available in the Army's reserve at Selo. On the same day the 5 ½ battalions which Southwest Front HQ had sent from Carinthia and Tyrol arrived at Ovcja Draga.<sup>262</sup>

Archduke Eugene came to the front to consult 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ and the commanders of the three southern corps on 22 and 23 October. Based on these conversations and his personal observation of the fighting he was convinced that the enemy wouldn't be able to effectively threaten the front, much less break through. There were many signs that the actions on the Karst plateau had already reached their high point. However, the stubborn attackers still had enough uncommitted reserves available to win at least a partial success by making one last effort.

To ensure that there would be enough ammunition, when the battle started the Aus-Hung. high command had hurriedly sent the entire reserve supply of the Northern armies to the Southwest Front. Now, however, it would be necessary to strictly ration ammunition since no further supplies were expected before the end of the month. Ammunition needs had been calculated based on the experience of the earlier battles. However, in the latest heavy fighting, which had gone on for days, the artillery had borne the main burden of ensuring that the infantry kept fighting, and used more shells than had been expected.

To replace casualties, the units not in direct contact with the enemy absorbed troops of the XIV March formations. VII Corps was already using men from the XV March formations, but the Corps was still far below its authorized strength.

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262 Battalions III/18, II/37 and IV/77 came from GdK Rohr's Armeegruppe; Battalions I/ KJR 2, II/L-Sch Regt II, and half of I Res Bn/IR 29 came from Tyrol. However, the units from Tyrol were supposed to go to the line only if a crisis developed before the arrival of 6 ID, since it would be preferable not to waste their skilled personnel who were needed for fighting in the high Alps. As it turned out, they weren't called on to fight in the Karst.

The night of 23-24 October

In the night of 23-24 October the Italians continued to attack, committing large numbers of troops. Although the Michele sector had enjoyed relative quiet since the afternoon, soon after the sun went down the 29 Italian ID undertook heavy thrusts against the hill's northern slope. In the fifth attack, already toward morning, the larger enemy force - supported by powerful flanking fire from Mt Fortin - finally broke into the foremost trenches between the railroad and the road. Since it had meanwhile become light, this small stretch of front was conceded to the enemy, and the defenders concentrated in the second line (100 paces to the rear). For their part, the Italians were satisfied with this success and halted their attack, which had gone on here for almost a week. Meanwhile during the night the 16 Lst Mtn Bde had relieved 81 Hon Inf Bde on the southern wing of 20 Hon ID.

17 ID also experienced heavy fighting in the night. Enemy detachments had dug into the foremost trenches east of Ruins # 143. By 7:00 AM, before the two battalions which were reinforcing the Division (IV/39 and III/69) could arrive, the larger enemy force was driven out of the trenches in a counter-attack of unparalleled brilliance; this was carried out by the Magyar IR # 39 from Debreczen (even though it had suffered heavy losses in the hard fighting of the last few days) and parts of FJB # 24. About 200 prisoners from five regiments were taken. Thus far 17 ID had held its whole sector with three regiments (since IR # 43 was on Mt S Michele). To relieve IR # 39 and FJB # 24, both of which had suffered heavily, Corps HQ sent FML von Gelb the k.k. Lst IR # 6 (still in relatively good shape); its place in the Corps' reserve was taken by Lst IR # 25, which moved to Mikoli in the Vallone valley.

On the southern wing of VII Corps, the planned troop movements took place after the night-time fighting slackened off. The Styrian LW IR # 3 and 26 each deployed two battalions at the front and one battalion in reserve at Doberdo. GM Schön took over command of the sector.

24 October

In the morning of 24 October the exhausted troops enjoyed an unexpected and very welcome pause in the fighting. The artillery bombardment was also reduced, except against Mt S Michele. However, it was too early to believe that the enemy units had lost their power to attack.

The enemy Army commander now played his last card which he hoped would bring Mt S Michele into his hands, regardless of the cost. He had prepared a powerful blow. Under XIV Italian Corps, the entire 21 ID entered the sector between 30 and 28 ID northwest of the hill. Thus there were four and a half divisions ready to strike between the Isonzo and Heights # 197 early on 24 October. Moreover, the neighboring X Corps had been reinforced by 31 ID. At noon on the 24<sup>th</sup>, hundreds of guns of all calibers pounded the sector of the k.u.k. VII Corps; at 3:00 PM this fire intensified to an unprecedented height. Then the Italian storming columns emerged from their trenches along the entire front from the Isonzo to Mt dei sei Busi. They were followed by strong and deeply-massed reserves, while further regiments marched from the plains over the Isonzo bridges. It appeared that pressure from these hosts would push back the exhausted defenders and break through the front.

Roughly seven to eight regiments were involved in the massed attack against Mt S Michele. By evening, the excellent cooperation by all arms had caused this thrust to completely collapse in front of our lines. On the northern wing of VII Corps, the 17 ID and 43 LW Inf Bde were similarly attacked by strong forces, and here also the Italians gained no ground at all. Despite repeated air attacks against the battery positions, the Aus-Hung. artillery played an important role in winning success on this last great day of the battle. They had correctly concentrated almost all their firepower against the enemy infantry. According to reports from the entire front, their effectiveness against the attacking massed formations was overwhelming. It was impossible to knock out the much larger Italian artillery force, but at least some of their most dangerous batteries had been silenced.

In some places the bitter melees continued through the night until the morning of 25 October. The fighting was especially heavy on the heights by the ruins, where the last Italian assault was shattered around 4:00 AM. At the same time some attacking detachments at S Martino also collapsed.

In the final phases of this last full-scale assault by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army, there were incidents where panic broke out among the retreating troops. The crisis of the October battle on the Karst had reached its height on the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup>, and could be considered over. In most areas the foremost defensive line had been held. West of S Martino our troops had fallen back to the second position and the commanders decided not to

recover the first line, which was about 200 to 400 meters away; they wished to avoid needless casualties. The k.u.k. units had to conserve their strength for the next phase of the battle. The other tiny dents which the Italians had made in our front were and remained completely meaningless.

### **c. A pause in the Karst fighting, 25-27 October**

The exhaustion of the troops compelled Cadorna to order the Army of the Duke of Aosta to briefly interrupt the attack on the evening of 24 October. The battle would be resumed after the units had been brought back to order, replacements found for the casualties, ammunition replenished, and fresh troops came up. Cadorna also wanted to improve the performance of the artillery.<sup>263</sup> Despite the enormous expenditure of ammunition in the first week of the battle, the defenders had stood their ground everywhere. The Italians' great superiority in artillery hadn't had an effect. This was attributed to the inferior quality of the guns and ammunition, and to the insufficient training of the artillery officers. In fact there had seemed to be no overall plan for laying down fire; employment of artillery had been inflexible, and there were few instances in which targets had been quickly altered based on the actual course of the fighting in the various sectors.

The casualties of the attackers had been extraordinarily heavy, and doubtless greater than those of the defenders. The two Italian armies on the Isonzo lost 39,000 men in the first phase of the battle (from 21 to 27 October).<sup>264</sup>

The k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army used the pause after fighting slackened off to relieve some of the first-line troops, incorporate reserves, and especially to restore the totally destroyed positions and obstacles. In the night of 24-25 October a number of troops left the front of VII Corps for a rest camp behind the Vallone valley. Lst IR # 6 was inserted in the front on the left wing of 17 ID.

As of 25 October, the only reserves available to 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ were the five and half battalions from Tyrol and Carinthia (at Ranzino) and the four Landsturm battalions from 187 Bde (at Selo). However, on 27 October the 6 ID arrived in the Wippach valley and was assembled in the area of Schön Pass. k.k. Lst IR

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263 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 158

264 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 467

# 26 was re-assigned by Front HQ from the Pola garrison to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and by 29 October was supposed to join XV Corps at Podmelec. Attempts to restore all units to their full strength could only be implemented in part, because heavy fighting broke out again already on 28 October.

## 5. Preparations for the attack on Görz

While the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army had stormed with its full strength against the Aus-Hung. positions on the upper Isonzo, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had fought with the k.u.k. III and VII Corps in four days of bitter and very bloody battle for possession of the Doberdo plateau, at first (through 23 October) the only activity at the Görz bridgehead was a methodical bombardment of Pevma and the Podgora by heavy trench mortars. The deployment of a great number of heavy batteries and trench mortars in front of the bridgehead made it appear that the enemy had exaggerated the strength of the defenses and the size of the garrison. The same impression is given by the post-war Italian literature, which refers repeatedly to the "fortifications" or "entrenched camp" at Görz. These references are incorrect and misleading. In Volume II we have already explained that the Aus-Hung. position at Görz was tactically unfavorable. An example of the actual state of the defenses as of the end of October was the line on Mt Sabotino, which consisted of just a row of rifle pits, dug into the ground to provide shelter for about half a man's body.

The first major probing thrusts by larger units came on 23 October, primarily against the northern and southern bulwarks of the Görz front, Mt Sabotino and the Podgora Heights. In the afternoon several Italian bands, covered by strong fire, advanced in the former sector; they moved through holes torn in the obstacles during the five days of artillery fire and entered our damaged battle line. At Oslavija, sharp counterattacks by small reserve forces of 60 Inf Bde drove them back. The fighting on Mt Sabotino itself continued into the night, when parts of IR # 30 and of LW IR # 37 cleared all of the enemy out of the positions. In these actions the Italians for the first time used artillery shells containing poisonous gases.

The enemy repeated their thrusts at Mt Sabotino and Oslavija early on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Italian detachments entered our trenches by surprise, but weren't able to withstand a counterattack and were soon driven back. Troops of the reinforced 4 ID again tried to take Mt Sabotino after extensive artillery preparation, but

their attack was broken up by our batteries while it was still getting started; flanking fire from the other side of the Isonzo (in the sector of 18 ID) inflicted especially heavy casualties on the enemy. Several hundred prisoners were taken by the Austrians. The failure of the powerful scouting thrusts on 23 and 24 October prevented the enemy commanders from ordering any further isolated attacks on the northern wing of the bridgehead prior to the general offensive against Görz.

On the other hand, enemy artillery fire against the Podgora Heights increased on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Concentration of a large number of troops in the hills north of Lucinico indicated that an attack was imminent, but it never took place. Probably this was once again due to the fire of our batteries against the assembly areas. On the next day, after a bombardment of Görz city and of the Podgora which lasted for several hours, about eight to ten battalions finally attacked the heights. All their attacks shattered thanks to the splendid stand by the Dalmatian LW IR # 23.

Another attempted attack on the 26<sup>th</sup> was unsuccessful; the enemy dug in on the southern slope of the Podgora for several hours, but in the night of 26-27 October they were checked and then driven away. There were no significant operations on 27 October. In some places the Italians inched closer to our barricades, without launching any large assaults. On the other hand, Görz was bombarded; this caused damage to many houses and bloody casualties among the civilians who'd stayed in the city.

## **6. The Italians continue their breakthrough attempts at Tolmein and Plava, 25-29 October**

While there was a pause in fighting for several days on the Karst because of the exhaustion of both parties, there was no rest for the k.u.k. troops on the upper Isonzo. It was possible from one day to the next that winter weather might settle upon the Krn area and immediately put an end to large-scale operations. This compelled the Italians to make stubborn attempts to secure the hotly-contested crags and ridges east of the Krn summit. The first of these attempts was a surprise attack on 25 October before daybreak; it was shattered by the watchful troops of 15 Mtn Bde. An offensive in early morning failed, as did another in the afternoon of the same day, even though it was carried out with heavy artillery support by many battalions; GM Wieden's soldiers stubbornly defended their rocky positions. On the next day there were some final, weaker thrusts on the Krn. Defensive fire checked the Italian storm troops on the obstacles and forced them to retreat. On 27 October there was a heavy snow storm that limited all movement in the difficult high mountain terrain. This ended fighting in the Krn area for a long time.

### Italian thrusts at Tolmein and farther south

At Tolmein the morning of 25 October passed quietly, and gave the tired defenders a chance for well-earned rest after the hard fighting of the past few days. In the afternoon there was a general artillery bombardment against our positions between Mrzli vrh and the narrow part of the valley at Selo, which at night was followed by an infantry attack on the Vodil vrh. The enemy broke into some of the trenches, but were driven out again by the local reserves after a hot action. The Italian infantry didn't attack at the Tolmein bridgehead or at Plava on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

However, on 26 October fighting flared up anew at all the important points along the front north of Görz. In the Tolmein basin a group in division strength, consisting of infantry, Alpini and Bersaglieri battalions, attacked 8 Mtn Bde in the morning. The Brigade stood fast against the first powerful assault, and hurled back the oncoming battalions a second time in hand-to-hand fighting in which many prisoners remained in their hands. The Italians were apparently again planning to cross the Isonzo between Ronzina and Ajba, because they tried to bring bridging equipment on the roads leading down the steep Kolovrat ridge; this was hindered by our artillery. At Plava,

the II Italian Corps resumed its attempt to break through the front of the k.u.k. 1 Mtn Bde after a one day pause (the attempt on 24 October had been shattered with great losses). A powerful bombardment preceded this assault. In the evening, enemy detachments were able to push through Globna into the fully destroyed trenches after a bitter action. Very costly fighting continued until noon on the 27<sup>th</sup>, when the defenders were finally able to recover the old lines along almost their entire extent. Our artillery maintained a continuous fire until evening on the stretches of trench which the enemy still occupied.<sup>265</sup>

After a day of rest, the battalions of 8 Italian ID and of Alpini Group A repeated on 27 October the attack between Dolje and the Mrzli Vrh which had failed two days earlier. In front of Dolje they were repulsed three times; farther north a detachment was able to dig in on the ridge which runs southeast from the Mrzli vrh toward Dolje. Reserves from 3 and 14 Mtn Bdes drove them out again by midnight in a toilsome action. Thus all parts of the foremost line were again in our possession by morning except for part of the trench at Kuppe # 854. The enemy remained quiet in the Tolmein basin; a surprise attack on Selo was thwarted by our artillery.

On 28 October, while the battle by Görz and on the Karst reached a great intensity, the commander of the Italian troops on the upper Isonzo (G.Lt Tassoni) made a final attempt with all his forces to take the important part of the valley by Tolmein prior to the onset of raw winter weather, which was already imminent. From the morning of this gloomy autumn day, Alpini Groups A and B and then 7 and 8 ID, which had already been engaged for several days, attacked again with praiseworthy valor on the entire front from the Mrzli vrh to Selo. The fighting centered on the part of the line between the Mrzli vrh and Vodil vrh, where a strong group of picked battalions thrust repeatedly in an attempt to exploit the partial success won the day before next to Kuppe # 854. However, they were defeated. Finally around noon a new mass attack, reinforced by strong reserves, broke into the trenches where the inner wings of 3 and 14 Mtn Bdes came together. Small groups of soldiers hurried to the scene from the brigade, division and corps reserves; they were engaged for many hours (until the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>) in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle but were able to completely restore

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265 Tosti, p. 100. At Plava the 3 and 32 Italian ID lost 78 officers and 1890 men dead or wounded from 24 to 27 October. In this period of time the k.u.k. 1 Mtn Bde lost about 20 officers and 550 men in the same categories.

the original situation and to push the stubborn enemy off the slope.

At the same time the heavy Italian attacks against the positions of 8 Mtn Bde on the hills were completely repulsed. In some instances the assaults were broken up while still being prepared, thanks to accurate flanking fire from the batteries stationed on the high ground at Lom.

#### Situation of the defenders at the end of October

All reserves had been committed to the fighting for the retention of the Mrzli vrh and Vodil vrh, and the troops were exhausted after fighting day and night without any rest. This greatly concerned XV Corps. FML von Stöger-Steiner, the commander, had already asked 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to be reinforced by full-strength detachments trained for mountain operations, and he could no longer be denied. On 28 October, Army HQ called up the three battalions from Carinthia which had moved to Ranziano (III/18, II/37 and IV/77)<sup>266</sup> and sent them by trains (which had been held in readiness) to Podmelec, where they were unloaded early on the 30<sup>th</sup>. The commander of 50 ID, GM Tunk, used the new units to relieve troops in the parts of the front where fighting had been heaviest - at Dolje and on the Mrzli vrh. However, the need for reserves was so great that two of the battalions thus relieved had to stay at the front in a quiet sector under 7 Mtn Bde; here they replaced two full-strength battalions which in turn moved to the more endangered sector. The k.k. Lst IR # 26 had been promised to XV Corps on the 26<sup>th</sup>, but its arrival had been delayed.<sup>267</sup> In its stead, on 29 October the two and half battalions from Tyrol (I/KJR 2, II/L-Sch II and half of Res Bn/29) were sent from Ranziano to follow the battalions from Carinthia. Meanwhile, however, the fighting died down on XV Corps' front, so the trains carrying the Tyrol battalions were diverted and they were returned to GdK Dankl.

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266 Along with the battalions that had come from Tyrol, these three battalions made up a combined brigade under Col. Konstantin Ritter von Wasserthal.

267 Lst IR # 26 (from Marburg) had never engaged in combat; hitherto it had been part of the garrison of the Pola military harbor. Because of its deficient weaponry (captured Russian rifles), equipment (no field kitchens) and uniforms (old dark-colored coats) it wasn't ready for action. After it came under 5<sup>th</sup> Army it was placed behind the left wing at Selo (which wasn't under attack) where it could receive the necessary training and equipment.

As the unsuccessful attempt to break through on the upper Isonzo died down, the enemy returned again to slower, methodical offensive operations. Military actions languished now for a long time, because the mountain winter had set in with heavy snowfalls. The only disturbance to the winter calm, which lasted through the end of November, was a surprise attack by an Italian regiment against Sv. Maria on 30 October.

Between 25 and 29 October the k.u.k. XV Corps had lost a total of about 4000 men (900 dead, 2800 wounded and 300 missing). In this period of time 12 officers and 850 men were taken prisoner. The Italian official history doesn't provide any casualty figures, but the Alpini Groups (A and B) and 7 and 8 ID, which attacked boldly and stubbornly, must have suffered severely.<sup>268</sup>

On 2 November the 50 ID reorganized the defenses between Mrzli vrh and Vodil vrh; the main attack had taken place here, where the wings of 3 and 14 Mtn Bde came together. Now a new HQ was created for the area and placed under Col. Wasserthal.

There were a few more actions in the sector between Selo and Plava in the last days of October. Since the VIII Italian Corps had failed to widen the bridgehead on the east bank of the Isonzo at Plava, the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army (G.Lt Frugoni) returned to the idea of launching a large force over the river at Canale, which he had abandoned on 21 October. Therefore on 27 October the 27 ID made a risky and unusual attempt to send a detachment of volunteer swimmers over to the east bank to cover troops who'd follow on boats. The attempt failed.

The last attempt to cross the river occurred on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The first mobile bridge which the Italians placed at Ajba had already been destroyed before dawn by a small detachment of the k.u.k. 13 Mtn Bde. After five hours of artillery bombardment the enemy wanted to cross the river in broad daylight (around noon) on boats and pontoons. Their equipment was so badly shot up by artillery and machine gun fire that they made no further attempt to cross the river in this sector.

## **7. The second phase of heavy fighting, 28-30 October**

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268 Tosti (p. 107) states that Brigade Valtellina, which entered the fighting at Sv. Maria under 7 ID, lost 39 officers and 700 men between 26 and 30 October.

### **a. Situation of both sides**

The three quiet days (25-27 October) were just a pause prior to the decisive blow which the Italian high command intended to mount at any price after they had restored their units to full order and brought up fresh reinforcements.

#### The Italians

Already in the final days of the earlier fighting the 21 ID of Italian XI Corps and 31 ID of XIII Corps had been brought nearer to the front, and parts of the former unit had been in the line. All parts of both divisions were deployed at the front during the pause in fighting. VII Italian Corps sent a brigade from its reserves to the sector of 14 ID, which therefore controlled four brigades. Finally a brigade from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's reserve relieved half of 16 ID on the Army's southern wing. Thus half of the available troops had been moved from the rear to the line. To replace them, the high command ordered some units from the eastern Tyrol front - 9 ID from 1<sup>st</sup> and 10 ID from 4<sup>th</sup> Army - to move to the area west of Cormons. (Preparations for this move had already been under way since the battle started.) 10 ID arrived by 28 October; 9 ID didn't reach Manzano until 2 November.

Since the flank attacks north and south of Görz had encountered significant difficulties, it was decided not to wait for the success of these operations before mounting the thrust against the city itself. Public opinion was impatiently awaiting a direct assault on this goal. Therefore G.Lt Capello's VI Corps on the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army would attack the heights from Mt Sabotino through Oslavija to the southern end of the Podgora with three divisions. At the same time the Duke of Aosta's reinforced Army would capture Mt S Michele. To the left of VI Corps, II Corps would rip apart the thin Aus-Hung. defensive shield at Plava. The offensive was initially scheduled to start on the 27<sup>th</sup>, then was postponed to 28 October.

#### The Austro-Hungarians

Meanwhile the defenders had carried out only part of their planned re-deployment and relief of troops on the Karst. Under GM Lukachich's 20 Hon ID, the 39 and 81 Hon Inf Bdes and then 16 Lst Mtn Bde were stationed from north to south as far as the northwest corner of S Martino, where the Division linked up with 17 ID. However, only one Honved Regiment from the 20<sup>th</sup> was in the front line. IR # 43 and Bn III/69 held the foremost

position on Mt S Michele, so that the main body of the Honved Division (ten battalions strong) provided a deeply deployed reserve for the sector. As ordered by Corps HQ, the heights on which stood the church of S Martino had been turned into a strong bulwark, and a new second line had been constructed by the Division's reserves between the outer position on the eastern summit of Mt S Michele and a point east of S Martino. 111 Lst Inf Bde had been inserted on the left wing of 17 ID. IR # 39 stood at Marcottini as the Division's reserve. Thus units from various commands were intermingled.

When 22 LW ID entered the front they found a very difficult situation. Their deployment took place during the hottest hours of the battle on the Karst. In some places the original positions were no longer recognizable. The enemy had dug in along the center of the Division's sector; only on the right wing and on Mt dei sei Busi were the defenses, though damaged, mainly intact. Therefore the Landwehr had suffered heavy casualties in their first days at the front even though they hadn't been in major fighting. However, it would be necessary to hold the foremost line under all circumstances. And so the Landwehr from Graz and Marburg, who were stationed close enough to the enemy to carry on hand-to-hand combat, worked as quickly as possible to dig new positions in the open stony ground of the Karst. The toil was indescribable.

The deployment of the troops on the southern half of the Karst plateau was basically unaltered, as was true farther north under XVI and XV Corps. The Army's reserves consisted of 6 ID, which was arriving by train at Schön Pass in the Wippach valley, and the four Landsturm battalions still stationed at Selo.

## **b. The struggle for Görz and simultaneous fighting at Plava, 28-30 October**

### 28 October

At Plava, where the battalions of 1 Mtn Bde had been enduring heavy attacks by II Italian Corps for a week and held onto all their positions, the enemy artillery on the Korada and the surrounding heights once again directed a murderous fire on our lines. Several times during the day the stubbornly attacking 3 ID tried to establish themselves in the totally destroyed trenches at Zagora, which the garrison had been ordered to abandon while the bombardment was going on. Each time they were driven out by our counterattacks, the last of which took place

just before darkness fell. On Heights # 383 and at Globna the 32 Italian ID had already been repulsed by defensive fire in front of the barricades.

Thus the situation once more was tense at Plava, where prisoners stated that strong Italian forces were still available to continue the offensive. This forced the generals to bring all available troops to the endangered area. The commander of 18 ID, GM Stracker, sent his trained March companies to the southern wing, which hadn't been attacked, thus freeing rested front-line troops who could intervene in the hottest fighting. By this method the Division created a reserve of 20 companies.

The fight for the chain of hills just west of the Isonzo, which separated Görz from the enemy, began early on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The artillery bombardment, which had already gone on since the 18<sup>th</sup>, greatly increased in intensity; opposite the key bulwarks in the bridgehead, Mt Sabotino and the Podgora Heights, it increased to an all-destroying drum fire. The obstacles and trenches had long been destroyed before the VI Italian Corps stormed ahead along the entire front in the early afternoon. Excellent troops - 4 ID plus the Granatieri di Sardegna Brigade - advanced toward Mt Sabotino. In the left sub-sector, their first wave reached the damaged trenches at Oslavija, but was thrown back by the garrison. The main body of the enemy's attacking group was pinned down by very effective machine gun fire, and also suffered heavy losses due to flanking fire from the artillery group of 18 ID, which was stationed on the high ground north of Mt Santo and fired with great accuracy. The enemy retreated in great haste back to the protection of their starting positions; thus the Italian attack in the Sabotino area came temporarily to an end. Several days would pass before they resumed the attempt to take this most important bulwark of the bridgehead, after they were reinforced by a brigade of 10 ID which had arrived from the Cadore.

The Italian 12 ID attacked the southern wing of the bridgehead (the Podgora Heights) in the afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup>. Here the terrain was unfavorable for the defenders because they had no room to fall back; moreover the broken ground in front of the lines made it difficult to spot the attackers as they prepared to advance. Heavy fire from trench mortars had eliminated the obstacles and damaged the battle lines on the western slope. The attacking Italian regiments were able to break into the positions. At two points they even reached the crest of the Podgora ridge just south of Heights # 240, whence they could see the goal of their difficult offensive, the city of Görz,

shimmering at their feet in the light of the setting sun. Then five companies of the Dalmatian LW IR "Zara" # 23, which was defending the Podgora, hurled themselves against the larger enemy force. In a brilliant attack, which was accompanied by the sound of horns, they hurled the Italians back down the slope.

In the center of the Görz sector the 11 Italian ID attacked the heights of Oslavija-Pevma-Grafenberg, using plentiful reserves. However, before the massed infantry was able to get past the obstacles which here and there had survived the bombardment, the destructive cross fire of our batteries forced them to fall back. When the day ended, in most sectors there was a deep quiet in front of Görz.

For the k.u.k. 58 ID, the 28<sup>th</sup> of October was a memorable day. The Dalmatians of GM Nöhring's 5 Mtn Bde and some of the east Galicians of Col. de Brunfaut's 60 Inf Bde were especially distinguished; they had stood their ground against a much larger force and also taken about 500 prisoners. Despite the powerful intervention of the Italian artillery and trench mortars, casualties were held to a reasonable limit thanks to excellent leadership and to the defenses which had been improved continuously since the summer battles. Divisional commander GM Erwin Zeidler, who had an engineering background, played a major role in preparing the positions.

There were many indications that the strong offensive against the Görz bridgehead would continue, and this alarmed HQ of the Southwest Front. To ensure that the bridgehead would be held, in the evening of 28 October the XVI Corps was given control over IR # 17, which was arriving by rail as the first element of 6 ID; the only qualification was that the regiment shouldn't be used to relieve other units. In the evening IR 17 arrived in the Görz area. The front of XVI Corps was 33 km long between Auzza and the mouth of the Wippach, and at the end of October was opposed by seven divisions. However, by wise deployment of its troops the HQ was in a position to maximize use of its scanty resources; each of its divisions (18 and 58 ID) was able to keep 20 companies in reserve by holding back parts of the battalions in the foremost line.

#### 29-30 October

In the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup>, the Italian high command ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies to energetically continue the offensive which they had started. However, on 29 October it was noted that the

attacks were less powerful, and involved a significantly shorter front.

During the night, battalions of 1 Mtn Bde had thrown back the 3 Italian ID at Zagora and taken more than 200 prisoners. After this setback, the enemy restricted their activity north of the Görz bridgehead to a large-scale bombardment of the area, especially the Globna and Zagora sectors. Also there were no further actions here on 30 October.

At Görz the bombardment resumed in the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> and lasted throughout the day, but the mass attack which was expected didn't materialize. Over 2000 shells struck the rocky crag of Mt Sabotino in a short time; the city of Görz itself was again hit hard by artillery as well as by aerial bombs, which caused fires and further civilian casualties. Several battalions tried to approach Mt Sabotino, but were brought to a stop in front of the barricades. Enemy troops who concentrated at the the foot of the western slope were broken up by several mortar shells. Apparently the 4 Italian ID wasn't in shape to carry out a decisive operation and was waiting for reinforcements.

Therefore the VI Italian Corps south of Oslavija had to attack by itself. The failure to simultaneously assault the entire bridgehead soon took its toll. Attempts by 11 ID to advance onto the Pevma heights were shattered by flanking artillery fire, and its troops were soon fleeing the field.

12 ID pushed against the Podgora from positions which they'd established very close to the defenders' lines; they broke into a short segment of our works next to Heights # 240. Here the 5 Mtn Bde withstood the superior enemy forces for hours of grinding combat. With rifles, bayonets and hand grenades they thwarted any further advance by the gallant Italians and captured numerous prisoners. The Army's commander-in-chief FM Archduke Friedrich, who was visiting 58 ID, was an eye witness to this furious melee on the Podgora, which he observed from the position of the Division's artillery commander. Until evening the fighting surged back and forth around the narrow area where the enemy had penetrated the line; then the reserves of 5 Mtn Bde counter-attacked and took back all the ground that had been lost in the morning. Later in the evening many Italian storm troops attacked using hand grenades (some of them armed with gas), but were repulsed with heavy losses. Thereafter the enemy stayed in their positions throughout the night on their entire front.

In front of Görz the supporting artillery had once again played a major role in the success of the hard-fighting infantry. The outnumbered battalions, exhausted from days of bombardment and battle, were still able to offer sustained resistance thanks to the well-planned and executed artillery operations around Görz. Led by Lt-Col. Grund, the artillerists rose to all the demands of the situation and provided outstanding support throughout the prolonged fighting.

In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> the Italian high command realized that the gallant and stubborn but costly attacks of the last two days in front of Görz had been indecisive, as had the combat (to be described below) on the Karst. Therefore large-scale fighting was temporarily halted on 30 October; operations were restricted to small-scale but very intense thrusts at the most important points along the front. Thus in the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> the artillery and trench mortars launched a concentrated fire on the southern part of the Podgora, followed by an assault of several battalions which broke into our lines. After a difficult action that lasted until dawn of the next day, the reserves of GM Nöhring's battle-tested 5 Mtn Bde cleared out the intruders. At Pevma, parts of Col. Adalbert von Dani's 4 Mtn Bde conducted a brave thrust against enemy soldiers who'd worked their way very close to our positions; they drove the Italians back and destroyed their fortifications. Three days of bombardment against our trenches and reserves in the bridgehead near Lucinico had been completely unsuccessful.

### **c. Fighting around Mt S Michele, 28-30 October**

A mighty bombardment began south of the Wippach in the morning of 28 October, and in several hours inflicted damage on the positions which had been hastily repaired in the last few days. The fire intensified shortly after noon; after a heavy drum-fire the main body of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army attacked with seven divisions on a front just 7 km long between Peteano and Mt dei sei Busi.<sup>269</sup> At the same time strong air units attacked the nearby villages and command posts.

#### 28 October

The Italian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army planned to have its northern corps (XIV) of

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269 The order of battle included 16 brigades under XIV Corps (29, 30, 21 and 28 ID) and X Corps (19, 31 and 20 ID).

four divisions once again direct its main attack against Mt S Michele; the hill was to be captured by the corps' strong right wing, launching an envelopment assault from the south after breaking through at S Martino. X Corps in the center would strengthen its left wing to assist XIV Corps in breaking through at the point where the two commands came together east of Ruins # 143; then X Corps would pivot to its right and take Mt dei sei Busi from the north. VII Corps, on the Army's southern wing, would await the success of its neighbors before joining the offensive.

In the fighting which developed in the afternoon, the troops of 20 Hon ID on Mt S Michele and those of 17 ID southwest of S Martino offered very stubborn resistance to the massive thrusts of the enemy, which were sustained by apparently inexhaustible reserves. The Romanian-speaking soldiers of the south Hungarian IR # 43, still attached to 20 Hon ID, were particularly distinguished. Finally toward evening an overwhelming enemy force (parts of 28 and 19 ID which made up the inner wings of the two attacking corps) were able to penetrate several trenches on the left wing of 17 ID. Farther south, storm troops from 31 ID wanted to take the portion of the defensive positions which jutted forward at Kote 111; the enemy entered the lines several times, but each time were driven out by the Styrian Landwehr, who also took several hundred prisoners.

Because of the dangerous situation east of the "Ruin Heights", VII Corps HQ gave 22 LW ID a temporarily combined Landsturm regiment made up of troops from the smashed 110 Lst Inf Bde; they also brought up FJB # 24 from Segeti to the threatened area. In turn, the Army's reserves were brought up from Selo to Segeti. The portions of 6 ID which had arrived were held in their quarters, but were ready to march forward if necessary.

Meanwhile, however, the crisis in the afternoon had been overcome. As night settled over the battlefield, only 17 ID was still engaged in a bitter action against furious thrusts by fresh Italian units who were seeking to widen the area where they had entered the line, and to break through the Aus-Hung. front. When the fighting died down around midnight, FML Gelb decided that when 17 ID had its reserves ready in the morning they would strike the exhausted attackers, drive them from the area they had taken, and recover all the trenches.

Based on aerial reconnaissance, the observed approach of strong columns from the direction of Cormons, and the statements of many prisoners who'd been taken on the 28<sup>th</sup>, it was concluded

that the enemy would probably repeat their attack on the 29<sup>th</sup> with strong units. VII Corps would have only a few reserves available to face this onset. Some replacement troops joined the units of 20 Hon ID which had been pulled from the front, and 17 ID had to return IR # 39 to the line even though it was scarcely recovered. Most of the troops of 106 Lst ID had only just started to rest. Meanwhile, and until 6 ID was assembled, the HQ of 5<sup>th</sup> Army still had just the four Landsturm battalions at Segeti in reserve.

#### 29 October

Despite many days of exhausting and unsuccessful fighting, the strength and will to attack of the Duke of Aosta's army were still undiminished. In the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>, after more hours of heavy bombardment, the enemy divisions once more stormed ahead on the entire northern front of the Karst. The 30 Italian ID managed to establish themselves next to the northern summit of Mt S Michele, but a counterattack by 39 Hon Inf Bde soon forced them to evacuate the trenches they had won. IR # 43 held fast to the actual summit of the hill. Next to S Martino, 17 ID repulsed all attacks, some of which were already broken by our artillery before they were completely prepared. The attempts by the Division's left wing to wipe out the enemy's earlier penetrations were only partly successful; here, and even farther south by 43 LW Inf Bde, the defenders had a much harder time and endured several very critical situations. The commanders of the Italian 28 ID and X Corps hoped to build on their initial success of the 28<sup>th</sup> next to the "Ruin heights" and on the road by Kote 111; by ruthlessly committing masses of troops they wanted to break through the Aus-Hung. front and roll up the entire network of advanced positions from Kote 111 to Mt dei sei Busi. The enemy was constantly hurling new men into the battle. LW IR "Marburg" # 26 repulsed three large-scale storm attacks by 20 ID. The left wing of FML Gelb's 17 ID, working with Col. Merten's 43 LW Inf Bde, prevented any breakthrough and maintained a firm and cohesive front opposite the trenches which the Italians occupied north of Kote 111. VII Corps HQ placed their last available reserve battalion under 17 ID; therefore half of the Army's reserve (two Landsturm battalions from the group at Segeti) were ordered into the Vallone valley behind Mt S Michele.

In 20 Hon ID's sector, the enemy was repulsed again in the afternoon; after darkness fell they temporarily broke into the trenches east of Peteano, but once more were driven back. While 22 LW ID enjoyed a quiet night, under 17 ID the planned counter-

attack by IR # 39 and FJB # 24 was fully successful; several of the trenches which the enemy had taken in the last few days were recovered, and the Italians' hope that they would soon break through was dashed. To date the seven divisions which had stormed against the k.u.k. VII Corps in the second part of the battle had only managed to secure a few unimportant and completely destroyed parts of the trenches, while suffering a sharp reduction in their own strength.<sup>270</sup> The aged Supreme War Lord highly praised the staunch defenders of the Southwest Front in a general order issued to the entire Army and Navy.

In the evening, k.k. Lst IR # 26, marching from Nabresina, arrived in Selo. At the same time the III Bn/69, which XIV Corps had temporarily loaned to 20 Hon ID, moved to Vogersko because it was now needed back in the Görz area.

### 30-31 October

As at Görz and Plava, the intensity of the fighting on the Karst fell off sharply on 30 and 31 October. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, an attacking group broke into a small stretch of the trenches of 39 Hon Inf Bde next to Peteano. A nighttime counter-thrust by the Brigade's reserves couldn't break through, but did restrict the enemy to the sector they had already entered. 17 ID hurled back a surprise attack by Italian regiments west of S Martino with rifle fire and hand grenades. Because friends and foes were deployed so closely together in 22 LW ID's sector, there was continuous fighting with grenades.

### The nature of the fighting

Because of his outspoken pro-Magyar sentiments, the commander of the k.u.k. VII Corps, GdK Archduke Joseph, wasn't always fair in the judgments he passed on German-Austrian troops. Nevertheless, in his book "The World War as I Saw It" (written in Hungarian) he provides an accurate picture of the actions of the Styrian Landwehr. He wrote as follows about the situation on 30 October 1915.<sup>271</sup>

"...Today I receive a similar report from the commander of 22 LW ID. First he points out that in 43 LW Inf Bde the LW IR # 3 has lost 610 men since 23 October (including 121 dead), LW IR # 26 has lost 403 (77

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270 According to the Italian Official History (Vol. II, Text, p. 483), the southernmost brigade of XIV Corps alone had lost 30 officers and 1500 men in the two days of fighting.

271 Archduke Joseph, Vol. II, pp. 550 ff.

dead). Most of the casualties occurred in sectors where the troops had to deploy without any cover. Despite six nights of toil with all their strength, in these sectors the positions still only cover riflemen who are lying on the ground or - at best - those who are kneeling. Under these circumstances, the overwhelming fire of the heavy artillery will destroy 43 LW Inf Bde in eight to ten days. Then the position can no longer be held.

The General [GM Schön] reports as follows about the morale of the Division<sup>272</sup>:

'The enemy lies an average of 100 to 200 paces from our lines. Only in two places is the distance about 300 paces; in many cases it is just 40 to 50, in one place only 3 paces. In the last six days the men mostly can't sleep at all at night, and only briefly during the day. This is also true of the Brigade reserves, because from dusk to dawn they have to carry rations, equipment and other supplies up to the positions while under enemy fire.

The conditions in the trenches test even the strongest nerves. There is constant heavy artillery fire, by day and night, which causes splinters of stone to scatter, but there are other factors that damage morale. Troops often have to lie for a whole day next to wounded men or corpses. Heavy shells pound the graves, frequently dug just behind the trenches and mostly shallow because of the stony soil; this scatters parts of rotting bodies into our trenches, which moreover are inhabited by many rats. After two or three days of these conditions, our soldiers are so disgusted that they lose their appetites. Due to lack of water, they cannot clean themselves as long as they are in the lines. Many wounded men seeking protection crawl into holes in the ground where they soon perish if they are not discovered.

In the central sectors under enemy pressure, when the Landwehr regiments arrived they found only remnants of the garrison they were supposed to relieve. These troops were cowering in several dug-outs, their morale completely broken. The commander of one Landsturm company had just six men of his company with him... Doberdo, often under bombardment by heavy artillery, is just a pile of rubble. The report of an officer of k.k. Lst IR # 31 demonstrates what can happen to men under such fire. Half a company sought cover in a Doline which was hit by a heavy shell. 19 men were killed on the spot and 26 were wounded; the rest were scattered here and there, screaming as if they had lost their minds or desperately running around the ground...

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272 GM Schön prepared the report (here abridged) based on impressions he'd gained in the battle positions of LW IR # 26 in the night of 29-30 October and other things he'd learned in the past few days while commanding 22 LW ID.

The morale of LW IR # 3 and 26 is still far from reaching such a breaking point. The men fight with commendable self-sacrifice, although they know they are dealing with an overwhelming enemy force. Their performance doesn't suffer from the fact that they are outnumbered three to one.'

This report doesn't stem from a lack of self-confidence. On the contrary, it is motivated solely by a concern for the condition of the troops. The 22 LW ID is really an extraordinarily qualified and trustworthy unit, and its commander one of our foremost and bravest generals. Based on this information, I can do nothing but order all commanders to strengthen their fortifications and hang on."

Thus the battle in the northern part of the Karst plateau featured scenes that could compare with the horrors of Dante's Inferno. Meanwhile the front of the k.u.k. III Corps farther south was relatively quiet. Here there were just weak enemy thrusts on the Selz-Doberdo road and against the La Rocca Ridge east of Monfalcone; they were easily broken up by our artillery. The batteries of III Corps also provided frequent and effective help to the defenders of 22 LW ID. On 30 and 31 October the heavy batteries of VII and XVI Corps successfully suppressed the fire of their Italian opposite numbers deployed in the area southwest of Görz and on Mt Fortin.

In the night of 30-31 October, the IR # 43 (which had been fighting under 20 Hon ID since 22 October) was relieved by a Honved regiment. For nine days the 43<sup>rd</sup> had held the summit of Mt S Michele in desperate fighting while constantly bombarded by guns of the heaviest caliber. They had fended off overwhelming numbers of attackers by day and night. Now, with their ranks reduced and bloodied, the men pulled back to a reserve camp at Segeti. At the same time the IR # 61 of 17 ID went to the rear to receive replacements. At this point the 20 Hon ID on the northern wing of VII Corps had just 16 Lst Mtn Bde in the line, plus five battalions in reserve. Under 17 ID, the 111 Lst Inf Bde left the front when fighting died down and was supposed to stay in reserve until 4 November. Under 22 LW ID, the 110 Lst Inf Bde was also sent back a little later to recuperate.<sup>273</sup>

#### **d. Evaluation of the situation and plans of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ at the end of October**

Since winter had begun in the Julian Alps, 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was relieved of any immediate concern for their northern wing.

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273 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The HQ of 106 Lst ID, which was in charge of 110 and 111 Bdes, was already in reserve at Lokvica.

Also, the exhaustion of the attackers and the arrival of reinforcements for the k.u.k. XV Corps caused hope that the situation would be quieter and more secure for the foreseeable future.

Conditions were far more difficult on the middle and lower Isonzo. Here also the advent of poor weather and the effects of two weeks of unsuccessful battle had caused the enemy's attack to stall, but all observations and reports indicated that they had no intention of completely giving up Cadorna's great offensive any time soon. Of the Italian divisions identified in the Isonzo area, two (22 and 25 ID) still hadn't been used at the front; moreover, the Aus-Hung. commanders had received reports that the other Italian armies were being weakened to build up the Isonzo front. It was doubtful that the enemy would give up the positions right next to the defenders which they had gained after such great sacrifices and call off the offensive without winning a single tangible success to encourage their people back home. The enormous assembly of units and equipment on the Isonzo front signified rather that Cadorna would stick with his decision to carry on the campaign as a battle of matériel and attrition until his opponents were totally worn down. He knew that Austrian resources were very restricted, and stretched to the limit on three fronts. Also the impressive advance by the Central Powers in the Balkans made it necessary to relieve Italy's Serbian allies.

Even in periods when there was no major fighting, casualties were unnaturally high on the Karst because:

- . the troops were in very close contact with a larger enemy force for long periods, and
- . the units in the foremost line were pinned down in terrain west of the Vallone valley which lacked protective works and communications trenches, and dominated by the enemy artillery.

Nevertheless, the Army commander Gd.I Borojevic stuck to his decision to yield not one foot of ground without a contest. With a heavy heart he turned down all suggestions, motivated by concern for the troops, that the front should be pulled back to the western edge of the Vallone valley, where a second position was being constructed on a line which tactically was somewhat more favorable (Debeli vrh-Crni hrib-Marcottini-west edge of S Martino-Mt S Michele). He ordered that the present battle line was to be held under all circumstances. Army HQ tried to alleviate the difficult fighting conditions on the Karst by making the same groups of divisions permanently responsible for the various sectors. This would allow the troops and their commanders to become fully acquainted with the conditions in

their own parts of the front. Hopefully this would also strengthen their power of resistance.

Therefore it was planned to first relieve 20 Hon ID with all of FML Schönburg's 6 ID.<sup>274</sup> While this highly rated new unit was in line, reserves could be assembled in its rear. 16 Lst Mtn Bde, which became available once relieved by 6 ID, was still in fairly good condition; therefore after a brief rest it would be available to in turn relieve one of the brigades of 17 ID. III Corps, which had the best trenches and hadn't been seriously attacked since the first days of the battle, made four battalions available to reinforce the garrison in 22 LW ID's sector. The entire 106 Lst ID, which had sunk to the combat strength of just a regiment, could be pulled to the rear; it had proven its bravery, but had suffered heavy losses and hadn't received enough officers and replacements who were ready for action.

After recuperating, 20 Hon ID would once again relieve 6 ID and 106 Lst ID would relieve 22 LW ID; the 17 ID would stay in its current defensive sector. Army HQ ultimately wanted to have 6 ID, half of 22 LW ID and 16 Lst Mtn Bde available as reserve units.

During the short pause in the fighting, aerial reconnaissance didn't detect any change in the layout of the enemy camps west of the Isonzo. Boroevic had already ordered 6 ID to move to the Ranziano area on 1 November and to start to relieve 20 Hon ID on the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, when a heavy bombardment broke out along the entire front on the last day of October. Attacks at Plava and on the Karst on 1 November opened the decisive phase of the Third Battle of the Isonzo.

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274 IR # 17 of 6 ID, temporarily attached to XVI Corps, would return to the Division at the same time.

## **8. High point and crisis of the III Isonzo Battle, 1-4 November**

In the last few days, the enemy high command believed they had seen signs that the resistance of the Aus-Hung. front was weakening. They thought that their opponents' defenses had been greatly shaken, and that eventually the Austrians would have to pull back in several sectors to their rear positions. The Italian supreme HQ was full of hopes of victory when on 31 October they issued orders for a decisive action involving all available units. The first sentence of Cadorna's directive for the offensive stated: "After taking appropriate measures to regroup and reorganize the troops, the time has now arrived to reap the fruits of the pressure we have exerted on the enemy. We have now decided to begin the decisive phase of the offensive."<sup>275</sup>

The heavy fighting which flared up again from Plava to Mt dei sei Busi on 1 November developed into the high point of the battle that had now already lasted for fourteen days. On the outermost wings of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, however, there were only some insignificant engagements. The last, decisive fight for the possession of Görz led to heavy attacks at Plava and on the Karst plateau. The Italian leaders were still trying to gain ground on the flanks of the bridgehead and to make its capture easy by an envelopment maneuver.

### **a. A new breakthrough attempt at Plava**

#### 31 October-1 November

In this final attempt to win the battle regardless of cost, the mission of the II Italian Corps - to advance at Plava - remained the same as it had been since the war started. Meanwhile, however, its northern neighbor the VIII Corps still hadn't carried out its assignment of crossing the Isonzo and taking the edge of the Banisizza plateau. At the end of October the VIII Corps, unlike its neighbor, made no further attempts to reach its goal; except for a few weak operations which at most were just diversionary attacks, it did almost nothing. Since there was no coordination between VIII and II Corps, the latter had to fend for itself and naturally encountered great difficulties. Nevertheless, II Corps sent eight infantry regiments, supported

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275 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 388

by powerful artillery, to attack the k.u.k. 1 Mtn Bde on a front of only 3 kilometers. GM Novak von Arienti had just 6 (later 8) battalions plus 8 ½ batteries (5 light, 3 medium and ½ heavy) to oppose the Italians.

After a two-day pause, on the last day of October the enemy artillery brought our positions, observation points and rear areas under heavy fire. An Italian battle group (according to an intercepted wireless message it consisted of a regiment each of 3 and 32 ID) attacked the western edge of Zagora toward evening; after an hour of hand-to-hand combat they broke off the fight, only to repeat the thrust after darkness fell. When this also failed, the night was quiet. Strong units held in readiness in front of Globna and the much-contested Heights # 383 were targets of a strong bombardment by our batteries.

At dawn on 1 November an enemy group made a surprise attack on our trenches at Zagora under cover of rain and fog, but without artillery preparation; they took a substantial number of prisoners from the startled garrison. During the morning the fighting spread to almost the entire front of 18 ID; the enemy were able to enter the trenches opposite Paljevo and farther south, but their storming columns broke down completely in front of Heights # 383 and at Globna. In a counterattack the reserves of 1 Mtn Bde were able to clear the Italians out of the Paljevo position.

Meanwhile an unending stream of fresh enemy reserves was entering the area (near Zagora) where they'd broken in at dawn; they hoped to push ahead to the Kuk # 611 and roll up the positions on both sides. Our batteries on the Banisizza plateau sent salvo after salvo into the Italian troops pressed together in a narrow area near Plava; they prevented any new attacks against Paljevo or Heights # 383 and 363. Two battalions were sent to restore the original situation at Zagora, and in the evening they forced the enemy to partly evacuate the wrecked town, which had been leveled almost to the ground.<sup>276</sup>

#### 2-4 November

During 2 November the Italians sent new troops into the action, but without causing any decisive change. The bitter fighting

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276 In these actions Captain Emil Fey, commanding a company of Battalion IV/4, was especially distinguished. For recovering and then holding the Zagora position he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

surged back and forth until evening. As darkness began to fall, three and a half battalions of the k.u.k. 18 ID counterattacked after a brief artillery preparation and threw the enemy out of all the trenches<sup>277</sup>. Only at Zagora did some stubborn fighters of the 3 Italian ID cling to part of the position.

The stubborn and bitter fighting at Zagora continued on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Our troops were able to recover several trenches north of the town, but then had to fend off powerful Italian thrusts at Paljevo, which were repeated eight times during the day. The four battalions most heavily engaged at Plava lost up to 40% of their strength in casualties and had to be relieved in the next two nights. This used up all the reserves of 18 ID except for four March companies. Therefore in the evening of 3 November the Battalion II/17 was temporarily loaned to the Division. Battalions II/57 and III/2 BH IR, which had been sent by HQ of the Southwest Front from Armeegruppe Rohr to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, were also ordered to support 18 ID, and were to arrive on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

The II Italian Corps drove its troops forward in desperate assaults from noon to night of 3 November; surprisingly, they called a halt on the next day and ordered their men to fortify themselves in the piles of ruins at Zagora. Then at 9:30 PM the Dalmatian Bn III/22, on their own initiative, hurled themselves with brave determination on the Italians and stormed their positions. They threw the enemy into confusion and not only took the much-contested ruins of the town, but in the night of 4-5 November repulsed a series of sharp counterattacks.

Now there was quiet at Plava. Continuous pouring rain and increasing cold impaired the health of the troops, but also put a complete halt to the enemy's activity. The final result of five days of very costly attacks by II Italian Corps against 1 Mtn Bde was the occupation of an unimportant forward position west of Zagora.

## **b. Assaults on the Doberdo plateau, 31 October-2 November**

Just like II Corps at Plava, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army was supposed to support the decisive attack in the center against the Görz bridgehead by resuming its general offensive.

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277 GM Novak von Arienti was wounded during the counterattack this day; he continued to lead his troops until 4 November, when Colonel Teus took over 1 Mtn Bde.

Since neither a direct frontal assault on Mt S Michele nor any of the envelopment attempts had succeeded thus far, the Italian leadership now seemed to want to break through farther south on the Karst plateau. It's possible that this decision was based on the small temporary advantages gained by the inner wings of XIV and X Corps east of Ruins # 143. Perhaps a great success could have been won here if reinforcements smashed through the defenders' front. Thus the actions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army from 1 to 4 November featured a series of attacks directed toward the low ground east of S Martino and the area east of Ruins # 143.

31 October-1 November

Already the bombardment started early on 31 October, and increased from noon of this day to a very strong drum-fire; it was directed especially against the sectors mentioned above. Groups in divisional strength attacked the northern slope of Mt S Michele around 4:00 PM and next to Kote 111 around 6:00 PM. In the twilight of the fading autumn day these thrusts, which heralded the decisive final phase of the battle, were shattered. 20 Hon ID, however, suffered considerable casualties. Its commander, GM Lukachich, got the impression that his troops no longer could offer the necessary resistance to a large new attack after their recent heavy actions, and asked for reinforcements. Since 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ refused a request from VII Corps HQ for parts of the Army reserves, Archduke Joseph had to again send IR # 43 into the Vallone valley, although it had just arrived in its rest camps.

The Italian general offensive was supposed to start at noon on 1 November. The Duke of Aosta received 22 ID of XI Corps from the strategic reserves. The first thrusts in the morning hours along the Isonzo and against Mt S Michele were repulsed without difficulty. Then the Italian artillery increased their fire to an unprecedented fury against the VII k.u.k. Corps, and soon afterward the seven divisions at the front advanced for the decisive attack. 29 ID on the left wing of XIV Italian Corps struck along the Isonzo to divert the defenders' attention; the 30 and 21 ID, deployed in deep lines, stormed the four summits of Mt S Michele; the three brigades of 28 ID had the most important task of breaking through south of the road to S Martino. Fighting in close cooperation with 28 ID, the reinforced 19 ID on the left wing of X Corps attacked the heights east of Ruins # 143. At the same time the other two divisions of X Corps (31 and 20 ID) struck the part of our front between Kote 111 (on the road) and Mt dei sei Busi.

The massive attack was already defeated in most areas after a short action. Although exhausted by the long battle, the defenders exerted their last strength against the seemingly endless waves of attackers and repulsed the mighty thrust between the Isonzo and the southern edge of S Martino. The attacking masses fled back under a devastating barrage from our batteries and machine guns.

Fighting was especially heavy in the sector of 17 ID; east of the Ruin heights, where the drum-fire had achieved its greatest intensity and blown away all the obstacles and cover, the enemy

broke into our lines. Encouraged by a thunderstorm which hampered the defenders' vision, several regiments of 28 and 19 ID were able to enter the trenches of the Temesvar Division, after overrunning the handful of the garrison who still lived. Boldly and without fearing death, the Debreczen IR # 39 and Budapest FJB # 24 struck the much larger enemy force; by evening their counterattack had driven the Italians in retreat out of almost all the trenches they had won. They were only able to retain one stretch of the position. The neighboring 22 LW ID withstood the storm; their artillery had often intervened to help 17 ID during the high point of the enemy offensive. Now finally, in the evening, 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ allowed 6 ID to move up to the Ranziano area except for IR # 17, which stayed behind XVI Corps at Görz.

The troops of the k.u.k. VII Corps had brilliantly withstood a strenuous trial of strength against a much larger force.<sup>278</sup> They had fought through the hard battle in the hope that after the reckoning with the enemy the hour of release from all the pains of this great engagement would sound. Now, after successfully withstanding the offensive, the fighters were so exhausted that they could only be induced to further exertions by the stubborn will of their commanders. Through the two weeks of the battle they had been granted little or no relief. Even in nights when there was no fighting, all the men had to work to improve the barriers and destroyed positions; therefore many detachments were scarcely battle-worthy. The troops missed sleep above all. However, the end of the action hadn't come; further tests and suffering still lay ahead for the defenders of the Isonzo.

The resumption of the battle and the fact that on the Karst plateau another part of the front - although very small - had been lost to the enemy caused 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to issue some

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278 The total casualties of 5<sup>th</sup> Army from the start of the battle through 1 November (inclusive) were:

. Sector I [XV Corps] -	1312 dead,	594 missing,	3167
wounded; total =	5073 men		
. Sector II [XVI Corps] -	1125 " ,	611 " ,	
4212 " ; total =	5948 men		
. Sector III.a [VII Corps] -	3551 " ,	4086 " ,	
11,313 " ; total =	18,950 men		
. Sector III.b [III Corps] -	654 " ,	27 " ,	
1766 " ; total =	2447 men.		

The total was 6642 dead, 5318 missing, 20,458 wounded - 32,418 men. At the same time there were 4052 sick, so the grand total was 36,470 men.

reminders. They acknowledged the extraordinarily steadfast stand of the Isonzo soldiers, but emphasized the importance of holding their present positions so that victory could be gained in the Balkans. All commanders in VII Corps in particular were admonished to influence the conduct of the troops in the foremost line. To maintain the combat readiness of the troops under the difficult conditions in Sector III.a it was very important to keep relieving units to provide necessary rest and to ensure that the scanty reserves were properly employed.

2 November

The decisive fighting, and thus the high point of the battle, occurred on 2 November. At 7:00 AM the Italian artillery began a massed bombardment that soon destroyed all the obstacles that had been repaired during the night, along with sand-bag defenses, and inflicted substantial casualties. The hurricane of fire continued until late in the afternoon, only temporarily interrupted when enemy divisions launched massive infantry attacks. Sudden concentrations of quick and accurate fire by our own batteries were able to break up Italian troop concentrations and weak attacks in front of 20 Hon ID. Once again the main efforts in the morning and afternoon by the Italian XIV Corps (which had received fresh reserves) and especially by X Corps were directed against the sector east of the Ruin heights. Their intention obviously was to exploit their several local successes by breaking through our apparently wavering front.

After massive assaults had been repeatedly repulsed in prolonged hand-to-hand fighting, the Italians threw considerable reinforcements into the fray and in the afternoon were able to penetrate into 17 ID's sector in three new places. The worn out defenders had no fresh men available to halt the larger enemy force, which already seemed confident that their breakthrough would succeed. Therefore FML Gelb, the Division's commander, assembled the dead-tired reserves from behind the front - the remnants of 33 Inf Bde and 111 Lst Inf Bde - for a final counterattack. They checked the enemy and thus snatched away their hopes of winning a victory in the furious, costly fighting.

22 LW ID suffered considerably under a flanking bombardment from the Italian artillery; however, well-conducted cross-fire by the batteries of III and VII Corps broke up two assaults which the 20 Italian ID tried to mount in the Redipuglia area. When this rainy All Souls' Day came to an end, the attacking power of the Italian divisions, which hitherto had fought with unbelievable tenacity, wasn't completely broken. However, their capacity had been reduced. There were many signs that the very heavy pressure of the last few days was slackening. Our loss of ground east of the ruins, where the first line had been bent back, had been held to the minimum.

New deployments

Now the relief of the front-line troops was unavoidable because

of their casualties and declining strength, and because the enemy might continue the battle with newly-arrived units. However, GdI Borojevic insisted that the planned relief of the north wing of VII Corps by 6 ID should be carried out only in stages; thus he would still have a fresh - although small - Army reserve behind the seriously threatened sectors of Görz and Mt S Michele in case an unforeseen crisis developed in the next few days. It had now been confirmed that the Italians had taken units from the Tyrol front and moved them to the Görz area. Therefore the Aus-Hung. command could regard the attacks which were simultaneously developing in Tyrol as less dangerous; they ordered the Land Defense commander there to find the forces he needed to carry out operations in his own area.

In the night of 2-3 November, FJB # 7, 8 and 9 of 6 ID entered the line between the Isonzo and the summit of Mt S Michele; they relieved Hon IR # 3 and 4, which first were held in the Vallone valley in their Division's reserve and later moved to Ranziano. Under 17 ID, which had suffered the greatest losses, IR # 61 (which had enjoyed only two days of recuperation) re-entered the front to take the place of IR # 39, which was greatly weakened after the many counterattacks it had launched. The remaining Army reserve units were IR # 7 and BH IR # 2 at Ranziano, plus two Landsturm battalions apiece in the Vallone valley and at Kostanjevica.

From 3 November the intensity of the fighting on the Karst diminished. Both sides were exhausted. Moreover, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cadorna pulled 21 ID from the front of XIV Corps and sent it to his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which was fighting hard to win a decision in front of the Görz bridgehead.

### **c. Height and decline of the struggle in front of Görz, 1-4 November**

After the successful outcome of the earlier actions in front of Görz, the last day of October passed in almost complete quiet. However, this was merely a short breathing space while the enemy prepared a final effort to gain possession of the coveted city.

#### 1 November

From dawn on 1 November the slopes of the chain of hills between Lucinico and the granite summit of Mt Sabotino were enveloped in the glaring flames of countless explosions from very heavy shells. The Italian infantry began to advance at 7:00 AM. 4

ID, which had been substantially reinforced after its heavy losses on 28 October, opened the battle with a powerful thrust against the northern wing of the bridgehead. Under command of 4 ID, a brigade from 10 ID moved toward Point # 609 (the summit of Mt Sabotino) and the Granatieri Bde of 13 ID struck the southern slope of the hill. This impetuous assault and the following attempts to secure the key point of the Görz defenses were unsuccessful because of the defensive fire of 60 Inf Bde, excellently supported by artillery. Further attacks by fresh forces on 2 November suffered the same fate. By evening of this day the Italians had failed to enter the position at any point north of the Piumicabach. Heavy casualties forced them to pull back their tired and decimated regiments in the night of 2-3 November and to renounce further attempts for the time being. Thus the enemy gave up the fight around Mt Sabotino earlier than in other sectors; the defenders had held fast to their positions among the rocks of the hill without losing any ground.

Shortly after the actions described above had begun on the northern wing, the main body of 11 Italian ID and parts of 4 ID attacked farther south against the center of the bridgehead - the heights of Oslavija-Pevma - while the reinforced 12 ID struck the Podgora ridge. The first attacks were fended off. The enemy artillery then concentrated on a small front. After the barricades and trenches in the chosen area had been completely destroyed by artillery supported by many heavy trench mortars, the Italian infantry attacked. At the heights of Pevma, where 4 Mtn Bde had pushed back the Italians in close combat several days earlier, the oncoming line of attackers collapsed under our artillery barrage and soon fled to the rear. On the other hand, the inner wings of 11 and 12 ID - aided by a strong rain storm - penetrated the shattered positions on the Podgora west of Grafenberg and on Hill # 184 next to Lucinico. Because of the enemy's numerical superiority (five Italian regiments against three battalions of 5 Mtn Bde and one from 4 Mtn Bde), the situation seemed very critical. The available brigade and division reserves, including two battalions of IR # 17 (which had been attached to 58 ID), were quickly brought over the Isonzo to the most-threatened points. In a difficult action at night, our trenches were cleared of the enemy; many prisoners were taken by the morning of 2 November. Only one small detachment of the Italian 12 ID was able to hold onto part of the trench in the foremost line west of Heights # 184.

### 2 November

In the first hours of the morning of 2 November strong Italian

forces again stormed the entire front in front of Görz. 11 ID, which had already worked its way up next to our obstacles on Heights # 188 and by the church on the ridge at Oslavija, was able toward noon to set foot in the town and next to the church after a long and bitter struggle. On the other hand, the attacking columns on the heights west of Pevma and in front of the summit of Heights # 188 were broken up by flanking artillery fire. The most severe fighting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> was once again on the Podgora, where strong Italian forces moved to attack after massive fire by heavy artillery and trench mortars. The first waves fled back under the cross-fire of our batteries and machine guns, but after several more very stubborn thrusts the enemy were able to make a new penetration of the lines west of Point # 240 and on the southern wing, which was especially vulnerable to enveloping fire. The bombardment by the Italian guns and trench mortars increased to maximum intensity and tore substantial gaps in the ranks of the troops fighting there. Because the defensive installations were completely ruined, the heavy fighting which lasted until darkness took place between the first and second lines. A counterattack at night by two battalions of the divisional reserve threw the enemy out of this contested area. During the night it was possible for 5 Mtn Bde to restore a strong and cohesive battle front, using parts of the second line which ran generally along the crest of the Podgora. Several hundred prisoners fell into our hands during the bloody action. The engaged units of the k.u.k. 58 ID had lost about a quarter of their strength; the enemy had suffered a substantially larger percentage of casualties during their stubbornly repeated assaults.

The south wing of k.u.k. 60 Inf Bde wasn't able by evening to drive the enemy out of Oslavija, where they were firmly dug in. Now GM Zeidler sent his last reserve, a battalion of the Dalmatian LW IR # 37, to counterattack. The operation, led by the commander of the Landwehr Regiment, Lt. Col. Brückner, won a complete success by the morning of 3 November. The foremost line on the ridge by the church was recovered, two of our own fixed guns were recaptured undamaged, and several hundred prisoners along with much military equipment were taken.<sup>279</sup> The 11 Italian ID was so weakened by its losses that it had to be relieved by the second brigade of 10 ID. The Oslavija sub-sector through Heights # 188 (inclusive) was garrisoned by two battalions of 4 Mtn Bde.

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279 The prisoners included one commanding officer. Enough gunpowder was taken by 58 ID to fill 6000 hand grenades.

3-4 November

The fight around Görz had reached its climax. Without interruption the commander of VI Italian Corps, G.Lt Capello, had his troops continue the murderous battle; on 3 November he again sent them to storm the much-damaged positions in front of Görz. He believed there were good grounds for believing that the defenders' power of resistance was weakening and eventually must fail. He also knew that Italian public opinion was awaiting the capture of Görz with greater tension every day.

However, the commander and troops on the defending side also knew that everything was now at stake.

The Podgora was again in the center of the battle for Görz. The enemy had stopped attacking Mt Sabotino and were relieving the units at the front at Pevma. South of the Grafenberg-St Florian road, however, they assembled all available forces for a final, decisive thrust. The battle was resolved as a series of local actions waged with extreme bitterness. West of Grafenberg the Battalion II/52 on the left wing of 4 Mtn Bde repulsed six death-defying onslaughts; in the seventh assault the remnants of the battered attacking group threw down their weapons and surrendered. At Point # 240 at the summit of the Podgora all thrusts were also shattered with heavy losses. On the other hand, parts of 12 Italian ID were able to once again able to climb the southernmost ridge near Lucinico, and temporarily even advanced over Heights # 184. Here a melee took place that wasn't controlled by any high-level commanders, among shell-holes that were filled with a meter deep layer of mud after the rainfall of the last few days. For the time being there was no thought of any systematic counterattack. The weary Italian combatants already believed that they had broken the last resistance of their opponents, and that the last stretch of their *via dolorosa* to Görz lay before them. However, early on 4 November all of the remaining Austrian troops and battle-tryed leaders who'd been left on their own to guard the trenches, faithfully supported by a few batteries, struck back. Step by step they drove the enemy, who were equally tired and not as determined, out of the positions on the Podgora. Around noon on the 4<sup>th</sup>, as the sun broke through the clouds after several days of rain, the hotly-contested heights were firmly in our hands. A few Italians were still hanging on to only a small part of the trenches on the western slope.

While the costly fighting here had led in the morning to a completely successful outcome, north of Heights # 240 the

attacking enemy troops had already given up the battle the evening before and pulled back. The garrison of the bridgehead could look back with pride on their accomplishments. They had been outnumbered more than three to one. Besides the two Dalmatian Landwehr regiments (# 23 and 37), the Hungarian Battalions II/52 and III/69 as well as the Carniola IR # 17 were particularly distinguished. The Slovenes of the 17<sup>th</sup> had lost more than half their personnel. Without any room to fall back, the battalions of 4 and 5 Mtn Bdes had counterattacked immediately almost every time the enemy broke into the trenches; although these thrusts were carried out by very small reserve units, they were lightning quick. In cases where larger enemy forces had broken in, more elaborate counterattacks were organized, and they bore witness to the talents of the troops both in fighting and maneuver, down to the smallest units. It cannot be repeated often enough that the most valuable support to the bridgehead was the activity of XVI Corps' artillery; their most outstanding service was their quick defeat of the attacks on Mt Sabotino and the heights by Pevma.

The only ground the Italians gained permanently as a result of their attempts to break through at Görz in the third Isonzo battle was a part of the foremost trenches of our position on the western slopes of Heights # 184 and # 240; this had no effect on the tactical situation of either side. This extremely limited success cost the attackers about 300 officers and 10,000 men.<sup>280</sup> These casualties and the general exhaustion of the troops forced the enemy to halt the fighting for several days and to pull back the attacking divisions from the points where they were in very close contact with the defenders.

GdI Borojevic was not very generous with praise. However, after the close of these actions he assembled the officers at Görz and declared that his heart demanded that he thank the troops of 58 ID for their unparalleled achievements. Although the Division was stationed in the important bridgehead, in five months of combat it had caused the Army commander the smallest amount of concern. This was due to outstanding leaders and their incomparable soldiers.

#### **d. The third battle dies down on the Karst, 3-4 November**

The objectives of the corps and divisions of 3 Italian Army

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280 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 477

remained the same for 3 November. XIV Corps HQ replaced the departed 21 ID with a brigade from the HQ reserves.

On the northern slope of Mt S Michele, the relief of 39 Hon Inf Bde by FJB # 7, 8 and 9 of 6 ID had begun in the night of 2-3 November. During the rather rapid transfer of the sector from the Honved troops, one of the Jaeger Battalions - new to the front and its difficult conditions - suffered a setback. It lost contact with the guides from the Honved regiment which it was relieving, and stumbled past the position it was to occupy and directly into the enemy lines; the Battalion suffered heavy casualties from overwhelming Italian fire on three sides. The result of this action was that a small part of the position, which was in a very awkward situation and enveloped on two sides, was now evacuated. The HQ of 20 Hon ID had already asked Archduke Joseph to allow the position to be given up. The new line was established 50 paces to the rear. Otherwise the enemy was repulsed when they attempted to follow up. The position on Mt S Michele now ran directly west of the crest, with its four peaks, and from the northern peak straight north to the Isonzo.

A general offensive against the entire front of the k.u.k. VII Corps opened around 2:00 PM, but it failed to even reach our positions. In the night the attackers sought to break through the front north and south of S Martino, but failed completely.

Parts of the VII Italian Corps, covered by a strong rain storm, thrust against the k.u.k. III Corps for the first time in twelve days. 19 Lst Mtn Bde was able to halt the enemy, just as they had at the start of the battle (which was now eighteen days old). Fire from cannon and machine guns broke up the storming columns and drove their remnants back.

Fighting flared up one more time on 4 November. A thrust between Peteano and the northern peak of Mt S Michele was broken up in front of the defensive positions by concentrated fire. In the S Martino-Kote 111 sector, 17 ID smashed a series of powerful attacks; the Banat IR # 61 was particularly distinguished. Then the Italians directed a very heavy fire from the south against the flank and rear of S Martino and the southern slope of Mt S Michele, but their infantry didn't attack. The Hungarians relieved a few small units in the night of 4-5 November; two battalions of the Corps' reserve were sent to support 17 ID, and stationed behind its southern wing.

The outcome of the third battle

Fighting had raged from 18 October to 4 November in almost unbroken intensity. However, the attackers had failed to achieve even the first objective of their mightiest offensive to date - Görz was still firmly held by the defenders. Most of the Italians had attacked with a gallant disregard for casualties and unflagging determination. Here and there they managed to penetrate their opponents' lines, but never to break through them. The defenders always sent hastily-assembled reserves forward to either throw the enemy out by counterattacks from several directions or seal off the penetration if concern for our own forces or Italian resistance made attacks impossible. Therefore when the mighty action died down for the first time the wall of defenders was still standing where it had been at the beginning along the length of the theater of operations.

At the end of the battle the only noticeable terrain gained by the enemy outside of the Karst were penetrations of the foremost line on the slope northwest of Dolje, in the advanced position west of Zagora, and in the trenches on the western slopes of the Podgora by Heights # 240 and 184. On the Karst the attackers secured the forward positions we had evacuated at the start of the great offensive - at Peteano and on the northwest slope of Mt S Michele - and then a segment of about 1 km of the forward positions west of S Martino, a somewhat longer stretch east of the Ruin Heights # 143, and several parts of the first line between Kote 111 and Point 118. Otherwise the front was unaltered.

#### The casualties

In most areas both friend and foe had suffered substantial casualties since the battle started. Several Aus-Hung. units had lost almost half their personnel. The loss of 5<sup>th</sup> Army (plus 44 LW ID) was about 42,000 combatants. The following were the figures for the various sectors:

. 44 LW ID -	439	( 100 dead,	9 missing,	330 wounded)
. XV Corps -	5,420	(1423 "	, 594 "	, 3,403 " )
. XVI Corps -	9,329	(1338 "	, 1962 "	, 6,029 " )
. VII Corps -	23,890	(4661 "	, 4609 "	, 14,620 " )
. III Corps -	2,769	( 706 "	, 27 "	, 2,036 " ).

Thus the grand total was 41,847 (8228 dead, 7201 missing and 26,418 wounded). The "missing" category includes prisoners and those of the dead and wounded who couldn't be brought back from the front. Also, about 6000 men were sick during the period of the battle. By the end of the third Isonzo battle the remaining civilian population of Görz mourned the loss of 50 dead and 70 wounded.

There were also regiments on the Italian side which lost 50% of their men. Casualties of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were 24,800 combatants (15.5%), and of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army 42,200 (30.5%). Between them the Armies lost 67,000 men, almost 23% of their strength. Officer casualties were 2100 (498 dead, 110 missing, 1456 wounded, 51 taken prisoner); the rank and file lost 64,900 (10,235 dead, 9514 missing, 42,834 wounded and 2300 prisoners).<sup>281</sup> However, the "missing" also included many prisoners. The k.u.k. VII and XVI Corps alone had captured 92 Italian officers and 3800 men between 18 October and 4 November.

In its official report, the k.u.k. high command summed up the fighting through 4 November as the "Third Battle of the Isonzo", and this designation has also gone into the history books. The title seemed reasonable because of the pause that began on 5 November, but didn't take later events into account. Actually this "Third Battle" wasn't a self-contained action, but only part of series of combats extending over many days that wouldn't reach a bloody conclusion until December.

#### ***D. Mountain actions in late fall 1915 (mid-October to the end of November)***

##### **1. Events on the Carinthian front**

On 1 October Cadorna had advised both his armies on the Isonzo of his plans to attack on the front in the coastal land. A few days later he also urged the units in the mountains to make "energetic limited attacks." The purpose of these subsidiary operations was "to pin down our opponents and prevent them from shifting forces."<sup>282</sup> At this time the Austro-Hungarians were engaged in heavy fighting in the Balkans and in east Galicia and could hardly divert troops from these fronts; therefore Cadorna believed that his enemy's strained situation made the prospects for the Italian offensives especially favorable.

Besides making limited attacks, the Carnic Group (combined XII Corps) was supposed to provide artillery support to the offensive of the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in the Flitsch

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281 Italian Official History, Vol. II- p. 492 of Text and p. 413 of Documents.

282 Italian Official History, Vol. II, p. 549 of Text; pp. 456 ff. and 461 of Documents

basin.<sup>283</sup>

The early arrival of winter in the Carinthian mountains and the fact that the units opposed each other with equal strength along the border crest between Rombon and the Steinkaarspitze (on the eastern border of Tyrol) made it necessary to halt almost all combat a few days after the start of the third Isonzo battle. The Italians undertook several small-scale diversionary thrusts in sectors of the Carinthian front which had hitherto seen hot fighting, but they were much too weak to gain the desired result. After some hours of artillery preparation, Italian troops repeatedly attacked the positions on the heights and the mountain crossing points around Mt Peralba, on the Klein Pal, at Pontafel and next to the Mittagskofel; they were never able to penetrate our positions. Instead they were checked along the barricades, suffered substantial casualties, and then fell back to their own lines.<sup>284</sup> In the last days of October, and without any apparent reason, the enemy burnt to the ground most of the towns which lay between the fronts in the Fella valley (Pontafel, Pontebba, Leopoldskirchen and Lussnitz).

Only 44 LW ID in the Flitsch basin was engaged in lively combat from 20 to 27 October; this was in connection with the attacks of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army in the upper Isonzo valley. Fighting flared up here and there in this sector also in November.

When the temperature suddenly fell in the last days of October, winter arrived in the Carnic Alps; all the positions were soon covered by a thick mantle of snow. For months thereafter both sides restricted themselves to small operations without any special significance. For both friend and foe the necessity of fighting the adverse winter conditions in the high mountains took precedence over all other concerns.

In mid-October the ratio of forces between the Austro-Hungarians and Italians was about 1:1 in Carinthia, 1:2 in Tyrol and 1:2 ½ on the Isonzo. The relative strength of GdK Rohr's Armeegruppe gave Front HQ in Marburg a very welcome opportunity to withdraw its units to support 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which was heavily engaged on the Isonzo. Right at the start of the battle, the Armeegruppe was

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283 Italian Official History, Vol. II, p. 582 of Text; p. 495 of Documents

284 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Per the Index, the involved Aus-Hung. units were Group Fasser on Mt Peralba, 11 Mtn Bde on the Klein Pal, parts of 94 ID at Pontafel, and 92 ID on the Mittagskofel.

obliged to give up five battalions and two and a half batteries without regard to the situation on their own front.<sup>285</sup> These troops were hardly on their way when 5<sup>th</sup> Army sent another urgent appeal for reinforcements to GdK Rohr at the end of October. On 3 November the Armeegruppe sent two battalions to Podmelec. These were all the troops that could be given up without endangering the defense of Carinthia. The lack of reserves already would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to overcome local setbacks or to carry out troop rotation. Nevertheless the Armeegruppe received an order to hold further units available for eventual transfer. By 8 November Rohr's HQ had prepared a reserve which consisted of a Bosnia-Herzegovina battalion from 48 ID, two Landsturm battalions from 94 ID, and two and a half battalions from 92 ID.<sup>286</sup> At the same time, replacements were found for the battalions which had already been given up; they consisted of several extra companies drawn from fully-trained March formations.<sup>287</sup> They made it possible to relieve some of the troops and give them training which they needed after a long period of inactive positional warfare.

The continuing offensive against 5<sup>th</sup> Army finally made it necessary to send more troops there; in mid-November the two battalions of IR # 27 at Tarvis and a howitzer battery were sent, followed at the end of the month by half a battalion from 44 LW ID (which joined XV Corps in the Krn sector). Besides these significant forces (nine battalions since the start of the autumn campaign), it was also necessary to give up all available reserve ammunition and special equipment for the Isonzo front as the attrition battle continued. Without hesitation, GdK Rohr did all he could to support the resistance of the neighboring Army, especially since unusually heavy snowfall, avalanches and extreme cold limited the enemy's activity after mid-November.<sup>288</sup>

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285 The units were Battalions IV/39, III/18, II/37, IV/77 and IX March/LW IR 3, plus a 10.4 cm cannon, a 15 cm howitzer and half a 24 cm mortar battery. (The howitzer battery was sent to Tyrol rather than to the Isonzo.)

286 The units were Bn III/BH IR 3 at Kirchbach, the k.k. Lst Inf Bns # 40 (at Rattendorf) and 41 (at Hermagor), and Bns IV and V/27 with half of II/57 in and around Tarvis.

287 20 companies were available by 8 November, and 30 by the end of the month.

288 In mid-November the temperature sank to 19 degrees below freezing. In some places the positions lay under several meters of snow. Despite all precautions, between 11 and 20 November the Carinthian front had 2 men who froze to death and 284 others who suffered from frost bite (there were 18 first-

Apparently the Italian troops - except for those recruited in Alpine areas - suffered even more than the Austrians from the effects of winter. The number of enemy deserters increased markedly after the arrival of severe cold weather.

## **2. General offensive against Tyrol (18 October-21 November)**

To support the offensives against the Isonzo front which started on 18 October, Cadorna wanted the two armies on the left wing (1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) to simultaneously attack the mountain positions in Tyrol and thus pin down his opponents' forces. Once again they would seek to capture the Folgaria-Lavarone plateau and break out into the Puster valley. With the exception of the Ortler area, already covered with snow and ice, all sectors of the Tyrol front were to be attacked. The offensive was heralded by increased artillery fire on 18 October.

The enemy mounted ineffective diversionary thrusts in the Tonale area on 20 and 30 October.

### Actions on the southern Tyrol front

Fighting was heavier in the Chiese valley, where the enemy finally finished the artillery deployment and on the 18<sup>th</sup> attacked the advanced positions of 50 Half Bde on Mt Melino and the C. Palone. The defenders of these outposts were ordered to retreat to the main position so they could avoid the fate of the garrison of the Coston. The troops on Mt Melino were able to evacuate their trenches on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Those on the C. Palone wanted to first repulse the advancing enemy, and stood their ground. The much larger Italian force broke into the position and some of the gallantly fighting defenders were taken prisoner. The rest managed to break through. The Italian 6 ID didn't attack the main position.

Also in the Riva sector only the outposts were engaged. Meanwhile GdK Dankl ordered on the 20<sup>th</sup> that the positions in advance of the main line were to be treated only as observation points. Therefore on 23 October, when the enemy stormed the entrenchments at Casina and on the Dosso del Remit (7 km southeast of Riva), the works were evacuated according to plan. On the other hand, the Italians were unable to advance toward the Mori railroad station and to drive away our outposts on the

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degree cases, 138 second-degree, and 128 light cases).

Marilli Heights, near the main line of resistance south of Rovereto.

The V Italian Corps concentrated its main body on the north wing (9, 35 and 34 ID), but its efforts against the plateau were equally unsuccessful. Our positions in front of Folgaria, especially on the Pioverna, were attacked on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. However, the steel-hard resistance of GM Edler von Verdross' 180 Inf Bde shattered all the enemy assaults. The defensive line east of Lavarone was now subject to an artillery bombardment of unprecedented intensity, and troop concentrations indicated an infantry assault was likely. However, after the Italian storming columns found themselves in the glare of our searchlights on the night of 24-25 October they reverted to systematic, tiny advances with sap trenches. When 9 Italian ID left for the Isonzo on 31 October, V Corps dropped all their plans for an eventual attack.

#### The third offensive in the Dolomites

On 4 October the Italian high command had given 4<sup>th</sup> Army particular orders that during the third offensive on the Isonzo front it should "carry out energetic limited attacks and thus hinder the enemy from shifting their forces." At the same time, however, the Army was supposed to hold a division in readiness to be sent to the Isonzo. G.Lt Robilant, the new commander of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, picked 10 ID in the Sextner sector for this purpose. Therefore the eastern wing of his Army wouldn't be able to join the attack. Robilant wanted IX Corps (18 and 17 ID), reinforced by 1 ID, to again try to force their way into the Abtei valley. 2 ID of I Corps, as hitherto, was responsible for the northern slope of Mt Cristallo and the area around Mt Piano.<sup>289</sup>

In the first phase of the fighting, from 18 to 31 October, IX Corps made numerous thrusts against the area between Arabba and the Tofana II. The Aus-Hung. troops reported 75 attacks (including minor probes) in this period.

The hottest fighting took place around the Col di Lana, which

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289 Italian Official History, Vol. II - pp. 461 ff. of Documents, pp. 549 ff. of Text. See also Pengov, "Die Kämpfe um den Col di Lana 1915/16" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt., Vienna, 1923), pp. 430 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Details about the fighting in this period also appear in Anton Fedrigotti, "Col di Lana" (Munich, 1979), pp. 56-82.

was attacked by the Italian 18 ID and the left wing of 17 ID.<sup>290</sup> Here the enemy, who overall suffered defeat, were able to gain their only (very limited) ground. First they seized two small but important positions among the rocks (one apiece on 22 and 25 October). On the 20<sup>th</sup> they overwhelmed an infantry position 1500 southeast of the Col di Lana summit, defended by several companies of Kaiser Jaeger Regiments # 3 and 4 plus some Reich-German machine guns. After the garrison had already suffered casualties of 60% under the continuous fire, and no longer had any un-wounded officers, the enemy struck with great stubbornness and penetrated the thoroughly damaged trenches.<sup>291</sup> The defenders had to refrain from trying to recapture the position because they had so few reserve troops.

At the end of October the mountain fighting was halted by snowfall. Both sides had suffered heavy casualties.<sup>292</sup>

At the start of November the IX Italian Corps was ordered to support the main body of the armed forces, which was still storming the Isonzo front, by again attacking the Austrian positions in the Dolomites. Now 1 ID was also placed in the front line. Therefore hard fighting flared up again on the entire Dolomite front between 7 and 21 November.

Once again a furious struggle engulfed the Col di Lana. On the 7<sup>th</sup> a battalion of 18 Italian ID took the summit of the mountain by a surprise attack. However, well-aimed artillery fire prevented the enemy from building on this success, and in the evening a brilliant assault by V Battalion of L-Sch Regt # III hurled them off the summit again.<sup>293</sup> But the Italians didn't give

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290 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - According to Skizze 12, which shows where the Italians attacked, 26 of their 75 thrusts in October were directed against the Col di Lana itself, while 15 attacks were made on the lines just west of this outpost, and 8 more against Mt Sief farther north.

291 Schemfil, "Das k.u.k. 3. Regiment der Tiroler Kaiserjäger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Bregenz, 1926), pp. 246 ff.

292 The Italians calculated that the attacking group of IX Corps, which had 12,500 men, lost 6400 between 18 and 31 October (Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 551). Since the Pustertal Division had barely 4300 riflemen to oppose them, the Italian casualties were one third larger than the total number of defenders. In the same period the Austrians lost about 1800 men.

293 Feurstein, "Dolomitenkämpfe" (Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1925), p. 513

up. They delivered blow after blow until 11 November; after a snow storm caused a temporary pause in the fighting, the enemy resumed their attacks on 20 and 21 November out of dugouts in the snow. Yet all was in vain. The Italian military historian Tosti comments about this fighting: "On 10, 20 and 21 November the Alpi and Calabria Brigades [which made up 18 ID] paid further bloody tribute on the "Calvary" of the Cadore; they had to content themselves with digging in under the summit."<sup>294</sup>

All the Italian attacks on other parts of the Dolomite front also failed. Meanwhile the X Bn of the "Rainer" IR # 59 was proud to have captured the Sextenstein Heights (just south of the Tobling intersection) on 30 October.<sup>295</sup> Two days, later, however, the position had to be relinquished again to the enemy.

The final result of the third Dolomite offensive was best described by the Italian writer quoted above, who wrote:

"Great snow storms finally forced us to pause in fighting for these miserable positions. In five months of attacks we had been unable to break through the enemy lines in this area of high mountains and thus sever the great artery between the Trentino and the heart of the Monarchy....We had be content with improving our defensive position in the Cadore..."<sup>296</sup>

## ***E. The Fourth Battle of the Isonzo, 10 November-14 December***

### **1. Decisions of the Italian high command**

The misfortunes of the Italian Army to date had a substantial impact on the domestic and foreign political situation of the Kingdom. The international difficulties had been reflected for a long time in the press of the Western powers, in which one could always find malicious comments about the scanty achievements of the new ally. The Russians had already hoped in vain for relief from the Italians while their armies were being driven back by the Central Powers through Lemberg, Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk; now little Serbia was experiencing the same disappointment. The Serbian Army had already been driven out of the heart of their country without deriving any benefit whatsoever from the Italian offensive on the Isonzo.

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294 Tosti, p. 123

295 Hoen, "Geschichte des IR 59", pp. 397 ff.

296 Tosti, p. 124

Cadorna had to deal with the understandable desires of his allies that Italy should maintain as much pressure as possible on the Isonzo; he also addressed new requests from Paris and London that he should finally follow the example of the Western powers and send troops to the Balkans. This demand was supported by the Italian Foreign Minister Sonnino, to whom it was less a question of supporting Serbia than of protecting his country's aspirations on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. Already it seemed possible that in case of a new defeat at least part of the Serbian Army would pull back into Albania. For this reason the French had let it be understood that they would appear on the Albanian coast if Italy held back. These were grounds enough for the Italian diplomats to advise that Albania should be occupied by troops from the Royal Army.

Cadorna, however, raised important military objections against a major effort in Albania. Thus far he had held all his units in the main theater of operations, except for the garrison of Libya and a few battalions stationed at Valona.<sup>297</sup> However, in contrast to his earlier rejection of any Balkan involvement (which he sent to Paris in mid-October), he now stated that he could send an Italian corps of 30,000 men to Salonika if direct intervention was unavoidable. To be sure, he was in no hurry about sending this force. As previously, his heart's desire was success on the Isonzo front - and this success was also very urgent for domestic political reasons.

In the spring it had been difficult for the government to stir up enthusiasm for the war among the Italian people, who had little interest in the adventure. Only hope for an easy victory to achieve goals which had been outlined by the nation's statesmen and poets was finally able to motivate the population in the season of Pentecost. Now, however, the weeks had turned into months and then into half a year, and this hope was still unfulfilled. For this entire period, people had looked in vain through the press reports of the high command for joyous news

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297 At this time the inhabitants of Libya were driving the Italians, with heavy losses, out of all the occupied territory in the interior of the country; by the end of the year Italy held just two points on the coast - Tripoli and Homs. The garrison consisted of about 27 infantry battalions, a combined cavalry regiment and 38 guns (Cadorna, "Altre pagine sulla grande guerra" [Milan, 1926], pp. 47 ff.). At Valona was the 10<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt (3 battalions) plus 2 ½ batteries (Italian Official History, Vol. III, Text, pp. 79 ff.)

about the "liberation" of Trieste, Trent, or even Görz. Instead of these familiar names, they kept reading about the same unfamiliar villages which they could hardly find on a map. The recurrence of the same names betrayed the fact that the Army, instead of vigorously advancing, was standing in place. Meanwhile countless women at home were dressed in black; there was hardly a family that wasn't mourning someone. Thousands of cripples were in the hospitals. The men fighting in each of the tiny hamlets on the Karst, near Oslavija and on the middle and upper Isonzo were missed in palaces as well as in the poorest huts. The easy, triumphant march into the heart of Inner Austria had turned into a bitterly contested, costly and nerve-racking battle of attrition. The joyous ecstasy of Pentecost was followed by the disillusionment of All Souls' Day.

Thus it isn't surprising that the government and the General Staff looked ahead with some concern to the resumption of parliamentary sessions, which was scheduled for 1 December. They anticipated heavy criticism and complaints (and not only from the opposition parties), which would create further bad feeling in the general public.

The opening of the Parliament was still three weeks away. The cabinet and army high command agreed that this period should be utilized as much as possible. In his book about the war, Cadorna calls the time of the autumn battles the most difficult of the entire first year of the war.<sup>298</sup> Although the situation at the start of November was difficult, it wasn't time to throw in the sponge. The decisive factor leading to the decision to continue the fighting was hope that Italy's much weaker opponent would soon break down. The authorities were no longer thinking that they could soon capture Trieste and Trent, or thrust into the heart of the Monarchy. However, a token of victory - which would at least have a psychological effect - was still relatively near: Görz. Cadorna formed his decision based on this consideration. He would seek to gain this token before winter arrived. If still unsuccessful at the end of November, he would continue the action through the critical 1<sup>st</sup> of December to at least demonstrate his determination to win. Once this episode was over, there would be time to consider sending troops to the Balkans.

The background of this strategy lent its own characteristics to the battle that flared up anew on the Karst and on the Isonzo on 10 November. This was an action to which the attackers had been

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298 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, pp. 156 ff.

forced more by political than by military factors; among the defenders it was correctly referred to as the "parliamentary battle."

#### **a. The plan of attack and deployment of the Italian units**

The exhaustion of all the attacking troops, the need to bring order to the units and to replace casualties, and very bad weather had caused Cadorna on the evening of 4 November to order a halt to the offensive. However, he also told the Armies to be prepared to immediately resume fighting and to continue the pressure on the Aus-Hung. front; these instructions were carried out.

From 5 to 10 November the most worn-out Italian troops - mainly within 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - were relieved by fresh and rested divisions. The units were reinforced and prepared for action in partly new groupings. The Italians were always able to immediately replace their heavy casualties from replacement troops held just behind the front; in time of need this process took place regardless of whether the new personnel were familiar with the terrain. The Italian artillery still had apparently endless supplies of ammunition, since their fire didn't appreciably diminish at the most critical parts of the front during the pause in the fighting, despite the long duration of the preceding battle.

The Italian commander-in-chief was aware that Austria-Hungary's military strength was stretched on all of the other fronts of its widespread theaters of operations at the start of November. He therefore concluded that for the moment the Aus-Hung. high command would find it difficult, or perhaps impossible, to find reinforcements to support 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which prisoners' supports indicated had been considerably weakened. Before the brief pause in the fighting could develop in the defenders' favor, Cadorna sent the greater part of his units once more into a battle, which was scheduled to start on 10 November.

The slight prospects of success in the mountains along the upper Isonzo, where winter had already come, and the difficulty of attacking in the Monfalcone area forced the Italian leaders to restrict their offensive mainly to the front between Plava and Mt dei sei Busi. North and south of this sector, operations would be undertaken merely to pin down the Aus-Hung. forces; this time the decisive attacks would be directed only against the Görz bridgehead and the northern part of the Doberdo

plateau. The objectives of the Italian armies on the Isonzo were unaltered. The first goal for Frugoni's Army was still to capture the Görz bridgehead; a simultaneous offensive from Plava would support this thrust. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army was mainly trying to secure Mt S Michele.

The plan of attack itself was also little changed from that of the preceding battle. Because of the narrower scope of the offensive, the two northern parts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (reinforced IV Corps and VIII Corps - together about seven divisions) would only seek to hinder the transfer of opposing units from the upper Isonzo; however, they would also be ready to make a large-scale attack if conditions made it necessary.<sup>299</sup> Planning for the attack of the two southern corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was somewhat different from that in the earlier battle. VI Corps would strike the southern part of the bridgehead (with the main effort at Oslavija). II Corps was given several difficult assignments. Its right wing (4 ID) was to support the attack of VI Corps toward Oslavija by a thrust of its own between the Piumicabach and the road from St Florian to Heights # 188. Its left wing (3 and 32 ID) would strike from the Plava bridgehead toward the Kuk (Point # 611).

Thus the main effort was directed toward securing the ridge which runs from Heights # 188 to Point # 172 (the church at Oslavija), where the inner wings of the two corps could attack together. The offensive against the Podgora would start as soon as success was won at Oslavija as well as on Mt S Michele (where the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would advance). This time no major operation was contemplated against Mt Sabotino on the northern wing of the bridgehead, ostensibly because time was pressing and the necessary artillery preparation couldn't be completed quickly enough.<sup>300</sup> The Italian high command may have hoped that this formidable position would fall to the victors like a ripe fruit after the planned breakthrough from the Oslavija ridge to the Isonzo.

The main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army (XI and XIII Corps) would resume its attack on the northern part of the Doberdo plateau simultaneously with 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's thrust at Görz. XI Corps would approach Mt S Michele from the northwest with three divisions; XIII Corps would strike the advanced Karst positions in the area around Heights # 197 and Kote # 111 from the west with two and a half divisions. The Army's southern wing (VII Corps) would

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299 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 418

300 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 496

support the main offensive by lively activity in selected parts of its front.<sup>301</sup>

There were only a few changes to the organization of the Italian units during the pause in the fighting.

On the northern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, the main body of VIII Corps shifted out of the Isonzo valley at Canale and toward the north; they deployed opposite the southern wing of the Tolmein bridgehead. 7 ID transferred from IV to VIII Corps. Otherwise the organization of IV Corps was unaltered; between the Rombon and the Isonzo west of Tolmein they deployed the Bersaglieri Division (with Brigade Aosta), 33 ID, 8 ID, and the Alpini Groups A and B. Next in line to the right was VIII Corps with 7 ID in front of Sv. Maria, 13 ID in front of Heights # 588, and a regiment of 27 ID on the west bank of the Isonzo between Dobljar and Anikowa. The rest of 27 ID was in reserve of VIII Corps, on the Kolowrat Ridge west of Heights # 588. The composition of II and VI Corps was basically unchanged.

Under the Duke of Aosta's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, from 4 to 7 November the XIV Corps (except for 29 ID) was relieved by XI Corps and the X Corps (except for half of 20 ID) by XIII Corps. Half of 9 ID (Brigade Palermo) stood behind XI Corps, in reserve at Versa.<sup>302</sup> Many of the troops of VII Italian Corps were also relieved. 14 ID moved back to Aquileja and Pieris, and was replaced by 23 ID (between Mt dei sei Busi and Monfalcone) and 16 ID (down to the sea). One brigade of 16 ID was in reserve at Villa Vicentina.

As reserves of the Italian high command, X Corps was resting in quarters at Strassoldo, XIV Corps at Ajello, and half of 9 ID (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army) at Manzano.

Thus there were about 7 ½ infantry divisions on the upper Isonzo, 2 at Plava, 4 ½ at Görz and 10 around the Karst bastion. Counting the strategic reserves and the troops directly under corps and army HQ (independent Bersaglieri, bicycle and border finance battalions) a total of divisions were ready for the fourth Isonzo battle.

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301 Italian Official History, Vol. II - p. 504 of Text and p. 429 of Documents

302 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This is apparently an error; Brigade Palermo wasn't part of 9 Italian ID. It had come to the Isonzo from 5 ID (in the Tonale sector).

The order of battle on 10 November was as follows:<sup>303</sup>

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - IV Corps (Bde Aosta, Bersaglieri Div, 33 ID, 8 ID with Alpini Groups A and B), VIII Corps (7, 13, 27 ID), II Corps (3, 32, 4 ID; half of 10 ID), VI Corps (11 and 12 ID [latter of three brigades], half of 10 ID)
- . 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - XI Corps (29, 22, 21 ID; part of 30 ID), XIII Corps (25 and 31 ID; half of 20 ID), VII Corps (16, 23 and 14 ID plus an independent bde)
- . Strategic reserves - XIV Corps (28 ID, bulk of 30 ID), X Corps (19 ID, half of 20 ID), 9 ID.

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303 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This information is presented on Beilage 27 in the original. As noted above, there are discrepancies between this account and some of the Italian regimental histories.

**b. The k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army awaits further attacks**

Although the fury of the enemy attacks markedly declined toward the end of the third Isonzo battle, based on the general situation the defenders counted on just a temporary break in the fighting. The activity and assembly of strong troop concentrations in and behind the enemy front, and the fact that none of the sectors was weakened, indicated that the Italian offensive would soon resume. Moreover, intelligence reports stated that trains were in motion on all the railroads of Italy, bringing reinforcements, ammunition and military equipment to the Isonzo. The constant noise made at night by wagons and motor vehicles behind the enemy lines indicated clearly that a necessarily enormous amount of ammunition was being built up for the resumption of a major battle. This was also confirmed by deserters.

For now, however, there was no expectation that the Aus-Hung. high command could provide any reinforcements. Despite the heavy losses in the third Isonzo battle, the staff in Teschen believed that 5<sup>th</sup> Army was still strong enough - after receiving several battalions from Tyrol and Carinthia - to hold off the Italian storm for at least a week without the help of stronger units.<sup>304</sup> The main concern of Army commander Borojevic was to provide new reserves in his entire sector and to rebuild the diminished combat effectiveness of his divisions. By sending troops back to rest camps they could recuperate, catch up on badly-needed sleep, and enjoy plentiful rations. The commanders hoped that by incorporating reserves the worn-out units could again be fully ready for battle before the next offensive began as anticipated. By absorbing March formations, the regiments of VII Corps (which had suffered the most damage) were brought up to more than half strength, while those of the other corps were almost at their authorized size.

5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ proposed that some of the combat-ready March and

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304 Despite the long duration of the third Isonzo battle, and the greater intensity of the fighting, total losses of the Aus-Hung. units were relatively less than in the second battle. This favorable circumstance was partly due to the progress in fortifying the battlefield, but mainly to a more expedient grouping of the units and wiser use of reserves. This had minimized the mixing of units from different commands to the extent that this is ever possible in large-scale actions, and thus made control of the battle orderly.

Landsturm battalions which had been thrown together in *ad hoc* units would be better utilized by sending them to older, established units of men who spoke the same language. Therefore the AOK at Teschen approved the dissolution of 206 Lst Inf Bde. Of its components, Battalions IV and V of LW IR # 37 went to 56 Inf Bde in mid-November; k.k. Lst Bn 35 and k.k. Lst March Bn 7 were broken up to replenish 111 Lst Inf Bde; and the Hungarian Lst Eta Bns I and II/29 were used to create a new III Bn of k.u. Lst IR # 29 (under 16 Lst Mtn Bde). The combined X March Battalion of IR # 17, which had been very distinguished in all its actions, went to its parent regiment. The Styrian Lst Inf Bn 154, the only part of the Trieste garrison fit for field duty, was sent to 6 ID to provide replacement troops.

There were several changes to the organization of 5<sup>th</sup> Army prior to the start of the new fighting. Under XV Corps, the k.k. Lst IR # 26 arrived at Podmelec on 7 November. In the night of 9-10 November they went to the quiet Lom sector to relieve two battalions of 7 Mtn Bde, which moved to Šlap as 1 ID's reserve. Two battalions from Carinthia which 5<sup>th</sup> Army had wanted to hold as the Army's reserve were stationed at the front northwest of Tolmein. Since it would be difficult to relieve them, XV Corps instead held Battalions II/37 and I/98 plus XI Ma Bn of IR 28 east of Santa Luzia at the Army's disposal.

Under XVI Corps, one of the battalions from Armeegruppe Rohr which had arrived at the start of November was sent to 18 ID; the second stayed behind the southern wing of this Division, in the Army's reserve. IR # 17 was reunited at Görz; two of its battalions were in reserve of 58 ID, one was directly under Army HQ.

Under VII Corps, FML Schönburg-Hartenstein's 6 ID took over the sector of 20 Hon ID in the night of 5-6 November. Col. Rudolf Müller's 12 Inf Bde held the northern slope and summit of Mt S Michele with its three Feld Jaeger battalions and IR # 7; as previously, the southern slope as far as the northwest corner of San Martino was defended by 16 Lst Mtn Bde, now placed under 6 ID. It was led by Col. Fiebich-Ripke, then Col. Bernatsky. BH IR # 2, two battalions of 16 Lst Mtn Bde and (until it was dissolved) Lst Inf Bn 154 made up the reserves of the divisional sector; they were stationed between Cotici and the northern Vallone valley under the commander of 11 Inf Bde, GM Walter Ritt. von Schreitter. By 7 November the 20 Hon ID assembled in reserve around Ranziano. 17 ID had 33 Inf Bde on the right of

its front, 111 Lst Inf Bde on the left.<sup>305</sup> The Division's reserves (in the Devetak-Marcottini area) were IR # 43, FJB # 24, and Lst Inf Bn 157 (attached from the Army's reserves). South of 17 ID, the 22 LW ID had parts of 110 Lst Inf Bde and of 43 LW Inf Bde in the first line; four battalions from these two brigades stood behind them in reserve between Doberdo and Micoli. The reserves of VII Corps in the Lokvica-Segeti-Kostanjevica area were commanded by HQ of 106 Lst ID; they were three battalions of 17 ID under 34 Inf Bde HQ, four Landsturm battalions under 110 Lst Inf Bde HQ, and finally the four battalions of 206 Lst Inf Bde which were scheduled to be dissolved.

HQ of 61 ID was placed under III Corps to control the units on its southern wing; on 12 November it took command over nine battalions (19 Lst Mtn Bde plus IR # 96). To the left of 19 Mtn Bde, the IV and V Bns of LW IR # 37 (from the dissolved 206 Lst Inf Bde) were at the front as the western wing of 187 Inf Bde. Two battalions of the 187<sup>th</sup> remained at Selo and Brestovica at the disposal of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ.

Thus at the start of the fourth Isonzo battle the following 22 battalions were in the Army's reserves:

- . three battalions of XV Corps assembling east of Santa Luzia;
- . 20 Hon ID in the Ranziano area;
- . three battalions of 187 Inf Bde at Temnica and two more behind III Corps.

The order of battle of the Army was:

- . XV Corps (Sector I) - 50 ID (15, 3 and 14 Mtn Bdes; Group Wasserthal), 1 ID (8 and 7 Mtn Bdes)
- . XVI Corps (Sector II) - 18 ID (13 and 1 Mtn Bdes), 58 ID (60 Inf Bde, 4 and 5 Mtn Bdes; IR # 17 in reserve)
- . VII Corps (Sector III.a) - 6 ID (12 Inf and 16 Lst Mtn Bdes), 17 ID (33 Inf and 11 Lst Inf Bdes), 22 LW ID (110 Lst Inf and 43 LW Inf Bdes)
- . III Corps (Sector III.b) - 28 ID (56 Inf Bde only), 61 ID (from 12 Nov - had 19 Lst Mtn Bde plus IR # 96), 187 Inf Bde
- . Reserves - 20 Hon ID, HQ of 106 Lst ID, and the independent battalions summarized above.

During the pause between the third and fourth battles of the Isonzo, HQ of Southwest Front did all it could to at least

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305 111 Lst Inf Bde was soon relieved by IR # 43 and sent back to a rest camp at Segeti. Since the beginning of the autumn fighting the Brigade had lost 43 officers and 2200 men.

narrow the gap a little between the number of our batteries and those of the enemy. Some medium batteries were moved from Armeegruppe Rohr to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and the re-arming of the batteries with new types of guns was accelerated. Four 15 cm cannon and mortar batteries plus their crews were brought from Pola to 5<sup>th</sup> Army. There was still a great demand for long-range guns, since the Italians had deployed very heavy pieces on the lagoons at the mouth of the Sdobba, where they were beyond the reach of the defending artillery and could strike at the entire Karst plateau.

### **c. Events during the pause in fighting (5-9 November)**

The powerful massed attacks by the Italians in the third Isonzo battle had pinned down Aus-Hung. forces on the entire Southwest Front; therefore the leadership was able only with difficulty to find troops to spare in the less threatened sectors for the creation of some very scanty reserves. Moreover, the units of XVI and VII Corps which were taken from the line during the pause in fighting at Görz and on the Karst were still partly or wholly unfit for combat; at least a short period of recuperation would be needed to restore their capabilities by resting and by absorbing replacements.

The Italian high command correctly reckoned that the exhausted and much smaller defending force shouldn't be given time to replenish and reorganize its units. This was why, as noted above, they ordered the Army commanders that although the major offensive was suspended, very heavy pressure should be maintained on the Aus-Hung. front. These instructions governed the combat activity in the first days of the pause between the two battles. Especially on the Karst plateau, the troops didn't get to rest. On 5 November the entire front was under fire by artillery of all calibers, which were joined between San Martino and Mt dei sei Busi by an abundance of trench mortars. In the afternoon an Italian battle group made a surprise attack on the center of 17 ID and penetrated the lines of IR # 61. The commander of 34 Inf Bde, Col. Boleslav Wolf, immediately led counterattacks which led to the recovery of most of the trenches occupied by the enemy. Then, however, new Italian units entered the action; on the 6<sup>th</sup> and in the following night there was very stubborn fighting. By early 7 November the troops from 17 ID (parts of IR # 43, 46 and 61) and of 1st Inf Bn 42 from the Army reserves - which were gradually committed to the fray - were able to throw the enemy back in most places. The Italians just retained two parts of the trenches on both sides of the carriage

route between Ruins 143 and San Martino. IR # 61 bore the brunt of these three days of bitter fighting, and lost half of its effective strength.

In the following three days, the efforts by our troops to recover their strength were still hindered by infantry thrusts and by fire from artillery and trench mortars.

On 6 November, storm troops from 58 ID took some trenches on the Podgora from the Italians. Cannon brought close to the front on the Karst successfully bombarded the Isonzo bridges between Sagrado and Pieris, which were in heavy use during these days.

In the afternoon of 9 November some local thrusts by the enemy at Plava and on the Podgora, plus a powerful bombardment of the northern sector of the Karst, heralded the start of the fourth Isonzo battle.

Around 2:00 PM the positions at Plava were suddenly hit by a very strong barrage from guns of all calibers. Around 3:00 PM several battalions advanced against Zagora and Heights # 383, but soon had to pull back under the defenders' fire. Some Italian troops were preparing to resume the advance, but were dispersed by several well-aimed salvos; they made no attempt at further attacks this day.

Around the same time, parts of 12 Italian ID (about four to five battalions) attacked the trenches of 5 Mtn Bde in the southern part of Podgora; they launched surprise thrusts, without much artillery preparation, from sap trenches they had constructed close to our lines. By committing reserves, the enemy renewed these attacks four times, but were shattered by the concentrated defensive fire of all weapons systems with heavy casualties. To prevent any repetition of such surprises in the future, GM Zeidler ordered that the enemy's advanced positions on the Podgora should be destroyed, and instructed 5 Mtn Bde to prepare a storm troop operation for this purpose.

In the last few days the bombardment by the Italian artillery and trench mortars against the positions and reserves on Mt S Michele, the area east of the Ruin heights, and on both sides of Mt dei sei Busi had been tolerable, but on the 9<sup>th</sup> it swelled again to an extraordinary strength. At the same time, many air squadrons bombed our reserves, rest camps, command posts and railroad facilities. This was the direct introduction to the fourth battle of the Isonzo.

## **2. The general offensive in the first phase of the battle, 5-9 November**

Around noon on 10 November the battle began after a four-hour artillery preparation of unprecedented intensity. There were powerful attacks at Podgora and a general, centrally-controlled mass offensive on the 20 km front between Monte Sabotino and Heights # 118 which protected the Görz bridgehead and the northern part of the Karst plateau

### **a. The main attack of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army on Görz, 10-13 November**

During the third Isonzo battle, the attack by the reinforced southern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army on Mt Sabotino and the Podgora had won no noteworthy success despite very heavy sacrifice. The enemy therefore now showed some reluctance to select these bulwarks of the bridgehead, which their troops feared as "impregnable", as the first targets of the new attack. Instead, the main thrust by the Italian units in front of the Görz bridgehead was directed against 4 Mtn Bde and 60 Inf Bde at Oslavija.

The lessons which the enemy learned in the earlier battles caused them to change the method of their artillery preparation. They had recognized that by concentrating their fire in a narrower time and area before the infantry attack they achieved better results than by bombarding a broader and deeper portion of the defenses for several days. The artillery preparation for each thrust was now shorter, more concentrated, and considerably livelier. Thus on the Isonzo "the hour of the birth of the drum fire typical of modern warfare had arrived. And at the same time the response of the defending artillery developed into a true 'barrage fire.' By experience, the art of gunnery was turning into a firm system. Moreover, the cooperation of infantry and artillery for the first time was truly effective."<sup>306</sup>

#### 10 November

A rain storm in the early morning had delayed the start of the battle. Later in the morning, as the weather and the visibility improved, the Italian artillery brought the entire front of the bridgehead under fire of rising intensity.

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306 Pitreich, "Sperrfeuer", p. 259

After the destructive bombardment of the entire bridgehead had lasted for just three hours, toward noon it swelled for another hour into a drum fire by all the guns and trench mortars. Then strong groups of infantry stormed ahead onto Monte Sabotino and on both sides of the road toward the ridge of the Oslavija church, as well as against the positions of the Podgora South sector (on both sides of Heights # 184).

The gallantly advancing battalions of 4 Italian ID on the northern wing reached the barriers in their first onslaught, and here were able to bring up a gun to within about 50 meters of our trenches. Now, however, long-range fire from the batteries of XVI Corps stationed on the high ground north of Mt Santo and the defensive fire of 60 Inf Bde struck the attackers in the front and flank, and threw their ranks into confusion. The mass of troops soon fled back to the protection of their starting points. The advance of the Italian Granatieri Bde in the Piumica valley was no more successful; their thrust against San Mauro and their planned envelopment of Heights # 188 from the north broke apart under the artillery and machine gun fire of the defenders. This setback renewed the Italians' belief that Mt Sabotino was impregnable; their commander gave up all further attacks here.<sup>307</sup>

Meanwhile the Italians had also advanced against the k.u.k. 4 Mtn Bde. In cooperation with the right wing of 4 Italian ID, the 11 ID with its three brigades attacked along the St Florian-Pevma road toward Heights # 188 and the Grafenberg. From the start, however, the troops suffered heavy casualties under cross fire from artillery and machine guns; finally they were only able to establish themselves in front of the barriers.

The most stubborn fighting once again occurred at Podgora South, where the rainstorm didn't keep the 12 Italian ID from launching repeated assaults. Here the fighting lasted after dark and toward midnight, at which time the enemy who'd broken into part of the trench west of Heights # 184 were driven out in a brief counterattack by the reserves of 5 Mtn Bde.

#### 11 November

On 11 November the divisions of the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army attacked on a new and smaller front between the Piumicabach and Podgora. Again the guns thundered from morning until noon,

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307 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 496

and then several regiments began their operation against Podgora South. An accurate barrage and especially the machine gun fire from the flanks shattered repeated attacks with heavy losses. The enemy were finally able to establish themselves only in a part of the trench west of Heights # 184; this sector would change owners frequently in the next few days. At Oslavija an assault by several battalions was repulsed; when the Italians concentrated for later attacks they were dispersed by artillery fire, and the area became quiet. However, pilots reported that there were large troop encampments in the area west of Görz, so it was believed that the fight would continue.

Except for their temporary penetration into the trench on the Podgora, the attackers had won no success in the first two days of the battle, but had suffered very heavy casualties.<sup>308</sup>

#### 12 November

On 12 November the Italian artillery deployed around the bridgehead concentrated their powerful fire against the heights at Oslavija and Pevma, and against all of the Podgora. Infantry attacks started in the morning, but gained the enemy no ground except for the piece of trench west of Heights # 184 that has already been mentioned. Around noon the artillery switched to drum fire, which was followed by a massive attack of several Italian brigades on the front Oslavija-Lucinico. As in earlier days, the enemy's main efforts were directed against Oslavija and Heights # 184; the troops on the heights west of Pevma hung back, probably because of the well-known accuracy of the cross-fire by our batteries. After repeated attacks and the commitment of strong reserves, Italian storm troops penetrated our lines next to the church of Oslavija. In all other sectors the defenders hurled back the Italian masses.

#### 13 November

The Italian infantry, exhausted after their furious offensive, had to cut down their activity on the following day. However, our positions that had been the center of the recent fighting were hit all the more heavily by numerous high-angle batteries and heavy trench mortars. The city of Görz was also temporarily a target for heavy caliber guns. Quietly and carefully the commanders of 58 ID (GM Zeidler) and of 4 Mtn Bde (Col. Dani)

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308 Tosti (p. 108) reports that on 11 November the Granatieri Brigade had just 3200 men left out of the 6000 who had started the battle.

made ready to recover the lost position on the ridge by the Oslavija church. After a short artillery preparation several companies of the Dalmatian LW IR # 37 and Hungarian Battalion III/69, led by Col Brückner, fell upon the enemy in an irresistible charge, broke into the lost trench and brought the first line back into our hands. 10 officers and over 500 men were taken prisoner by the gallant soldiers. The two Italian brigades which had moved up in the last few days to points just in front of our works at Heights # 188-Oslavija and west of Pevma now had to withdraw to their starting points of 10 November.<sup>309</sup>

#### Reactions of the opposing generals

The unfortunate experiences in the position on the slope on the western side of Heights # 184 (the southern part of the Podgora) forced XVI Corps HQ to move the main line of resistance back about 200 meters east, to the crest. Here a new entrenchment had already been completely prepared. Holding it did prove to be much easier and less costly than hanging on to the position on the slope, where reserves had arrived too late or not at all, and where the much larger enemy force could strike from nearby sap trenches. In both the earlier and recent fighting the defense of this line had caused large and unnecessary casualties.

After carefully and systematically destroying all the works, the garrison of this part of the trench pulled back to the new line on the crest in the nights of 13-14 and 14-15 November, without interference from the Italians. XVI Corps received a reinforcement of heavy howitzers to enhance their domination of the ground in front of the Podgora.

In the Italian camp, the setback on 13 November led to disputes between the commander of VI Corps (G.Lt Capello), who was attacking at Görz, and his Army commander G.Lt Frugoni who had ordered him to continue the assault on 14 November without pausing. Capello sent the high command a report about the fighting to date, which presented an unsettling picture of the condition of the troops. Therefore Cadorna decided that the operations in front of the Görz bridgehead should be immediately interrupted.<sup>310</sup>

Thus the first phase of the fourth Isonzo battle ended in this

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309 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 503

310 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 503

sector. The course of the fighting had been strongly influenced by inclement weather. The almost continuous bombardments left thousands of shell holes on the battlefield in front of the Görz bridgehead, which was turned into a morass of mud, in places knee-deep. The fury of the Italian attacks with a 3:1 numerical superiority (nine brigades had stormed the bridgehead) was thus diminished to the advantage of the defenders. All the troops, defenders as well as attackers, suffered unspeakably in the continuing dampness and cold; illnesses were spreading to an alarming degree.

### **b. Secondary attacks by II Italian Corps at Plava, 10-12 November**

At the same time as the main assault on Görz, the II Italian Corps conducted diversionary attacks in the sector of the k.u.k. 1 Mtn Bde at Plava. Their goal was the same as previously. This secondary operation was doomed to defeat from the start.

Against the three battalions of 1 Mtn Bde between Descla and Zagora, II Corps sent their main body - half of 32 ID attacked between Globna and Heights # 383, while farther south the rest of 32 ID plus 3 ID were ready to strike.

At noon on 10 November the enemy stormed the defensive positions after several hours of bombardment. In front of Globna, at Heights # 383 and at Paljevo the advance of 32 ID and the left wing of 3 ID soon stalled under well-aimed defensive fire. On the other hand, toward evening a strong battle group from 3 ID set foot in part of the sector at Zagora after seven assaults that culminated in hand-to-hand fighting. Even this small gain had to be relinquished in the morning hours of 11 November; a counterattack by Battalions IV/4, IV/22 and a combined March Battalion not only recovered the lost portion of our position, but also several adjacent Italian trenches. With glorious persistence, on 11 November the commander of II Corps, General Garioni, sent fresh troops over the fields littered with corpses to again attack Zagora. Battalions from four or five different regiments repeatedly stormed against our weak lines in this narrow area until noon. Each time they were either mowed down completely by effective machine gun and artillery fire, or in places were thrown back in a bitter melee involving hand grenades and rifle butts.<sup>311</sup> Finally the stubborn attackers fell

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311 Here the Battalions IV/4, IV/22, III/2 BH and a combined March Battalion of 18 ID contended against odds of 3:1 or 4:1.

back into their own trenches; however the enemy artillery continued all day to pound our battle and reserve positions with fire.

Italian thrusts against Heights # 383 and the town of Paljevo were hindered by the batteries of 18 ID. There was a continuous fire fight that lasted until noon on 12 November. A new infantry assault was attempted in the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> after a very heavy bombardment, but repulsed with heavy casualties. In the evening the enemy gave up the fight completely, and the front was quiet until 18 November. The 18 ID relieved their worn-out battalions from the front, and were still able to keep four battalions in reserve.

### **c. Italian attacks on the Karst front, 10-11 November**

The extremely heavy bombardment of the positions on the Doberdo plateau in the afternoon of 9 November was followed on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> by powerful infantry attacks by the Army of the Duke of Aosta against the entire front of the k.u.k. VII Corps and certain sectors of III Corps.

On these two days of major battle the enemy's main body was still carrying out a coordinated general offensive against the greater part of the Karst front. In the following days of this phase of the battle the seriously weakened Italians would only be able to mount thrusts at parts of the line.

#### 10 November

The operation was initiated in the morning of 10 November with three hours of bombardment, mainly by guns of heavy caliber; they caused significant casualties as well as damage to the barricades and fortifications. Around 11:00 AM, after the fire was re-directed from the forward trenches to the reserve areas, many strong attack groups from the XI and XIII Italian Corps advanced against the entire front of the k.u.k. VII Corps. The 29 Italian ID (which had stayed in line when the rest of XIV Corps went into reserve) and 22 ID (which had just come to the front) attacked the seasoned troops of the Alpine lands' 6 ID and of Hungarian 16 Lst Mtn Bde. After a hot and very bitter action on Mt S Michele and at San Martino, which lasted past noon, the Italians were thrown back. Our artillery gave excellent support to the defenders, and repeatedly smashed reserve forces that were marching through Sdraussina to open new attacks.

Between San Martino and the road at Kote 111 the k.u.k. 17 ID repulsed all attacks by the 21 and 25 ID. In the afternoon the enemy concentrated their strength and renewed the attack; they were able to penetrate the lines in two places. Then the gallant Hungarian IR # 39, led by Col. Joseph Ritter von Hittl, counter-attacked the Italians and drove them out. Another part of the trench west of Kote 111 was recovered by FJB # 24 early on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

31 ID and half of 20 ID attacked 43 LW Inf Bde on the southern wing of VII Corps. Waves of storming infantry pushed repeatedly against Mt dei sei Busi and the area farther north, but were stopped in front of the barricades by the accurate fire of the defending Styrian Landwehr. Several batteries from FKR # 8 and the 1st Bn of FHR # 3 intervened with very effective flanking fire from the neighboring sector of the k.u.k. III Corps. The battalions of 16 Italian ID which attacked the line of III Corps on the hills between Monfalcone and Kuppe 121 were soon dispersed by artillery fire. Around 5:00 PM a heavy storm put an end to the fighting and enveloped the battlefield in complete darkness.

#### 11 November

In outline, the last general offensive by 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army on 11 November was a rather exact repetition of the operation of the day before. Once again drum fire from hundreds of Italian guns thundered against the furrowed plateau of Doberdo for three hours (from 8:00 to 11:00 AM); at noon the entire line of their infantry advanced to the attack. The story of this last great day of battle doesn't need to be given in great detail. With these attacks, which were delivered with force and stubbornness until evening, the battle reached its first climax.

Thanks to the accuracy of the artillery, whose fire broke up the enemy reserves in their assembly areas, the troops of FML Schönburg-Hartenstein on Mt S Michele were able to repulse the oncoming regiments. Some Italians broke into the line at Peteano, but were thrown out again by Jaeger and Bosniaks.

In the sector of 17 ID, Col. Göttlicher's 111 Lst Inf Bde had returned to the front in the night of 10-11 November, replacing IR # 43. Throughout the 11<sup>th</sup>, the enemy repeatedly launched strong assaults against the Division's IR # 39 and 46, which were hard pressed. Finally, however, they were able to drive the much larger Italian forces back by evening.

On both sides of Kote 111, after heavy combat in the night, there was only a firefight during the day. On the other hand, 31 Italian ID opened a major assault in the area of Mt dei sei Busi; by evening the Marburg Landwehr had repulsed five mass attacks in a heroic action.

Since the Italian attacks against the southern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army had collapsed on the 10<sup>th</sup>, the III Corps enjoyed relative quiet on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the days thereafter. Mostly there was just fighting between the heavy batteries, while the lighter field batteries of III Corps intervened successfully in the actions of VII Corps. On many days the enemy bombardment rose to great intensity along certain parts of the front, especially on the heights east of Monfalcone, and infantry attacks were expected; however, the next assault here didn't come until 22 November.

The mighty battle on the 11<sup>th</sup> at Görz and on the Karst obliged 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to bring some of their reserves closer to the front. The three battalions at Tolmein (II/37, I/98 and XI Ma Bn of IR 28) marched to Chiapovano. IR # 17 was supposed to return to 6 ID as soon as possible. The deployment of the other reserves wasn't altered. Their condition and strength was satisfactory; only 20 Hon ID still had less than half of its authorized personnel.

As of 12 November, the reserves of VII Corps consisted of IR # 61 and k.k. Lst IR # 31 and 32 (all temporarily reduced to two battalions). There was also one fully operational battalion of k.u. Lst IR # 29. IR # 43 could be used if necessary.

To retaliate for the repeated enemy air attacks on towns behind our front, the Flieger Companies on the entire Southwest Front were instructed to mount coordinated raids against selected targets - the HQ of high-ranking Italian commanders and important military and economic facilities. In the following days these raids were successfully carried out.

#### **d. The Italians try to break through by a double envelopment of Mt S Michele, 12-15 November**

After two days of attacks by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army against the front of the k.u.k. VII Corps had ended without success, the enemy sought to obtain their objective - Mt S Michele - by a strong envelopment assault; they attacked from the north out of the Peteano area, while simultaneously trying to break through

the center of the k.u.k. VII Corps southwest of San Martino. Therefore on 12 November the battle became a series of individual actions which were extraordinarily bitter and involved strong forces.

12 November

At noon on 12 November several Italian regiments thrust against the northern slope and summit of Mt S Michele, but were easily repulsed by 12 Inf Bde, which was well supported by the artillery. A second assault soon followed, and led to a temporary break-in south of Peteano; finally, however, the Italians were defeated when the Inner Austrian Jaeger Battalions # 7 and 9 restored the situation with a counterattack. A third assault, with strong reserves deployed in depth, collapsed under the concentrated fire of the defenders' artillery and machine guns. The fighting died out as darkness fell.

Between Mt S Michele and San Martino there was only a fire fight, and in the first hours of the afternoon the right wing of 17 ID repulsed some light attacks. On the other hand, two or three regiments struck 111 Lst Inf Bde on both sides of Kote 111; although strong reserves also joined the attack they were thrown back with bloody losses by evening.<sup>312</sup> The front of 22 LW ID wasn't assaulted. IR # 46, parts of which had been in the defensive line since the start of the third battle, was relieved by IR # 61.

As the fighting by VII Corps became more stubborn, 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ ordered IR # 17 to be held at St Peter, ready to intervene. In place of this Regiment, XVI Corps was given Battalion III/57 from the Army's reserve; it moved to the Görz sector from Ravnica. The three battalions east of Santa Luzia which were under Army HQ reached Chiapovano on 12 November, and Vogersko on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>.

13 November

The fighting reached a greater intensity on 13 November, and its climax on the 14<sup>th</sup>, after which it declined into a pause of two days. The enemy attacked the same parts of the front as on the 12<sup>th</sup>. After the Italian artillery once again blasted the entire sector of the k.u.k. VII Corps for three hours, concentrated and very large forces assaulted the area between the Isonzo and the summit of Mt S Michele and the line southeast of Heights # 197 as far as Kote 111 (inclusive). On the northern slope of Mt S Michele they seized a portion of the foremost defenses about 600 paces wide. Half a battalion from BH IR # 2 immediately

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312 In front of a company of 17 ID next to the carriage route from San Martino to Ruins # 143 lay the bodies of 500 dead or badly wounded attackers.

counter-attacked, but this force was too weak to prevail. Therefore the planned operation to recover the position was postponed until night, when the preparations and the assault itself would have some cover against the murderous cross fire by the Italian artillery on the exposed slope of Mt S Michele.

In the southern sector of the offensive, an isolated early thrust by several enemy battalions was defeated by the right wing of the k.u.k. 17 ID. After several hours of strong artillery fire against our positions, in the afternoon three or four brigades of 21 and 25 ID mounted a massive assault; however, it was quickly repulsed in hand-to-hand fighting by the gallant soldiers of the k.u.k. 33 Inf Bde and k.k. 111 Lst Inf Bde.

Around 9:00 PM the Jaeger Battalions # 7 and 9, though greatly reduced by casualties, crowned the day's successes with a night-time counterattack. They recovered the entire forward position north of the S Michele summit, taking prisoners from several regiments of the Italian 29 ID.

The casualties of VII Corps on this day - 140 dead and 400 wounded - were not excessively high. By observation, and especially by intercepting enemy radio messages, it was learned that the losses of the attackers were very great.<sup>313</sup>

On the other parts of the Karst front the defenders could easily deal with some diversionary feint attacks, although they were occasionally accompanied by very strong artillery fire.

#### 14 November

Although attacks against all other sectors of 5<sup>th</sup> Army were halted on 14 November, fighting raged on along the Karst. In an early surprise attack, the Italians were able to penetrate the sector of the Kremsier k.k. Lst IR # 25 (attached to 17 ID). They couldn't push ahead or widen their penetration because they were hindered by our artillery fire. A counterattack in this area was planned for the evening.

Toward noon on the 14<sup>th</sup> a new and heavy drum fire was directed against both the sectors selected by the Italian Army commander, and was followed by a mighty infantry attack. After repelling

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313 According to one intercepted enemy message, one of the battalions of the eight to ten Italian regiments engaged this day on the Karst had lost 8 officers and 476 men.

several assaults in hand-to-hand combat, around 4:00 PM the 6 ID lost part of the trench, about 400 paces broad, south of Peteano. When darkness fell, strong Italian forces north of this penetration tried to enlarge their gains with repeated attacks, but were driven back by BH IR # 2. Soon afterwards the commander of 12 Inf Bde, GM Rudolf Müller, ably led a counterattack by BH IR # 2, parts of k.u. Lst IR # 17, and the remnants of FJB # 8; after a bitter melee they recovered the lost trench along its entire length. Our troops even followed the retreating enemy beyond the position. Italian reserves arrived too late and were compelled to pull back. The fighting gradually abated.

The attackers tried to expand the area in which they had penetrated the lines of 17 ID, but were repulsed. A thrust against 22 LW ID on Mt dei sei Busi broke apart under cross fire from the defending batteries of VII and III Corps.

IR # 43, Lst Inf Bn 157 (from the Army reserves) and parts of k.k. Lst IR # 25 launched a night-time counterattack to recover the trench north of Milestone 111, but they had no success. Strong enemy forces with numerous machine guns held fast to the area they had taken. Since there were no fresh reserves, the operation was canceled and a new defensive line was occupied 200 paces behind the forward trenches now held by the Italians. Lst IR # 25, which had lost half its personnel in the fighting, left the front in the night of 14-15 November and was replaced by parts of IR # 43. In the adjacent sector to the south, where the Eger Lst IR # 6 had gallantly defended its entire position, some of the companies had also been reduced to half-strength.

Overall the casualties in this day of battle were very heavy. VII Corps had lost 1400 men dead and wounded plus about 350 missing. Therefore 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ placed the three battalions assembled at Vogersko under VII Corps; Archduke Joseph sent Bn I/98 and the XI March Battalion of IR 28 to Biglia to join 6 ID, and Bn II/37 to Devetaki (in the Vallone valley) to join 17 ID. IR # 17, which wasn't ready yet for the front, was pulled back to Schön Pass and Osek.

#### 15 November

The five days' contest for possession of the hotly-contested Mt S Michele continued on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but ended on the night of 15-16 November. It seemed that the enemy commanders had united their last fresh units to attempt to break through and envelop the northern slope of Mt S Michele, because the divisional sectors

farther south weren't seriously attacked any more.

From dawn on 15 November the hurricane of fire from the Italian guns roared in a wide circle against the right wing and center of the Graz 6 ID. The fresh enemy brigades had already begun to attack around 7:00 AM. They temporarily broke into the line again in the same area as on the day before. Several companies of the Szekesfehervar k.u. Lst IR # 17, which was very distinguished in this battle, counterattacked around 10:00 AM and again drove out the Italian storm troops. However, very damaging cross fire from the enemy's heavy guns forced a new evacuation of this completely destroyed position, which moreover was vulnerable from nearby Mt Fortin on its flank and partly from the rear. Toward noon a massive Italian assault pushed into the position, which had been completely leveled by concentrated artillery fire, and even beyond it. The remnants of BH IR # 2, FJB # 8 and k.u. Lst IR # 17 threw themselves against the enemy, defying death. With excellent support from the artillery, they were not only able to halt the much larger Italian force, but in a stubborn action they once more drove them out of the lost first line of trenches. North of this sector as far as the Isonzo the foremost line was held only with difficulty against continued assaults.

Around 5:00 PM the Italians resumed their attack, bolstered by fresh reinforcements, into this so heavily-contested part of the front. A simultaneous thrust against the summit of Mt S Michele was shattered. Counterattacks during the night brought the lost parts of the battle line back into the hands of Schönburg's 6 ID, except for a stretch of about 100 paces. This last part of the trench was given up to the enemy; holding it further would have been unwise because it was exposed to especially effective Italian artillery fire; many more casualties would have been suffered due to the inadequate protection.

This action had involved only the sector of 6 ID, but was especially stubborn and drawn-out because the enemy kept feeding it with fresh troops. It closed the first phase of the fourth Isonzo battle successfully for the defenders. VII Corps had held onto most of its battle line; a few insignificant parts of the first line of defense had to be given up in order to conserve men for the rest of what the Italians clearly expected to be a battle of attrition. Fortunately the enemy halted the fighting for a two-day pause. This was very convenient for the defenders, whose troops had been fighting almost continuously, enduring heavy combat, and naturally had an urgent need for a

breathing space.<sup>314</sup>

### **e. Measures to strengthen the Aus-Hung. Isonzo front**

Already during the third Isonzo battle the commander of the Southwest Front, Archduke Eugene, had held back about six battalions in Tyrol and two more in Carinthia in readiness to move to the Isonzo if necessary. He intended to soon return the five battalions which had already been drawn from Carinthia, as he had already returned the first troops from Tyrol. However on 14 November he was forced by the stubbornly conducted Italian assaults to send the IV and V Bns of IR # 27, which were being held at Tarvis, to the Wippach valley to join 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

The high command followed the events in the southwest with serious concern. Because of the general situation, and especially the imminent session of the parliament at Rome, the Aus-Hung. high command had to count on further major exertions by the Italians. From hour to hour it became more questionable whether 5<sup>th</sup> Army would be equal to the continuing heavy fighting. According to a report on 11 November, the available reserves (20,000 riflemen) belonged mostly to units which had already suffered severely and which could no longer be counted on unconditionally to intervene decisively in a crisis and hold out.

The reports from the front were still confident and indicated that the condition of the troops was relatively good. Nevertheless the AOK at Teschen feared that the troops would become exhausted from the prolonged fighting, in which they were seldom relieved, and from the bad weather. Therefore they decided to continue to monitor the strength of 5<sup>th</sup> Army and its use of reserves, while taking measures to have reinforcements available to send before a crisis arose.

As the battle progressed, on 14 November the AOK again asked 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to estimate, based on previous fighting, how many days their units could safely hold the front if the Italian offensive didn't subside. 5<sup>th</sup> Army, however, couldn't give an unequivocal

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314 A glance at the strength figures of 17 ID provides evidence of the intensity of the actions. From 15 October to 15 November the Division lost 250 officers and 11,400 men; on 17 November, despite the incorporation of the available replacements, it had just 7500 combat troops. (Schwartz, Vol. V, p. 172.)

answer because their ability to hold out depended not only on the strength of their own troops, but also on the enemy's numerical superiority and also on the techniques of their artillery, which were improving daily. From 18 October to mid-November the 5<sup>th</sup> Army had lost about 60,000 combat troops, of which VII Corps alone had lost 31,000.

Naturally the most pressing concern of the Army commander was that he wasn't able to relieve the divisions fighting in the decisive sector on the Karst, despite all his efforts. The next March formations wouldn't be available until the 20<sup>th</sup>. According to prisoners the Italian attacks would continue until 1 December. Therefore it was Borojevic's best guess, based on experiences on this front, that he could be sure of holding the line only if he had another full-strength division, in addition to the reserves already available, to relieve the divisions of VII Corps. He was less concerned about the other sectors, but could no longer pull any units away from them. Otherwise, as long as the supply of artillery ammunition remained plentiful the Army commander was still confident that he could deal with events as they unfolded.

The Front HQ at Marburg supplemented this report by 5<sup>th</sup> Army. They stated that the power of resistance of the troops on the Isonzo wasn't unlimited. If the larger enemy force continued to attack for weeks, the arrival of units from other fronts, if they did become available, shouldn't be delayed. Timely reinforcements could conserve the strength of the veteran troops before it was worn down by the persistent struggle.

Therefore the Chief of the General Staff decided to send a unit to the Isonzo front quickly; this was 9 ID, which was stationed behind South Army on the eastern front in the reserves of the high command. Since this Division alone didn't seem sufficient to overcome the crisis, which along with the battle might last until December, GO Conrad also wanted to send a second unit, the 5 ID of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. To make this possible, he asked the Chief of the German General Staff to have one of the divisions which were now available in the Balkans replace 5 ID in 7<sup>th</sup> Army. However, the attitude of Romania prevented Falkenhayn from agreeing to weaken the forces now assembling in the Banat. Conrad nonetheless decided that 9 Inf Bde of 5 ID, which was in reserve of 7<sup>th</sup> Army in northern Bukovina, could follow 9 ID to the Isonzo a week later, even though it couldn't be replaced.

The battalions from Carinthia (IV and V/27) arrived in 5<sup>th</sup> Army's reserve on 15 November, as the fight on the northern slope of Mt

S Michel reached its climax. On this day the Army HQ learned of the transfer of 9 ID; it would detrain at Opcina and initially be at Boroevic's disposal in the Gorjansko-Nabresina area.

Heavy snow storms which restricted visibility forced a pause in the fighting on 16 and 17 November, while the available March formations were incorporated by XVI Corps and 20 Hon ID. Under 17 ID, in the night of 16-17 November the IR # 39 was relieved by # 46, and k.k. Lst IR # 6 by the newly-assigned Bn II/37. Moreover, VII Corps HQ planned in the next few days to regroup their units by sending 106 Lst ID back to the line between 17 ID and 22 LW ID; with more men in line and deployed more deeply, each division would have better possibilities of relieving its troops. However, this plan couldn't be carried out for the time being because of the renewal of fighting and the intention of Army HQ to have VII and III Corps swap places on the Karst plateau.

### **3. The battle breaks down into individual actions at Görz and on the Karst plateau (18 November-1 December)**

#### **a. Plans of the Italian leadership for continuing the fight on the Isonzo**

The result of the first phase of the fourth battle of the Isonzo was once again unsatisfactory for the attackers. Only some isolated parts of the trenches on the Podgora and Mt S Michele, and next to Kote 111 had been taken at the cost of very heavy casualties. Otherwise there had been no success, and the ground gained didn't justify the sacrifice. In this period an Italian minister justly remarked that "the capture of Rome [in 1870] had cost Italy much less these few kilometers of desolate ground on the Karst."

Despite the discouraging reports from his subordinates about the condition of the troops, Cadorna couldn't bring himself to break off the battle. Time was pressing, and the hoped-for success would have to be won as quickly as possible - either the capture of the city of Görz or at least of Mt S Michele. Based on prisoners' statements the Italian high command reckoned that the exhausted Aus-Hung. troops might soon break down; presumably they couldn't continue to withstand the hammer blows against their front. This deceptive hope led the Italian commander to let the offensive continue with stubborn persistence and without

regard for further casualties. This decision, which after three days of unsuccessful fighting was surely not easy, was somewhat justified in that Cadorna still had substantial additional forces. The strategic reserves - X and XIV Corps - had rested for about ten to twelve days. 9 ID was also available to intervene, and half of 35 ID (Brigade Novara) had left the snow-covered front in the Tyrol mountains and arrived west of Görz in mid-November.

Already on 17 November, after a very short pause in the fighting (on the Karst it was just for one day), Cadorna ordered the offensive to resume against the front from Mt Sabotino to the sea. Within this area he left the choice of objectives to the discretion of the Army commanders, and took no part in operational planning or the deployment of the engaged units.<sup>315</sup> He may have hoped that competition between his subordinates would reap success sooner than the methodical approach he had hitherto favored. Thus the last phase of the Italian fall offensive broke down into a series of individual, but large-scale, attrition actions. Only the plan for the bombardment of the city of Görz remained in the hands of the high command.

#### **b. The systematic destruction of the city of Görz by air raids and artillery**

The night of 17-18 November passed quietly on the battle lines west of Görz. Before dawn the stillness was broken only by skirmishing between outposts on the Podgora. Bells were striking five o'clock from some still undamaged belfries. Then, shortly after some dull explosions in the distance, powerful artillery blasts pounded the streets and houses of the still sleeping city, which was enveloped by an unnatural howling thunder. The rumble and crashing grew ever louder, as more heavy-caliber guns deployed in a wide circle around Görz hurled their shells into the city. Houses collapsed, burying all their inhabitants in the rubble, and heavy bombs destroyed entire streets. A red glimmer from large fire storms rose to merge with the early fog of the breaking day. Heavy clouds of thick, dusty smoke lay over the entire Görz basin and afflicted the whole city.

This destructive work didn't surprise the defenders, since Italian prisoners had been saying since the start of the battle that the city would be pounded into rubble if it wasn't captured

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315 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 435

by the middle of November.

As noted above, in Cadorna's orders for resuming the offensive the guidelines for the bombardment of Görz took up the greatest space.<sup>316</sup> All the medium and heavy batteries of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies which were in range of Görz fired on the city from 5:00 to 9:00 AM. Then some of the batteries switched their fire to the military installations of the bridgehead in preparation for the planned attack. From noon to 2:00 PM the air squadrons bombed the city, after which the artillery took over again until darkness fell. Already in the morning about 3000 shells, mostly heavy caliber, had fallen in all parts of Görz.<sup>317</sup> The two hours of bombardment from the air had relatively little effect.

In the first attacks against the bridgehead the Italian artillery had already fired upon the barracks and buildings in which they believed HQ or troops were stationed; they also targeted areas which could be used to deploy batteries, as well as street intersections and bridges. The damage inflicted, however, was insignificant. Now that the city was being systematically bombarded a great amount of private property was destroyed, while the losses to the troops and the damage to military installations remained unimportant. Despite damage to the water lines, it was possible to prevent great fires from spreading. On the other hand, shells hit many large civil and military hospital, clearly marked with the red cross, and other buildings with purely humanitarian purposes.

The Italian leaders justified the destruction of the city on the grounds that it provided comfortable and safe lodging for the Aus-Hung. HQ and troops, and that the population had been almost entirely evacuated.<sup>318</sup> While it was true that the city and its outlying suburbs could have accommodated many troops, the defenders of the bridgehead actually had very few reserves, most of whom had to be stationed in the towns at the foot of the chain of heights just west of the Isonzo because of the limited space in the rear areas. The other reserves were mainly posted in the eastern suburbs, with very few in the city itself. Of

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316 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents, p. 436

317 Ibid. All the 149 mm mortar and heavy cannon batteries took part in bombarding Görz, as well as all the 21, 28 and 30.5 cm howitzer and mortar batteries. The ammunition available for the operation was almost unlimited. During the bombardment of the city the heavy field howitzer batteries had begun to fire on the positions on the Podgora and at Oslavija.

318 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p. 518

the higher HQ, only those of 58 ID and 4 and 5 Mtn Bdes were located in Görz. There were still about 2500 civilians in the city (which had 30,000 inhabitants before the war started).

Our artillery couldn't adequately respond to the long-range enemy batteries which were striking the city on 18 November. Their visibility was hampered by the smoke, and fire coordination was impeded by the destruction of wire communications.

The bombardment and air attacks continued for days in varying strength and soon had reduced one of the most beautiful cities in the southern Monarchy to a pile of rubble. About a fourth of the 2000 houses in the city and its suburbs were completely destroyed, and hundreds more were damaged. Precious cultural monuments and irreplaceable objects of art were destroyed. However, the Italian objective was unfulfilled, since this destruction had no effect on the military situation. The command HQ stayed at their posts in Görz. Even the remaining citizens stayed through the bombardment, establishing living quarters in the cellars of strongly-constructed houses.

### **c. The Italians try to break through at Oslavija and on the Podgora, 18-24 November**

After 4 Mtn Bde had driven a larger enemy force out of Oslavija on 13 November, the Italians realized that they wouldn't be able to permanently secure this much-contested village without simultaneously taking the the heights of Pevma and the ridge next to Heights # 188. The commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, G.Lt Frugoni, was given half of 9 ID by the high command, and by 18 November deployed his forces in front of the Görz bridgehead for a new attack. 4 ID was stationed on both sides of the road north of Heights # 11 while on its right the 11 ID was opposite the ridge on which the Oslavija church stood. The newly inserted combined 9 ID deployed in front of the heights of Pevma-Grafenberg, and 12 ID opposite the Podgora. The principal attacking group, three divisions on a front of just 2 ½ kilometers, was in front of Oslavija; they were accompanied by numerous field artillery batteries which deployed in the foremost line. All high-ranking commanders were supposed to be with their troops "to raise the morale of troops who had suffered continuous casualties, deprivation and illness."<sup>319</sup> All

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319 Zingales, "La guerra sull' Isonzo nel 1915" (Rasegna dell' esercito italiano, 1924, p. 415)

units in front of the bridgehead were under VI Corps, whose commander G.Lt Capello was given authority to decide when the attack should begin.

While the bombardment of Görz continued, the Italians were content on 18 and 19 November to move slightly forward against the positions west of the city, after a strong artillery and trench mortar barrage. In front of Oslavija and Pevma they were driven back by our artillery fire, in front of the Podgora by rifle fire. Local thrusts on the southern wing of the bridgehead were repelled without difficulty. Finally on 20 November at least twelve Italian regiments opened the general assault between the St Florian-Pevma road and the Cormons-Görz railroad.

#### 20 November

In the morning the enemy was able to defeat a battalion which had just been at the front for a few hours, and rather suddenly penetrated the line between Heights # 188 and the Oslavija church. Their further advance was prevented by artillery fire directed against the threatened sector. In the afternoon several battalions from 4 Italian ID also attacked Mt Sabotino, which had been left in peace since the first days of the battle. However, this advance soon came under crossfire from the Aus-Hung. batteries, and collapsed. Reserves came up, but were driven back by effective machine gun fire from 60 Inf Bde. Thereafter the enemy restricted operations against Mt Sabotino to bombardment by heavy caliber guns.

South of Oslavija, troops of 11 Italian ID advanced three times against the Pevma heights. Here also they couldn't withstand the effective flanking fire of our batteries and finally withdrew from in front of the barricades and back to their starting points.

The 12 Italian ID and parts of 9 ID fought more stubbornly on the Podgora. A coordinated mass attack against the southern wing was thrown back at Kuppe # 184 with hand grenades. It was followed by strong thrusts against the heights at the summit (Point 240), and when these also failed there were renewed attempts against Kuppe 184. The fighting ended in the darkness with the entire battle line still in our hands. It had proven easier to hold this position than the original line on the slope facing toward the enemy.

In the evening and night of 20-21 November, 9 ½ companies from

LW IR # 37 and from Bn III/57 counterattacked at Oslavija, but won back only part of the lost trench. Heights # 188, which had been stormed by 4 Italian ID on 20 November, remained in the enemy's hands.

Since all the reserves of 4 Mtn Bde had been committed for the attempt to recover the ridge by the Oslavija church, and since the enemy's general offensive against the bridgehead was still in progress, GM Zeidler was again given IR # 17 from 6 ID. The Regiment had been stationed at Cernizza in the Army's reserve; in the evening of 20 November it marched to Görz, from where one battalion was sent already in the night of 20-21 November to the front of 4 Mtn Bde facing Heights # 188.

#### 21 November

58 ID HQ planned to use IR # 17 to recover Kuppe 188 on 22 November. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the front was to be held under all circumstances while troops were readied and brought into place for the counterattack. However, when the enemy again attacked next to Heights # 188 in the afternoon they soon fled back with heavy losses, and a battalion of LW IR # 37 thrust ahead after them; the battalion recovered the largest part of the lost trench, while the Italians left behind several hundred prisoners. Their attacking group at Oslavija was already much inter-mingled; detachments of eleven Italian units had been part of the offensive.<sup>320</sup>

The enemy didn't make another attempt against Mt Sabotino on 21 November; on the other hand the heights south of Oslavija and especially the entire Podgora were the scenes of heavy assaults and hand-to-hand fighting which lasted until evening and ended with the complete defeat of the Italian 9 and 12 ID.

In the night of 21-22 November the distinguished IR # 17 from Carniola took over the sector between the Piumicabach and Oslavija, while a battalion of LW IR # 37 held the ridge by the church. The rest of the latter regiment moved back temporarily into the northern part of Görz, and then to rehabilitation quarters in Ossegliano. The Galician IR # 80 (of 60 Inf Bde) also left the front and moved to Gojace.

#### 22-24 November

On 22 November the entire bridgehead suffered a very heavy

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320 Zingales, p. 415

bombardment, especially the Oslavija and Podgora sectors and the fortified bridge east of Lucinico.<sup>321</sup> The Italians launched powerful thrusts against the Podgora several times between 11:00 AM and the late afternoon, but were bloodily defeated by the concentrated fire of the defenders. The situation at Oslavija was unchanged all day. In the night of 22-23 November parts of 4 Mtn Bde tried to recover the short stretch of the front southwest of Heights # 188 which was still in the enemy's hands. However, they collided with enemy units which were trying to advance at the same time; the Italians were repulsed, but our own counter-attack had become impossible. After these night actions there were no other assaults on the Görz bridgehead on 23 November; the enemy, however, continued to fire artillery and to edge closer to the obstacles.

Four battalions (including men from Brigade Novara which had left 35 ID in Tyrol) attacked early on the 24<sup>th</sup>, trying to break through on both sides of the Oslavija church. By 8:00 AM they were halted by Battalions II/17 and III/57, which counterattacked and destroyed a group which had tried to hold onto part of the position. Four officers and 270 men from four different regiments were thus taken prisoner; 300 dead and wounded Italians were also counted in front of the trenches of the defending battalions. The enemy made no further assaults on 24 November.

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321 Görz was hit by several hundred heavy shells. In one workshop a 30.5 cm shell killed 21 Landsturm workers and wounded 72 more.

**d. The last phase of fighting at Plava, 18-30 November**

Since the attacks of II Italian Corps at Plava were repulsed between 10 and 12 November, enemy activity here was restricted to the usual bombardment of our lines and to skirmishing.

Meanwhile the resumption of the battle at Görz and on the Karst caused the commander of II Corps to also decide on a last offensive, which began on the 18<sup>th</sup>. His plan was for 3 ID to take the heights north and south of Paljevo and then advance toward the Kuk # 611. Parts of 32 ID guarded the west bank of the Isonzo as far as Anikova, while one brigade was attached to 3 ID and another part of the Division was sent to the Görz sector.

The operations which took place at Plava in the following days differed from the earlier attacks. Instead of a concentrated offensive by strong attacking groups, there was a series of thrusts by smaller groups, designed mainly to pin down the opposing troops rather than to reach wide-ranging goals.

On 18 November a group of several battalions thrust toward Zagora, but was completely defeated in an action of one and a half hours. On the next day the attack was repeated in the afternoon by an entire brigade, after a powerful artillery bombardment. The main body of the attackers was hurled back with heavy losses; some detachments penetrated the defenses on the road west of Zagora, but in the evening were thrown out by a counterattack. The Italians' efforts on the 20<sup>th</sup> to again advance on this road were unsuccessful.

Early on 21 November, four Italian companies made a surprise crossing of the Isonzo downstream from Zagora and dug in along the east bank of the river. The enemy tried to widen this bridgehead through the evening, but were hindered by the fire of our infantry. Then the reserves of 18 ID, after careful artillery preparation, cleared all the enemy troops from the east bank. Finally in the morning of 22 November the Italians attempted a strong attack between Zagora and Paljevo, but were soon halted by well aimed artillery and machine gun fire. In the following days only the enemy batteries and trench mortars were active.

On 26 November, in connection with attacks by VIII and IV Italian Corps which started this day on the upper Isonzo (described further below), a strong attacking group moved

forward between Heights # 383 and Paljevo after suitable artillery preparation. However, they were pinned down by defensive fire in front of the barricades. Toward evening a sudden burst of fire hit the Italian troops who'd slowly inched forward - along with their reserves - and forced them to beat a hasty and disorderly retreat. At 9:00 AM on 27 November a bombardment opened against Heights # 383 and the town of Zagora; at times it escalated to drumfire. Three or four Italian battalions attacked the heights around noon, but couldn't move forward under the defensive fire. At Zagora the Dalmatians of Battalion II/22 repelled the enemy attack with hand grenades. This was the end of the Italian offensive operations in the sector of the k.u.k. 1 Mtn Bde. Only the artillery on both sides continued to fight until the first days of December, with varying intensity.

#### **e. The pincers attack by XI and XIII Italian Corps against Mt S Michele, 18-26 November**

After just a day's pause in the fighting, which the k.u.k. VII Corps used to relieve some of the troops of 17 ID, heavy guns and trench mortars began to pound the entire sector again early on 17 November, and continued until evening. The imminent enemy attack forced 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to place the remaining battalions of 187 Inf Bde at Temnica under VII Corps.

##### 18 November

On 18 November the weather grew warmer after a period of wintry rain and storm, and much of the Duke of Aosta's army again resumed the battle for Mt S Michele. There was no substantial change to the enemy order of battle. Once again the XI Corps was to make the decisive thrust on both sides of Mt S Michele, supported by the left wing of the neighboring XIII Corps in the area east of the "Ruin heights" # 143. Each of these Corps had a brigade and several independent battalions in reserve. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army HQ had also made available, if necessary, a brigade apiece at Versa and Chiopris. The southern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (VII Corps) didn't take part in this action, except for an attack at Selz on 22 November.

The deployment of the units of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Doberdo plateau was also mainly the same. In the fighting that now commenced, the enemy always followed the same tactics until the end of the battle. To gain small local advantages, they concentrated the fire of the mass of guns and trench mortars

stationed around the Karst plateau on small sectors of the Aus-Hung. positions until all the works were fully destroyed and the garrison seemed to have been driven away. Then enemy detachments occupied the ruined trenches, but only until they were counterattacked. This process was repeated except in cases - which often happened during this battle - where both sides let all their guns pound the area continually, so that neither of them could dig in. However, although the enemy persistently tried to break through the first line to the point of self-sacrifice, they were unsuccessful at every part on the front.

From dawn on 18 November the Italian batteries struck Mt S Michele with a mighty rain of steel and iron. The fighting soon again burst into bright flames. Once again the offensive opened with an attempt to win the prize of the stony heights - the key to Görz as well as the Karst - with an envelopment from two sides. The strongest attack was directed against 6 ID on the northern wing of VII Corps. In the area next to the railroad east of Peteano and half way up the slope to the summit of Mt S Michele, troops of the Italian 29 and 22 ID made continuous attempts to break through the front, so that they could envelop Mt S Michele from the north. It was in vain. The enemy did manage to advance onto the northern slope twice during the morning, but both times were thrown back by a counterattack of the XI March Battalion of the Prague IR # 28, which here lost two thirds of its men.<sup>322</sup> Finally it was necessary to evacuate the position during the day because of the frightful bombardment from the flank.

The storm against the summit (Point 275) was fended off; on the other hand, at noon the enemy made progress south of the railroad. Fighting surged back and forth during the whole afternoon, and also through the night. West of S Martino, next to Heights # 197, the 17 ID withstood two attacks at mid-day, and a third in the afternoon; the fighting was hand to hand until evening when the enemy had to withdraw. The Szegedin IR # 46 under Lt Col. Zeiss was especially distinguished here.

#### 19-20 November

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322 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The active battalions of IR # 28 had been disbanded earlier in the year for misconduct on the Russian front. This gallant action by the March Battalion began the process of restoring the Regiment's reputation, and in 1916 it again expanded to full size. The authorities never had reason to complain about the prowess of Czech troops on the Italian front.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> the Italians broke off their attack against the northern wing, but continued their attempt to envelop Mt S Michele from the south. In the morning their thrust against the southern slope was thrown back by the k.u. 16 Lst Mtn Bde. In the afternoon 17 ID was able to repel the attacks of the Italian 21 ID east of Ruins # 143. To help 6 ID, VII Corps HQ gave the Division two Landsturm battalions from 187 Inf Bde; in the night of 20-21 November they relieved IR # 7 on Mt S Michele. This Regiment, in turn, reinforced the Isonzo sector east of Peteano, where the Italians' attempts to break through were becoming ever heavier.

On 20 November the enemy repeated their attempt to envelop Mt S Michele from two sides. In the night, part of the k.u.k. 12 Inf Bde were able to clear the Italians out of the places where they had penetrated the lines on the northern slope. 17 ID repulsed an attacking group of three regiments around 8:00 AM, and a second thrust toward noon. In the afternoon, after a day-long pause, there was a mighty attack on the railroad at Peteano and the area farther south. This action lasted into the night. Because of the enemy's superior numbers and powerful artillery fire, the remnants of the garrison of a strong point ahead of the line on the railroad east of Peteano, and of a small part of the slope, had to pull back. This unimportant success was the only one the enemy could claim during a whole day of fighting on the northern wing of VII Corps, and had been purchased with disproportionately heavy casualties. However, the continuing losses of 6 ID caused the HQ of the k.u.k. VII Corps concern about the long-term prospects of holding Mt S Michele. They asked for and received from Army HQ the two battalions of IR # 27 which had been stationed at Biglia since 17 November. Since IR # 17 had been placed under XVI Corps for the fighting at Görz, at the moment the only remaining reserve unit under Army HQ was 20 Hon ID. On the other hand, 9 ID began to arrive at Proseco on the 19<sup>th</sup>, and all of its troops were unloaded by 21 November.

#### 21 November

On the 21<sup>st</sup>, only the southern slope of Mt S Michele came under attack. Here three Italian regiments thrust ahead at mid-day and were able to push back the center of k.u. Lst IR # 29 west of the church at Point # 197. Effective fire from the sector's artillery hindered the arrival of enemy reserves and any widening of the penetration. A counterattack by 16 Lst Mtn Bde, along with parts of IR # 7 and 61, didn't recover the entire

lost position. Therefore the new battle line had to be bent back from the northwestern corner of S Martino through the church at Point # 197; north of the church it joined the original first line on the southern slope of Mt S Michele.

The enemy's continuing attempts to take Mt S Michele and Görz, and the extraordinary casualties in the sectors under attack, forced GdI Borojevic to order 9 ID to gradually relieve 28 ID in III Corps; IR # 96 was to leave the sector of 61 ID. 28 ID would then absorb available replacement troops and serve as the Army's reserve behind III Corps. Moreover, VII Corps HQ would immediately have the rebuilt 20 Hon ID relieve all the troops in the sector of 6 ID. XV Corps would pull from the line the remaining battalions from Carinthia (III/18 and IV/77) and hold them ready to entrain at Ovcja Draga. The artillery wouldn't be affected by the planned troop movements.

On this day 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ learned that the high command was sending 9 Inf Bde, which would arrive at Ovcja Draga on 25 November and initially would be in the Army's reserves in the Wippach valley.

At the same time, HQ of Southwest Front ordered four battalions to be transported to 5<sup>th</sup> Army from Tyrol. These troops (k.k. Lst Inf Bns 165 and 169, Tyrol Lst Bn III and Res Bn III/37) arrived at Ovcja Draga during 23 November and were assigned to XVI Corps.

The new grouping of the units was based on the decision of the high command to hold onto the whole defensive front regardless of circumstances. Above all, an enemy advance into the Rubbia area wouldn't be tolerated, since this would not only enable them to finally envelop Mt S Michele, but force both VII and XVI Corps to significantly and permanently strengthen their inner wings. It didn't seem advisable at this time to weaken the northern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, even though it wasn't under attack. This was because a new offensive on the upper Isonzo was always possible (and in fact would soon take place). Also, an adequate garrison was needed in this more or less independent sector to relieve Army HQ of anxiety about sending reinforcements in case the Italians mounted a large scale operation against Tolmein.

The reason why the enemy had been able to win several partial successes against the northern wing of VII Corps was the layout of the front after the defensive line had been pulled back from the edge of the Karst during the summer battles. From that time the sector between the summit of Mt S Michele and the front on the bank of the Isonzo between Peteano and Rubbia (which hadn't

moved) formed a hook running to the north. It was bombarded from the flank and even from the rear by the enemy artillery stationed nearby on Mt Fortin and even by heavy battery groups in the Mossa-Valisella area. The farther this line was pulled back toward the mouth of the Wippach, the more it would be exposed to this flanking fire and suffer further weakening. Therefore a more favorable location would have to be found for this position, which must be held under all circumstances, somewhere between the present location which jutted out toward the enemy and a flatter line far to the rear. To meet this requirement, VII Corps HQ was now building trenches between the eastern part of Heights # 275 and the Isonzo; they ran just west of Boschini and reached the Isonzo next to the mouth of the Wippach. Meanwhile, however, VII Corps was still able to hold onto most of the original foremost battle line despite its tactically unfavorable location.

The arrival of reinforcements now permitted the temporary relief of some units in the areas where they were approaching exhaustion. However, great care was needed to avoid committing new troops, who were unfamiliar with this battlefield, to critical areas before they had time to become accustomed to the conditions on the Karst. Therefore 9 ID would be sent to the less-endangered southern wing of the front, freeing 28 ID for later use in a more difficult area. For the most difficult sector (Mt S Michele and the area farther south), two divisions should be available so they could be constantly rotated. Finally, it was very important to have a large supply of ammunition at hand; the high command did all they could to meet this requirement. The Land Defense HQ of Tyrol and the HQ of Armeegruppe Rohr also contributed a great amount of munitions to 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### 22-23 November

On 22 November the Italians continued their pressure in the S Martino area. As the fighting continued, the right wing of 17 ID had to be pulled back a very short distance on the western edge of the town. On the other hand the 16 Lst Mtn Bde, supported by a battalion of IR # 7 as well as by parts of Hon IR # 17 (of 20 Hon ID) which had just come to the front, were able in the night of 22-23 November to recover and retain part of the trenches that had been lost to the enemy during the day.

Following a pause of nineteen days in the sector of the k.u.k. III Corps, on 22 November enemy detachments made some isolated attacks. After a strong bombardment of our positions by heavy

caliber guns, parts of the Italian 23 ID made a surprise assault on 56 Inf Bde from the eastern end of the village of Selz. Troops from the Styrian IR # 47 immediately drove the Italians out of the positions with a counterattack, and took many prisoners.<sup>323</sup> From now on the southern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army wasn't seriously assaulted during the fourth battle of the Isonzo.

Fresh enemy units once more launched bitter attacks north and south of Mt S Michele on 23 November. In this prolonged action the troops of 6 ID and 16 Lst Mtn Bde held their positions. However, the planned relief of 6 ID was impossible while the fighting was going on. The last great attempts of the enemy to conquer Mt S Michele finally made it necessary to also deploy 20 Hon ID in order to retain this key point of the Isonzo front. First it would be necessary to reorganize the mingled units. In the night of 23-24 November the Hon IR # 4 replaced 16 Lst Mtn Bde at the front. FML Schönburg-Hartenstein held the positions between the Isonzo up to and including Mt S Michele with his 6 ID plus Hon IR # 3. GM Lukachich, commanding 20 Hon ID, defended the sector from Mt S Michel up to and including the S Martino-Sdraussina road with a battalion of IR # 7, Honved IR # 4 and 17, and IR # 61 from 17 ID. Hon IR # 1, which had been temporarily placed in reserve of XVI Corps, returned on 24 November to VII Corps in the Vallone valley. After its relief, 16 Lst Mtn Bde moved to a rest camp at Temnica.

#### 24-26 November

Meanwhile the fighting continued on Mt S Michele. In the night of 23-24 November parts of IR # 61 and of Hon IR # 4 counter-attacked in an effort to restore the situation at S Martino, but couldn't break through. An attack in the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> by the newly-arrived Palermo Brigade (of 9 Italian ID) broke down completely with heavy losses. The Italian assault on the northern slope started in the third hour of the morning on 24 November. The attackers entered the position where the wings of Hon IR # 3 and a battalion of IR # 27 came together, and seized a small knoll southeast of Peteano; a well-led and smartly-executed counterattack by the Carinthians of Battalion III/7 brought this area back into our hands on the morning of 25 November.<sup>324</sup> K.k. Lst Inf Bns 30 and 152 repulsed an attack at the summit of Mt S Michele; in the night the Hon IR # 1 took over their front. New fighting erupted at S Martino soon after

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323 Vogelsang, pp. 365 ff.

324 Krug, "Mit den Siebenern wider den Erbfeind" (Graz, 1917), pp. 22 ff.

mid-day. Thrusts and counter-thrusts continued until evening. At 8:30 PM the Hungarians were able to recover their old position by storm, and held onto it.

The situation of VII Corps demanded that all units should be concentrated and placed under their correct parent headquarters. Archduke Joseph planned a deployment in depth with four divisional sectors. He wanted to have 20 Hon ID on the northern wing as far as S Martino, then 17 ID on the line down to Heights # 164 (southeast of Heights # 197), 106 Lst ID to a point south of Kote 111, and 22 LW ID from this point to Mt dei sei Busi. 110 Lst Inf Bde would be placed under 106 Lst ID (rather than 22 LW ID), and the four Landsturm battalions of 187 Inf Bde under 22 LW ID. Army HQ approved these planned measures. Despite the ongoing fighting, they were carried out by 27 November. However, in the sector of 20 Hon ID the 6 ID also had to stay for the time being to ensure that the northern sector - along with Mt S Michele, the key to the Karst plateau - could be held until the battle ended.

The actions around Mt S Michele continued on the 25<sup>th</sup>. About half of the trenches on the northern slope which were recovered in the early hours had to be evacuated due to heavy Italian artillery fire, but were back in our hands again early on 26 November. Repeated Italian thrusts north of the summit and at S Martino were thrown back by artillery and machine gun fire.

Under III Corps, the relief of 28 ID by 9 ID started in the night of 25-26 November. The first elements of 9 Inf Bde arrived by train in the Wippach valley, and assembled in the Osek-Cernizza-Selo area.

Enemy attacks fell off considerably on 26 November; by noon there was relative quiet on the entire front of VII Corps. Then a heavy bombardment opened against the positions between the railroad and the summit of Mt S Michele (Point 275). It caused the defenders many casualties, especially due to flanking fire from Mt Fortin and from the heavy batteries at Valisella.

#### **4. The final struggle, 26 November to early December**

##### **a. Italian attacks on the upper Isonzo, 26 November-1 December**

In the Julian Alps the mountain winter had appeared in the first

days of November. Snow storms prevented any military operations for the time being on the heights and in the upper Isonzo valley. However, Cadorna's plan for the fourth Isonzo battle had intended that G.Lt Frugoni with the two northern corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army should carry out diversionary attacks in the Rombon-Canale area. This would hinder the transfer of Aus-Hung. units, which otherwise would be easy because of the weather in the mountains and the consequent pause in the fighting there since 29 October. The orders of the high command stated that "As soon as circumstances become favorable, the IV and VIII Corps should initiate decisive operations."<sup>325</sup> This meant that the corps should attempt to carry out their assignment from the beginning of the autumn campaign - the conquest of the Tolmein basin and Flitsch, as well as the heights on the east bank of the Isonzo.

From 10 to 18 November very raw and cold weather dominated the upper Isonzo. After heavy thunder storms and flood-like rain turned into snow storms accompanied by extreme cold, almost any military activity was impossible. However, the temporary warming trend which started on the 18<sup>th</sup> was also going by without any major offensive upstream from Plava. Finally on 26 November - after a pause of almost a month and a half - both northern corps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army resumed their major offensive against the k.u.k. XV Corps. This occurred only after a sharp order from Cadorna, who blamed the transfer of Aus.-Hung. battalions from the Tolmein sector to the fighting at Görz on the failure to carry out his instructions to maintain pressure against the northern wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>326</sup>

Since the hopelessness of the attacks on the Karst plateau and Görz was becoming clearer every day, the Italian leadership no longer hoped for a major improvement in the general situation. However, they expected a final effort to at least gain a local success against their opponents' northern wing, which apparently had been weakened by troop transfers.

G.Lt Frugoni sent the majority of VIII Corps into the principal attack against the Tolmein bridgehead. IV Corps would have its right wing (8 ID and both Alpini groups) ready to assault the Dolje-Mrzli vrh area; its left wing would pin down the Austrians in the Rombon-Krn area, at least to the extent permitted by winter in the high mountains. VIII Corps, which now included 7 ID, held one regiment of 27 ID on the Isonzo between Anikova and Doblar. 13 ID would attack Heights # 588, and 7 ID the Sv Maria

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325 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, pp. 494 and 537

326 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Text, p. 537

Heights. The remainder of 27 ID formed the Corps' reserve on the Kolowrat Ridge, west of Summit # 588.

#### 25-27 November

On 25 November, lively artillery activity preceded the offensive against the positions on the hills at Tolmein and against the Mrzli vrh-Vodil vrh ridge. The fire kept intensifying at dawn on the 26<sup>th</sup>. After a short burst of drum fire, around 10:00 AM the main body of 8 ID and of Alpini Groups A and B - about twelve battalions altogether - stormed ahead. On the Vodil vrh the attack of the Alpini collapsed under artillery fire before they reached the positions of 14 Mtn Bde (now commanded by Col. Edler von Conrad). There was hand-to-hand combat on the Mrzli vrh, where three defending battalions threw back a much larger enemy force by 2:00 PM, while taking several officers and more than 250 men as prisoners.<sup>327</sup>

After this first enemy assault on the heights was shattered, VIII Corps didn't carry out its own planned offensive against the positions on the hills in the Tolmein basin.

By early on 27 November the prospects for the attackers were further worsened by a strong overnight snowfall. Therefore during the entire day the enemy only mounted diversionary thrusts, all of which were unsuccessful. Toward evening the foremost Italian positions were strongly occupied, and in the night of 27-28 November some troops from 7 ID twice attacked at Sv Maria; they were repulsed, and prisoners from four regiments remained in the hands of Battalion III/35 (8 Mtn Bde).

#### 28-29 November

On 28 November, after very heavy bombardment by artillery and trench mortars, the Mrzli vrh-Vodil vrh ridge was again assaulted around 11:00 AM by a brigade from 8 ID plus several Alpini and Bersaglieri battalions. On the Mrzli vrh and at Point # 854 (on the ridge farther south) some Italians broke into the line but were thrown out completely by the counterattacks of small reserve groups. Along the rest of the front the onrushing waves were laid low by the concentrated fire of all the defenders' weapons. The offensive, which in places was carried out in thick lines, cost the enemy several hundred

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327 The defending units were Bns IV/30 of 3 Mtn Bde, II/66 of 15 Mtn Bde, and III/85 of 7 Mtn Bde.

dead and wounded as well as numerous prisoners.<sup>328</sup> However, the troops from 3 and 14 Mtn Bdes engaged in this fighting also had significant casualties, especially Battalions II/66 and III/85 which were the most heavily engaged. The VIII Italian Corps, stationed opposite the hills at Tolmein held by the k.u.k. 8 Mtn Bde, only made some tentative probes which were easily repelled.

On 29 November, after strong artillery bombardment, the enemy again attacked the positions on the heights of the Mrzli and Vodil vrh; they were checked by the accurate fire of our batteries and machine guns, which also broke up their troop concentrations in the Krn area. On this day there were also heavy thrusts against the Tolmein bridgehead. From morning until afternoon the positions on the hills stood under heavy, destructive fire, which swelled to drumfire from 3:00 to 4:00 PM. Then the enemy made three successive thrusts before evening against the Sv. Maria Heights with large, deeply-deployed masses of troops; they were thrown back by the gallant defenders and suffered heavy casualties. On the 30<sup>th</sup> the left wing of VIII Italian Corps (the reinforced 7 ID) repeated the thrusts against Sv. Maria. After three storming attempts suffered bloody defeat, the area became quiet in the evening. Between Selo and Heights # 588 the timely fire from our batteries hit several attacking battalions from 13 Italian ID, which returned to their starting points.

#### The start of December

On 1 December the enemy attempted a final assault against the front between Mrzli vrh and Selo. The artillery preparation lasted from early in the morning until 1:00 PM. Then the infantry assaults on the Mrzli vrh and on both sides of Point # 584 were shattered by the resistance of 3 Mtn Bde and of Group Wasserthal. However, the enemy's largest effort was directed against the bridgehead. Only in front of Sv. Maria and the line between Heights # 588 and Selo were the Italians able to get

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328 Zingales (p. 416) asserts that the Mrzli vrh (Summit # 1360) was taken and held, but this is incorrect. The defenders only gave up a piece of the trench, 100 paces long, that thrust far out toward the enemy about half a kilometer away from Point # 1360; a new position was established 30 to 50 paces farther to the rear. The Mrzli vrh itself (# 1360) always remained in the possession of the k.u.k. troops. The Italian Official History (Vol. II, Text, p. 541) refers to 28 November as a "rest day" and contains no description of the actions.

close enough to storm our lines. Here, however, their attacking waves collapsed under the defenders' fire.

Repeated changes in the weather, involving rain and snow storms, fog and cold, put an end to the five days of heavy fighting at Tolmein.<sup>329</sup> In several hours of artillery fire the enemy systematically destroyed the largest settlements behind our positions, especially Tolmein (the principal town).

#### Operations of 44 LW ID

At this point we will briefly describe the events which involved the eastern wing of Armeegruppe Rohr during the fourth Isonzo battle.

While the k.u.k. XV Corps wasn't engaged in major fighting until the last days of the battle, as described above, north of the Krn the adjacent 44 LW ID of Rohr's Armeegruppe had been repelling several attacks since the battle began.

After a heavy bombardment of many hours, the Italians began to thrust forward on the Vrsic and the Javorcek on 11 November. In a short but heavy action the defenders - Upper and Lower Austrians from 87 LW Inf Bde - were able to drive the attackers back to their positions at noon. In the afternoon a new assault against the forward position on the Vrsic was defeated by artillery fire and rolled bombs. Moreover, on this day the enemy's sand-bag position next to the Vrsic summit was blown up for the third time in just a few weeks. Attacks which the Italians had prepared against the Javorcek and the positions in the valley east of Flitsch weren't carried out.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> the enemy repeated their operation in the Javorcek-Vrsic sectors. After five hours of powerful preparation by artillery fire, a major enemy assault was again repulsed by GM Richard Jellenchich's 87 LW Inf Bde (supported by parts of the Carinthian LW IR # 4 from Col. Edler von Schuschnigg's sector). Two surprise attacks on the Javorcek in the evening and an assault on the Vrsic position were fended off brilliantly with rifles and hand grenades. In this action the small but heroic

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329 Tosti (p. 108) has the following to say about the cessation of fighting and the condition of the Italian troops: "The operations were halted because of bad weather. Here, in the icy Isonzo valley, cold and storms caused the first cases of frost bite among the troops, who after so much toil and adversity finally found themselves in wretched condition."

garrison of the position on the Vrsic crest was especially distinguished, while losing three fourths of their personnel.

On the following days through 18 November, large-scale operations were hindered by bad weather. When the strong winter frost began to moderate on the 18<sup>th</sup>, there were new thrusts on the Vrsic Heights and in the Flitsch basin, which however soon broke down.

The actions which engulfed XV Corps on 26 November led to greatly increased activity by the enemy artillery in 44 LW ID's sector, but initially there were no infantry attacks. Finally on 28 November the Italians attempted an envelopment attack against the foremost position on the Vrsic, which was thrown back mainly by rifle grenades. In the following days there were only minor operations and artillery actions, until the change in the weather on 1 December brought a long-lasting period of winter rest.

### **b. The Italian breakthrough attempt against the Görz bridgehead is shattered, 25-29 November**

#### 25 November

On 25 November, persistent and strong artillery and trench mortar fire heralded a new attack by Italian forces seeking a decision at Görz. The city itself was once again bombarded, more heavily than in the preceding days. Three Italian thrusts on both sides of the Oslavija church, apparently to scout out the strength of the defenses, were repulsed without difficulty in the afternoon. Our pilots reported that almost all the camps in the Coglio (the hills north of the Görz-Cormons railroad) were empty; this meant that all enemy units were at the front. Prisoners confirmed that a major attack on the bridgehead was imminent.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> it was more evident that the general offensive was starting. Troops in the strength of about two or three regiments rushed against our positions at Oslavija four times in the morning, and twice again before evening. They were unable to penetrate the line. Toward noon at Pevma, one or two Italian regiments fled back under the destructive cross fire of the artillery, and a strong attacking group stormed the area south of the Podgora summit (Point 240) after a four-hour bombardment. They were halted in hand-to-hand fighting by the tough, confident Dalmatian troops of GM Nöhring's 5 Mtn Bde. The

fighting halted for the night, except that occasionally shells of the heaviest caliber fell on Mt Sabotino and in the city of Görz.

27 November

On 27 November the artillery preparation for the Italian attack began even before dawn. Hundreds of projectiles from pieces of all calibers thundered against the Oslavija ridge and the Podgora. In the first light of the late autumn day the offensive against the damaged trenches began. For this final effort, the enemy commanders had deployed five divisions in a narrow area between Mt Sabotino and the railroad, and reinforced them with regiments from the Plava area and with Bersaglieri bicycle battalions which were directly under Army HQ. The main body of this force was sent to break through into the bridgehead between Heights # 188 and the Oslavija church. The enemy made repeated assaults with great stubbornness, kept sending in new reserves, and suffered substantial casualties. By 4:00 PM the storming columns had advanced along the road six or seven times, but collapsed under the defensive fire. Then the defenders themselves thrust ahead from their positions and in a brilliant charge captured the last part of the trenches which the enemy had taken on the southwestern slope of Heights # 188 on 20 November; they also took numerous prisoners. Besides Battalions III/17, III/18, IV/22 and IV/77, which took part in this bitterest and bloodiest action since the start of the battle, the well-directed artillery of XVI Corps performed special service to win the day's successes. Because of their enormous losses, the Italians postponed the massive assault they had planned for the night of 27-28 November. They replaced their worn-out troops (regiments from 4, 9 and 10 ID) with fresh units, and during the night restricted their activity to a weak thrust against Heights # 188, which remained firmly in our hands.

While this heavy fighting raged at Oslavija, there was no attack on the center of the bridgehead. On the other hand, battalions from four Italian regiments attempted in many hours of heavy individual actions to secure the crest by Point # 184. Once again they were repulsed by the Dalmatians with rifles and hand grenades; finally, due to a lack of grenades, the defenders repeatedly drove back the enemy by hurling stones. GM Zeidler took part of his reserves from their rest camps and moved them closer to Görz. Col. Domaschnian assumed command of 60 Inf Bde, whose sector now once more included the Oslavija sector.

28-29 November

The battle for the Görz bridgehead continued on the 28<sup>th</sup>. In the morning the defenders repulsed storming attacks by fresh troops

at Oslavija. Once again the heaviest fighting occurred on the blood-soaked ridge where the front ran between the church and the road. The positions next to the church and Heights # 188 remained in our hands. The enemy halted their offensive in the evening. They brought up further reinforcements for the next day, among them troops from 32 ID and half of 35 ID (Brigade Novara). At Pevma, after one unsuccessful Italian attack there was only an exchange of gunfire. On the bridgehead's southern wing the 5 Mtn Bde once again defeated all the Italian assaults. Here there were already signs that the attackers were becoming discouraged; many enemy soldiers gave themselves up.

The last great attack in front of Görz took place on 29 November. In the morning the defending artillery was able to pin down the Italian attackers while they were still a short distance from our positions. In the afternoon, after very strong artillery preparation, there was a mass attack by several fresh regiments against the ridge where the church stood. After the fighting surged back and forth the Italians were finally able to secure the area on both sides of the church. When the hot action ended, the defenders' line therefore was bent back from Heights # 188 along the road about 700 paces to the rear, and established on a low ridge 400 paces southeast of the church. Directly west of Oslavija this new position linked up again to the original foremost line. In the adjacent sectors of the bridgehead the stubbornly fighting defenders didn't give up a foot of ground. The heights west of Pevma and Grafenberg, as well as the Podgora, were only lightly attacked; here the enemy's action was restricted to lively work by the sappers plus artillery fire.

#### 30 November-1 December

In the night of 29-30 November GM Zeidler was able to relieve the battalions which had been most heavily engaged in the recent fighting and which had lost up to two thirds of their strength. These five battalions, along with IR # 17 and one battalion from IR # 80, made up the Division's reserve in the rest camps east of Görz. In addition, 58 ID was given one of the battalions which had come from Tyrol and been placed under XVI Corps.

The enemy was satisfied with their penetration at Oslavija and gave up their offensive on 30 November. This was also due to the sudden arrival of bad weather. The Italians continued to hold Görz, the Isonzo crossing points, and the positions west of the city under heavy fire. On 1 December, about four battalions attempted a surprise attack along the road toward Pevma, covered

by thick fog; they were easily defeated, after which the front was quiet. The heroic defenders had rendered excellent service. They had been able to stand up to weeks of stubborn and repeated assaults by a much larger enemy force exerting all its strength.<sup>330</sup>

### **c. The last Italian assaults on the Karst are in vain, 27-30 November**

While decisive fighting took place at Oslavija in the last days of November, the Italian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army also continued its stubborn attacks on Mt S Michele without pausing. The Duke of Aosta kept leading his troops to battle. To be ready for these attacks, on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> GdI Borojevic carried out the planned relief of 28 ID and the western wing of 187 Inf Bde between Lokavac and Duino by 9 ID. This made the battle-tested troops of 28 ID available; they were placed in readiness as the Army's reserve in the Selo-Gorjansko area. At the same time 9 Inf Bde, which had detrained at Ovcja Drag, assembled at Cernizza. In the night of 26-27 November, Col. Göttlicher's 111 Lst Inf Bde (of FML Kletter's 106 Lst ID) took over a sector between 17 ID and 22 LW ID, from Heights # 164 to about 800 paces south of Kote 111.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> the Italian batteries bombarded their familiar targets on the northern slope of Mt S Michele, at S Martino and by Kote 111. In the last-named area the Italians opened larger attacks in the afternoon. These thrusts, along with others against 22 LW ID and 17 ID at S Martino, collapsed and cost the enemy substantial casualties. Toward evening the 106 Lst ID expelled some Italian storm troops who'd penetrated the position west of Kote 111. The front north of S Martino wasn't attacked on 27 November.

There was heavy fighting on both the following days, 28 and 29 November. Beginning early on the 28<sup>th</sup> all parts of Archduke Joseph's front were under extremely strong fire, especially from heavy and very heavy guns. However, the k.u.k. batteries of VII and XVII Corps dominated the battlefield east of Peteano (on both sides of the road and railroad) so completely that the Italian regiments assembled there didn't dare open their planned

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330 The commander of 58 ID, GM Erwin Zeidler, won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for the defense of Görz in 1915. The same distinction was awarded to the commander of XVI Corps, FZM Wenzel Wurm, for his leadership in the Isonzo fighting this year.

attack. Around noon a group of four Italian regiments stormed Mt S Michele. The barrage fire of our batteries pounded their ranks, and in most places the attack broke apart. The enemy was only able to drive into a small part of the front on the northern slope of Mt S Michele. There was a bloody melee at S Martino, as well as farther south in 17 ID's sector; the 106 Lst ID was also engaged in frightful individual actions next to Kote 111. New enemy reinforcements ran against the entire front. They wavered for a moment while our artillery repeated its earlier activity. In the dwindling light of the early dusk the brave regiments, especially the Hungarian IR # 39 and the "Egerländer" of Lst IR # 6, threw themselves on the enemy and defeated them so completely that they finally withdrew in disorder to their starting points.

There were no attacks south of 106 Lst ID. The artillery broke up enemy troop concentrations in front of the lines. Our 24 cm mortars destroyed some entrenched Italian close-support guns at Vermeigliano. The German 13 cm long-range cannon fired with obvious success against the Italian batteries on the lagoon.

On 29 November the enemy gathered themselves for a final general assault against Mt S Michele; once again the fighting was very heavy. However, before daybreak the XI March Battalion of the Prague IR # 28 was able after a short fight to recover the area which the enemy had penetrated on the northern slope of the hill. Beginning at 7:00 a strong drumfire struck the entire front as far as Kote 111. Around noon the gallant Honved Infantry Regiments # 1 and 4 withstood repeated Italian assaults against Mt S Michele and S Martino. After new artillery and trench mortar preparation the enemy troops attacked twice in dense masses. By resisting bitterly the 20 Hon ID held onto their shot-up positions; only one part of the trench west of S Martino was lost. After the second assault was shattered our batteries tore gaping holes in the ranks of the Italians as they withdrew in thick clumps.

106 Lst ID threw back all attacks, and 22 LW ID also held onto all of their positions.

In the night of 29-30 November the most exhausted troops were relieved within each of the divisional sectors. On 29 November the 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ had placed 16 Lst Mtn Bde of VII Corps - which had been in camps at Temnica since the 24<sup>th</sup> - in the Army's reserves.

At 6:00 AM on 30 November the enemy attempted a surprise attack

on Mt S Michele, but it was shattered by infantry and machine gun fire. On this day the enemy's artillery bombardment slowed down because visibility was restricted by fog and rain. The only other attack took place toward evening when several Italian battalions struck 106 Lst ID, but were defeated.

After careful preparation, in the night of 30 November-1 December the IR # 46 recovered the part of the trench west of S Martino which had been lost the day before. On 1 December the Italians' activity was restricted to heavy bombardments and weaker infantry thrusts against Mt S Michele, Heights # 164 and Kote 111; they failed to break through.

#### **d. The Italian autumn offensive dies out. The k.u.k. units on the Isonzo re-group (2-15 December)**

The Italians' mighty tide ebbed on 1 December. Therefore this day may be regarded as the last of the fourth Isonzo battle. However, the Italian autumn offensive didn't immediately break off completely; through 14 December the enemy mounted territorially restricted partial assaults in various places. One of these, in the Mt S Michele sector, began on the 7<sup>th</sup> and lasted for almost three days.

#### The final actions

First, on 2 December the city of Görz was bombarded with the greatest intensity yet, and very substantial damage was done. From 3 to 6 December there were large artillery actions and many small-level thrusts against the Görz bridgehead and Karst plateau. These actions involved a strong but unsuccessful assault on the church at S Martino, a heavy new bombardment of Görz on 4 December, and several breakthrough attempts at Oslavija which were accompanied by strong artillery fire but failed.

On 7 December stronger Italian forces (troops from 22 and 29 ID) assaulted the positions on both sides of Mt S Michele; the fighting gradually spread south past S Martino. The enemy broke into one point on the northern slope of Mt S Michele, but were thrown out again in a brilliant counterattack by Hon IR "Budapest" # 1. On 8 December the Italians penetrated the line at the same point, but once again had to fall back due to a counter-thrust. On 9 December the enemy finished their three days' offensive with a night-time attack on the northern slope of Mt S Michele, which also failed. Thereafter the fighting gradually died out.

In the other sectors there were several minor offensive thrusts. An Italian torpedo boat flotilla started to bombard the coastal positions at Sistiana, but soon had to withdraw under the fire of our heavy batteries. On 8 and on 14 December the k.u.k. XV Corps was successful in some minor operations, in which part of the trenches at Dolje was taken from the enemy.

On 15 December the two months of unbroken fighting on the Isonzo came to an end, and it was almost completely quiet. Raw weather spread over the land; snow storms swept the heights while icy showers of rain and the "Bora" wind struck the Karst. Inclement weather, especially dampness and humidity, affected friend and foe in the following weeks more strongly than the effect of weapons.

5<sup>th</sup> Army's achievement

For 47 days the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army had been fighting an enemy force two and a half times its size; in some places the Italians had a 4:1 advantage.<sup>331</sup> The attackers' troop strength remained at a high level almost to the end of the battle because of quick replacements; they had a practically unlimited supply of ammunition and of all other necessary equipment. Nevertheless the defenders victoriously held their positions. The ground lost in the third Isonzo battle had been very small, and was even more restricted in the fourth battle. The Italians had slightly penetrated the ridge at Oslavija (between the church and the road), and captured isolated parts of the trenches on the Podgora and the north slope of Mt S Michele. The foremost defensive line had been pulled back on the western edge of S Martino. Some trenches between S Martino and Kote 111 had also been lost, but the enemy's advance had never been more than a kilometer into our defensive positions. It had no particular affect on the later course of the fighting.

Because of the size of the forces committed to the two autumn battles, as well as the length and intensity of the fighting, the casualties of 5<sup>th</sup> Army were higher than in the two summer battles. However, the percentage of casualties had been greater in the second Isonzo battle. From 10 November to 1 December the losses were as follows:

- . Sector I (XV Corps) - 2123 (590 dead, 295 missing<sup>332</sup>, 1238 wounded)
- . Sector II (XVI Corps) - 7761 (1277 dead, 1507 missing, 4977 wounded)
- . Sector III.a (VII Corps) - 14,469 (1851 dead, 3223 missing, 9395 wounded)
- . Sector III.b (III Corps) - 1038 (177 dead, 27 missing, 834 wounded).

The total was 25,391 men (3895 dead, 5052 missing, 16,444 wounded). Between 10 November and 1 December there were also 8256 cases of sickness.

The entire casualty list of 5<sup>th</sup> Army from 18 October to 1 December (including the pause in fighting for 5-9 November), contained 71,691 men (25,865 dead and missing and 45,826 wounded).<sup>333</sup>

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331 As for example at Oslavija, Plava and the Tolmein bridgehead.

332 The "missing" troops included men whose death or wounding hadn't been confirmed, as well as prisoners.

333 As the fighting died down between 2 and 15 December there were about 10,000 more losses, of whom 5300 were sick because of the raw weather.

In the fourth Isonzo battle the Italians lost 48,967 men<sup>334</sup> (7498 dead, 7513 missing and 33,956 wounded). Their entire casualties during the autumn offensive were about 116,000 troops.<sup>335</sup>

The attrition attacks of the Italians against the Görz bridgehead and Mt S Michele caused both sides to cram large forces into narrow areas. The reinforcement of the garrison of the Görz bridgehead was a response to the concentration of an especially strong group of attacking enemy troops in the Oslavija area. On the Karst the front was thickened by the new organization of four deeply deployed divisions under VII Corps. Moreover, in the northernmost of these divisional sectors the 6 ID stayed until fighting ended as a fifth division. Now efforts were made to remedy the confusion caused by the diversion of units away from their own HQ.

#### The mid-December deployment

In the reserves of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, 9 Inf Bde and 28 ID were fully ready for action at the end of the battle; 16 Lst Mtn Bde needed to be rehabilitated.

The end of the battle made it possible from 11 to 15 December to relieve the k.u.k. VII Corps, as long planned, with 6 and 28 ID. Thus the northern Karst sector (III.a) was placed under III Corps HQ, which meanwhile handed over its old sector (III.b) to the HQ of 61 ID.

On 10 December Archduke Eugene ordered that XV Corps would come under Rohr's Armeegruppe as of 15 December; the 14 Mtn Bde, however, would remain under 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

Meanwhile the return of troops who'd been detached from other army areas or units was begun. On 11 and 12 December the three battalions from Carinthia (III/18, III/75 and IV/77) left VII Corps to rejoin Armeegruppe Rohr; they went to XV Corps, which in turn gave up the four battalions from Tyrol (Lst Bns 165 and 169, Tyrol Lst Bn III and III Res Bn/37) on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. IR # 17 had already been placed under its own Division on 6 December. On the same day, VII Corps sent Battalions II/37 and I/98 plus XI March Bn/IR 28 to XV Corps. By mid-December all of the temporary reinforcements had left the Army area. In

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334 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Text, p.541 and Documents p. 441

335 This total includes about 200 officers and 8600 men taken prisoner by the k.u.k. troops.

addition, the Carinthian IR # 7 and FJB # 8 of 6 ID were given up to Armee- gruppe Rohr; in exchange, the Division got Battalion 3/BH IR 2, and then the HQ and three battalions of IR # 27 which had still been in Carinthia.

To replace the battalions which had been given up, 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ temporarily sent XVI Corps two battalions of IR # 27 and one regiment of 9 Inf Bde to relieve the troops in the Görz bridgehead; they were later joined by the other regiment of 9 Bde.

### **e. The autumn campaign on the Isonzo as a battle of materiel**

The Italian attacks, which lasted with just short interruptions for almost two months, developed into a pronounced battle of attrition and materiel. It was Cadorna's will that it should be renewed as long as necessary until the assigned objectives were attained.<sup>336</sup>

The following observations and figures will present a picture of the use and consumption of the forces and equipment of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army from 18 October to 15 December. Here it must be borne in mind that the heavy fighting on the four battle fields in question<sup>337</sup> took place on a front just 42 km long. Moreover, the 9 km line of the k.u.k. III Corps was only subject to a major attack by strong forces on 21 and 22 October, so the rest of the fighting was concentrated on a front of just 33 kilometers.

When the autumn battles started, the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army consisted of about 11 divisions, with 125 ½ battalions, 20 squadrons, 500 light guns, and 110 medium and heavy guns (there were 142 ½ mobile batteries). They were opposed by an enemy force about 2 ½ times larger - 25 divisions with 338 battalions, 130 squadrons, 1063 light guns, and 305 medium and heavy guns (under about 340 mobile batteries); by mid-November this force was joined by 30 more battalions (about two and a half divisions). To remedy this imbalance, during the third Isonzo battle GdI Boroevic was given 27 ½ battalions plus 7 field and several medium batteries. During the fourth battle these reinforcements

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336 Italian Official History, Vol. II, Documents p. 376;  
Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 158

337 Between Mrzli vrh and Selo, between Globna and Zagora, at the Görz bridgehead, and on the Doberdo Karst plateau.

were followed by another 24 battalions, 6 field batteries, several medium batteries and some technical companies. Thus the total additional infantry were 51 ½ battalions (of which, however, 2 ½ battalions had already been sent back to Tyrol in October and 6 others were broken up to replenish other units). At the end of the battles about 28 Italian divisions opposed 15 Aus-Hung. divisions on the Isonzo.

#### A statistical overview of the forces

The following chart shows the changes in the strength of 5<sup>th</sup> Army from mid-October up to the point when XV Corps was reassigned (on 15 December).

i) Strength on 15 October - 3477 officers, 116,159 riflemen, 340 machine guns, 2775 horsemen, 610 guns (the latter included 78 old pieces without carriages, used for close-up defensive support)

#### ii) Losses

a) Due to battle casualties and illness...

- . From 15 to 31 Oct - 765 officers and 34,616 men
- . From 1 to 15 Nov - 524 officers and 23,839 men
- . From 16 to 30 Nov - 584 officers and 24,254 men
- . From 1 to 15 Dec - 243 officers and 9978 men

The total was thus 2116 officers and 92,687 men. (13,738 dead, 13,794 un-confirmed deaths and woundings plus missing and prisoners, 46,625 wounded, 20,646 sick.)

b) Due to changes in the order of battle...

- . From 15 Oct to 30 Nov - 120 officers, 5200 riflemen and 14 machine guns (when 10 Mtn Bde left for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on 18-19 Oct), 1765 horsemen (when 12 squadrons left as part of a new organization of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's cavalry), and 36 guns (FKR # 32 left 106 Lst ID for 7<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . From 1 to 16 Dec - 156 officers, 5400 men and 32 machine guns (when battalions from Carinthia were returned to Armeegruppe Rohr and those from Tyrol to the Land Defense Command)

Total losses were therefore 2392 officers, 103,287 men, 46 machine guns, 1765 horsemen and 36 guns.

#### iii) Gains

- a) Reinforcements - 1225 officers, 36,840 riflemen, 99 machine guns, 192 horsemen and 56 guns. They were under 206 Lst Inf Bde, 6 ID, k.k. Lst IR # 26, the "Carinthian group" (III/18, II/37, IV/77, III/57, III/BH 2), 9 ID, 9 Inf Bde, the "Tyrol group" (k.k. Lst Bns 165 & 169, Tyrol Lst Bn III, III Res Bn/37), Bns IV/27 and V/27.
- b) Replacement troops - 1105 officers and 57,100 men
- c) Returned sick and wounded troops - 745 officers and 22,900 men
- d) Other - 81 machine guns, 185 horsemen and 75 guns. (The latter were from Carinthia, Pola and Cracow, plus newly formed batteries.)

Total gains were therefore 3075 officers, 116,840 riflemen, 180 machine guns, 377

horsemen and 131 guns.

iv) Strength on 15 December - 4160 officers, 129,712 riflemen, 474 machine guns, 1387 horsemen and 705 guns.

The actual number of men in 5<sup>th</sup> Army was of course different from that of the rifle strength; thus for example on 1 December there were 433,000 men but just 135,000 riflemen. For every fighter there were roughly two men involved in supplying them.

During the autumn fighting, 113 machine guns became unusable due to damage and 23 were taken by the enemy. 184 light and 31 medium or heavy guns were damaged by enemy action or burst barrels. No guns were lost to the enemy. Some of the damaged machine guns and artillery were already repaired during the battles.

A significant amount of ammunition of all types was expended. From 18 October to 1 December the Army used:

- . 37,090,000 infantry and machine gun bullets,
- . 706,000 artillery rounds (including 110,000 for the medium and heavy guns)
- . 16,000 rounds of thrown explosives, and
- . 76,000 hand grenades.

#### The service of the technical troops

At this point the contributions of the technical troops and workers must be emphasized. Most of the work in the battle positions was performed by the combat units themselves, along with the pioneers in their ranks. The technical troops mainly constructed dug-outs; especially during the battles, however, they also worked in the foremost lines - sometimes to lead details and sometimes as entire units. The military worker detachments with the divisions also built fortifications, but they were mainly responsible for assembling, preparing and moving technical equipment, and also for preparing back-up positions and for special assignments in the rear areas.

For months the technical troops (sapper, pioneer and railroad companies plus the worker detachments with the front-line forces) suffered casualties as they labored very hard night after night under enemy artillery fire. From these casualties and from illness these units lost a half or even two thirds of their strength.

The worker detachments under army or corps HQ in the second and third lines worked on positions and dug-outs, and also were responsible for maintaining the roads behind the front, building barracks, producing barricades, and similar tasks. In critical moments they also brought construction material and barricades

up to the foremost line. In the rehabilitation areas they constructed baths, de-lousing stations, barracks, electrical works, roads and various kinds of railroads. In workshops behind the front, various kinds of military and other equipment were produced, especially hand grenades. The latter were urgently needed by the troops, but not being turned out in sufficient quantity in the interior. Other products made for hand-to-hand combat were signal cartridges, clubs, daggers, bill-hooks (which were especially cherished by some of the Hungarian troops as their side weapon of choice, and called "Fokós"), and finally even wooden cannon.

Over 1000 boxcars full of building material, explosives and special technical equipment were sent to 5<sup>th</sup> Army during the autumn battles.

The service of the communications troops was especially difficult and important during the prolonged battles on the Isonzo. This involved mainly the telephone detachments of the infantry and artillery, but also those of the higher headquarters as well as the telegraph formations. Day and night, often under the most difficult conditions and under very heavy enemy fire, they repaired the damaged lines up to the foremost positions and observations points. The men who worked on these lines suffered significant casualties. In 5<sup>th</sup> Army's sector the communications troops kept 3500 km of wire connections constantly in service.

The activity of the doctors and auxiliary medical personnel was especially noteworthy; their difficult and self-sacrificing service at the front of the battle demanded the full commitment of their sense of duty and commitment. The increased difficulties in the wide open terrain of the Karst, the lack of approach- and communications-trenches, and the extraordinary amount of enemy fire complicated the transport and care of the wounded to an extreme degree. These factors caused substantial casualties among the medical staff, who without complaining fulfilled their important tasks until they were exhausted. They received honorable recognition from all the commanders, without exception.

The columns of trucks proceeded tirelessly. Every night they came as near as possible to the front to supply it with all possible supplies, especially with ammunition, and then carried back the sick and wounded to their starting points. In the last two battles a total of 40,000 tons of gear and military equipment was brought to the fighting troops and 86,000 men

(almost all sick or wounded) were taken back.

Between 1 and 15 October, 287 trains brought 67,500 tons of foodstuffs to 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

Naturally such an enormous military and economic effort demanded support from an extensive transportation network. Newly constructed were 64.1 km of major rail lines, 25.1 km of electric light rails, 33.8 km of cable-railways, 17.5 km of horse-drawn lines, 160 km of major roads, 52 km of roads for carriages, 164 km of roads for carts, and 95 km of roads for pack-animals. Another 411 km of major roads and 50 km of roads for carriages were improved. Also built were:

- . water pipelines with a total length of 113.2 km,
- . living quarters for 118,100 men and stables for 80,000 animals,
- . supply depots covering 14,000 square meters in total area, and
- . 502 hospitals and special barracks.

These figures also show what unprecedented forms the war was taking, especially on this battlefield.

## **5. Cadorna's generalship and the results of the autumn battles in the Southwest**

When the Italian high command opened their long-planned autumn offensive, victory seemed assured because they had a superiority in numbers and resources over their opponent that was seldom duplicated during the war. However, the offensive was shattered, just like all their earlier major efforts, primarily because the high-level leadership was all too methodical.

### Methods of the Italian generals

The first operational goal on the front in the coastal lands was Görz, against which Cadorna had already deployed his largest forces during mobilization. All divisions between Plava and the sea were supposed to simultaneously attack to win this city at the end of June. Because the Italian troops were new to the war, they weren't able to gain any success in the first Isonzo battle. Two weeks later the Italian high command sent the bulk of Aosta's Army against the Karst plateau of Doberdo for the first time; possession of this bastion would lead to the capture of the Görz bridgehead. However, after a hot and prolonged struggle the defenders of Mt S Michele held onto this high ground which was the key to the surrounding area. Therefore, as noted in Volume II, there was no general attack on Görz during

the second Isonzo battle.

Despite this setback, for the renewed offensive in fall Cadorna held fast to the guidelines he'd issued in July. He did widen his plan, however, to include the capture of the Bainsizza plateau as well as the Karst bastion of Doberdo. Thus he hoped that Görz would be seized like a ripe fruit. Attacks against the Dolomite front and the Folgaria-Lavarone plateau, which had been unsuccessful in summer, would be renewed to at least pin down the Austrian forces.

Yet the ardently desired success still wasn't achieved. The Görz bridgehead wasn't assaulted in the first phase of the third Isonzo battle, even though the Italian armies on the Isonzo had the means to do so with a two to one numerical superiority. Moreover, after the first two days of the battle the southern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army fell into almost complete inactivity. Frugoni's seven divisions stationed north of Plava as far as Rombon fought no major actions between 29 October and 26 November (but this was due also to the early onset of winter weather). The plan to capture Bainsizza failed to develop, except for a later attempt by insufficient forces at Plava. Thus the defenders only had to contend with assaults against certain points of the Isonzo front, to which they could send reserves drawn from sectors that weren't under attack.

In the second phase of the third battle, which started at the end of October, Cadorna directed his main efforts simultaneously against Görz and Mt S Michele. Thus the attack concentrated only on the central part of the Isonzo front, even though the objectives of the first phase of the battle - the capture of the Doberdo and Bainsizza plateaux - hadn't been achieved. The already exhausted Italian troops were unable to win success in any area because the commanders didn't commit fresh reserves at the right times and lacked the ruthless will to demand that their soldiers should overcome the last enemy resistance. But Cadorna continued - perhaps mistakenly - to adhere to his same methods. In the same days the Italians were also attaining nothing but bloody casualties on the mountain fronts, so that Archduke Eugene was able to throw units from Tyrol, Carinthia and the Tolmein area to the lower Isonzo.

For the fourth Isonzo battle, the Italian commander decided from the start to restrict the length of the front to be assaulted in half, to just the line between Plava and Mt dei sei Busi. Thus the entire northern wing was left out. However, even in this smaller area there were simultaneous and general attacks only on

the first two days (10 and 11 November). Already on the 12<sup>th</sup> the disjointed and therefore hopeless action of II Corps at Plava came to an end, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> the attacks at Görz were suspended. Meanwhile on the Karst there were strong but not all-encompassing assaults in the Mt S Michele area from 12 to 15 November.

In the final phase of the fourth Isonzo battle (from 18 November on), Cadorna gave up over-all control of the further operations to his Army commanders. Görz, the initial objective which still hadn't been taken by mid-November, was destroyed according to his orders. The Italian leadership thus threw away the advantage of their strong numerical superiority, and the fighting broke down into a series of local but very strong attacks against small parts of the Aus-Hung. front. Control of what had been originally a unified and tightly-controlled operation slipped from the high command to the Army HQ. The Armies in turn directed all their efforts to achieve various restricted goals, hoping to win at least a local success. Finally the battle developed into a number of isolated actions, in which the available troops were hurled without regard for casualties. However, these uncoordinated assaults also shattered on the unshakeable wall of the defenders.

Because attacks ceased on the wings during the third Isonzo battle, and because of Cadorna's altered plan of attack for the fourth battle, during the longest part of the fighting about ten divisions weren't involved. The leadership had decided not to attack in their sectors, but parts of these units could have been sent to the decisive points. Cadorna's failure to do this was a major reason for the final dashing of his exaggerated hopes.

Besides the fact that the Italian Army was facing an opponent willing to accept enormous sacrifices, its tragedy in the first year of the war was the failure of the high command to draw the necessary conclusions from the very favorable situation and promising conditions which existed when Italy entered the war. Obviously Cadorna wasn't sufficiently rich in ideas to overcome the stubborn resistance of his determined counterpart on the other side of the Karst and mountain positions.

#### The strength of the Isonzo defenders

For the defending k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army, the third and fourth Isonzo battles, like the earlier ones, were purely defensive actions. Since the position of the front line changed very little, there

was no opportunity to correctly utilize the art of maneuver. The general situation made it necessary to operate with the smallest possible forces. The breakdown of the Italian offensive into individual actions, described above, also influenced the character of the autumn fighting on the Isonzo. The highest levels of command were relatively unimportant. Besides providing moral support with a firm will, their intervention in general was restricted to properly committing the scanty available reserves. The middle and lower levels of the chain of command were the actual leaders of the defense. The burden of the fighting was borne by the troops, whose achievements were truly super-human. The defenders in their dug-outs and foxholes learned for the first time the horrors of a "battle of materiel." After the endless, hellish torture inflicted by the Italian artillery and trench mortars for endlessly long days and nights, it was almost a relief to engage in bloody hand-to-hand combat, which was waged with all the cruelty of primeval instinct. In such fashion, the enemy was thrown back forty times from the Podgora during the eight weeks of the double battle; in the same period there were thirty similar assaults at Oslavija.<sup>338</sup> When the Italians appeared in front of the defenders' trenches they usually had a numerical advantage. For six weeks the k.u.k. 1 Mtn Bde at Plava with six to eight battalions withstood the attacking II Italian Corps of 22 to 24 battalions, and the latter also had a much larger number of guns and trench mortars. The enemy gradually committed parts of 17 regiments plus several bicycle battalions to the breakthrough attempt at Oslavija, opposed by about 10 Aus.-Hung. battalions; they gained just one small part of the lines, which was almost meaningless for the further course of the war.

Nevertheless the defenders couldn't underestimate their enemy. It is true that the elan of the Italians varied greatly from regiment to regiment. However, most of the reports of our troops always refer to the outstanding bravery of the Italian infantry and praise their officers in particular. Moreover, as the months went by the proficiency of the attackers improved. Both the efficiency of their artillery and the offensive techniques of their infantry made noteworthy progress.

The sacrifices which had to be borne by all parties were heavy. One combatant writes that "Both sides were understanding that the affair was much, much more serious than they had expected.

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338 Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 171. See also Pitreich, "Sperrfeuer", p. 254.

The Italians no longer spoke of a walking excursion to Vienna. However, the Austrians also found the Isonzo to be something entirely different from Novara and Custozza. The battlefield on the Isonzo had become a hell, like the worst parts of the German western front; any other theaters of operations seemed like areas of rest and rehabilitation."<sup>339</sup> It was true that other battlefields lost a good deal of their horror for troops who had once fought on the Isonzo. Nevertheless, as already noted in another section, the soldiers on the Aus-Hung. side who had repeatedly failed to show the desire power of resistance in the East "fought like lions" on the Karst, at Görz and in the Julian Alps.

The fire of the autumn battles on the Isonzo was fully quenched by the stormy weather, rain and snow of mid-December. After eight long and difficult weeks both friend and foe, deathly exhausted, let their weapons sink to the ground. For a considerable time the arrival of early winter had already put a stop to the war in Carinthia and Tyrol. When the last flicker of fighting died out on the Isonzo just before Christmas, the two lines of trenches were still in the same places where they had existed on the bloody autumn morning when the Italians began their second offensive. In fact, the entire defensive front between the Stilfserjoch and the Adriatic was still basically unaltered a half year after Italy entered the war with fresh forces. Without hindrance from the new enemy, the commanders of the Central Powers had used these six eventful months to achieve their major objectives in the eastern theater of operations. Meanwhile their front was unbroken on the Isonzo and in the mountains which bordered Venetia.

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339 Veith, "Die Isonzoverteidigung", pp. 1051 ff.

## V. Late Autumn 1915 on the Russian Front

### A. *The fighting in the Polesie, 16 October to 14 November*

#### 1. General situation on the Eastern front in mid-October 1915

During the days when the Entente's French and English troops were landing at Salonika, the attitude of Romania became more important in evaluating the situation on the Eastern front as well as for the Serbs, who badly needed help from the Western powers. This was all the more evident since there had been tension between the Danube Monarchy and Romania since mid-September, which had caused the Romanians to reinforce the troops on their border. The tension was only reduced with difficulty.<sup>340</sup> The allied Central Powers were also increasingly convinced that Russia would at least indirectly participate in the operations to help Serbia. It was expected that the Russians would most likely continue their attacks on the east Galician front, and perhaps also try to envelop the southern wing through Romanian territory.

It wasn't clear whether the Romanians would maintain their neutrality if the Russians marched in, or would enter the war on the side of the Entente. Their political goal was the acquisition of Transylvania and Bessarabia. The former would have to be demanded from Austria-Hungary, the latter from Russia. Transylvania was the more desirable objective. It was known that the Entente had increased their diplomatic activity in Bucharest since the attack against Serbia began. Public opinion in Romania inclined more toward the Entente. Around mid-October Graf Czernin, the Aus-Hung. ambassador to Bucharest, reported that nationalist agitation among the Romanian population was constantly increasing. The Liberal newspapers impatiently demanded in passionate articles that the Bucharest government should join the Entente.<sup>341</sup>

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340 Österr.-ungar. Rotbuch - "Diplomatische Aktenstücke, betreffend die Beziehungen Österreich-Ungarns zu Rumänien in der Zeit vom 22. Juli 1914 bis 27. August 1916" (Vienna, 1916), pp. 19 ff.

341 Czernin, "Im Weltkriege" (Berlin, 1929), pp. 127 ff.

Conrad renounces offensive operations in the East

Because of these dangers, on 13 October GdI Falkenhayn inquired through GM Cramon what precautionary measures the k.u.k. high command were taking to protect the flank of the Eastern front in case the Russians attacked in Bukovina while the Romanians broke into Transylvania. This question, which was also posed the following day by Ritter von Wiesner, the representative of the Aus-Hung. Foreign Ministry to the AOK at Teschen, frankly annoyed GO Conrad. At this time - as Conrad had to admit in his written response to Falkenhayn - the k.u.k. high command had only one unit which could oppose the Romanians or extend the right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army - the 70 Hon ID which had just been formed in Transylvania from Landsturm troops and the Gendarmerie.

GO Conrad was well aware of the fact that the Romanian government had been hindered so far from entering the war on the side of the Entente only by the successes of the Central Powers against Russia. For a while, therefore, he had considered whether he should again resume the offensive in Russia after the incorporation of the October replacement troops (XV March battalions of the Common Army and the Honveds as well as the XIV March Battalions of the Austrian Landwehr). The goals would have been to drive the enemy completely out of eastern Galicia and to capture Rovno, which hadn't been achieved in September. However, despite all the blows they had suffered the Russians had already displayed surprising strength during the Rovno campaign. Their continuous attacks had made great demands on the Aus-Hung. forces stationed in the East. In the latest actions it had been noted that the Russian artillery fire was more effective. As the Russian Army became stronger and winter approached, the prospects for a new thrust toward Rovno became poorer. On the other hand, at any moment the Russians might launch an offensive to relieve Serbia. The particularly vulnerable portions of the Aus-Hung. front seemed to be on the Styr in the north, at Aleksiniec in the center, and on the Strypa in the south. Moreover, new Italian attacks on the Isonzo were expected, and troops were very much needed there. Units might soon have to be moved from the Eastern front to the Italian theater of operations. Events at Salonika also demanded the attention of the high command; the landing of the English and French meant that the course and outcome of the Balkan campaign had by no means been decided.

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Larcher, p 27. "Das Zaristische Russland im Weltkrieg", pp. 224 ff.

Under these circumstances GO Conrad gave up all plans for a further offensive against Russia for the time being. This was all the easier because he primarily wanted to win a complete victory in the Balkans, and then if necessary use force to seek a decision with Romania.<sup>342</sup> Meanwhile - and especially because of the Romanian danger - setbacks on the Eastern front should be avoided under all circumstances, and the necessary measures taken to protect the southern flank.

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342 Glaise-Horstenau, "Die Katastrophe", p. 51

Defensive measures

Conrad first hastened to move four Landsturm battalions from the Danube bridgeheads to Kimpolung and Jakobeny, where they worked on defensive positions. If the Russians actually did violate Romanian neutrality and advanced against southern Bukovina as well as northern Transylvania, the right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army would extend to the south and oppose the enemy in an already prepared line running from Czernowitz through Radautz and Suczawa to Kimpolung. If necessary, this front could still link up with the Strypa line if pulled back to the line Kulaczowce-Zablotow-Lukawetz-Kimpolung. In the event of a Romanian invasion, 70 Hon ID would withdraw to the fortified Maros-Kokel line, while delaying the enemy advance for as long as possible.

In order to have units available to extend the southern wing and to repel new Russian assaults, an order issued in the night of 13-14 October instructed the armies in east Galicia and Volhynia to set up strong reserves. Pflanzer-Baltin had assembled 6 ID at Kotzmann. 39 Hon ID would leave the front of VI Corps for Buczacz, behind the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Bothmer intended to relieve 38 Hon ID on the northern wing of South Army with 3 Gd ID; then 38 Hon ID would become a reserve unit of the high command. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army already had two divisions in reserve (51 Hon ID at Zloczow and 26 LW ID behind both its wings); it would also provide at least one division as an Army Group reserve at Brody. Behind 1<sup>st</sup> Army the 9 ID was held in readiness in place of 46 LW ID. 4<sup>th</sup> Army had made 21 LW ID available for the HQ of Linsingen's Army Group. In addition, after the incorporation of the October replacements Archduke Joseph Ferdinand was to make 3 ID available to move to the Southwest front, where HQ of XIV Corps had already been sent. In an attempt to employ as many units as possible from the Alpine and coastal lands against Italy, the high command had for some time intended to have 3 and 6 ID change places with VII Corps.

GdI Linsingen controlled the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army, Group Gerok (k.u.k. XVII Corps, Cav Corps Herberstein, XXIV Res Corps, Cav Corps Hauer) and the new group of GdA von Gronau (from the former Bug Army, with German XLI Res Corps, German 5 CD and Gd CD). Toward mid-October he expected new Russian attacks at the bend in the Styr by Czartorijsk. There were several indications that Brussilov was moving reinforcements to his northern wing. Therefore in Group Gerok parts of the Polish Legion and 11 ID, along with 11 Hon CD, were assembled behind Corps Conta<sup>343</sup> at

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343 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Conta was commander of 1 German ID. At

Okonsk and Maniewiczzy.

On the right wing of the German front north of the Pripyat, Prince Leopold of Bavaria's Army Group (Woyrsch's Army and 9<sup>th</sup> Army) had already taken up their permanent positions at the end of September behind the Oginski Canal, the Szczara and the Serwecz. Hindenburg's Army Group was deployed between the point where the Berezina flows into the Niemen, and the Gulf of Riga. On his right wing the units from 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Armies were combined in a new 12<sup>th</sup> Army under GdI von Fabeck. Its front stretched from the Niemen past the Lida-Molodieczno railroad. 10<sup>th</sup> Army held the sector farther north as far as the Disna. Its left wing was pulled back and then attacked by the advancing Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies at the start of October. Around this time the right wing of the Niemen Army (stationed on the Dvina) also had to repel Russian thrusts on the Dvinsk-Vilna road.

This in outline was the situation on the eastern front in mid-October. Between Czernowitz and the Pripyat, a front of about 560 km, there were 44 Aus-Hung. infantry and 12 cavalry divisions<sup>344</sup> plus 4 German infantry and 1 cavalry divisions. Total strength was about 350,000 riflemen. On the German front between the Pripyat and the Gulf of Riga (750 km) there were 43 German infantry and 9 cavalry divisions plus 2 Aus-Hung. infantry divisions. Total strength was about 360,000 riflemen. The troops were no longer so densely deployed in Lithuania and Volhynia, which had been the main targets of the recent major offensives, but instead were more evenly distributed along the wide fronts.

#### Intentions and plans of the Russians

The most urgent question facing the Russians in late fall 1915 was how to bring armed assistance to the Serbs. Already on 1 October the President of the French Republic, Poincaré, had informed the Tsar that French and English troops would land at Salonika, and at the same time expressed the hope that Russia would also take part in operations to help Serbia. Ten days later, after the French ambassador Paléologue in an audience had again pressed for Russian participation, the Tsar consented to

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this time he was in charge of the k.u.k. 11 ID in addition to his own Division.

344 Actually these were cavalry divisions # 1 to 11 plus 1 Lst Hussar Bde and a new Cav Bde in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which had been built with squadrons taken from infantry divisions and placed under Col. von Benes.

send a detachment of troops on the long sea route through Archangel to Salonika.<sup>345</sup>

Neither France nor Serbia was satisfied with this very limited military assistance. They wanted Russia to send an army through Bessarabia into the Dobruja or land troops at Varna and Burgas to fall upon the rear of the Bulgarians. The Russian high command, however, remained cautious - just as they had in the days when France and England were expecting Russian cooperation in the Dardanelles campaign. At the start of 1915 Russia had been promised the right to occupy Constantinople by itself.<sup>346</sup> Now the Russians watched with very mixed feelings as military units of the Entente entered the Near East. They already noted with great uneasiness that a British bulwark on the flank of the Bosphorus was developing at Salonika.<sup>347</sup> Moreover, after their severe defeats and losses of men and equipment the Russian high command felt that a quick and energetic intervention in the Balkans was impossible. Thus it was natural when they asserted with well-feigned concern that if they sent units to the Balkans they would weaken their situation in the main theater of operations.<sup>348</sup>

Nevertheless the Entente powers, especially France, continued their efforts to win Russia over for armed intervention in the Balkans on the behalf of Serbia. On 23 October General de Laguche, the French representative at the Russian headquarters, gave the Tsar a memorandum which alluded to the great importance of the Balkan theater of operations. General Joffre had gone to London to work with the the English government on a plan for a combined operations in the Balkans. Discussions had already started with the Italians to convince them to also take part in this enterprise. The memorandum went on, however, to state that it was not simply a matter of helping Serbia.<sup>349</sup> Above all Romania, which was still adhering to its uncertain policy, must be won for the Entente. Therefore the French felt that it would be desirable to land Russian troops on the Bulgarian coast. Naturally it would be worth while for Russia if Romania entered

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345 Paléologue, Vol. II, pp. 87 ff.

346 Adamov, "Die Europäischen Mächte und die Türkei während des Weltkrieges" (Dresden, 1930), Vols. I (pp. 138 ff.), II (pp. 113 ff.), III (pp. 18 ff.) and IV (pp. 16 ff.).

347 Frantz, "Russland auf dem Wege zur Katastrophe" (Berlin, 1926), pp. 88 ff.

348 Klembovski, "Strategic Studies concerning the World War 1914-1918" (in Russian; Moscow, 1920), Vol. V, part 9.

349 *Ibid.*

the war. Russia had already recognized all the Romanian aspirations in Bukovina in June 1915. France also wanted Russia to promise Bessarabia to the kingdom on the Danube in order to buy its help.

However, Bratianu believed that the favorable moment for Romania to intervene hadn't arrived yet. Russia also hesitated to comply with France's wishes. Because of the open question of Bessarabia, the Russians were satisfied for now with Romania's benevolent neutrality.<sup>350</sup> Anyway, after the heavy defeats in the summer the Russian Army couldn't spare strong units for the Balkans. However, the Russians didn't want to leave Serbia completely in the lurch. In this political and military dilemma the Russian high command decided on new attacks on the Volhynian and east Galician fronts. These attempts to relieve the hard-pressed Serbs would consist only of short thrusts.

## **2. The Battle of Czartorijsk (16 October-14 November)**

### **a. The Russians break through, 16-18 October**

Brussilov, who was very eager to attack, requested reinforcements from Ivanov at the start of October and stretched his northern wing to the area of Kuchocka Wola. This extension to the north was based on a plan to thrust to the west; the Russians wanted to drive the allies from Czartorijsk, where their line followed the bend in the Styr and thus bulged toward the east, and to recover the Kolki bridgehead. Therefore the northern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army was placed in a more favorable position and made firm contact with 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the wilderness of the swamp.<sup>351</sup>

From the newly-arrived 2 Rifle Div plus 4 Rifle Div, Brussilov created the XL Corps. It was instructed to make a surprise assault through Czartorijsk and Kulikowiczy, with its right flank covered by the Cavalry Corps of Gillenschmidt and Velsaiev. Simultaneously the XXX Corps (71 and 80 ID, reinforced by 82 ID) would attack Kormin while XXXIX Corps prevented the allies from sending reinforcements.

#### 16 October

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350 "Das Zaristische Russland im Weltkriege", pp. 216 ff.

351 Brussilov, p. 169

On 16 October, isolated Russian thrusts against the southern wing of Gerok's Armeegruppe initiated the new actions at Czartorijsk. Troops from 4 Russian Rifle Div, covered by artillery, moved forward in the course of the day toward Kulikowiczy and Nowosielki. In this sector (the right wing of Corps Conta), Col. Gustav Fischer's east Galician 22 Inf Bde (IR # 95 and 58) held a thin line on the eastern bank of the Styr, which was a difficult position. A forest stretched in front of the bridgehead and the Styr flowed to its rear. The men of 22 Bde felt that this obstacle behind them would have unfavorable consequences. However, the Russians left them no time to ponder their situation. The enemy artillery continued to fire until dusk. The garrison of the bridgehead prepared to meet a night-time attack, but the Russians didn't come. They stopped their artillery fire for the night.

#### 17 October

There were no signs of increased enemy activity at the bend in the Styr at Czartorijsk during the 16<sup>th</sup>. However, toward 4:00 AM on the 17<sup>th</sup> several Russian companies crossed the Styr in thick fog in the sector of German 1 ID. G.Lt Conta had meanwhile moved his reserve, the East Prussian IR # 41, closer to his right wing. The penetration of the Corps' center seemed to be unimportant. After a short bombardment by German artillery the Russians at Czartorijsk pulled back over the river; meanwhile, however, they had broken through on the wings - at Nowosielki and at Rafailowka.

Probably the Russians had already come over the Styr after darkness fell on the 16<sup>th</sup>, at a poorly guarded point at the junction between the k.u.k. 22 Inf Bde and German 1 ID. Then the Russians slipped undetected from the banks of the river, covered with bushes, as far as the woods along the Okonka. Thus it happened that a battalion of the German IR # 41, which evidently wasn't supposed to move into the gap until the Russians attacked, was struck from the rear early on the 17<sup>th</sup> and its lines were broken. At dawn the enemy appeared by surprise in Nowosielki, and at the same time struck the flank of k.u.k. IR # 58, fighting on the opposite bank. In the confusion, the companies engaged on the left wing of IR # 58 were encircled and taken prisoner by the Russians; the rest of the Regiment sought to flee over the Styr.

The broken battalion from East Prussian IR # 41 and the miserable remnants of IR # 58 assembled on the Komarow-Rudka road; along with the Corps reserve (the rest of IR # 41, which

had hurried forward), they started to counterattack toward Nowosielki. Meanwhile GM Paschen - commanding German 1 ID - ordered Col. Fischer to defend Kulikowiczy to the last man. But Kulikowiczy was already lost. Here the Russians had overrun the bridgehead of IR # 95 in the morning, after a heavy bombardment. Hundreds of Ruthenian soldiers lost their nerve and surrendered to the enemy. Other groups, led by brave officers and NCO's, pulled back to Komarow over the plank bridge that connected the bridgehead with the west bank. Many soldiers who tried to save themselves by swimming drowned in the Styr.

Believing that 22 Inf Bde was already retreating to Gradie and Kolki, GM Paschen ordered at 1:45 PM that the group which was counterattacking and heavily engaged in front of Nowosielki should withdraw to Rudka. Corps Conta countermanded this order just in time. Col. Fischer had meanwhile built a very thin line of resistance on the western bank of the Styr. Despite the heavy setback which both of his regiments had suffered, and despite the fact that he had lost all contact with the neighboring East Prussian IR # 41 on his left, he sought to stand his ground between Komarow and Siemki. He was successful. The remnants of 22 Inf Bde held on bravely and awaited the reinforcements which were hurrying forward through Kolki.

GdI Kritek, commanding the k.u.k. XVII Corps, responded to orders from GdI Gerok by sending two battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Legion Bde (from Cav Corps Herberstein) plus two more battalions and artillery from the German 22 ID from Kormin to the battlefield. These first reinforcements arrived toward evening. Now Col. Fischer was instructed to recover Kulikowiczy in the next morning, but it would prove impossible to carry out this order.

#### 18 October

In the night of 17-18 October, XL Russian Corps brought reinforcements over to the western bank of the Styr at Komarow, Nowosielki and Czartorijsk. The group which had deployed to counterattack between 22 Inf Bde and 1 German ID (German IR # 41 and parts of k.u.k. IR # 58) were pushed back toward Rudka and Komarow by strong enemy detachments. Covered by the morning fog, the Russian storming column drove deep in the direction of Bielgow. The Prussian regiments fighting at the bend of the river at Czartorijsk were suddenly attacked from the woods lying behind their positions. A truly desperate struggle ensued. Companies sacrificed themselves to save batteries which had been overrun and battalions which had been cut off. Only remnants of

the broken German 1 Inf Bde could be assembled afterwards at Kamienucha and Rudka. The Brigade had lost hundreds of men killed, wounded or captured; 10 guns and many machine guns fell into the hands of the Russians.

Encircled on the right and threatened from the rear, the German 2 Inf Bde now also had to pull back from the river bend, to Podgatie and Miedwieze. In fighting with the dispersed remnants of 1 Inf Bde, the Russians advanced nearer to Bielgow, Kamienucha and Rudka around noon. Separated from Corps Conta, the k.u.k. 22 Inf Bde, along with the two German battalions (of 22 ID) which had quickly joined them from Kormin, held fast to the approaches to the village of Komarow. Their left wing was bent toward the west, and the right flank was also threatened because the Russians had managed to cross the Styr upstream from Kulikowiczy. Nevertheless a brilliant counterattack by two German companies saved the situation one more time. Toward evening Col. Fischer's endangered group had to pull back to the line Siemki-Razniczy. Because of the developments to the north of 1 German ID, G.Lt Conta at the same time took up a temporary position running from Kukli through Lisowo to Kostiuchnowka.

#### The situation worsens

Fighting on the north wing of Corps Conta was GM Grubic's 21 Inf Bde of the Lemberg 11 ID; toward mid-October they had to divert IR # 55 to the southern wing of Corps Hauer in order to drive back some Russians who were attacking out of Mulczicy. The rest of 21 Bde was stationed on the west bank of the Styr opposite Rafailowka. On 16 October the 55<sup>th</sup> IR, in a combined attack with 1 CD, captured Mulczicy. In the night of 16-17 October the Russians crossed the river downstream from Rafailowka. In the morning fog on the 17<sup>th</sup> they struck the very thinly held front of 21 Inf Bde in the flank and rear. The defending battalions were completely surprised and pulled back to Kostiuchnowka, losing many troops as prisoners. To oppose the Russian advance over the Styr from the north, Hauer sent IR # 55 and his Corps' reserve, 11 Hon CD. Conta sent two German battalions to help the defeated 21 Inf Bde. However, these reinforcements weren't able to restore the situation on the northern wing of Corps Conta. Gillenschmidt's IV Russian Cavalry Corps moved forward on the 18<sup>th</sup>; they threw IR # 55 and 11 Hon CD back toward the northwest and compelled them - along with Cav Corps Hauer - to retreat to Galuzia and the area south of Jeziery.

The overall situation was threatening. There was a 10 km gap in the front between Razniczy and Kukli. The Russian breakthrough

toward Kukli-Bielgow and the withdrawal of Corps Hauer placed Corps Conta in danger of being totally cut off. Fortunately, after Linsingen and Gerok received the first report of the complete collapse of the front at the bend of the Styr early on the 18<sup>th</sup> they had already begun to bring up available reinforcements. GdI Kritek received an order to send all forces he could spare to Kukli; he was in charge of the southern wing of Armeegruppe Gerok on the Kormin - XVII Corps (41 Hon ID, 13 LW ID), German 22 ID, 1 Polish Brigade and Cav Corps Herberstein (4, 2 and 7 CD). During the 18<sup>th</sup>, Kritek sent a battalion of 22 ID, the Polish Brigade and LW IR # 24 of 13 LW ID toward the north; he wasn't hindered by Russian thrusts against 41 Hon ID. Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, who had placed 10 CD and 21 LW ID behind his 4<sup>th</sup> Army as a reserve, gave them up to Group Gerok. Although the Russians made some isolated attacks against the Archduke's Army on both sides of the Rovno-Kovel railroad, he was able to stretch his north wing to Boguslawka and make 45 LW ID (on the Putilowka) available for Kritek.

This transfer of troops left 4th Army very weak; it now consisted of just IX Corps (2 and 10 ID), X Corps (3 and 4 ID plus 37 Hon ID) and 24 ID, which was in reserve at Luck. To ensure that this Army had adequate forces, GdI Linsingen asked the high command to temporarily leave 3 ID - which was supposed to move to the Italian front - on the Putilowka. GO Conrad agreed. He himself was striving to restore the situation after hearing that three to five Russian infantry divisions and a strong force of cavalry had broken through at the bend in the Styr. The necessary orders were issued from Teschen in the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Böhm-Ermolli was to give up 26 LW ID, which was stationed in reserve behind 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, while Pflanzer-Baltin gave up the 2 Polish Brigade from the eastern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. These units would move by rail through Lemberg to Kovel.

## **b. The allies begin to counterattack, 19-27 October**

### 19-20 October

Early on 19 October the LW IR # 24 and the first troops of 21 LW ID arrived in Kolki. As ordered by G.Lt Conta, Col. Fischer had meanwhile once again sent his weak group (two German battalions and remnants of 22 Inf Bde) to advance from the Razniczy-Siemki bridgehead north to reach Komarow. However, he was pinned down in heavy fighting south of that village. Strong enemy units were advancing from Kamienucha through Rudka and Kukli, and once more outflanked the German 1 ID. Hurrying forward through

Kolki, LW IR # 24 and the leading troops of 21 LW ID (GM Keki's 41 LW Bde) struck the advancing Russians west of Komarow and halted their victorious course.

There was still a dangerous gap between Corps Kritek and the right wing of 1 German ID, which was bent back to Okonsk. The 1 Polish Bde and GM Hansmann's 42 LW Bde (of 21 LW ID) wouldn't arrive to close this gap until the next day. However, the Russians failed to exploit their success. Instead of continuing their thrust with the necessary force straight toward the west, they were apparently trying to widen the breach in the line with attacks toward the southwest and northwest.

On 20 October GdI Kritek was instructed by GdI Gerok to strike the flank of the enemy in the Styr bend with the troops in the Razniczy area, all of whom were placed under the commander of 21 LW ID, GM Podhajsky. GM Keki's group (his own 41 LW Bde plus LW IR # 24, three battalions from German 22 ID, and the remnants of 22 Inf Bde) was unable to drive the Russians from the strongly fortified town of Komarow and from the sandy heights farther west. GM Hansmann's 42 LW Bde suffered a bitter surprise. They were supposed to move to Jablonka, but as they advanced through the swamps and woods they were struck by enemy units; after an action which surged back and forth, Hansmann fell back to Kopyli-Razniczy. The Russians had already reached Gradie, Dolzyca and Sawerynowka. Once again a gap opened between the troops of Kritek and Conta; it was shielded only by 1 Polish Bde, which hurried to the area.

G.Lt Conta had replenished the ranks of the badly damaged 1 German ID with replacement troops hastily brought up from Kovel, and had halted the k.u.k. 21 Inf Bde at Kostiuchnowka. He also attacked on the 20<sup>th</sup>, along both sides of the railroad. As 1 ID advanced, it was shot up by strong Russian artillery and also by machine guns; the troops were already checked in front of the Russian positions west of Miedwieze and just east of Lisowo. The 21 Inf Bde on Conta's north wing moved their thin lines forward to the western edge of Kostiuchnowka. With some difficulty the neighboring Cav Corps Hauer held onto their widespread positions between Wolka Galuzijskaya and Jeziercy.

#### 21 -22 October

On 21 October some Russian units which had worked their way ahead against 22 German ID at Czernysz were forced by artillery fire to retreat behind the Korminbach. Further north the enemy attacked Cav Corps Herberstein. These isolated Russian thrusts

on the Kormin didn't cause GdI Gerok to hold back the troops he'd received from 4<sup>th</sup> Army (10 CD and 45 LW ID) behind his right wing. Instead he let them march ahead to the north, where they reinforced Kritek's attacking flank.

After a forced march, GM Viktor von Bauer's 10 CD appeared in front of Gradie and Dolzyca. They were to assist 42 LW Inf Bde, which had withdrawn to Razniczy but was now attacking again. Together with dismounted cavalry and Polish legionnaires, this Brigade drove the Russians out of the bog-encircled villages of Gradie, Dolzyca and Jablonka. Thus they halted the momentum of the Russian companies which had broken through, and thrust toward Kukli along with several Polish companies from the south and west. Meanwhile Conta pushed forward his right wing, which had withdrawn to Okonsk, toward Sobiatoryn and Sawerynowka. Here the Russians offered desperate resistance on the Okonka. The center of 1 German ID drove back a Russian battalion which had reached Lisow. The left wing held its ground on the sandy heights just west of Miedwieze and at Kostiuchnowka.

While Kritek assembled the main body of 45 LW ID in the Razniczy bridgehead on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, there was heavy fighting for possession of Kukli. Hansmann's 42 LW Bde took the Russians' forward positions on the Okonka and then entered Kukli from the south, supported by dismounted detachments of 10 CD and by parts of the 1 Polish Bde. The Russians held onto the northern outskirts of the village and tried to push the attackers back with counter-thrusts. Heavy fire from artillery and machine guns prevented Conta's Corps from advancing on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

23-27 October

For the 23<sup>rd</sup>, GdI Gerok ordered a general offensive. Kritek was supposed to recover the bridgeheads of Kulikowiczy and Nowosielki. Conta was instructed to assemble as many units as possible on his left wing, and to send them to break through at Podgatie toward Czartorijsk.

Kritek placed all the forces of his attacking wing under FML Smekal, the commander of 45 LW ID. Smekal ordered Keki's group to take Komarow while the newly-arrived troops of 45 LW ID thrust through Rudka to Budka. At the same time, 10 CD and 42 LW Inf Bde along with 1 Polish Bde were supposed to advance from Kukli west through Budka toward Czartorijsk. Meanwhile the Russians had brought reinforcements (parts of XXX Corps) over the Styr to Komarow. FML Smekal's attacking troops weren't able to push into the very stubbornly defended enemy positions on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Corps Conta also was unable to carry out the general offensive ordered for this day, because the enemy were still trying to break through on all parts of the thinly-held front. Although the Russians were fended off, their attacks made it necessary to commit the reserves which Conta had prepared on the left wing for his own offensive.

On 24 October, FML Smekal let his artillery prepare for a new and effective bombardment near Komarow. The strongly-defended town of Kukli finally fell this day into the hands of GM Hansmann's Brigade, after Polish legionnaires stormed the Russian trenches farther north. The Poles and the brigade on the right wing of German 1 ID moved their lines forward into the woods of Kamienucha, where the Russians still were making counterattacks. In the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> the left wing of 1 ID took the enemy positions on the edge of the woods east of Lisowo, some of which were evacuated by the Russians due to our pressure against Miedwieze.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> GM Podhajsky's attacking group launched a new thrust against the Russian positions on the heights west of Komarow; after costly fighting, about 5 km of these lines were taken. Komarow itself, however, still couldn't be captured. In the afternoon the left wing of 1 German ID, well-supported by artillery, stormed the main Russian position between Lisowo and Miedwieze and pushed farther ahead up to the Miedwieze-Bielgow road. Meanwhile, however, the weaker right wing of 1 ID was hit by a larger enemy force and its line was broken south of the village of Huta Lisowskaja. The attacking wing of Corps Kritek also collided with attacking Russians, whom they fended off

until night fell.

On 26 October the enemy dug in along a line running from Komarow through Rudka and Kamienucha to a point west of Podgatie, occupying the woods between the towns. The attack on this position opened in the afternoon, but the advance was checked by surprisingly heavy enemy artillery fire. On the two following days the over-taxed troops weren't able to make any further progress. Their strength was exhausted. They had already suffered very heavy casualties in the prolonged actions.

Meanwhile the main body of 26 LW ID (52 LW Inf Bde, artillery and Division HQ) had moved by train through Kovel and were assembled at Maniewicze [Maniewiczy]. Linsingen placed these newly-arrived reinforcements under Corps Conta to carry out a renewed offensive which was planned to start on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **c. The Russians are driven from the bend in the Styr, 28 October-14 November**

#### The allied attacks bog down, 28 October-2 November

In the night of 27-28 October, G.Lt Conta deployed 52 LW Inf Bde in the center of 1 German ID; on the 29<sup>th</sup> the Bohemian Landwehr and the 1 German Inf Bde were to attack the enemy south of the Lisowo-Czartorijsk road. Kritek was also ready to attack on this day. After very hard fighting, around noon his strike group broke into the stubbornly defended Russian positions at Rudka and farther southeast. However, once again it was impossible to wrest the well-fortified village of Komarow from the enemy. This was the end of the offensive against the Russians' southern flank at the bend in the Styr.

Under Corps Conta, the German 1 Inf Bde took Kamienucha toward noon on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Three hours later the 52 LW Inf Bde stormed Huta Lisowskaja and Bielgow. Farther north the German 2 Inf Bde was supposed to join the offensive, but flanking fire from Russian machine guns prevented them from advancing on Podgatie.

When the right wing of Corps Conta continued their advance, they encountered bitter resistance from Russian rifle regiments in the swamps and woods in front of Budka and on the heights, surrounded with quicksand, east of Bielgow. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, East Prussian Gren Regt "Kronprinz" # 1 took Budka after a difficult action, while the right wing of 52 LW Inf Bde sought to take the Bielgow heights from the south. However, this envelopment was

thwarted by the swampy terrain. The attackers sank up to their hips in the bog, and many perished.

There was no change in the situation on the 31<sup>st</sup>. When darkness fell several companies of 2 Polish Bde, which had arrived from the Bukovina, deployed in the center and on the left wing of Corps Conta. FML Lischka, the commander of 26 LW ID, took control of the troops fighting in the Bielgow sector. On 1 November there was supposed to be another general offensive against the enemy positions between Komarow and Budka, on the heights east of Bielgow, and on both sides of the Lisowo-Czartorijsk road. However, on this day Russian counter-thrusts hindered the advance of the attacking wing of Corps Kritek.

At dawn the Russians struck the left wing of Corps Conta's 52 LW Inf Bde. The enemy was repulsed, partly in hand-to-hand combat. Then (at 8:00 AM) the battalions of this Brigade and of the German 2 Inf Bde went over to the offensive. Despite heavy casualties, they worked their way forward right next to the enemy, but it was impossible for them to break into the strongly-constructed position. The assault finally succeeded in the afternoon of 2 November. Gren Regt # 3 found a favorable moment in which the flanking fire of the Russian machine guns was diverted toward Bielgow, and burst forward.<sup>352</sup> Together with two companies of 52 LW Inf Bde they overran the Russian position as well as the trenches lying farther back which sheltered the reserves. They also pushed into the even stronger Russian second position south of Podgatie.

Meanwhile Corps Conta had bombarded the heights of Bielgow for three hours with heavy, medium and light guns. The heights were surrounded by a cloud of smoke and dust. Around 2:30 PM both regiments of 52 LW Inf Bde threw themselves against the wavering enemy. The attackers broke through and rolled forward irresistibly over the expanse of ruins, which were pock-marked with shell-holes and trenches and covered with mangled barbed wire. The Russians still alive in the smashed positions either willingly became prisoners or tried to flee into the woods by Czartorijsk.<sup>353</sup>

After the storm of the heights east of Bielgow the LW IR # 9 and 10 continued to advance. Then the Russians suddenly counter-

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352 Schillmann, "Grenadier-Regiment König Friedrich Wilhelm I (2. Ost-Preussisches) # 3" (Berlin, 1924), p. 160

353 Wisshaupt, "Die 52. Landwehr-Brigade im Weltkrieg", pp. 349 ff.

attacked with strong forces from the woods around Czartorijsk. In a confused action the 52 LW Inf Bde fell back to Bielgow. Here German reserves were deployed and halted the Russian counterattack. However, the withdrawal to Bielgow had opened a gap in the front. In the night of 2-3 November the Russians advanced into this gap and against the rear of the German 2 Inf Bde; this forced Gren Regt # 3, which had still been holding its forward position, to retreat to its starting point.<sup>354</sup>

#### The situation of both sides on 3 November

G.Lt Conta ordered that the attack should resume already on 3 November, so that the lost positions could be recovered. On this day Kritek also wanted to attack the Russians again, at Komarow. However, the tired troops weren't capable of a new offensive. Every day and every night had caused them heavy sacrifice. Clumps of fallen soldiers lay in the swamps, rising over the landscape; the no-man's land between the positions was also covered with the dead. The burden of trench warfare lay heavily upon the troops fighting in the front line. Their health was already deplorable because of the lengthy trials and tribulations they'd suffered in the swamps. It was also very difficult to bring up supplies, since there were very few passable routes to the front; at these points the bearers were struck by machine gun fire and many became casualties. Since it was impossible to start fires so close to the enemy, food had to be eaten cold. The weather, moreover, was generally so chilly that life in the fortifications became a torment. Drenched to the skin, the soldiers stood day and night in the soggy trenches. Dysentery broke out, and the losses due to sickness increased every day. Many troops were so exhausted that they fell asleep at their posts.

From the reports they'd received, Linsingen and Gerok were well aware of the difficult conditions under which the sorely-tried troops had to suffer for many days and nights. Nevertheless they were determined to drive the Russians completely from the bend in the Styr. They urged their divisions to make new exertions, and in general orders demanded that the stubborn enemy, the malicious swamps and the raw weather should all be mastered. Since they anticipated further Russian assaults, they moreover instructed that fortifications should be constructed in case of emergencies. Whenever a favorable opportunity was present, the units should immediately open an attack.

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354 Schillmann, pp. 160 ff.

The Russians were fighting under the same difficult conditions. Brussilov had already lost thousands of dead, wounded or captured men, but was also unwilling to break off the battle. He had received 101 and 125 ID as reinforcements from Ivanov, and deployed them on the Kormin. The fighting along the bend in the Styr at Czartorijsk had drawn in all of XL Corps and Cav Corps Velsaiev plus most of XXX and parts of XXXIX Corps. With the help of Cav Corps Gillenschmidt, at the start of November Brussilov extended the series of isolated thrusts to the entire front between Komarow and Miedwieze.

When General Gillenschmidt's cavalry, reinforced by some infantry, began to attack along the Wiesiolucha and Strumien at the start of November, GdA Gronau was in the process of rearranging his forces. To provide better protection for the roads leading through Kamien Kaszyrskij to Brest-Litovsk and Kovel, he was going to relieve 5 German CD with 82 Res ID. Before this was carried out, 5 CD suddenly found themselves attacked from behind in the night of 2-3 November. Russian detachments, led by local guides, had penetrated the thin German lines in the wilderness of the swamps without being observed, and suddenly appeared in Kuchocka Wola. However, the Germans were soon able to drive the enemy from this hamlet. Russian attempts to cross the Strumien were similarly thwarted, so that Corps Gronau was able to carry out the scheduled troop movements.

#### Further Russian thrusts, 4-11 November

On 4 November Gillenschmidt delivered a new blow through Kostiuchnowka with his southern wing, reinforced by 49 ID. The weak 21 Inf Bde of the Lemberg 11 ID was thrown back to Wolczek. Prussian companies guarded Conta's northern flank at Miedwieze. Detachments of 11 Hon CD hurried to the scene from Cav Corps Hauer, as did Polish legionnaires from Corps Conta; they hurled themselves against the enemy. After three days of action that swept back and forth, the Russians were pushed back again to Kostiuchnowka.

Meanwhile the 1 German ID didn't remain idle. On the 5<sup>th</sup> they began to attack again with their right wing. 1 German Inf Bde was able to gain a little ground at Budka. In the afternoon the 52 LW Bde and 2 German Inf Bde were also supposed to push ahead after short but concentrated artillery fire. But the Russians had strongly occupied positions on the heights east of Bielgow and west of Podgatie, and fired their well-placed machine guns so effectively that any advance was impossible. In the next few

days the rifle regiments of XL Russian Corps themselves went over to the offensive to thwart the allied attempt to envelop them in a pincers attack at the bend in the Styr. With contempt for death the riflemen made a series of thrusts at various points.

On 7 November, long before dawn, the enemy penetrated the position of a Polish company in the swamp by Bielgow and also pushed back the left wing of 52 LW Inf Bde. The Russians had to be driven out by a counterattack. Two days later, early on the 9<sup>th</sup>, they broke through some troops of 45 LW ID at Budka and then also rolled up the right wing of 52 LW Bde from the south. In the woods south of Huta Lisowskaja companies of LW IR "Jung-Bunzlau" # 10 were encircled; in heroic actions some of them broke out, but others were taken prisoner. The actions in the forest also engulfed LW IR "Leitmeritz" # 9 up to its right wing, but the Regiment was able to pull together and hold its position until FML Lischka's reserves intervened from Huta Lisowskaja and threw back the encroaching Russians.<sup>355</sup>

The German 2 Inf Bde was involved in a similar misfortune. Early on the 11<sup>th</sup> the Russians advanced into the positions of the foot detachments of 10 CD which had just been deployed next to the Germans' right wing, and then suddenly appeared in the rear of the Prussian battalions who were next in line.<sup>356</sup> This time again it was possible to quickly free the encircled troops in the trenches from their critical situation by sending reserves to counterattack. The left wing of Corps Kritek similarly endured further Russian assaults at Komarow.

#### Last phase of the battle, 12-14 November

During these wearisome trench actions, Gerok was preparing a new attack. The ranks of the regiments of 1 German ID and of the Aus-Hung. divisions were again filled by replacements from their homelands, and the artillery of Corps Conta was further reinforced. Based on orders from Linsingen's Army Group HQ, G.Lt Conta concentrated the main body of German 1 ID in front of Podgatie so he could break through between the Lisowo-Czartorijsk road and Miedwieze. In the Miedwieze-Kostiuchnowka sector the 2 and 3 Polish Brigades were united under the command of FML Ritter von Durski. 21 Inf Bde, relieved by the Poles, moved in the night of 11-12 November south of the Lisowo-

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355 Wisshaupt, "Die 52. Landwehr Brigade im Weltkrieg", pp. 348 ff.

356 Schillmann, pp. 163 ff.

Czartorijsk road to the center of Corps Conta. Kritek had to give up the main body of 22 German ID to reinforce the right wing of Corps Conta. 120 guns, including 21 cm mortars, were placed in position. On 7 November GdI Fath, formerly commander of the Vienna bridgehead, had taken command of the k.u.k. divisions deployed east of the Styr (45 and 21 LW ID plus 10 CD). Now he was ordered by Gerok to attack immediately if the Russians tried to send units from the Komarow sector to oppose Conta's offensive.

After these preparations, 13 November was the day on which the allied troops fighting near Czartorijsk were supposed to finally free themselves from the torture of stationary warfare in the cold swamps. The bombardment opened around 8:45 AM. Covered by the artillery, the attacking battalions of 1 German ID moved forward as closely as possible to the enemy position at Podgatie; then they stormed the lines at noon. After hard fighting, the Russian trenches between Podgatie and Miedwieze were taken. Meanwhile, however, the enemy once again launched a desperate counter-thrust, and pushed back the k.u.k. 21 Inf Bde. In the afternoon the German 1 ID also had to evacuate part of the captured Russian positions at Podgatie. Since the early approach of dusk made it unlikely that a renewed attack in the forests would be successful, and because the units were badly inter-mingled, G.Lt Conta ordered that the operation wouldn't be resumed until the 14<sup>th</sup>.

In the night the Russians started isolated fire fights. It seemed that they planned to launch a new counterattack at dawn from the sand-hills at Bielgow. The tired allied troops in the trenches stared at the intervening terrain with feverish eyes, but the expected Russian onslaught didn't happen. Toward morning patrols went forward and found the enemy entrenchments empty.

On 14 November the divisions of Fath's new corps moved out of their muddy trenches. They passed through burning Komarow and the swamps and woods along the Okonka and established their lines along the Styr north and south of Nowosielki. The regiments of Corps Conta climbed the empty heights of Bielgow-Miedwieze, which the Russians had evacuated, and occupied the edge of the wood west of Czartorijsk. Detachments sent ahead in pursuit advanced further into the open, slightly undulating land along the river; they encountered only weak enemy rear guards in the villages along the Styr bend.

Brussilov had already evacuated all his positions between

Komarow and Kostiuchnowka during the night. After five Russian divisions had been burnt up in the costly fighting, he had apparently given up hope that he could continue to hold the front west of the Styr against his opponents' persistent pressure. The allied units had achieved noteworthy success in the difficult days since 16 October in actions against a brave and stubborn enemy. They had taken more than 20,000 prisoners, 70 machine guns and 1 piece of artillery. They gathered over 3000 Russian corpses in the swamps and woods by Czartorijsk after Brussilov withdrew. However, the allied units had also suffered considerable casualties. The Aus-Hung. divisions engaged at the Styr bend alone had lost 28,000 men (dead, wounded or missing).

### 3. The actions at Baranowicze, 20-22 October

During the Battle of Czartorijsk there were no major actions involving 4<sup>th</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> Armies. The Russians only made some isolated thrusts with small forces at Murawica on the Ikwa (against 40 Hon ID) and in the sector of 25 ID; both were repulsed.

On the German front north of the Pripyat, GFM Hindenburg continued his efforts to gain ground in the direction of Dvinsk, Jakobstadt and Riga until the end of October. The Russians held onto these sally ports over the Dvina, and launched counterattacks. The actions around the Lithuanian lakes, which involved 10<sup>th</sup> German Army, also died down toward the end of October. Farther north the left wing of GdA von Scholtz's Armeegruppe was anchored on the Dvina about half way between Dvinsk and Jakobstadt. GdI Otto von Below assumed command over the northernmost part of the front and over the coast defense forces. His HQ, formerly called the Army of the Niemen, now became the new 8<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>357</sup>

At the end of October there was costly fighting which involved the k.u.k. XII Corps (16 and 35 ID), now led by FML Henriquez. Since the end of September the Corps was in the center of Woyrsch's Army (Beskid Corps, k.u.k. XII Corps, Landwehr Corps, Division Bredow, and 119 ID); stationed on the Szczara, it covered the Minsk-Baranowicze rail line. Opposite this important front were the inner wings of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Armies (Gren, IX and X Corps plus half of XXIV Corps). During October the Russians made almost daily attempts to cross the Szczara with small forces, and at a few points they were able to

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357 Ludendorff, pp. 139 ff.

penetrate the positions of XII Corps. After short actions, however, each of these Russian scouting detachments pulled back again over the river.

#### Course of the action at Baranowicze

Early on 20 October, after a heavy artillery bombardment, there was a strong trust toward Baranowicze. Troops from X Russian Corps overran the first line of 35 ID at Litwa and also drove into the second line. A large number of the Romanian personnel of IR # 50 laid down their weapons. FML von Podhoranszky, the commander of 35 ID quickly sent his divisional cavalry and (from the Corps' reserve) the k.k. Lst IR # 51 into the breach; however, they weren't able to reach the lost trenches in their counterattack. Meanwhile available troops from the German Landwehr Corps and from the Army's reserve (a German Landwehr regiment) were sent to the endangered 35 ID. These reinforcements arrived on the battlefield in the afternoon and were able to recapture the reserve positions of 35 ID. Two battalions apiece from the k.u.k. 16 ID and from the Beskid Corps, as well as German artillery, were sent to join the troops who'd already hurried to the scene. Moreover, on the 21<sup>st</sup> the entire German 119 ID was available, after GO Woyrsch had sent it by forced marches from his northern wing to the town of Baranowicze.

In the night the Russians again broke into the crumbling front of 35 ID. Early on the 21<sup>st</sup> GO Woyrsch arrived at Baranowicze to direct the concentric counterattack toward Litwa which he had ordered. The German reinforcements, mixed with the badly weakened regiments of 35 ID, began to attack after powerful artillery fire. Then parts of XXIV Russian Corps struck FML von Schariczter's 16 ID, which was fighting in the area southeast of Baranowicze. The main blow was directed down the main Sluck-Kobrin highway, where IR # 31 and 64 - largely composed of Romanians - were stationed. At the same time, III Caucasian Corps tried to deliver short blows against the Beskid Corps. All of the Russian attacks against the Germans were repulsed. The troops of the k.u.k. 16 ID deployed just to the left of the Beskid Corps also held their ground, but the enemy broke through the center of the Division with their first thrust. The wreckage of IR # 64 fled from their positions on the Szczara west into the forest. The divisional cavalry hurried to the scene, but couldn't seal the wide gap in the front. The situation became more critical as the morning went on. The troops of 16 ID who'd been pushed west along the Sluck-Kobrin road suffered new Russian attacks, and were able to hold on only

with difficulty. FML Schariczer urgently requested reinforcements from Corps HQ.

Meanwhile the counterattack on Litwa had succeeded. In a few hours the Russians were hurled out of the trenches they'd taken from 35 ID, and the allies took more than 1600 prisoners. Therefore it was possible for FML Henriquez even during the morning to send part of 35 ID to help 16 ID. Woyrsch was also able to send the hard-pressed 16 ID two battalions from the 119 German ID, which was held in readiness at Baranowicze.

In the afternoon these reinforcements counterattacked along the Kobrin-Sluck road; meanwhile from the south the reserves of the Beskid Corps, which had held its lines, struck the flank of the Russians who'd penetrated our position. However, counter-thrusts by the enemy brought the advance to a halt toward evening. GO Woyrsch ordered that the offensive should continue on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. As day broke, the Russians pulled back over the Szczara to their starting points. Thus the situation was completely restored. However, in two days of hard fighting the k.u.k. XII Corps had lost more than 7500 of its 22,000 men. A great portion of the casualties listed as "missing" were from IR # 31, 50 and 64, which had offered little resistance to the Russian onslaught.

#### Effects of the fighting on the XII Corps

Because of the setback at Baranowicze, the HQ of Woyrsch's Army lost confidence in the reliability of XII Corps. Therefore FML Henriquez asked the high command to return him IR # 62 and 82 (which currently were with 10 ID in 4<sup>th</sup> Army). He wanted to exchange them for IR # 31, 50 and 64, which were composed mostly of Romanians from Transylvania. GdI Falkenhayn also demanded at Teschen that troops should be sent to XII Corps who would show greater powers of resistance. GO Woyrsch also suggested that XII Corps should be broken up and its regiments incorporated into Reich-German units so that the Romanians could be stiffened and trained. The Aus-Hung. Chief of the General Staff turned down this idea, but sent IR # 62 back to XII Corps along with IR # 63 (the latter from VI Corps). In turn, FML Henriquez sent IR # 50 to VI Corps. At the start of November, GO Woyrsch had XII Corps take over the Gorodiszczze sector; they relieved German troops (Division Bredow) who were then sent to the more sensitive sector in front of Baranowicze. IR # 62 joined XII Corps on 3 November, followed in mid-month by IR # 63. Thereafter 35 ID consisted of IR # 51, 62 and 63 plus k.k. Lst IR # 51 and k.u. Lst Eta March Regt # 3. 16 ID had IR # 2, 31

and 64 plus the k.u.k. Reserve IR # 2. The other reserve IR (# 31 and 64) had been dissolved after the costly action at Baranowicze.<sup>358</sup>

## ***B. The fighting in east Galicia from the end of October to mid-November***

### **1. The actions at Nowo-Aleksinieci-Lopuszno (21 October to 3 November)**

#### **a. The Russians attack V Corps**

In the third week of October, Böhm-Ermolli intended to attack the Russians at Sapanow, where they had established themselves on the western bank of the Ikwa, and drive them over the river. For this purpose, half of 26 LW ID and one regiment of 29 ID were held in readiness behind the right wing of XVIII Corps. Moreover, Böhm-Ermolli had to implement orders issued by Army Group HQ on 13 October regarding the establishment of reserve forces. Therefore he planned to have V Corps relieve 33 ID by extending the Corps' line to the south and sending its reserves (IR # 41) to the front. However, at this time the Russians were increasing their activity opposite V Corps and finally made it impossible to carry out the proposed re-deployment.

#### The Russians strike on 21 October

Early on 21 October the VII Russian Corps (13 and 34 ID), supported by 16 ID of VI Corps, mounted a short but powerful onslaught against the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.<sup>359</sup> In several waves the Russians stormed the front of the k.u.k. V Corps between Nw. Aleksinieci and Rostoki. After hefty artillery preparation, around 9:00 AM they broke through 43 LW ID, whose units (from east Galicia and Bukovina) were already weakened by earlier losses; the smashed battalions of this Division fled back toward Zagorze. Their neighbors on the right, the Hungarian 33 ID of

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358 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The percentage of Romanian troops in the k.u.k. regiments mentioned here were: # 2 - 27%, # 31 - 69% , # 50 - 71%, # 51 - 62%, # 62 - 46%, # 63 - 73%, # 64 - 86% , # 82 - less than 10%.

359 Gurko, "Russland 1914-1917: Erinnerungen an Krieg und Revolution" (Berlin, 1921), pp .110 ff.

IV Corps, who were already sore pressed by Russian thrusts out of Nw. Aleksinieć against their front, now had to pull back their endangered left wing. FML Goglia's Corps reserve, IR # 41, had been stationed at Zagorze; they were sent during the morning to counterattack, and collided with the Russians in the Las Wereszczak woods, about 1 km west of the lost positions. A very bitter struggle ensued. After a gallant fight, IR # 41 gave way to the enemy pressure and fell back with the dispersed remnants of 43 LW ID to Zagorze.

Meanwhile FML Rudolf Krauss' 34 ID had been vigorously attacked by the Russians on the heights east and southeast of Lopuszno. They also sought with their right wing to limit the damage caused by enemy penetration of the lines of 43 LW ID. However, as the Russians advanced they were increasingly outflanking the right wing of 34 ID, and making it impossible for the bravely-fighting IR # 33 to continue to hold its ground. Gradually the enemy rolled up the entire line of V Corps as far as the village of Lopuszno. One part of 34 ID (GM von Lauingen's 67 Inf Bde) withdrew to the west to a prepared position on the edge of the Czarny Las woods; the other (Col. Koneczni's 68 Inf Bde) fell back to the north and onto the edge of the heights where the land begins to rise from the valley of the Ikwa.

By noon the situation seemed very dangerous. Between the remnants of 43 LW ID at Zagorze and the much-weakened 34 ID on the eastern edge of the Czarny Las there was a broad gap in the front. On the heights north of Rostoki-Lopuszno, the connection between V Corps and FML Kosak's Group (27 and 29 ID) had been lost. The fighting on 21 October had cost V Corps 7500 men.

However, the Russians didn't know how to exploit their success. They stood fast on the heights east of Lopuszno, in Wolica, and in the woods east of Panasowka; during the afternoon they moved farther west only with great hesitation. Meanwhile GdK Böhm-Ermolli was sending reinforcements to the endangered V Corps - Col. Benes' cavalry group from Radziwilow and Col. von Vecsey's cavalry group from Niemiacz. (The latter group had been formed in mid-October from the divisional cavalry of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.) In forced marches the Ersatz troops of 34 ID which hadn't yet been incorporated (the XV March battalions) were brought up to Panasowka to close the gap in the Corps' center.

Toward evening the 43 LW ID moved its thin lines forward to the heights east of Zagorze, and thus re-occupied its previously abandoned reserve positions. On its right, 33 ID had bent back its left wing to the heights northwest of Nw. Aleksinieć. Here

also FML Schmidt-Georgenegg, commanding IV Corps, deployed parts of IR # 101, which he had started to send from his right wing to Zagorze during the morning. The gap between 34 ID and 43 LW ID had been filled by the hasty arrival of Col. Vecsey's six squadrons, along with March companies from 34 ID and other parts of IR # 101. On the northern slope of the hill at Lopuszno, FML Kosak had assembled the available reserves of 27 and 29 ID and restored his Group's connection with V Corps. In the evening Col. Koneczni's 68 Bde from 34 ID was placed under FML Kosak.

When the Russians broke into the positions of V Corps early on 21 October, the 51 LW Inf Bde were moving from Radziwilow to Brody, where they were supposed to entrain and follow the rest of 26 LW ID to Kovel. When GdK Böhm-Ermolli learned of the severe defeat of V Corps, he decided to halt this Brigade at Brody and then send it to the right wing of Group Kosak. The high command concurred in this decision. In the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> the Brigade was placed under FML Kosak and ordered to recover the heights of Lopuszno. Moreover, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the 51 Hon ID would move from Zloczow to the area south of Podkamien, where it would be placed at the disposal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. V and IV Corps were to support the counterattack with artillery fire and would join in on the flanks of the operation as soon as Kosak began to gain ground. It was hoped that the Russians who'd penetrated to the west would be pushed back, and that the lost positions of V Corps would be recovered.

### **b. Groups Kosak and Rozwadowski counterattack at Lopuszno and Panasowka**

#### Bitter fighting at Lopuszno

On 22 October it was possible to carry out preparations for the operation without interference, since the Russians didn't continue their offensive. Around 7:30 AM on the next day (23 October) FML Kosak concentrated the fire of his batteries on the heights which the Russians occupied east of Lopuszno. The infantry awaited the signal to attack at their posts north and west of the village, in the low lands and behind the edge of the heights where the ground slopes down to the Ikwa, as well as in the reserve trenches on the eastern edge of the Czarny Las. Around 8:00 AM, just a half hour after the artillery bombardment had started, FML Kosak's attacking group moved forward; it was made up of 51 LW Inf Bde plus detachments from the 27, 29 and 34 ID.

On the left wing the principal striking force - six battalions under Col. Olbrich - secured the northern slope of the heights east of Lopuszno, despite suffering casualties. On the right wing, two Jaeger battalions of Col. Koneczni's group drove into the northern part of Lopuszno with their first onslaught.<sup>360</sup> Now other troops of 34 ID, ready for action, rose from their trenches and worked with Col. Koneczni's group to seize part of the woods southwest of Lopuszno from the enemy. However, around 9:00 AM the attack stalled along the entire front. On the right wing the attackers came under strong fire from Russian machine guns concealed in the woods that covered the edge of the heights.<sup>361</sup>

Col. Olbrich's group had no better luck. They were hit by Russian counter-thrusts through the heights east of Lopuszno, which led to destructive individual actions which couldn't be settled by the commitment of the last reserves. Meanwhile twilight was falling. Since the prospects of a further attack in the darkness with the exhausted troops weren't promising, FML Kosak halted the fight.

However, it seemed necessary to recover the edge of the heights south of Lopuszno in order to flatten the bulge in the front between V Corps and Group Kosak. Therefore FML Kosak moved 51 LW Inf Bde during the night of 24-25 October from the heights east of Lopuszno behind the left wing of FML Krauss' 34 ID; Krauss placed IR # 29 of his Division behind his right wing to accompany the assault on the Wolica Heights.

During these autumn days, a bewildering network of trenches had been build on the battlefield in front of Lopuszno, and they often changed hands in the course of the fighting. The leadership was losing control of the troops after they entered this labyrinth of trenches. To prevent this, the attack would be mounted not only from the foremost position of 34 ID, but also from the deployment area farther to the rear in the Czarny Las.<sup>362</sup>

In the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>, after an artillery bombardment, 51 LW Inf Bde marched in good order out of the Czarny Las woods. They

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360 TRANSLATOR's NOTE - Presumably the two battalions in question were FJB # 23 and 28, which were assigned to Koneczni's 68 Inf Bde.

361 Wisshaupt, "Das Gefecht von Lopuszno" (in Öst. Wehrzeitung, Issues 33, 34 and 37 of 1923).

362 "Das Infanterie Regiment 94 im Weltkrieg", p. 395.

had to cross a wide, open field under enemy artillery fire, and therefore suffered casualties just to reach the positions of 34 ID. Here their advance broke down in the maze of trenches. Individual companies did try to move further, but when they left the trenches they were caught on our own barbed wire and were driven back by Russian machine gun fire from the Lopuszno woods. IR # 29 didn't fare much better; they were pinned down in the trenches of 34 ID by flanking fire from Russian artillery deployed on the heights north of Wolica.

#### A pause to regroup

Since the two-fold attack at Lopuszno hadn't gained the desired success, GdK Böhm-Ermolli came to Krutniew and Zagorze on 26 October to speak directly with the Corps commanders and to get a closer look at the condition of the right wing of his Army. Here he gained the impression that as long as the Russians remained in possession of the heights between Nw. Aleksinieć and Wolica they would continue to threaten V Corps. Therefore on the 27<sup>th</sup> he ordered FML Goglia to reconquer the ridge which ran just west of the Austro-Russian border and in front of the new positions of 43 LW ID.

GM Ritter von Jordan-Rozwadowski, the commander of 43 LW ID, had given up two of his burnt-out regiments (IR # 24 and LW IR # 36) to 14 ID. In exchange he received IR # 76 from 14 ID and 51 LW Inf Bde from Group Kosak. For the planned attack, moreover, he had available the entire artillery of V Corps as well as six batteries from Group Kosak and IV Corps. Thus his strength was around 10,000 riflemen and 90 guns of all calibers; they were to attack on a front about 3 km wide, and were deployed only a few hundred paces from their objectives.<sup>363</sup>

GM Rozwadowski, who carefully prepared the assault, planned to concentrate his forces closely together for a short spring forward. Right behind the foremost position he had trenches prepared to protect the attacking groups. Steps were cut in the trenches and passages cleared through the barbed wire for the use of the storm troops. With small sorties, Group Kosak and IV Corps sought to divert the enemy's attention from the preparations for the attack.

After the reinforcements for 43 LW ID arrived on 31 October, FML

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363 Wisshaupt, "Der Gefecht bei Panasowka" (in Schweizerische Monatschrift für Offiziere aller Waffen; Issues 2, 3 and 4 of 1932)

Goglia selected 1 November as the date for the operation. However, the sky was gray over the heights and rain showers hindered the bombardment and air observation. Therefore the attack had to be postponed until the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

#### The action at Panasowka

As All-Souls' Day began, the Russians were very active; they sent scouting detachments against IV Corps. Kosak repeated his diversionary thrusts. The enemy moved reserves behind their front toward Lopuszno. Toward noon GM Rozwadowski deployed his attacking troops in their jumping-off points within 43 LW ID - IR # 76 on the Division's left wing and most of 51 LW Inf Bde in the center. In the reserve trenches behind the right wing stood the remaining battalions of 51 LW Inf Bde; two regiments of 43 LW ID (LW IR # 20 and 22) were in readiness at Zagorze-Panasowka.

Around noon the powerful artillery opened their bombardment, which escalated to massed fire at 1:45 PM. However, GM Rozwadowski didn't concentrate all of his batteries at first against the northern part of the Russian position, as had originally been intended. Instead he simultaneously struck the assembly areas behind the Russian front and the enemy artillery with heavy caliber guns.

IR # 76 was to attack the Russians' northern strong point, a clump of woods west of Wolica. GM Rozwadowski was counting on the destruction wrought by his guns. He received a report that the grove near Wolica had been taken, and brought up his divisional reserve (LW IR # 20) from Zagorze to exploit the success. IR # 76 had indeed struck the woods, but their assault had ended in front of the Russian barbed wire. IR # 29 of the neighboring 34 ID had no better luck; their advance came to an end after gaining just meager ground.

GM Rozwadowski had switched the artillery fire to the south, to open the way into the enemy position for 51 LW Inf Bde. Toward 3:00 PM the LW IR # 12 of this Brigade threw themselves against the bulge in the front on the northwestern end of the Las Wereszczak; however, the enemy position hadn't been smashed by the artillery, and the resistance of the garrison in the trenches wasn't broken. Since LW IR # 12 couldn't move forward, Col. Ritter von Zygadlowicz (commanding 51 LW Inf Bde) committed two battalions of LW IR # 11 which had been held back, hoping to get the attacking line moving again. But when the sun set the attackers were still lying in front of the Russian position;

they dug in on the open field or ducked into the trenches that covered no-man's land. Individual companies attempted to attack the woods at Wolica at night, but were defeated.

Meanwhile FZM Goglia ordered that the mixed-up units should be brought to order and that the attack would continue on the next day after a renewed artillery bombardment. However, bad weather on 3 November limited the activity of the artillery. When an effective bombardment finally began toward 1:00 PM, the Russians had already had time to bring their reserves up and strongly occupy their positions. The Russian guns shot back energetically. The regiments of the reinforced 43 LW ID, which were pressed together to fill their trenches, suffered substantial casualties. The attackers were pressed to the ground. Around 2:00 PM parts of IR # 101, which had been stationed on the left wing of Rozwadowski's Division since 21 October, advanced out of their trenches in an attempt to restore impetus to the assault. However the Russian guns hadn't been neutralized, and the enemy reserves hadn't been dispersed. Strong forces assembled in the grove at Wolica for a counterattack. Rozwadowski's left wing fought desperately to retain the ground they had won. On the right wing, several companies of LW IR # 11 worked their way very slowly closer to the enemy strong point on the northwestern edge of the Las Wereszczak. Several times Col. Zygadlowicz repeated the order for the Regiment to storm ahead. This, however, was impossible because the enemy barbed wire hadn't been destroyed and the resistance of the Russian defenders was unbroken. Toward evening the commander of LW IR # 11 had to report to the Brigade that his troops had suffered heavy losses and therefore a further assault was unthinkable. A similar report arrived from IR # 76. Therefore FML Rozwadowski gave up his hopes for success and ended the action with the consent of the Corps and Army commanders.

In the night of 3-4 November the battered attacking troops pulled back - some of them to their starting points on the front of 43 LW ID, others to Zagorze-Panasowka. The casualties of IR # 76 in the Panasowka action were 50%, and those of 51 LW Inf Bde were 25%.

## **2. Russian thrusts on the Strypa and Ikwa (31 October-11 November)**

The new Russian attacks in the Polesie and in east Galicia were undertaken at approximately the time when the Italians opened the third battle on the Isonzo and when the k.u.k. high command was planning to continue the campaign in the Balkans until the Entente forces were expelled. Moreover, military measures might also be necessary against Romania. Conrad and Falkenhayn agreed completely that the general situation demanded the maintenance of the defensive wall which had been erected against Russia. However, the recent events at Baranowicze, Czartorijsk and Nw. Aleksiniec had shown that the Russians were always capable of causing serious danger at various points along the front. Anticipating further Russian relief attacks in east Galicia, GO Conrad issued a general order to his Armies on 28 October in which he forcefully pointed out that a decision was now being sought in the Balkans. Therefore everything possible must be done to hold our positions against the Russians. Above all, commanders should employ their personal influence on the troops to reinforce their will to hold on; setbacks like those at Baranowicze and Czartorijsk were detrimental to the reputation of the k.u.k. Army. In addition, the Russian incursions had led to wide-spread troop movements and to the use of divisions which might be needed in the Balkans or in the southwestern theater of operations.

The front on the Strypa also remained active in the second half of October, although the Russians didn't launch any serious attacks. Toward the end of the month, GdI Bothmer relieved 38 Hon ID on the north wing of Corps Marschall with 3 Gd ID, and placed the Honveds at Sloboda Zlota as a strategic reserve. There were also several changes within Corps Hofmann. The regiments which had been assembled from March formations were designated k.u.k. IR # 103 and k.u. Hon IR # 308, 309 and 310. The HQ of 55 ID was dissolved. Hofmann's Corps now consisted only of three brigades - 130 and 131 Bdes plus Bolzano's Bde, which was given the number 132.

On 31 October the 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army made a new sortie. Parts of XXII Corps, covered by thick fog, attacked the center of South Army on the upper Strypa. After a hefty artillery bombardment, at 5:00 PM they struck at the point where Corps Marschall and Corps Hofmann came together. FML Hofmann sent his reserves (parts of 131 and 132 Inf Bdes) to the battlefield, but they were unable to recover the lost positions on the Strypa. In the

evening some Finnish Rifle battalions crossed the river and pushed into Siemikowce. At the same time the 130 Inf Bde was heavily assaulted in the bridgehead at Sosnow; threatened from the north, they had to pull their left wing over the Strypa.

The night passed in heavy fighting. GM Blum, commanding the northern wing of Corps Hofmann, sought with his intermingled units (IR # 103, Hon IR # 308, the Ukrainian volunteers, and LW IR # 35) to halt the enemy who were advancing against his flank. Early on 1 November he was supposed to attack, together with German 48 Res ID, and to drive the enemy over the Strypa. However, before the counterattack started moving the Russians again attacked the left wing of GM Blum's group; mounted Russian cavalry detachments drove back the weak Ukrainian regiment. Marschall's right wing (48 Res ID) held fast to the area northwest of Siemikowce and brought the enemy to a standstill.

Meanwhile GdI Bothmer made his Army reserve (three battalions of 3 Gd ID) available to Corps Marschall, along with 38 Hon ID which had again been attached to him by the high command. In the afternoon GdK Marschall sent these troops to counterattack toward Siemikowce after a strong artillery barrage. Thereupon the Russians evacuated the west bank of the Strypa opposite the bent-back left wing of Corps Hofmann; from Siemikowce, however, they delivered blow after blow and brought the advance of 38 Hon ID to a halt. The Honveds resumed their counterattack on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and drove into Siemikowce after a difficult and costly action. In the next morning (3 November) this important town was recaptured by the Russians. GdK Marschall once again pounded Siemikowce with artillery; then in the afternoon he went over to the offensive with all the troops on the right wing of South Army (38 Hon ID plus parts of German 48 Res ID, of 3 Gd ID and of Corps Hofmann). Despite a stubborn defense, the enemy was now driven east over the Strypa. In the evening the Honveds advanced into Siemikowce. Early on the 4<sup>th</sup> the Russians were driven from the last houses of the hotly contested, burning town. Several thousand prisoners fell into the hands of the allies.

This success had an effect. On 4 November the Russians opposite Sosnow and Burkanow, where they had moved up to the bridgehead positions of 130 and 132 Inf Bdes, also pulled back in the direction of the Sereth, and to their starting points.

Then the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army attempted to attack. On 5 November parts of XI Corps advanced against 39 Hon ID near Wisniowczyk. Artillery fire from Arz's VI Corps forced them

back. The Russians tried again on the 6<sup>th</sup> and on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Hon IR # 306 of 202 Hon Inf Bde, which had replaced IR # 63 in this position, repulsed all the attacks. Next day there were weak Russian thrusts against 15 ID on the southern wing of XIII Corps, which were also defeated.

At almost the same time, Brussilov's XVII Corps opened bitter fighting on the Ikwa at Sapanow. GdK Böhm-Ermolli's plan to take this town and its bridgehead from the Russians hadn't been implemented, because the reserves he'd assembled behind the right wing of XVIII Corps had to be sent to Group Kosak. Now the Russians again sought to break into the lines of 31 ID. Their thrusts went on for five days (7 to 11 November), but the Hungarian IR # 44 and BH IR # 3 held the front in stubborn defensive fighting.

### **3. The Aus-Hung. Eastern front from mid-November to the second half of December**

At the start of November the k.u.k. high command moved 9 ID, which was standing in readiness behind 1<sup>st</sup> Army, to the area of Kozowa in Galicia. Since 38 Hon ID was deployed at Siemikowce, it seemed necessary to have a new strategic reserve in Galicia. This was especially advisable because pilots were observing troop concentrations behind the Russian front - in the area north of the Buczacz-Czortkow railroad, on the road between Kamenets Podolsk and Skala, and at Lipkany near the Bessarabian border. On the other hand, the Russian attack on the Strypa died away on 8 November, sooner than anticipated, and it was also quiet for the time being in front of Czernowitz.

Therefore in the middle of the month the 9 ID from Kozowa and 9 Inf Bde from 5 ID on the Dniester were sent to support the hard-pressed Isonzo front. To replace these units, the high command wanted to bring 70 Hon ID to the Galician front. However, the movement of this Division from Transylvania was delayed by the uncertain attitude of Romania. For this reason, on 22 November GO Conrad approached Falkenhayn with a request to be given one of the German divisions which were then in the Banat. The German Chief of Staff refused, on the grounds that the retention of as many German troops in south Hungary as possible was useful because of its effect on Romania.

Quiet reigned in most of Galicia and Volhynia since mid-November; the only exceptions were a few scouting operations by the Russians, which necessitated some small counter-thrusts at

the bend in the Styr at Czartorijsk. Despite the many days that elapsed without fighting, the next few weeks were a time of great exertion and deprivation for the troops. They had to work on permanent positions for the winter from early in the morning until the evening; if the daylight hours weren't enough, they labored also at night. Day after day the men carried enormous burdens - giant trees from the immense forests of Volhynia, which were laboriously turned into posts and logs to reinforce the loose earth of the trench walls. Winter arrived early, and in mid-November the ground was covered with snow. An icy wind howled over the Podolian steppe and struck all the positions and roads. Afterwards there was a thaw and rain which turned the entire countryside into a morass. Water stood in the trenches. The troops, stuck in the mud and swamps, constantly had to repair the trench walls and the dug-outs. Moreover, supplies were still inadequate, especially for 4<sup>th</sup> Army because the railroads leading to Kovel had thus far received only emergency repairs. In December the logistical situation of 4<sup>th</sup> Army worsened, because on the 6<sup>th</sup> the railroad bridge over the Vistula at Ivangorod was damaged by an ice floe. The health of the troops was adversely affected by a bitter shortage of the necessities of life, by constant hard work on the positions, and by tiresome outpost duty. The garrisons of the trenches were plagued by dysentery and by diseases of the kidney and of the joints. Some men even died of weakness.

#### Troop dispositions

Under the prevailing conditions the short period of quiet was very necessary because it allowed the relief of some divisions after the incorporation of the November replacement troops (the XVI March battalions of the Common Army and the Honveds, and the XV March battalions of the Austrian Landwehr). As ordered by the high command, at the start of December Linsingen assembled 21 LW ID and Cav Corps Lehmann (the former Cav Corps Herberstein) as the Army Group's reserve at Luck; also in the Group's reserve were 22 German ID at Kolki and the k.u.k. 15 ID at Maniewicze. XVII Corps was reassigned from Armeegruppe Gerok to 4<sup>th</sup> Army. This Army placed 24 ID (formerly in its reserves) on the left wing of X Corps, and stretched its north wing by placing 4 ID in a new sector south of Siemki as far as the Styr. 13 LW ID and 4 ID once again made up II Corps under FML Kaiser. 25 ID of 1<sup>st</sup> Army was placed under I Corps. Around the start of December the 51 LW Inf Bde, which had been held by 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, was sent by rail to Maniewicze. Corps Fath now consisted of 45 LW ID, all of 26 LW ID, and 10 CD. Corps Conta had 1 German ID and FML Durski's Polish Division (2 and 3 Polish Brigades). The 1

Polish Bde was placed under Cav Corps Hauer (1 and 9 CD, 11 Hon CD).

Behind his Army Group, in late November GdK Böhm-Ermolli had assembled 32 ID at Zagorze, 43 LW ID and Benes' Cavalry Bde at Brody, 51 Hon ID in the area west of Sapanow, and finally half of 40 Hon ID at Demidowka. Since 9 ID had left for Italy, 38 Hon ID stood in readiness at Kozowa behind the South Army. Small Russian forces had once again advanced against Burkanow, Wisniowczyk and Dobropole on 19 November. On the next day they had already pulled back toward the Sereth, but there were signs that more troops were concentrating in front of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, especially between the Dniester and the Pruth. Therefore on 30 November Pflanzer-Baltin moved Hon IR # 306 by rail from VI Corps to Horodenka so that it could unite with the main body of 202 Hon Inf Bde. Meanwhile only 5 Hon CD was available behind XI Corps. On 2 December the high command ordered 51 Hon ID to be shipped to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. This Division assembled at Sniatyn on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

The high command moreover intended to send 21 LW ID and one division from 4<sup>th</sup> Army to Galicia in case the Russians renewed their attacks here. GdI Linsingen, on the other hand, proposed on 16 December to lead an assault toward Rovno with five divisions. Falkenhayn supported this idea, but it wasn't approved by Conrad, who reasoned that a thrust in Volhynia wouldn't keep the Russians from attacking south of Tarnopol. Also, Conrad felt that previous experiences indicated that an advance over the swamps on the Putilowka or over the formidable barrier of the Ikwa offered little chance of success; these rivers were not yet frozen. Finally, the staff at Teschen was sure that a new Russian offensive was being prepared against their front. Despite the inclement weather, the positions were being continually strengthened during this quiet period. Even without the December replacement troops (XVII March Battalions of the Common Army and Honved, XVI Battalions of the Austrian Landwehr), the combat strength of the divisions was up to between 7000 and 12,000 men. Some divisions had 15,000. 42 Hon ID (under Corps Korda) even numbered 20,000 riflemen.

The units in the defensive positions in Volhynia and Galicia were distributed rather evenly. Now, however, it appeared that the Russian troops were stationed more densely south of Tarnopol, and above all between the Dniester and Pruth. For the time being, the only reserves behind the South Army and the east wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army were two and a half infantry and one cavalry divisions. However, after the troop movements of the last few

weeks there were five infantry and three cavalry divisions ready in Volhynia and at Brody which could be sent to the most threatened points if necessary. The situation had substantially improved in that Romania, impressed by the great successes of the allied Central Powers in the Balkans, wasn't inclined at present to join the side of the Entente. Reports arrived at Teschen on 17 December that the Romanians didn't intend to strike until spring of the coming year.

#### An analysis of the operations in late fall

In looking back at the events which had transpired between mid-October and mid-November, it is clear that none of the attacks which Ivanov launched in Volhynia and east Galicia in late fall 1915 had any wide-ranging objectives. They were merely intended to provide some relief for the Serbs. Therefore Ivanov had to restrict himself to short sorties, which undeniably did achieve initial tactical successes. However, they hadn't obliged the allies to move even one battalion from the Balkans to the Eastern front.

Because of the Russian advance at the Styria bend, the k.u.k. high command had been obliged to postpone the planned transport of 3 ID to the Southwest front. The defense against the Russian assaults had also prevented the establishment of a strategic reserve to deal with the Romanian danger. Moreover, the high command couldn't go along with Falkenhayn's wish to send Aus-Hung. units to the German front north of the Pripyat to make up for the fact that Corps Conta was still at the Styria bend.

The Russian thrusts to relieve the Serbs in October and November had not hindered the transfer of 6 ID from a quiet sector to the Southwest front. As already noted, in mid-November another division and a half (9 ID and half of 5 ID) followed 6 ID. Thus after the fall of Brest-Litovsk, only four divisions had been made free on the Aus-Hung. part of the Eastern front so they could move to the Italian theater of operations.<sup>364</sup> This proved that despite all the victories of the preceding summer, the Eastern front was still menaced by the recovered Russian armies.

#### **4. Russian plans for a new offensive**

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364 The units were 106 Lst ID (including the extra 60 Inf Bde), 6 ID, 9 ID, and 9 Inf Bde from 5 ID.

Toward mid-December, 7<sup>th</sup> Army received reports from spies that the Russians were moving troops from the Odessa area to the Bessarabian border. Pilots flew out to clarify the Russian intentions, but this was in vain. Driving snow and low-lying clouds kept them from seeing the enemy deployment in front of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army.

#### Strategic options of the Russians

Back on 31 October the Tsar had ordered the formation of a new 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army with three corps and a cavalry division taken from the West Front plus a cavalry division from Southwest Front. This Army was to assemble near Odessa and the Bessarabian border so that it could intervene in the Balkans. General Evert sent V Caucasian, II and XVI Corps plus a combined Cossack division to Odessa. General Ivanov added one Cossack brigade apiece from his 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies. Command of the new 7<sup>th</sup> Army was given to General Shcherbachev; his place at 11<sup>th</sup> Army was taken by General Sakharov.<sup>365</sup>

At the start of November the troops of 7<sup>th</sup> Army arrived at Odessa. Serbia and France impatiently awaited the armed intervention of Russia in the Balkans. But the negotiations with the Romanian government regarding passage of Russian troops through Dobruja remained fruitless. The Russian high command was also unable to decide whether to land troops on the Bulgarian coast. For one thing, the units at Odessa weren't ready for operations. They lacked rifles and military equipment, and their ranks had to be replenished again after the costly fighting in the summer and fall. But there was a second problem. The commander of the Russian fleet on the Black Sea, who was supposed to lead the amphibious operation, raised serious objections. He pointed out the lack of transport ships and the danger that German submarines would attack them at sea. He declared that it would be impossible to supply troops along the Bulgarian coast in winter unless he could use the Romanian harbor and its magazine at Constanza as a supply base.<sup>366</sup>

Under these circumstances the Russian high command gave up the plan for a Balkan campaign, despite the urging of Serbia and France. Alexeiev anyway had developed more grandiose plans since the days when the Germans had broken off their dangerous offensive toward Minsk, and no longer threatened the approaches

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365 Lemke, pp. 136 ff. Klembowksi, Part V, p. 7. Frantz, "Russland auf dem Wege zur Katastrophe", p. 93

366 Paléologue, Vol. I, pp. 422 ff. Klemowski, Part V, p. 8

to St Petersburg. He recognized that his situation was eased because the Germans had weakened their Eastern front for the campaign in Serbia and to build up their defenses in the West. He wanted to use this time to prepare a death-blow against Austria-Hungary. His new plan reflected the same spirit which had brought the Russian armies to the gates of Cracow a year earlier.

The decisive attack would occur on the Rovno-Czernowitz front in the direction of Brest-Litovsk and Lemberg, with 500,000 men. With ten corps on his left wing, Alexeiev wanted to cross the passes of the Forest Carpathians into Hungary and threaten the Balkan front of the allied Central Powers from the rear. In the Russians' program for this grand offensive the other Entente powers would play a significant role. Ten corps would land on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, advance toward the Danube, smash Bulgaria, and then enter south Hungary and link up with the Russians at Budapest. The Italians would attack simultaneously, while the French and English would pin down the Germans in the West. If the Germans did intervene to prop up collapsing Austria-Hungary, Alexeiev believed the Italians could take the road through Graz to Vienna while the English and French could fight their way free through the German defenses in the West. Meanwhile the victorious Russian Army, leaving a force to guard its flank at Bistritz in north Transylvania, would advance into the heart of Germany - to Berlin.<sup>367</sup>

Alexeiev's fantastic plan of late fall 1915 was based on the idea of a concentric general attack by all the Entente countries against the encircled Central Powers. General Joffre, the French commander-in-chief, advanced similar ideas. At the start of October General Laguiche had already asked the Stavka to send a plenipotentiary to the French headquarters in Chantilly to address the ever more pressing question of a combined attack by all the allies. The Russian Army, after its enormous losses in military equipment, would first need to be rearmed by the Entente, and would only be able to strike with most of its forces after a long time had passed. The Russians were also disturbed by the fact that their prestige in the Balkans was at low ebb due to the collapse of their protectorate Serbia. Their allies, especially France, were urging the Russian high command to fight in the Balkans, and thus bring the wavering Romanians over to the Entente. The most likely method of winning over Romania was for the Russians to win a major success in east

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367 Frantz, "Russland auf dem Wege zur Katastrophe", p. 93.  
Klembowksi, Part V, p. 8

Galicia and the Bukovina.

The planned attack in Galicia and Bukovina

Therefore it was only natural when Alexeiev on 12 November recommended to the Tsar that the Odessa Army should be led to Galicia and should attack along with the reinforced armies of the Southwest Front. The Tsar approved this plan. The Russian high command pursued the assembly and arming of their strategic reserve at Odessa with great energy. Newly-drafted recruits filled its ranks. Meanwhile most of Ivanov's Armies remained completely inactive. Brussilov, however, launched continuous small sorties in Volhynia to pretend that he was contemplating a new offensive at the bend in the Styr. Ship movements near Odessa, lively troop deployments on the Bessarabian border and deceptive reports about an impending landing on the Bulgarian coast were also designed to camouflage the Russians' true intentions, as was a naval bombardment of Varna and Burgas on 17 November.

On 23 November the Russian high command ordered Ivanov to strike a blow against the weakest part of his opponents' front in Galicia after 7<sup>th</sup> Army arrived. Strong reserves and a cavalry corps should be made ready to exploit any success and to advance through the passes of the Forest Carpathians into Hungary after the collapse of the Aus-Hung. front. The West and Northwest Fronts were instructed to have as strong a force as possible in reserve. The Guards, now organized as two corps, were designated the strategic reserve of the Stavka, and stationed at Zmerinka.

At the end of November the new 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army stood ready at Odessa, and its artillery had been greatly increased. In complete secrecy the Army assembled on the east Galician border between Husiatyn and Woloczysk at the start of December, and it was placed under Southwest Front on 12 December. Ivanov planned to first divert his opponents' attention from the Strypa with thrusts by 9<sup>th</sup> Army (reinforced by XI and XII Corps) between the Dniester and Pruth. Then 7<sup>th</sup> Army would strike the decisive blow on the Strypa. It was given XXII Corps from 11<sup>th</sup> Army and Dragomirov's Cav Corps from 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Simultaneously with 7<sup>th</sup> Army, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army would attack on the Strypa and smash the enemy. The center of the Aus-Hung. front would be separated from its southern wing and rolled up toward the north, where 8<sup>th</sup> Army would be pinning the allies on the Styr and on the Ikwa. Brussilov had moved 2 Rifle Div to Kamenets Podolsk and 82 ID to Ulaszkowce; they were placed at the disposition of the commander

of the Southwest Front.<sup>368</sup>

General Alexeiev's plan for a new offensive presupposed that there would be large-scale and - if possible - simultaneous cooperation by all the Entente armies. It remained to be seen how far the Western powers were willing to take part in a gigantic scheme for an attack. Nevertheless, the Russian Southwest Front would soon strike. Although it had received substantial reinforcements, its complete replenishment with troops and military equipment was still incomplete. Therefore the prospects for a winter offensive over the Carpathians, especially after the experiences of the year before, were chancy. However, the preparations had advanced so far by mid-December that the generals only needed an order to unleash the storm.

#### Balance of forces at the front

The following is a summary of the units deployed by both sides on the Eastern front as of 24 December 1915. (Independent brigades have been counted as half divisions to arrive at the totals).<sup>369</sup>

#### THE ALLIED CENTRAL POWERS

- . German Eastern front = 46 ID - including 2 Aus-Hung. ID- and 11 ½ CD
  - . Army Group Hindenburg = 33 ID and 7 ½ CD
    - . 8<sup>th</sup> (ex "Niemen") Army (including Group Mitau and Scholz's Group) = 16 ½ ID and 4 ½ CD
    - . 10<sup>th</sup> Army = 11 ½ ID and 3 CD
    - . 12<sup>th</sup> Army = 5 ID, 0 CD
  - . Army Group Prinz Leopold = 13 ID - including 2 Aus-Hung. ID - and 2 CD
    - . 9<sup>th</sup> Army = Just 3 ID
    - . Woyrsch's Army = 8 ID - including 2 Aus-Hung. ID
    - . Gronau's Group = 2 ID and 2 CD
- . Aus-Hung. Eastern front = 42 ½ ID - including 4 German ID - and 12 CD
  - . Army Group Linsingen = 15 ½ ID - including 2 German ID - and 4 CD
    - . Group Gerok = 6 ½ ID - including 2 German ID - and 4 CD
    - . 4<sup>th</sup> Army = 9 ID
  - . Army Group Böhm-Ermolli = 12 ½ ID and 4 CD
    - . 1<sup>st</sup> Army = 4 ID
    - . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army = 8 ½ ID and 1 CD
    - . In reserve, moving behind the Army Group = 3 CD
  - . South Army = 5 ½ ID - including 2 German ID

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368 Klemkowski, Part V, pp .9 ff. Lemke, p. 355

369 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This material appears in the original as Beilage 30.

. 7<sup>th</sup> Army = 9 ID and 4 CD.

#### THE RUSSIANS

- . North Front = 25 ½ ID and 10 CD
  - . 12<sup>th</sup> Army = 10 ID and 3 CD
  - . 5<sup>th</sup> Army = 15 ½ ID and 7 CD
- . West Front = 59 ID and 10 ½ CD
  - . 1<sup>st</sup> Army = 12 ½ ID and 3 CD
  - . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army = 8 ID and 1 CD
  - . 10<sup>th</sup> Army = 13 ½ ID and 1 CD
  - . 4<sup>th</sup> Army = 14 ID and ½ CD
  - . 3<sup>rd</sup> Army = 11 ID and 5 CD
- . Southwest Front = 42 ½ to 44 ½ ID and 12 CD
  - . 8<sup>th</sup> Army = 12 ID and 4 CD
  - . 11<sup>th</sup> Army = 7 or 8 ID and ½ CD
  - . 7<sup>th</sup> Army = 8 ½ ID and 4 CD
  - . 9<sup>th</sup> Army = 11 ID and 3 ½ CD
  - . Arriving behind the Front = 4 or 5 ID.

## VI. The Year 1915 Closes

### *A. Final activities in the Balkans*

#### 1. Situation and plans of the four allies

In the conference of the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the Central Powers at Teschen on 20 November, Falkenhayn had essentially concurred with Conrad's suggestion that after defeating the Serbs (who at that time were making a final stand at Kosovo polje), they should drive back Sarrail's Entente army. However, Falkenhayn also declared that the difficult logistical situation and terrain would make it impossible to open this attack prior to 20 December. Although GO Conrad had to agree with this reservation, he still resisted the idea that the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which had advanced on Mackensen's right wing, should remain inactive for such a long period in the desolate area near Novibazar. He directed his gaze on the confusing situation in the western Balkans, which he wanted to clear up just as much as he wanted to drive back Sarrail.

In the northernmost part of this area the Montenegrins still stood with 53,000 riflemen, although their commitment to the fight was flagging. Their cannon on Mt Lovcen were aimed at the Bocche di Cattaro, and they had made themselves at home in

Scutari. Central Albania would perhaps be flooded in the next few days by the remnants of the Serbian Army, which would be able to re-assemble there. At Durazzo the ambitious Albanian leader Essad Pasha, who was friendly to the Serbs but had been won over by the Italians, was gathering his followers around him. The Italians had established a strong point at Valona. At this time they were only a few battalions strong, but had the capability of landing new forces any day. The Greeks were deployed in Epirus. If the Central Powers really wanted to make a clean sweep in the Balkans, then they would also have to deal with these various forces in the western part of the peninsula.

Therefore on 23 November Conrad had decided to first prepare to capture Mt Lovcen. Simultaneously, Aus-Hung. troops would push into northern Montenegro. In connection with this idea, on the 25<sup>th</sup> the Chief of the k.u.k. General Staff had let his German colleague know - as required by the military convention of 6 September - that if no joint operations were planned for the immediate future Mackensen's command would have lapsed and Conrad would resume full control over the Aus-Hung. troops of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. He also took this opportunity to tell Falkenhayn that he was rejecting the Bulgarians' proposal that they should take part in the conquest of Montenegro north of the line Mitrovica-Ipek-Scutari.

Meanwhile, however, Falkenhayn had considerably changed his opinion. On 23 November he came again to the Balkan theater of operations and met there with Enver Pasha, the Vice-Generalissimo of the Ottoman Army. Enver had been able to greet the arrival on the Bosphorus of the first batteries which had arrived from the territories of the Central Powers; these included a k.u.k. 24 cm mortar battery, which was to be followed in December by a 15 cm howitzer battery.<sup>370</sup> The confidence of the Turkish military leaders was thus strengthened so greatly that they were drafting plans to attack their opponents at the Dardanelles.<sup>371</sup> This optimism of Enver had an effect on Falkenhayn. Mackensen also contributed by his assertion that Sarraill's Entente army should be attacked quickly, before it could receive further reinforcements. For the present, of course, it was unthinkable that strong German or Aus-Hung. forces could be committed because of the logistical

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370 Pomiankowski, "Der Zusammenbruch des Ottomanischen Reiches" (Vienna, 1927), p. 138. Adam, "Die österreichisch-ungarische Artillerie in der Türkei" (Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 560)

371 Liman von Sanders, "Fünf Jahre Türkei" (Berlin, 1919), pp. 125 ff.

difficulties. The Bulgarians, however, who needed fewer supplies and were closer to their supply sources, could immediately resume the offensive toward the south - with the aid of German batteries and military equipment - as soon as they felt strong enough to do so.<sup>372</sup> Apparently Mackensen didn't reckon that the enemy's Orient Army would offer decisive resistance in its forward position at the bend of the Cerna, since meanwhile the Serbs had been driven from the field.

These impressions caused Falkenhayn to change his mind. When he returned to his headquarters, he surprised Conrad with a suggestion that Mackensen's offensive should now be resumed immediately. This idea was agreeable to Conrad, inasmuch as the tasks which Falkenhayn envisaged for the various parts of Mackensen's forces didn't directly conflict with the special objectives of the Aus-Hung. high command in Montenegro and Albania.<sup>373</sup> Falkenhayn proposed that the armies of Boyadiev and Todorov - initially with just parts of Gallwitz's army - would advance against Sarrail from the north and northwest and throw him over the Greek border. That border, however, wouldn't be crossed "under any circumstances, not even by planes."<sup>374</sup> Kövess' Army would lose the Alpenkorps and the k.u.k. 57 ID but gain a Bulgarian division, and would cover the right flank of Mackensen's main attacking group in the area of Prizren and farther north. The implementing orders were sent to Mackensen on 27 November after they were approved by the three high commands.

However, Falkenhayn already began to waver again in the next few days. A report had arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup> from the Bulgarian front that the Orient Army had destroyed the bridge at Gradsko. This measure indicated that the enemy had no intention of advancing further toward Skopje. Shortly thereafter news arrived at the German headquarters that Sarrail intended to retreat. This possibility caused the Chief of the German General Staff to once more give priority to the political considerations involving Greece which from the beginning had influenced his military planning. On 3 December he expressed his concerns to his Aus-Hung. colleague, without questioning the great importance of driving the Entente completely from the Balkans, which "naturally would be easier by not interrupting the current

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372 Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. I, pp. 288 ff.

373 Cramon, p. 37

374 Schwarte, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 395 ff.

See also Jochim, "Das Unterbleiben des Angriffes auf Saloniki" (Deutscher Offiziersbund, Issue # 5 for 1924)

operations" instead of striking later.

Conrad on the other hand argued strongly against any delay in the offensive against Sarrail's army, which should be carried out according to the current plan. Four days earlier (on 29 November) the staff at Teschen had received a report from Paris that the Italians had decided to send an auxiliary corps to Albania to assist the remnants of the Serbian Army. This decision of the enemy leaders had further strengthened the Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff in his conviction that Sarrail should be dealt with as soon as possible. He feared that "a combined attack by the English and French from the south, along with the Italians who were expected in Albania, the Montenegrins and the Serbian remnants, might only too easily be successful against the Bulgarians." Therefore Conrad not only advised the Germans not to withdraw their units from Mackensen's front, but proposed that a combined force of Germans and Austro-Hungarians should deploy in the Macedonian areas which the Greeks didn't want the Bulgarians to occupy (through Doiran, Gjevgjeli and Bitolj).

## **2. Sarrail retreats to Salonika; the Entente evacuates the Dardanelles**

The attack against Sarrail was supposed to start on 5 December, led off by Todorov's 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army. After the Battle of Pristina, General Todorov had moved two brigades from his northern group to the southern group. He planned to have the right wing of the southern group (7 ID) strike the French troops who'd halted by the mouth of the Cerna, and force them to retreat east over the lower Cerna toward Demirkapu. But before the Bulgarians advanced (in 17 degree cold), the French began to strike their camps in the desolate Macedonian mountains. Sarrail had already decided on this course on 22 November, because the defeat of the Serbs on the Kosovo polje deprived the Entente army of any reason to stay in their advanced position. After the bridge at Gradsko was blown up the enemy began to move back their heavy guns and baggage train. The troops didn't follow until the night of 3-4 December. The Bulgarians immediately thrust forward; they encountered the French at Demirkapu (on 6 December) and other locations in sharp actions. They stayed on the enemy's heels as far as Gjevgjeli near the Greek border. The last Entente troops reached Greek soil on the 12<sup>th</sup>; based on new and urgent warnings from the German OHL the Bulgarians didn't follow them.

Farther west the Bulgarian Cavalry Division, with a German

squadron, entered Bitolj [Monastir] on the 4<sup>th</sup>. The Serbs in this area (several battalions from the Bitolj sector) were falling back; they had decided to retreat through Ochrida and Struga to Albania rather than to Salonika. Only about 1500 Serbs had joined the Entente army on the western bank of the Vardar.

General Sarrail withdrew his troops, who hadn't suffered heavy losses, to a fortified camp along the heights directly north of Salonika. This was a good defensive position, but the general situation caused Sarrail serious concerns. To the north, the Bulgarians were threatening to cross the border at any time; they were prevented from doing so only by the advice of Falkenhayn, who wanted to avoid anything which could make the situation of the Greek King difficult. To the east, on Thracian soil, the Turks were raising a new army. Between Sarrail's troops and the Bulgarians, the Greek Army stood east, north and west of Salonika. While their expeditionary army was retreating from Macedonia, the Entente powers had tried to extract concessions from King Constantine. The King declared that if necessary he would resist the intervention of the troops of the Central Powers on Greek soil by force. However, this policy didn't include a scenario in which the Entente units, by their movements, might entice the Bulgarians to cross the border; in such a situation the Greek Army would withdraw and let the two sides fight it out. Constantine declared further that he couldn't agree to allow the Entente to construct fortifications in his country, but he did reduce the number of Greek troops in Salonika.<sup>375</sup> Because of this uncertain attitude of the Greeks, the Entente leadership - which held conferences at Calais, Chantilly and Paris on 4, 6 and 9 December - decided only with difficulty to leave the expeditionary army at Salonika. This is certainly a good point to raise the question of whether Falkenhayn had acted in the best interest of the overall military situation when he asked the Bulgarians to halt on the Greek border. Had he overestimated the military, technical and political difficulties which at this point stood in the way of a sudden advance against Salonika? Had he thus renounced a great success which later could have been achieved only under much less favorable circumstances, if at all?<sup>376</sup>

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375 Larcher, pp. 105 ff. Oehmichen, "Essai sur la doctrine de guerre des coalitions" (Paris, 1927), pp. 75 ff.

376 On this issue, see Cramon, p. 38. Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", p. 159. Gallwitz, pp. 520 ff. GM Hoffmann, "Der Krieg der versäumten Gelegenheiten" (Munich, 1923), p. 126. Krauss, "Ursachen" (p. 182). Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. I,

At this time the Western powers felt that they were very weak in the Balkans. This was proved not only by their negotiations with Greece (described above), but also by the over-hasty evacuation of their Dardanelles position, which took place a few days after Sarrail retreated to Salonika. The immediate cause was the concern of Lord Kitchener, the British War Minister, that the Turks might mount a new thrust against the Suez Canal; for this reason he had even temporarily postponed the shipment of four British divisions to Salonika. At his urging, the Dardanelles expedition, which had been so costly to both sides, was now given up. In the night of 20-21 December the Entente troops evacuated the front at Anaforta, abandoning a mass of military equipment. In the night of 8-9 January they gave up the southwest tip of the Gallipoli peninsula at Seddil-Bahr, their last outpost at the gates of the Dardanelles, to the joyous defenders. The units which withdrew were first sent to recuperate on the islands of Lemnos and Lesbos. The two Austro-Hungarian batteries in the area saw some action in this operation.

### **3. The end of the year in the western Balkans**

#### **a. Conrad's further plans to attack Montenegro**

Conrad's decision on 22 November to attack Mt Lovcen envisioned nothing more than a local operation. However, when news arrived a few days later that the Entente would send an Italian auxiliary corps to Albania, Conrad decided his project would now have to extend to all of Montenegro and northern Albania. Montenegro would be assaulted from three sides as soon as possible. A group would assemble at Cattaro to advance over Mt Lovcen, and 62 ID would come over Montenegro's northern border; the main body of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would first occupy the basin of Sjenica, Ipek, Djakova and Prizren to establish a base from which they could invade the almost-encircled country. The offensive at Mt Lovcen was naturally of special importance, because it could lead to a thrust along the Adriatic coast and cut the enemy off from any escape route. Although Cattaro was a remote area, preparations were made easier by the fact that troops and equipment could be brought in by sea or over the railroad (which, however, had just one narrow-gauge track). When the high command decided on 3 December to mount a major attack, they hoped that the operation at Mt Lovcen could open

already on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

The task facing the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was more difficult. The flow of supplies, already hampered by the lack of roads, was slowed further by the harsh winter. It was impossible to estimate how soon the attacking group could be ready to strike Montenegro from this front.

Because of the plans of the k.u.k. high command regarding Montenegro, they naturally wanted sooner or later to resume full authority over Kövess' Army, which now still belonged to Mackensen's Army Group. However, as noted above, the orders which this Army had received on 27 November wouldn't interfere with the Montenegro project, so there was no reason to raise the issue immediately at the German supreme HQ. Conrad didn't want to lay all his cards on the table, especially since Falkenhayn wouldn't divulge his own intentions regarding the divisions he had pulled out of Serbia.

Regarding the participation of Bulgarian troops in the offensive (into the area south of the line Prizren-Scutari), Conrad stated that he didn't want to use them.

## **b. Actions and troop movements on the Montenegrin border**

### The deployment

In the last days of November the k.u.k. high command started to bring up supplies and equipment for the Lovcen offensive. To give the operation the necessary strength, several brigades were added to the garrison of the Cattaro-Castelnuovo military harbor; beginning on 6 December a substantial mass of heavy artillery was deployed at various points. On 29 November the brigades of Schiess and Streith, which had been taken back to Cacak, received the order to march to Visegrad and Megjegja. After this movement was completed on 12 December, the troops were sent by rail to Castelnuovo. They were followed by other units which got on trains at several stations in east Bosnia:

- . Col. Zhuber's Brigade, which had come out of the Sanjak of Novibazar and was reinforced by two battalions from Mrazek's dissolved brigade;
- . Col. Lörinczy's Brigade, which was newly formed from fortress garrisons, and finally
- . Col. Dominic's Fortress Brigade from 62 ID.

The 62<sup>nd</sup>, which thus had been robbed of its best troops, received

the two Drina security groups of Major Generals Vuchetich and Vukadinovic, which were less capable units. The Division had been taking orders from four different HQ; in some cases these orders had been contradictory since the HQ were keeping them secret from each other. Now 62 ID was placed directly under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ, which in turn would take instructions only from Mackensen's Army Group.

Because the Montenegrins were in a very favorable position to observe the inner reaches of the Bocche di Cattaro, the k.u.k. AOK was rightly concerned that they would soon notice our preparations and be in a position to step up their defensive measures. To divert the enemy's attention and pin down their units firmly on the northern front of their country, Teschen directed on 3 December that mixed detachments should advance against the Tara River. Mackensen's Army Group went beyond this directive in orders they issued on 5 December, which provided that 62 ID's advance against Montenegro from the north, which had led to the capture of Plevlje, should remain in motion; it would be accompanied by a push from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the east. In detail, 62 ID was ordered to advance to the Tara, with its left wing toward Mojkovac. XIX Corps would push to Bijelopolje and Berane, VIII Corps to Rozaj and Ipek (Peja). The western group of the Bulgarian Army (basically 3 ID) would occupy the Djakova-Prizren-Pristina area and come under Kövess' Army.

In the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>, GFM Mackensen received reports about the progress of the Serbian retreat; therefore he directed that parts of XIX Corps plus 10 Mtn Bde of VIII Corps should advance toward Berane and Andrijevisa; the latter town had increased importance because it was the starting point of a road to Scutari. After occupying Ipek, 59 ID would support this operation by advancing to Plav and Gusinje.

#### Logistical problems and successful actions

However, despite all these tempting goals, even the most battle-worthy units of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were unable to advance effectively in the first half of December, because the logistical situation had gotten even worse in the last few days. Thus the majority of the individual forces were almost immobile; even the small battle groups which had been sent ahead could be supplied only with difficulty. Moreover, throughout the area of operations bands of roving Albanians, seeking booty, were a plague on the land. Although we wanted to enlist the Albanians' military help, at least in certain situations, it was necessary for the time being to keep them out of the occupied areas for political

reasons and because of their inclination toward robbery.

In front of 62 ID, Montenegrin rear guards were still holding their ground on the heights south of Plevlje; on the 7<sup>th</sup> they even dared to attack. On this day the advanced troops of XIX Corps, moving in several columns and fighting repeated skirmishes, crossed the Giljeva planina and reached the line of pools at Suhodol; the Corps' main body was still in the Sjenica-Dugapoljana area. Under VIII Corps, a detachment of 10 Mtn Bde in the upper Ibar valley drove Montenegrin units back from Ribaric toward Rozaj and took over a thousand prisoners. 9 Mtn Bde of 59 ID reported the greatest advance on the 7<sup>th</sup>; in action with Drina Div I they took Ipek and almost 400 prisoners, with considerable military equipment.<sup>377</sup> Contact was established the next day with the Bulgarians advancing south of Ipek. Exhaustion and lack of supplies had robbed the Bulgarians of their mobility. However, for the foreseeable future the main body of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would also remain pinned down behind the front maintained by the Army's advanced guards.

Around this time, it was believed at Teschen that the Serbs would probably move to the Montenegrin western front after their withdrawal through Podgorica to Scutari. It was considered that the continued existence of the Serbian and Montenegrin armies hinged on their ability to hold onto the area between the Adriatic and the line Cetinje-Podgorica-Scutari. Therefore GO Conrad felt it was necessary to reinforce the troops allotted to the Lovcen operation; on 8 December he informed Mackensen's Army Group HQ that he would need 20 Lst Mtn Bde, XIX Corps HQ and FML Sorsich's Group HQ for this purpose. In place of XIX Corps, 53 ID would remain under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with three brigades (17 Mtn, 21 Lst Mtn, and Schwarz's Bde). Since Mackensen felt that nothing stood in the way of immediate implementation of this scheme, on the same day he ordered 20 Lst Mtn Bde diverted through Nova varos to Uvac. He left it up to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to decide whether to part with the staffs Conrad wanted. XIX Corps HQ arrived on the Bocche on the 9<sup>th</sup>, followed two days later by Sorsich's Group HQ.

In fact the Montenegrins, from whom the preparations in the Cattaro Bay couldn't be hidden, had already asked for armed help from the Serbs.<sup>378</sup> They hoped that with such reinforcements they could hold out indefinitely against even a large enemy force. However, at this hour the events at Ipek seemed much more

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377 Serbian Official History, Vol. XIII, p. 222

378 *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 221

important to the Serbian high command, because the eventual fall of this town would threaten the line of retreat of the main body of the Serbian Army, and also open the main route to the Scutari coastal plain to the enemy. Moreover, an Austrian thrust toward Andrijevisa would raise the danger that the Montenegrin northern front would be rolled up prematurely. Because of the very critical situation of their armies, the Serbia high command could only order Dunav Div I, which by chance had been left behind due to the crowded roads, to offer resistance at Rugova "to the point of extreme self-sacrifice" to cover the retreat toward Andrijevisa.

#### A period of little fighting

The next week passed for the advanced troops of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army without any noteworthy fighting, so that the troop movements could be carried out without disturbance. 21 Lst Mtn Bde, sent to Novibazar, was placed under VIII Corps HQ on 11 December. 62 ID now consisted of 205 and 209 Landsturm Brigades, Col. Hausser's Bde, and the Groups of Vuchetich and Vukadinovic; based on GdI Kövess' order of the 10<sup>th</sup>, the Division should now finally throw the Montenegrins over the Tara and hold onto the upper Lim valley until strong parts of 53 ID (17 Mtn Bde and Schwarz's Brigade) reached Bijelopolje. If possible, the 53<sup>rd</sup> would then advance further in the Lim valley south of Bijelopolje. Under VIII Corps, only the main body of 10 Mtn Bde would advance to Rozaj for the time being. Although Army Group HQ had ordered a decisive advance on the 5<sup>th</sup>, this had to be postponed because the logistical problems still hadn't been overcome. The available transportation facilities were sufficient only to keep 53 ID and VIII Corps supplied in their current locations. VIII Corps wouldn't be able to advance until the facilities at Kraljevo were moved forward to Raska. 53 ID was dependent on bearers to bring supplies from Ivanjica. It wouldn't be possible for this Division to be supplied through Uvac, the end point of the southern branch of the Bosnian eastern railroad, until the bridge at Megjegja was restored; even then, however, the lack of a passable road from Uvac to Dugapoljana would be a problem.

On 11 December GdI Kövess was satisfied to learn that GdI Sarkotic had postponed the attack on Mt Lovcen until the period between 1 and 10 January 1916 because the narrow gauge railroads were overloaded. Naturally 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should meanwhile keep the opposing enemy units under constant pressure.

Therefore 62 ID began to advance on 13 December; fighting many

actions against Montenegrin rear guards, they reached the Tara between its mouth and Prencanje by the 16<sup>th</sup>. On the next day they extended their left wing to Mojkovac; the Division's 205 Lst Inf Bde, cooperating with parts of 53 ID, took Bijelopolje. 2000 prisoners were taken, mostly Serbs from 1<sup>st</sup> Army. An even larger number of enemy troops laid down their arms in front of the main body of 53 ID; in the last few days the latter Division had captured over 14,000 men. However, the Montenegrins on the south bank of the Tara stubbornly defended all the crossing points against 62 ID; east of Mojkovac they couldn't be driven from their positions until the 24<sup>th</sup>. They also successfully defended the stony mountain paths leading from Bijelopolje and Uglo toward Berane against 53 ID.

Under VIII Corps, the advanced troops of 10 Mtn Bde were pressed so hard by the Montenegrins west of Rozaj that reinforcements had to be sent to them from Novibazar. In the event, Serbian and Montenegrin covering troops offered such sustained resistance on the heights west of Rozaj that the intended transfer of 10 Mtn Bde to the western front of Montenegro had to be canceled. In its place, 21 Lst Mtn Bde was sent through Kraljevo to the railroad. Brigade Hausser of 62 ID was also sent by rail to the Bocche; in exchange, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army received GM Haustein's Brigade which hitherto had been on the lines of communication. 9 Mtn Bde of 59 ID was still in place at Ipek, where they had discovered or dug up hundreds of guns abandoned by the Serbs, in addition to some which they captured in action. Opposite this Brigade the last Serbian detachments were pulling back from Rugova toward Plav. 18 Mtn Bde of 59 ID had to stay back at Mitrovica so that it could be supplied.

Some units of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were still living from hand to mouth; therefore no progress was made in building up reserve supplies in the front areas for an advance. The lack of sustenance also afflicted the civilian population, especially in the area occupied by 3 Bulgarian ID, which was foraging ruthlessly.

Meanwhile 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army's pursuit of Sarrail had ended on the Greek border. If the offensive was ever to be resumed, it would do so only after the railroad in the Vardar valley was restored and this would take several weeks. Meanwhile the k.u.k. 57 ID, assigned to Gallwitz's Army, would remain inactive at Prokuplje. The Bulgarian high command was showing little inclination to let their 3 ID follow GdI Kövess' orders without reservation; they continued to send the Division direct orders, including one to march from Prizren to Gostivar. GO Conrad therefore proposed that 57 ID should move to Pristina, from

which it could either relieve 3 Bulgarian ID or go to Skopje in case the offensive against Sarrail resumed. On 15 December the 57 ID received an order from Mackensen's Army Group HQ to march to Pristina, where parts began to arrive on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. No final decision regarding the disposition of either this Division or 3 Bulgarian ID was made by Christmas.

#### Recruitment of Albanian troops

Both sides had to deal with the local Albanian population. When the Montenegrins withdrew their eastern front behind the upper Lim in mid-December, they had to fear rebellions in this purely Albanian area. The Serbs would have to stay in the sector for as long as possible to suppress the inhabitants. Also in northern Albania, on both sides of the Drin River, the civilians had already adopted a threatening attitude; they sought revenge for the atrocities perpetrated by the Serbs and Montenegrins in the year 1913.

Leaderless bands of quarrelsome men were also causing difficulties in the areas occupied by Aus-Hung. troops. It was intended to form them into military units and send them to fight the enemies of the Central Powers in Albania. Hassan Bey Pasha was entrusted with preparations for the recruitment and training of this Albanian Legion; an opponent of Essad Pasha, he had been Justice Minister in the government of Prince Wied. The Legion was to consist of an infantry brigade plus two mountain batteries and several machine gun detachments; the officers at the battalion level and higher were to be Austro-Hungarians. It was hoped that at least one regiment would be ready by mid-January, and the entire brigade by the end of that month.

In the recruitment, organization and employment of the Legion it was necessary to take account of the differences between the Catholic and Muslim Albanians. Therefore at first the recruits were divided into three groups and sent to different areas (Ipek-Mitrovica, Djakova, and Prizren); eventually they would be sent to (respectively) Podgorica, Scutari and Kruja. They would also be attached to the divisions of VIII Corps to carry out special assignments.

#### **c. Entente efforts to help the Serbs**

As the remnants of the Serbian Army, followed by about 40,000 recruits and a considerable number of other refugees, fled through the snow-covered stony wasteland of the Albanian

mountains, they were sustained by hope that they would find food, clothing and medical supplies on the Adriatic coast. The Serbian high command had already been loudly lamenting their fate in order to demand from the Entente powers a secure and healthy place where their fully exhausted troops could recuperate after two months of fighting and strenuous marching.<sup>379</sup> However, when the Serbs arrived in the Scutari area they were at first disappointed in their expectations of aid; the harbors of San Giovanni di Medua and Durazzo were almost completely empty. The Western powers were moving to help their ally only with great hesitation. Italy's reluctance was caused by its rivalry against Serbia, which had been aggravated when the London Treaty of 26 April 1915 had promised a great part of the Adriatic coast to the Italians. England's attention was riveted on the Near East and the Dardanelles. Only France was seriously trying to help the Serbs in their hour of great need.

On 13 and 14 November the Italian government, apparently at the urging of France, had already hosted a conference at Rome to coordinate relief efforts for the Serbs. General Cadorna took part in this conference.<sup>380</sup> He was now willing to send up to 60,000 troops to Salonika, but vehemently opposed any separate operation by an Italian detachment in Albania. For him that country was a secondary theater of operations, inhabited by a population of bandits, in which no decisive successes could be won and setbacks might occur. Cadorna however was overruled by all the other participants in the conference and had to pledge to send troops to occupy Valona and Durazzo, although their mission was limited to guarding the two harbors. Three brigades were to assemble at Brindisi to be shipped over for this purpose.

In these same days, France was sending supplies of all types to Brindisi, whence they would be shipped to Durazzo to help the Serbs.<sup>381</sup> However, the commander-in-chief of the French fleet, who was responsible for operations off the Albanian coast based on a naval convention between England, France and Italy signed on 10 May 1915, objected to landing troops and supplies at Durazzo. He was concerned about the possibility of a thrust by Aus-Hung. vessels from the Bocche di Cattaro, and therefore proposed that Valona should be the sole base for the navies.

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379 Voivode Putnik, who was mortally ill, no longer took part in the business of Serbian HQ. From this point General Peter Bojovic performed the tasks of the Chief of the General Staff.

380 Cadorna, "Altre pagine", pp. 125 ff.

381 Larcher, p. 115

Supplies could be moved from there to Durazzo by land.<sup>382</sup>

On 29 November, right after GO Conrad received the first reports that the Italians were sending an auxiliary corps to Albania, he had in fact given the k.u.k. naval HQ responsibility for keeping the Albanian coast under constant surveillance and for interfering with the shipment of enemy troops. Therefore on 5 December the cruiser "Novara" led a flotilla of 4 destroyers and 3 torpedo boats against the merchant ships anchored in the harbor of San Giovanni di Medua; most of them were sunk or seriously damaged, while the crew of a stranded French submarine were taken prisoner at the mouth of the Bojana. Two Aus-Hung. cruisers and several torpedo boats sortied into the Otranto Straits two nights later, but didn't encounter the enemy. While returning north they sank several sailing boats off Durazzo.<sup>383</sup>

The operations of the Aus-Hung. ships forced the French to suspend the transport of supplies for the Serbs through the northern Albanian harbors. Now the Serbs' needs were most desperate. Their high command was forced to contemplate a further march with their fully exhausted troops to Valona or even to Santi Quaranta, since the Entente considered it too dangerous for them to embark at San Giovanni di Medua or Durazzo. To avoid this further hardship, on the 16<sup>th</sup> the heir to the Serbian throne begged the Tsar to make sure that the remnants of the Army could be sent by sea from San Giovanni di Medua to Salonika.<sup>384</sup> Some of the troops at least would have to stay in northern Albania to support the Montenegrins - in case the latter were attacked - and to ensure that they didn't seek a separate peace.

On 15 December the Italian fleet resumed the shipment of supplies, and the Serbs moved slowly closer to the coast. Meanwhile the transport of the Italian expeditionary corps to Valona was also accomplished. To Cadorna's surprise, the commander of the force (General Bertotti) was placed directly under the Minister of War.<sup>385</sup> Thus Cadorna's influence on the operation in Albania, which he felt was superfluous, was diminished. The Serbs still refused to march on foot to Valona,

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382 Military Archive (Marine Archive), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1929-31), p. 245. French Official History, Vol. VIII, Text, p. 449

383 Military Archive (Marine Archive), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg", p. 246

384 Serbian Official History, Vol. XIII, p. 320

385 Cadorna, "Altre pagine", p. 129

so it was proposed to move them by ship. The Italian naval command, however, wouldn't do this; they also turned down a request to transport Italian troops to Durazzo, where they were urgently needed because of increasing pressure from the Bulgarians in the upper Skumbi valley. With some justice, there were concerns that the Serbs might be smashed by a Bulgarian thrust through Elbasan.

Now the Italians suddenly raised objections to the movement of large Serbian forces to Valona and demanded that they should stay north of the Skumbi; they claimed that they feared the Serbs would cause an epidemic in the city. Therefore the southern Serbian group, which had already been marching toward Valona, changed direction toward Durazzo.

Around this time the French developed a plan for moving the Serbs to Corfu.<sup>386</sup> The proximity of the island to Albania, its healthy climate, and the possibility of effective naval protection against attacks from the sea gave this proposal an advantage over the other projects advanced at this time (involving Italy, Algeria, the Aegean islands, or Salonika). After the Serbian Army recuperated on Corfu, it could still move to Salonika. However, diplomatic measures first had to be taken because the island of Corfu had been neutralized since 1864; these steps weren't finished until after Christmas.

After mid-December the Aus-Hung. Navy made just one attempt to interfere with their opponents. They had received reports that the Serbian King Peter would be taking ship from Durazzo to Italy, so on the 19<sup>th</sup> they sent "Novara" on patrol between Durazzo and Brindisi.<sup>387</sup> However, the King was at this time still in the midst of his Army.

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386 French Official History, Vol. VIII, Text, pp. 450 ff.

387 Military Archive (Marine Archive), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg", p. 249

***B. Planning of the two sides at year's end*****1. The Entente prepares for 1916****a. The situation in the second half of December**

As the year 1915 - so momentous for the history of the world - entered its twelfth month, both sides faced a period of difficult military decisions.

Since Gorlice the Central Powers had won a series of individual successes. However, none had been decisive for the entire war. Russia had been pushed back far from the gates of central Europe. Nonetheless its armies on the Volhynian and east Galician battlefields had proven since mid-September that the Tsar's Empire wasn't inclined to accept the current judgment of the God of war as final. There were several indications that new Russian attacks were imminent, particularly against the southern wing of the Aus-Hung. front.

On the French front, the Germans had been forced to endure enormous attrition battles in Artois and Champagne from 19 September to the end of October; with unparalleled gallantry they had proven that they could withstand the heaviest storms. Toward the end of 1915 the British had 40 divisions in France instead of the 6 with which they'd originally taken the field; they were about to introduce universal conscription of all unmarried men below the age of 41. Unlike the English, the French had already sent all men fit for service to the front. However, they continued to increase their production of technical equipment of all types. This demonstrated unmistakably to the Germans that France, thanks to Albion's undisputed control of the seas, was drawing on the workshops of the entire world for weapons, ammunition and military gear.

Italy had very greatly disappointed its new allies; its divisions, despite bitter sacrifices, were held at the start of December in generally the same positions where they had entered the fighting a half year earlier. However, their superiority in numbers was still very great.

On the Balkan peninsula, the land route between Hungary and Turkey had been cleared through Serbia and Bulgaria at the start

of December. The Sultan no longer was concerned about holding onto the Dardanelles, even though he would have to wait another two to three weeks before his opponents finally retreated. In the Vardar sector the Entente's Orient Army had been retreating toward Salonika since 4 December, pushed by the pursuing Bulgarians. On the western coast of the Balkan peninsula the disorganized bands of the Serbs were pushing toward the sea between the Montenegrins and Valona, where Italian reinforcements were arriving. However, the land route between Budapest and Constantinople was still menaced on its southern and southwestern flank by several Entente bases.

In the remote Asiatic territories of the Ottoman Empire, the Entente for the moment had generally been pushed onto the defensive. Since spring a British-Indian expeditionary corps in Mesopotamia had been moving up the rivers toward Bagdad; on 22 November, however, they were defeated by Goltz Pasha (at the head of 6<sup>th</sup> Turkish Army) and besieged in Kut-el-Amarna. Here, as also on the Caucasus front (commanded since fall 1915 by Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievitch) the Entente forces were preparing to counterattack.

A major factor in the military successes of the Central Powers and their allies in Europe was the fact that throughout 1915 the Entente hadn't been successful in mounting unified and simultaneous offensives. For the military leadership of the four allied powers it would be a boon if they would again be permitted to operate on the "inner lines" in 1916 by their uncoordinated opponents. In the Entente camp, on the other hand, a top priority would be to prevent the chronological and geographical dissipation of their offensive strength which had occurred in 1915, and to prepare a grand general assault.

## **b. The second military conference at Chantilly**

Plenipotentiaries from the Entente countries met on 6 December for important discussions regarding military plans for the following year. Great Britain was represented by FM French, Russia by GdK Zhilinsky, Italy by G.Lt Porro, Belgium by General Wielemans, and Serbia by Col. Stepanovic. The conference was chaired by Joffre, who had been named a few days earlier the supreme commander of all French forces (including those fighting outside of France). The meeting was held once again at French supreme HQ in Chantilly.

General Joffre returned to the suggestions which he had already

raised at the first Chantilly conference on 7 July 1915. They were on the same lines as the plan hatched by the Russian Chief of Staff Alexeiev in the second half of November. Simultaneous attacks by the allies from the start on all fronts - France, Russia, Venetia, the Balkans, Syria and Egypt - would seize the initiative from their four opponents, who had much smaller forces, and finally push them back.<sup>388</sup> The Russians again advocated their old plan of having a strong force (10 corps) land in southern Dalmatia; this thrust into the rear of the Danube Monarchy would bring Romania and Greece over to the Entente. However, this suggestion was turned down. England, on the other hand, shocked its partners by proposing that the British troops at Salonika should be sent to Egypt, where the Turks seemed to be threatening to attack over the Suez Canal.<sup>389</sup> Alexeiev, when he was informed of this plan, had the Russian ambassador in Paris (Izvolski) use all his influence to get the English to abandon the idea. Joffre and French Minister-President Briand concurred with the Russians, and G.Lt Porro let the British know that if Salonika was abandoned the Italians probably would also have to evacuate Albania. Since Kitchener had already ordered a retreat from the Dardanelles, there was a danger that the Entente would disappear entirely from the Balkans.<sup>390</sup> The English now agreed that Sarraill could remain for now in his fortified position by Salonika. However, the necessary forces would be moved to Egypt in the spring (since the Turkish attack on the Suez Canal wasn't expected to occur before April).

Although there was agreement in principle to a general offensive on all the main fronts, it was difficult to select a point in time; in fact, it could hardly be said that a consensus was achieved. Naturally the general attack should start as soon as possible - preferably in March - to anticipate any counter-measures by the quadruple alliance. However, on all sides there were reservations about such an early start. Russia had been badly shaken by the 1915 campaigns; despite very abundant support from its allies, it wouldn't be fully equipped with guns, ammunition and military equipment until June. Italy

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388 Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. I, p. 383. Valentinov, "The Relations with our Allies in Military Questions during the War of 1914-1918" (in Russian: Moscow, 1920), p. 85

389 Oehmichen, "L'engagement de la coalition en Orient 1914-1916" (in Revue militaire francaise, 1923 edition, issues 15 to 17)

390 Valentinov, p. 73. The decision to evacuate the Dardanelles was made in London on 10 December.

wouldn't have the necessary heavy artillery available on its Isonzo front until April; because of the snow, fighting couldn't open in the mountains until at least the middle of that month.<sup>391</sup> Serbia couldn't be counted on for the foreseeable future because its army would have to be completely reformed. Even for France and England the March target date was a problem, because their armies also needed to recuperate and to absorb replacement troops after the difficult autumn battles.

Nevertheless, the parties finally agreed basically that the general offensive would start in March 1916. Even though it would be impossible for everyone to attack simultaneously, each army would do all it could with its entire strength to pin down its opponents as early as possible; this would prevent the defenders from transferring troops to other fronts. The question of the specific areas within the various operational theaters in which offensives would occur remained open. If the Central Powers anticipated the intentions of the Entente by a counter-thrust, the front which was under attack would hold its ground while the other armies brought as much direct and indirect help as they could. However, each country that had extra manpower - meaning primarily Russia - should meanwhile undertake smaller-scale operations to weaken the common enemy.

Thus the plans of the Entente for 1916 betrayed only too clearly the extent to which all their armies were still suffering from the fighting in 1915. However, in all their conversations there was never any mention of giving up the struggle. All measures were directed at carrying on the war to victory for their multinational coalition.

### **c. Alexeiev's orders for an offensive on the Bukovina-east Galicia front**

From the Russians' viewpoint, the second war conference at Chantilly had only been partly successful. Alexeiev's plan to first overthrow the Danube Monarchy with a grand offensive from two sides, and thus open the way to Berlin through Budapest, hadn't been adopted by his allies. Thus when Russia struck Austria-Hungary it couldn't count on support from a powerful offensive against the Habsburg Balkan front, due to the opposition of Great Britain. Moreover, the representative of the Russian Chief of Staff at Chantilly hadn't been able to

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391 French Official History, Vol. III, Text, p. 649.  
Valentinov, p. 86

overcome the open resistance of Italy or the concealed resistance of France. GdK Zhilinsky had in fact got the impression that neither France nor Italy would start their own offensives until the Russians first won some success in spring 1916.<sup>392</sup>

At almost the same time that the meeting was held at Chantilly, the Bulgarians were driving the Army of the Orient over the Greek border. Meanwhile the remnants of the Serbian Army were arriving on the Adriatic coast after their miserable retreat through the wilderness of the Albanian mountains. Romania once again was showing little inclination to join the Entente. By the Russians' estimate, Ivanov's armies in Volhynia and Galicia were opposed at this time by about 300,000 to 350,000 enemy troops. However, the Austrians and Germans now had considerable forces available in the Balkans; they could move these units to Galicia and thus gain a substantial advantage over Ivanov's armies.<sup>393</sup>

Therefore the Russian high command decided that they would have to carry out the planned attack by the left wing of their Southwest Front earlier than they had originally intended, and without any help from their allies on Austria-Hungary's southern flank. On 20 December, the same day in which the Serbian Crown Prince again requested Russian help in a letter to the Tsar, Alexeiev issued the order to attack the Aus-Hung. positions on both sides of the Dniester. Although this wasn't the start of the grand general offensive against the Central Powers, it is still significant that Russia was once more the first combatant to enter the lists, despite the defeats it had suffered and its inadequate armaments.<sup>394</sup>

## **2. Disputes in the camp of the Central Powers**

### **a. Conrad wants to attack Italy**

Of the two chiefs of staff of the Central Powers, Conrad had his attention focused above all on Italy. On 21 May 1915 the Generaloberst had abandoned his intention of attacking this new enemy only with a heavy heart and after an urgent demand by

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392 Valentinov, p. 86

393 Lemke, p. 290

394 Klembowski, Part V, pp. 9 ff.

Falkenhayn. Scarcely a month later, on 19 June, he ordered the leader of the Italian group of his Operational Detachment, General Staff Lt Col. Schneller, to prepare a long study on "future operations against Italy."

#### Planning in summer 1915 for an offensive

Schneller's memorandum stated that it was necessary to ponder the basic concepts and timing of an offensive against Italy as early as possible, because a large-scale attack in the Italian theater of operations would require special preparations and because it was necessary "to soon win over the German OHL regarding the intended course of this war and to procure strong German forces to win a rapid success." Significantly, the author of this study, though writing just three weeks after the first shots were fired on the Southwest front, believed that the enemy army wouldn't make any significant progress in the foreseeable future; Conrad concurred with this opinion.<sup>395</sup>

With reference to strategy, the memorandum naturally relied on the numerous peacetime studies which had considered a possible offensive by Austria-Hungary against Italy.<sup>396</sup> However, these earlier plans had always envisioned an envelopment attack on Venetia with the main body based on the Isonzo; Lt Col. Schneller's study featured a thrust from the area southeast of Trent, between the Adige and Brenta, into the Venetian plain. He advanced two reasons for this shift in direction (of which Conrad endorsed only the first without reservations):

- . Lack of strength because of commitments in other theaters of operations, and
- . The fact that a thrust against the enemy rear, if it was as strong as possible and as distant as possible from the front in the coastal lands, would have an increased impact.

Naturally a sortie from the south Tyrol bastion would have a decisive effect only if a powerful army could thrust as quickly as possible through Bassano-Thiene. The difficulties of such an operation in the mountain terrain certainly weren't underestimated. Three specially selected corps with a large amount of very heavy artillery, the most modern mountain guns, and a

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395 TRANSLATOR's NOTE - For a summary and evaluation of plans in summer 1915 see Artl, "Die österreichisch-ungarische Südtirol-offensive 1916" (Vienna, 1983), pp. 27-37

396 See the studies dating from 1906 (Conrad, "Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906-1918" (Vienna, 1921-25 - Vol. I, pp. 411 and 457 ff.) and 1911 (*ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 64)

full complement of technical troops would be needed to break through the fortifications between the Vallarsa and Brenta; one or two more divisions would advance through the Rolle Pass against the entrenchments on the Brenta. As the assaulting force moved farther south, their flanks would need to be protected toward the west and east. In the direction of Verona this could be accomplished by a corps; in the Dolomites it would be the responsibility of the units already on the scene, reinforced by another division. Schneller estimated that under favorable circumstances the 10 or 11 divisions he'd commit to the operation should be able to overcome the Italian fortified lines in two or three weeks. Thereafter, however, they would no longer be strong or mobile enough to carry out the fighting in the plains. Therefore his memorandum recommended that this first wave of attackers should be followed by a second line of at least three corps. This concept would influence all future planning for the offensive until it actually started in spring 1916.

The "breakthrough group", whose concentration would take 14 days, wouldn't wait for the arrival of the "exploitation group." Careful calculation led to the conclusion that five weeks would elapse from the point when the troops began to get off their trains until their arrival in the plains. The memorandum stated that due to the weather conditions in the mountains the trains would have to start arriving in September 1915 if a decision was to be sought in the plains in October.

The Carinthian group was to be reinforced to 5 or 7 divisions, but the memorandum - with Conrad's concurrence - assigned it only a secondary assault against the upper Tagliamento. The Isonzo Army was to use the smallest possible force to pin the Italians in place. For the duration of the campaign the strength of the entire Southwest Front would be 28 to 32 divisions. A larger commitment of forces would be possible only if permitted by the general situation, in case there was a separate peace with "a Great Power."<sup>397</sup>

Although the HQ at Teschen would "naturally" control the overall operation, GO Archduke Eugene would take command over the two armies making up "Army Group South Tyrol." This was due in part to the fact that the strong German contingent "which is especially needed for the exploitation group" could be placed

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397 Conrad, who read the memorandum on 23 June - the day after the capture of Lemberg - inserted at this point the significant words: "That is the major issue!"

without friction under an Archduke.

Next to the remark about a "strong German contingent" Conrad wrote: "That is the great question!" And GM Metzger wrote: "Hardly to be realized!" Nevertheless, in a second memorandum dated 11 July Lt Col. Schneller returned again to the decisive importance of German help. This time Metzger's marginal note read: "At most, this support will only take the form of the Germans declining to move strong forces from Russia against France, and thus give us the opportunity to deploy substantial forces against Italy."

In light of future developments, it is significant that in the memorandum of 11 July Schneller asserted that we could achieve "numerical equality in the Southwest only if we make a separate peace with Russia" or if "the Central Powers decide jointly...to go over to the defensive in the north while turning together against Italy."<sup>398</sup> Then he went on:

"If Germany decides not to join us, and if the Monarchy similarly decides not to join the Germans in seeking a decision in France, we will have to arrive at a compromise that - while not ideal in a strategic sense - is quite possible because of the special interests of both parties. Each of the allies will then leave the forces which they both deem necessary against Russia; with the others, Germany will turn against France and the Monarchy against Italy. In this case we will have a much smaller number of troops available than will be needed to attain numerical equality [in Italy]. In this scenario, if half of the men on the Russian front (200,000 riflemen) would become available for the Southwest, we would have perhaps 20 to 25 divisions there. After this reinforcement the infantry in the Southwest would total 460,000 riflemen, or 75% of the enemy's strength. Even with this smaller force - if it is properly concentrated and strikes with all the energy it has - we can confidently expect success against our enemy, whose morale has been proven by our experiences to date to be lower than ours."

With his marginal note at this point - "Probably yes!" - Conrad took perhaps the first step in the direction that would later lead to the fateful decisions for the spring of 1916; he was considering the possibility that he could carry out the thrust from south Tyrol without either direct or indirect help from his ally.

The rest of Schneller's memorandum, which always assumed that at least 20 divisions could be made free in other theaters,

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398 GM Metzger's marginal comment was: "Such a decision is hardly to be expected from Germany!" Conrad added: "Correct!"

envisioned how the attack would develop, how its flanks would be secured (especially on the side of the Dolomites), how the artillery would be employed, and finally the selection of a date. Schneller urged that if possible the offensive should take place in 1915, even in winter, and was warmly supported by GM Metzger; Conrad, in his marginal notes, showed that he was reluctant to agree.

At the close of the memorandum, Schneller once again assembled all the arguments in favor of a joint venture by both Central Powers. If we have "confidence that we can still deal with Italy this year", implementation of this decision would not only free strong forces for employment elsewhere, but even bring final victory in the World War. This was because on the Italian front "the enemy coalition is weakest, and it is easiest to tip the balance in favor of the Imperial powers...in any event much sooner than in an attack against France", where a complete success couldn't be expected even after the deployment of the strongest force, or against Russia with its broad expanses and poor roads. The memorandum closed as follows: "Therefore it would be generous and strategically correct for the German OHL to temporarily put aside objectives that are more difficult to obtain and to agree to join us in an advance against Italy this year. It seems to me that we could obtain their agreement by promising to later provide them similar support in France."

Conrad, however, replied to these arguments that he couldn't think about attacking Italy until he could safely assemble at least 20 divisions from other fronts. Not realizing that a half year later Falkenhayn (in a completely altered situation) would turn the same argument back against him, Conrad went on: "Until now Italy's entry into the war hasn't altered the general situation; its departure would probably have equally little effect...We must always plan for an offensive and be ready to launch one...but whether we can ever do so depends on our situation *vis a vis* our principal opponent, Russia."

On 17 July 1915 the high command advised GO Archduke Eugene of their decision.

#### The AOK returns in late 1915 to plans for the offensive

Thus passed the summer, in which all the strength of the Central Powers was committed to the campaign against Russia, and the fall, in which Serbia was overthrown. Now, however, after Russia had been contained and the situation in the Balkans had been cleared up, the question of an offensive against Italy

again took on urgency. Already in mid-November the k.u.k. foreign minister, apparently after discussion with the Chief of Staff, had raised with the German Emperor the question which would dominate the next few weeks - should the next primary objective be Italy or France?<sup>399</sup>

In the first days of December, GO Conrad committed to paper his basic ideas on a thrust out of south Tyrol. His thoughts were based entirely on the concepts developed in the memoranda of June and July. "If the thrust is directed over the line Bassano-San Bonifacio, we would want at least 160,000 riflemen, because we anticipate that the attackers would be opposed from both flanks (from Verona and from the east), and that substantial forces would be needed to protect them." According to a study by the Operational Detachment, about half of these troops could be assembled from the area of the Southwest Front (three divisions from III Corps and one from XIV, half a division from XV, and one apiece from the Carinthian and Tyrol defenses). Except for any units which could be shifted in time from the Balkans, the other half of the troops would have to be provided by our ally. However, Germany was not at war with Italy, and therefore its soldiers couldn't be used for an offensive on this front; therefore German help could be provided only by relieving Aus-Hung. units on other fronts. Naturally the assault on Italy must take place before the Russians were ready for a new large-scale offensive, for which they were already preparing (in addition to the troop concentrations on the southern wing of their front). The Italians must either be forced to make peace or suffer such a blow that they could no longer pin down "300,000 [Aus-Hung.] riflemen" as they were presently doing.

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399 Zwehl, p. 173

The Teschen conference of 10 December

In the afternoon of 10 December, Conrad and Falkenhayn met to initiate the new phase of military planning. There is no verbatim transcription of the conference, which lasted for an hour and a half. However, a subsequent exchange of notes between the two Chiefs of Staff summarized the most important points in the conversation.<sup>400</sup> Conrad opened his remarks by stating that the Central Powers, unlike the Entente, shouldn't fight a war of attrition, but had to "seek a decision by an action in grand style", the sooner the better. Proceeding from this point, Conrad asked his imperial German colleague to consider that such an action directed against Russia wouldn't be quick enough, unless Romania came over to the side of the Central Powers. Also in the Balkans "a success against the Entente forces in the area couldn't decide the war." This left only the French and Italian theaters of operation available for the necessary decisive stroke. Conrad felt that ideally an offensive against France was preferable. However, Falkenhayn conceded "himself that the chances for a success here were not good at present."<sup>401</sup> Therefore the k.u.k. Chief of Staff turned the conversation to his principal point - since German-Italian relations made it impossible for German troops to take part directly in an attack on Italy, his ally should make enough German units available to relieve eight k.u.k. divisions from other fronts!

According to the summary which Conrad presented to his immediate circle of advisers that same evening, Falkenhayn raised several objections as the conversation continued, but then left with the promise that he would devote closer study to the question of how to make the forces requested by the Austrians available. Conrad's impression, however, was erroneous. Four days later he received a detailed note which denied all his requests; the note from Falkenhayn, who had meanwhile gone with his Emperor to visit Hindenburg's Army Group, was dated 11 December.

Falkenhayn's response to Conrad's plans

Falkenhayn started by vigorously opposing Conrad's opinion that "Germany doesn't want to make war against Italy." Referring to

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400 The notes were published for the first time by Cramon, pp. 39 ff.

401 The proceedings up to this point are summarized in this fashion in part of a letter which Conrad sent Falkenhayn on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and which wasn't contested.

the Alpenkorps, which was engaged on the Dolomite front in the first months of the war, he stated that German troops "from the beginning carried on a fight against the Italian attackers that was very useful for Austria-Hungary, and which was certainly known in Rome." Falkenhayn went on, "We have carried the entire burden of the war against Belgium, France and England and by far the main burden in the fighting against Russia and Serbia. Today Germany would not hesitate for an instant to also take part in an operation against Italy if our resources permitted and if it would be advantageous." However, this was not the case.

Above all, he believed that Conrad's estimate of the force needed for an offensive in Italy was too low; Falkenhayn thought it would require "a good 25 divisions", which would have to be particularly well prepared for the attack "because of the nature of the terrain, the time of year, and the Italians' very strong fortifications." He doubted that the k.u.k. high command would succeed in finding so many good troops, or in assembling sufficient heavy artillery; in the breakthrough area at least one battery would be needed per 150 meters of front. The lessons of the Carpathian and Masurian battles clearly spoke against an attempt with lesser forces or arms. In all probability the proposed operation would have two consequences:

- . a catastrophic decline in Austria-Hungary's capability to provide troop replacements, and
- . complete immobility on the German fronts, which could be tolerated only if the war were to be decided on the Italian front.

However, such a decisive victory couldn't be hoped for. In the first place, it was inconceivable that Italy would conclude a separate peace because of its economic dependence on the Entente. Moreover, even the defeat of an ally of England and Russia "which demanded so much and achieved so little" would scarcely trouble these powers, for Italy would still remain "their slave."

At the end of his note, perhaps with some ulterior motive, Falkenhayn made a counter-proposal to Conrad's suggestion on the 10<sup>th</sup> that the German OHL should deploy their troops in the trenches to make Aus-Hung. troops available. "After making this suggestion, Your Excellency should not wonder when I demand that the k.u.k. high command should make units which they don't need to ensure the security of their defensive positions on the Italian border and in Galicia available to relieve the German troops which are engaged under Linsingen's Army Group south of

the Pripyat.<sup>402</sup> It wouldn't be my intention to use this additional [Austrian] force for an offensive. However, by relieving German troops from the front they could make it possible for me to find practical use for the latter. I still haven't made a final decision about the active operations for which I could use these troops."

Conrad's reply to Falkenhayn on 18 December

In a long note dated 18 December, Conrad tried to convince Falkenhayn that his ideas and objections were untenable.<sup>403</sup> As he had stated previously, he still agreed that the war would more surely be won by victory in France rather than Italy. However, he was proposing only that the two countries should be attacked one after the other. Just as the Balkan campaign had begun after the end of the offensive against Russia, now - in his opinion - Italy could be attacked as soon as the necessary forces were no longer needed in the Balkans. They shouldn't be thrown against France until Italy had been driven from the field. Falkenhayn shouldn't underestimate the Italians; they were making substantial progress in all areas of military science; given the continuing difference in strength between the two sides, it would be a mistake to hope that Austria-Hungary, "after winning four battles on the Isonzo, would win as many more in the future." Falkenhayn should also consider that German units "alone wouldn't be able to win a final decision on either of the main fronts in the West or the East; Aus-Hung. units, however, wouldn't be available to take part in the decision or to relieve German troops in other sectors as long as they hadn't settled with Italy."

After reviewing the chances of success for an offensive out of south Tyrol, which Falkenhayn anyway hadn't questioned, Conrad declared that there was no other front in which an attack could have greater effect. Given sufficient infantry and strong artillery, it should be no more difficult to pass through a zone of mountains 30 to 40 km deep than it had been to force a crossing of the Danube-Sava line. Concerns about the time of year were beside the point, since the preparations would in any event continue until March.

Conrad said that it was particularly worth-while to know that there were no political factors standing in the way of the participation of Imperial German troops in a campaign against

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402 The reference is to the 1 and 22 ID.

403 Cramon, p. 40

Italy. German units would be needed for the second wave; however, units which were accustomed to the mountains and specially equipped could also be useful in the first wave. In this instance Conrad was thinking primarily of the Alpenkorps, 11 Bav ID, and perhaps IV Res Corps.

### **b. Falkenhayn decides to attack Verdun**

Although Conrad's arguments in his letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> may have been compelling, Falkenhayn was not to be convinced of the importance or feasibility of an offensive from south Tyrol - or from any other point - against Italy. When he received the arguments of the k.u.k. Chief of Staff he had already decided to move in another direction entirely.

When Falkenhayn had written Conrad on the 11<sup>th</sup> that he hadn't made a final decision about where he would carry on his next "active operations", this was still correct. However, for at least several days previously his thoughts had already been directed toward the Western front.<sup>404</sup> Falkenhayn considered Great Britain to be Germany's most dangerous foe, but it was very difficult to engage this country because of its geographical position. Moreover the German units didn't appear to be sufficient to destroy the British expeditionary force on French soil. Therefore Falkenhayn now decided to strike its best sword from the hand of the British Empire - the French Army. At the same time he would again intensify submarine warfare. After the first maritime successes the U-boats had been restricted to following the rules of surface warfare because of the threatening attitude of North America.<sup>405</sup> Now submarine operations would be increased in an attempt to cut imports into England; the naval command had promised that decisive success could be expected.<sup>406</sup> Falkenhayn didn't think that he was strong enough to break the resistance of France by a destructive attack. However, he believed that by a strategy that had never been attempted before in history he could bring victory nearer in a battle that would bleed the French white.

Already on 8 December, in a conversation with his principal

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404 Wendt, "Verdun 1916" (Berlin, 1931), pp. 26 ff.

405 This was due to the sinking of the passenger liner "Lusitania" (which the English were also using to transport munitions) on 7 May 1915 and of the "Arabic" in August; in both cases some American citizens lost their lives.

406 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", p. 181

assistant GM Tappen, Falkenhayn had referred to Verdun as a thorn in the side of the German front; its possession was apparently a question of prestige for the French. According to Falkenhayn's unusual plans it wasn't very important whether or not the Germans finally took the fortress. What he desired was a drawn-out fight in which the German leaders would force the enemy to suffer much heavier losses than their own; the Germans would hold their own commitment of infantry to a minimum while deploying a correspondingly much larger artillery force.

After a short stop on the Eastern front, Falkenhayn visited Berlin on 14 and 15 December; here he met with the Chief of Staff of the German Crown Prince, G.Lt Schmidt von Knobelsdorf, whose 5<sup>th</sup> Army would carry out the eventual attack on the Verdun fortress.

Plans for the offensive were also presented to other commanders on the Western front. Falkenhayn at this time was making one of the most fateful decisions of the World War. In the next few days the Chief of Staff prepared a very long memorandum to explain his thinking to the Emperor.<sup>407</sup> He did mention Conrad's suggestion for an attack on Italy, but added: "Its accomplishment would bring relief and future advantage only to Austria-Hungary, but wouldn't improve the general military situation...Italy's military potential is so small...that it will always remain under England's thumb...Moreover, Italy is the only one of our enemies whose inner weakness is such that it cannot possibly play a major role in the war, as long as the Aus-Hung. Army simply does its duty..." Sending more Aus-Hung. units to the Italian front (such as would be necessary for Conrad's planned offensive) "isn't desirable because of their tasks in the East."

After the preliminary planing, Falkenhayn's final decision was made at the latest on 21 December - he would trust his luck in 1916 in front of the doors of Verdun, the old fortress on the Meuse.<sup>408</sup> On the same day he invited his Aus-Hung. colleague to a conference at Berlin. It isn't known whether he intended to inform his ally that he had made a very important decision regarding the future of the entire war without consulting him. In the event, Conrad wouldn't hear the news for another six weeks, because he asked Falkenhayn to postpone the conference until after the German commander returned to Pless. In Conrad's reckoning, there was no reason to be hasty regarding plans for

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407 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", pp. 176 ff.

408 Wendt, p. 30

spring 1916, since it was first necessary to clarify the situation in the Balkans. The Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff had already been taking his own measures regarding the Balkans in the last several days.

### **c. Conrad decides to invade Montenegro and Albania**

In the Balkans, after mid-December any remaining activity at the Dardanelles could be left to the Ottomans, except for the assistance which the Central Powers had already willingly provided. The position of the quadruple alliance *vis a vis* Romania improved greatly around this time; the Kingdom was notably more serious about fulfilling its treaty responsibilities to provide surplus agricultural products and petroleum to the Central Powers. Therefore Vienna and Berlin could finally abandon a plan for sending an ultimatum to Romania, which they had periodically entertained but which had many disadvantages.<sup>409</sup> Recent military measures had also had an effect in Bucharest, such as the proximity until the start of 1916 of three German divisions which had come from Serbia, and the creation by the Bulgarians of a new 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on the northern border of their country.<sup>410</sup> Falkenhayn and the diplomats of the Central Powers hoped that this military display would help secure an eventual accommodation with Romania.

When the Romanians became more reasonable, the high commands of the Central Powers had no further reason to contemplate another major attack on Russia in the coming spring in order to secure the wheat fields of Ukraine. Apparently they also believed that the effects of the defeats which the Tsar's Empire had suffered in 1915 would be longer lasting than they had hoped several months earlier.<sup>411</sup>

#### The operational plan for the conquest of Montenegro

As Conrad pointed out in a note to Falkenhayn which he sent by courier to Berlin in the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, there remained for the Central Powers two points of interest in the Balkans - Salonika and the territory of Montenegro and northern Albania.

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409 Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", p. 174

410 The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army had two divisions - 4 ID plus the new 12 ID which was created from militia troops.

411 Golovine, "The Russian Army in the World War" (in English: New Haven, 1931), pp. 222 ff. Falkenhayn, "Heeresleitung", pp. 182 ff. Zwehl, pp. 176 ff.

Conrad now shared Falkenhayn's opinion that if the Bulgarians alone attacked toward Salonika the Greeks would likely go over to the side of the Entente. A combined offensive by Bulgarian and German troops against Sarraïl couldn't begin unless Greece joined the Central Powers. Until this happened, security for the southern border of Macedonia could be safely left to the Bulgarians.

In any event, Conrad told his Imperial German colleague, some time would elapse before the Greeks made a decision. Meanwhile it was all the more important to clean up the situation in the western Balkans; the first objective was to strike "the Serbian remnants, the Montenegrins and eventually the Italian units in north Albania." Conrad was contemplating strikes in two directions. One group, under the commanding general in BHD GdI Sarkotic, would advance "from the Bocche di Cattaro through the Lovcen area to Podgorica and Virpazar"; the other (Kövess' 3<sup>rd</sup> Army) would advance from Berane and Djakova to Podgorica and Scutari. On the southern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Conrad wanted to use the k.u.k. 57 ID, which since the agreement of 27 November had been earmarked for south Macedonia. This was because 3 Bulgarian ID, stationed at Djakova-Prizren, had shown no inclination to place itself under GdI Kövess. GFM Mackensen had already ordered that these two divisions should be swapped. Simultaneously with the southern wing of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Conrad wanted "at least two Bulgarian divisions to advance from Debra-Ochrida through Tirana and Elbasan, to strike the Serbs and Italians in central Albania." Such an advance by the Bulgarians into central Albania would enable the Greeks to enter southern Albania, an area where their claims were contested above all by Italy, and thus draw Greece closer to the side of the Central Powers. Conrad stated explicitly that for the campaign in Montenegro and north Albania Kövess would serve directly under the k.u.k. high command, and thus would be taken from Mackensen's Army Group.

At the same hour in which this letter was sent, the Chief of Staff of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, GM Konopicky, received a note from Conrad; he was instructed to share its contents only with his Army commander, not with Mackensen's Army Group HQ. After a general summary of the planned offensive, the note stated that "3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ alone would lead the operation"; for this purpose GdI Sarkotic with the troops assembling on Montenegro's western border would be placed under the Army's HQ. The forces in question would consist of FML Trollmann's XIX Corps along the Bocche di Cattaro (by the start of January he would have 33 battalions and 20 heavy batteries) and two brigades which

Sarkotic was assembling east of Trebinje. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ had reported that although a thrust from the northeast toward Lake Scutari would be effective, only a few brigades could take part because of the continuing logistical problems; most of the troops who couldn't be used on the northern front of Montenegro would therefore have to be moved to the western (Cattaro-Trebinje) sector, where the front was shorter. Therefore 10 Mtn Bde and Hausser's Brigade from 62 ID were being placed under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

Conrad went on to state that as soon as 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ had the rail line Skopje-Pristina-Mitrovica available (presumably by the end of December), they should send three brigades (59 ID and 21 Lst Inf Bde) through Ipek and Rozaj as far as possible in the direction of Podgorica. It was also planned that "57 ID should move forward from the line Djakova-Prizren in the general direction of Scutari." On the other hand, the logistical situation would determine whether the offensive could also feature a thrust from Bijelopolje through Kolasin.

#### Falkenhayn and Conrad fail to agree

In Berlin, Falkenhayn was very busy making the decision about Verdun; he didn't reply to Conrad's letter of the 16<sup>th</sup> until three days later. He referred to its main contents - the planned offensive against Montenegro and north Albania - only in a subordinate clause, and in a fashion which could hardly afford Conrad any satisfaction. Regarding the Salonika question, he told Conrad that a clarification of Greece's position couldn't be expected until the start of January. Even if the Greeks' attitude made an offensive against Salonika impossible, the German troops in the Balkans wouldn't be available for use in another theater until mid-February at the earliest. Meanwhile, however, the situation of the German front north of the Pripyat was urgently demanding his attention. The German divisions in the Banat would be used either on the Western front, against Sarrail's Entente army, or to hold down Romania. Therefore it was urgently necessary that the two Aus-Hung. divisions which the German OHL had requested in their note of the 11<sup>th</sup> should be made available "even if it were necessary to give up plans for an offensive against Montenegro and Albania."

Conrad answered on the same day (late in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>). The style and content of his telegram betrayed the strength of his bad humor. The General-Oberst told Falkenhayn that instead of two Aus-Hung. divisions he could take the two German divisions of the South Army, along with the staffs of

Generals Bothmer and Marschall; thereafter Austria-Hungary could do without the assistance of German units in the defense of east Galicia. Conrad declared firmly that he "naturally" didn't want to give up the offensive against Montenegro. Since Falkenhayn hadn't made "any particular objections" to the contents of the letter of the 16<sup>th</sup>, Teschen was informing Mackensen directly that GdI Kövess was coming under "the immediate direction" of the k.u.k. high command. Nevertheless, the Montenegro operation would be carried out in conjunction with Mackensen's Army Group "to ensure cooperation with the actions of the Bulgarian western group<sup>412</sup> and to maintain the supply lines."

Without waiting for further communications from Falkenhayn, on the next morning orders to implement these ideas were issued to Generals Kövess and Sarkotic, along with an explanation to Mackensen.

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412 The "Bulgarian western group" refers to the units which were supposed to advance toward Tirana and Elbasan.

Falkenhayn objects to the measures regarding 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

A few hours later, on the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup>, a message arrived from Falkenhayn, who was now hastening to stake out his position regarding Conrad's plans for the western Balkans. He declared that he couldn't agree to the separation of Kövess' Army from GFM Mackensen's Army Group because the concurrence of the Bulgarian high command was also required according to the existing understandings. It was true that he had "no objection against having 3<sup>rd</sup> Army carry out its function of protecting the flank by mounting an offensive", as long as the units involved couldn't be put to better use elsewhere. However, it was still necessary to co-ordinate military activity in the Balkans, "not only by agreement between the generals in the area, but even more by maintaining a unified supreme command." It wouldn't be easy to keep the Bulgarians working for the common cause if Austria-Hungary "did little" to encourage them.

At the close of his telegram, Falkenhayn referred to Conrad's offer to return Bothmer's two divisions. He was pleased by the offer, but feared that such a measure might encourage hostile activity by the Romanians and also by the Russians; there were already indications that the latter were planning new offensive operations toward Lemberg. Therefore he requested that "the German high command should be given some Aus-Hung. units instead of the German part of the South Army"; these units "would be sent to Prince Leopold's Army Group...where they would relieve German troops for use in the threatened sectors of Hindenburg's Army Group."

In another telegram of the same day, the German Chief of Staff addressed Conrad's doubts concerning 3 Bulgarian ID. He was convinced that the Bulgarians were willing to place the unit unconditionally at the disposal of Kövess' Army; however, this wouldn't happen until "after the deployment for the new operations is complete."<sup>413</sup> On the other hand, the Bulgarian high command would object to exchanging the k.u.k. 57 ID for 3 Bulgarian ID.

Conrad quickly replied to Falkenhayn with a wire on the same evening. He stuck to his position that the best way for Kövess' Army to guard the flank of Mackensen's Army Group would be to attack. However, it was certainly necessary for the western

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413 It's not clear which "deployment" Falkenhayn had in mind; most likely he meant the use of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to protect the flank of Mackensen's Army Group.

Bulgarian group to participate, "because otherwise in Albania the Serbs could complete their rehabilitation and the Italians could assemble without hindrance"; this would pose a grave threat to the allied units in Macedonia. Greece should also be asked to take part in the campaign in Albania, and thus bring a halt to Italian penetration of the southern part of that country. He still wanted to bring the k.u.k. 57 ID back to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army because of the uncertain position of the Bulgarian high command, but was willing to immediately reverse this decision if Bulgaria made available a division that was fully trained and prepared for mountain warfare to take its place. On the other hand, Conrad emphatically rejected Falkenhayn's request for two Aus-Hung. divisions to move to the German part of the Eastern front instead of Bothmer's German divisions. He told his immediate entourage that he agreed with Falkenhayn's concerns about weakening the front in east Galicia, but felt that the danger would not be lessened by taking away Aus-Hung. troops instead of Germans.

#### The debate becomes acrimonious

Now the animosity which had been smoldering for so long between the two generals became almost eruptive on Falkenhayn's part. The first part of the telegram he sent in reply in the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup> stated:

"According to our firm written agreements, Your Excellency has no right to unilaterally determine the operations of Mackensen's Army Group, nor make any major changes in its dispositions. But such activity also is contrary to the need for close cooperation between the high command, upon which alone hinges the fate of our dynasties and peoples. It is also contrary to the aspirations of the German high command and to what we are accomplishing with reference to our own interests in the area. I greatly regret being compelled to lodge a formal protest in this format against Your Excellency's measures."

As if this solemn declaration wasn't sharp enough, Conrad's feelings were equally wounded by the closing sentence of the note, in which Falkenhayn once more expressed his distrust of the capability of the Aus-Hung. troops, as he had so often in the past: "If Your Excellency believes that he can meet my request for some compensation for the German units under Linsingen only by removing the German divisions from Galicia, I hereby withdraw my request based on my evaluation of the general situation."

This message, with all the invective which was hardly normal in discussion between allies, caused as much resentment when it

arrived in Teschen as its author intended. However, in Conrad's response by wire, which was sent a few hours later, he was careful to remain as objective as possible.<sup>414</sup> He first pointed out that there were two written agreements regarding the operations of Mackensen's Army Group - one dated 6 September for the campaign against Serbia and another dated 27 November for the campaign against the Entente troops in Macedonia. Neither agreement stated that Mackensen's authority would last indefinitely. The mission envisaged on 27 November was essentially completed when Sarrail retreated behind the Greek border, since the question of whether the allies would cross the border wouldn't be settled in the foreseeable future. It was true that the attack on Montenegro and north Albania hadn't been mentioned in the latest agreements, but the task which he was assigning to the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was certainly consistent with its responsibility to guard the right wing of Mackensen's Army Group. The individuality of this assignment and the fact that the troops in BHD would have to be placed under GdI Kövess had caused Conrad to once more take over direct control of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Certainly this decision would have less impact on the conduct of the war in the Balkans than the withdrawal of seven German divisions, which Falkenhayn had initiated during the campaign in Serbia without the approval of Teschen.

Conrad went on: "Despite Your Excellency's objection, I cannot see how this has damaged the close cooperation of the two high commands, which must be maintained in the struggle for existence by our two Empires. It is an obvious fact that the German high command has greater forces at its disposal than the k.u.k. AOK, as Your Excellency keeps pointing out; however, both of us have been doing all we can to achieve our common goal, and must continue to do so."

Although Conrad thus tried to answer Falkenhayn's objections with the most temperate words possible, he didn't change any of his opinions or measures. He stated that he was now finally moving the k.u.k. 57 ID to the southern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army because of reports he'd received from the liaison officer attached to the Bulgarians. Several sentences of the note referred in

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414 Most of the original drafts of Conrad's correspondence, in his own writing, no longer exist. The archives mainly contain typed "concept papers", and it isn't possible to determine which individual was directly responsible for the contents of each part of the documents. It is known that the Chief of the Operations Branch, GM Metzger, always exerted his influence to make the tone of the correspondence more diplomatic. (This is based on information from former members of the Operations Branch; see also Cramon, p. 45.)

general to the attitude of the Bulgarians. In his latest telegram Falkenhayn had doubted whether the latter would take part in a winter campaign in Albania; he also said that strong Bulgarian forces shouldn't be pulled from the Greek border until the situation around Salonika was clarified. Conrad, on the other hand, believed that the Bulgarians would take part in any future Balkan campaign in which they could gain further territorial concessions beyond those granted by the treaty of 6 September. In this context they would want land in central Albania in the direction of Durazzo, and perhaps south Macedonia; the latter aspirations of course would have an impact on Greece.

With several words the General-Oberst finally sketched the prospects for continuing the offensive toward Salonika. It was his opinion that six Bulgarian and three and a half German divisions would be sufficient to deal with the Entente troops alone. However, if Greece intervened on the side of the enemy even the three German divisions still stationed in south Hungary wouldn't be a sufficient reinforcement for the minimum force he envisioned.

Suppressing his resentment, Conrad acknowledged Falkenhayn's refusal to take the two German divisions from east Galicia: "I courteously thank Your Excellency for withdrawing the request to transfer two divisions to the control of the German OHL. This makes us more certain that we can successfully withstand the eventual Russian attack which we expect against the front in Galicia and Bukovina."

If Falkenhayn had perhaps still hoped that his sharp words would induce his Aus-Hung. colleague to take back the orders which had been issued to Kövess, this answer must have greatly disappointed him.

Cramon writes in his memoirs<sup>415</sup>: "Falkenhayn was indignant; he was convinced that Conrad's action was a breach of the treaty and that it would obviously be regarded as such also in Sofia. He called me to Oderberg<sup>416</sup> and told me bluntly that he had no more trust in the AOK. To his regret, he was no longer in a position to defend the Austrians against the Bulgarians. I responded that it would be impossible to continue the hitherto successful direction of the fighting without the

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415 Cramon, p. 45

416 Oderberg was a rail station on the border north of Teschen, where Falkenhayn was catching a train for the Balkans after a short stop at Pless (without meeting Conrad).

personal cooperation of both Chiefs of Staff. Falkenhayn agreed with me, but stuck to his position that wholesome cooperation was now impossible. My duty was still to try to set things right."

#### **d. The personality clash between Conrad and Falkenhayn**

Thus at the end of 1915 the relations between the two Chiefs of Staff were ruined at a time that was most significant for the direction of the war. The occasion hardly seemed significant enough for a result so injurious to the common cause.

Based on our knowledge of subsequent developments in the Balkan theater of operations, we must recognize that Conrad was correct to at least improve the situation in the western Balkans while the question of Salonika was being clarified. The current position had become unbearable for Austria-Hungary and its southeastern provinces, especially since Italy had established a firm foothold in Albania. The flanking position which the enemy still held on the eastern coast of the Adriatic would also be a serious and continuing threat to the Macedonian front of the quadruple alliance. It would tie down far more units than Bulgaria, which was also threatened in the rear by Romania, had available. Even though Falkenhayn for a long time had been only half-heartedly carrying on the Balkan campaign, he didn't raise any basic objections to the correctness of Conrad's plans; he had to concede that they were also in the best interest of Mackensen's Army Group. Therefore it's difficult to understand why he delayed for so long to give his unconditional assent and even for a while suggested that Conrad should completely renounce the Montenegrin project to make a few divisions available for the Russian front.

Because of the long-standing personal tensions between the two men, it isn't surprising that Conrad suspected Falkenhayn of delaying to make the attack against Montenegro impossible. Time was pressing. It was only three or four months until spring, and preparations were under way to move the war out of the valleys and desolate areas of the Balkans back to the principal operational theaters. Naturally then every available man would be called away from the fronts that weren't of decisive importance. This was also true of the Aus-Hung. units in the Balkans, which first were supposed to conquer Montenegro and Albania. Thus it seemed that the period of time available to accomplish this goal was quite short. Further delay of just a few days could put the entire project in jeopardy.

In this dilemma, Conrad decided to quickly cut the Gordian knot. He separated Kövess' Army, whose troops he needed to conquer Montenegro, from Mackensen's Army Group and resumed unrestricted control of these units at his HQ. The fact that the upcoming campaign would thus be a purely Aus-Hung. enterprise could also be used to recover some of the badly damaged prestige of the Habsburg Monarchy among the Balkan peoples.

It is hardly possible to determine from the available documents what Falkenhayn really thought of Conrad's Balkan plans. Based on their exchange of views about an offensive against Italy, he certainly felt mistrustful and hostile toward Conrad's obvious intention to dilute the overwhelming influence of the German OHL on the development of overall strategy. His own decisions for 1916 were already rather firm. Germany should send all available forces to the West, the principal theater of the war. In this concept the restricted role of the Aus-Hung. armies was merely to relieve as many German divisions as possible on the other fronts, primarily against Russia. In connection with these plans, which he had so far only slightly sketched for his Aus-Hung. colleague, he looked at all of Conrad's schemes with more or less jaundiced eyes. This applied above all to Conrad's intentions against Italy. However, it's not certain that Falkenhayn was equally opposed to the Balkan plans of his ally for this reason or for any others. If this were the case, he had neglected to make this point to the HQ at Teschen with the necessary clearness. Instead his uncommunicative and delaying attitude forced Conrad to make his own decision.

In his message of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the k.u.k. Chief of Staff also strove to prove that he had the formal right to take action. In fact, neither the agreement of 6 September nor that of 27 November could be used to prove conclusively that the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had been placed under Mackensen's Army Group HQ for an indefinite period. With some justice Conrad also stated that he was following the example of Falkenhayn when he pulled the German divisions behind the Danube several weeks previously.

Falkenhayn's assertion that the independent action of the k.u.k. high command was setting an unfortunate example to the Bulgarians was naturally insufficient to convince Conrad to change his mind. The latter had already been very annoyed by Falkenhayn's earlier attempts to regard Austria-Hungary, a Great Power, as on the same plane as Bulgaria, a mid-level state.<sup>417</sup>

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417 Cramon, p. 33

Despite all these factors, it cannot be asserted that the aggressive action of the k.u.k. high command was necessarily preferable to a compromise settlement of the issue. The controversy was to have unfortunate consequences that would play a large part in the development of the 1916 operations. However, it is to be noted that Conrad's role in the planning of the Balkan campaign was only the immediate occasion, not the ultimate reason, for his break with Falkenhayn. For a long time the cooperation between the Chiefs of Staff had been marred not only by objective differences of opinion - which anyway were unavoidable because of the differing goals of their states - but by acrimonious personal clashes caused by their very opposite personalities.<sup>418</sup> In such an atmosphere, any pretext would have been sufficient to release the accumulated animosities. For Falkenhayn this moment came in the last days before Christmas 1915, a time in which he himself had decided to attack Verdun without consulting his ally. This decision was to have a much greater impact on the further course of the war for the Central Powers than Conrad's simultaneous but much less harmful decision regarding the Balkans.

## VII - Appendix

Major troop movements by rail, August to December 1915  
 (In the original, this material makes up Beilage 10)  
 Months shown are those in which the movement was initiated

### SEPTEMBER 1915

- . Deployment of German units on Serbian front
  - . HQ staffs and attached troops (Mackensen's Army Group, 11<sup>th</sup> Army, III Corps, and IV and X Res Corps)- From Oderberg and Salzburg to the Sava and Danube (287 trains)
  - . Heavy Artillery - From Salzburg to the Sava and Danube (51 trains)
  - . 101 ID - From Warsaw to Karansebes (60 trains)
  - . 11 Bavarian ID - From Oderberg to Karansebes (66 trains)
  - . 105 ID - From Oderberg to Werschetz (75 trains)
  - . 103 ID - From Oderberg to Bazias (76 trains)
  - . 25 Res ID - From Oderberg to Albunar (73 trains)
  - . 6 ID - From Salzburg to Pancsova (79 trains)

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418 TRANSLATOR's NOTE - Consistent with the guide lines established for the authors of this history, the personality issue is only briefly mentioned here. A good summary in English of this important aspect of the Conrad-Falkenhayn controversy is in Alistair Horne, "The Price of Glory" (New York, 1962), pp. 271-276. This chapter is significantly entitled "The Secret Enemies."

- . 107 ID - From Oderberg to Werschetz (57 trains)
- . XXII Res Corps with 43 and 44 Res ID - From Oderberg & Salzburg to Indjija (133 trains)
- . 26 ID - From Oderberg to Indjija (74 trains)
- . Deployment of additional Austrian units on the Serbian front
  - . 57 ID - From St Daniel to Indjija (55 trains)
  - . 59 ID - From Sesana to Sid (69 trains)
  - . VIII Corps HQ & attached troops - From Radom to Pecs & Sid (45 trains)
  - . XIX Corps HQ - From Brody to Neusatz (2 trains)
- . Movements behind the Serbian front
  - . 53 ID - From Dobojski to Sid (63 trains)
- . Reinforcements to the Italian front
  - . 106 ID - From Radom to Sesana (90 trains)
- . Movements behind the Russian front
  - . 10 CD - From Czernowitz to Lemberg (44 trains)
  - . 37 ID - From Ivangorod to Nizniow (72 trains), then from Stanislau to Lemberg (57 trains)
  - . VI Corps HQ and 12 ID - From Rawa Russka to Horodenka (81 trains)
  - . 39 ID - From Rawa Russka to Brzezany (70 trains)
  - . 41 ID - From Lublin to Lemberg (56 trains)
  - . Parts of 3 Polish Bde - From Tomaszow to Ivangorod (5 trains)

## OCTOBER 1915

- . Reinforcements to the Serbian front
  - . German Alpenkorps - First moved from south Tyrol to Germany (110 trains), then from Salzburg to Bazias (90 trains)
  - . 10 Mtn Bde - From Prvacina to Semlin (10 trains)
- . Reinforcements to the Italian front
  - . 206 Lst Inf Bde - From Slav. Brod to Laibach (10 trains)
  - . 6 ID - From Delatyn to Prvacina (58 trains)
  - . XIV Corps HQ and attachments - From Brody to Innsbruck (16 trains)
- . Movements behind the Russian front
  - . 26 ID - Assembled in Lemberg area (48 trains)
  - . 2 Polish Bde - From Stanislau to Kovel (16 trains)
- . Movements behind the Italian front
  - . 8 ID - From Laibach to Bozen (38 trains)

## NOVEMBER 1915

- . Reinforcements to the Italian front
  - . 9 ID - Parts first moved from Lemberg to Stanislau (33 trains); then Div moved from Kozowa to Prosecco (55 trains)
  - . 9 Inf Bde - Kotzmann to Ovcja-Druga (15 trains)

- . Movements behind the Russian front
  - . 26 ID - Brody to Maniewice (13 trains)

DECEMBER 1915

- . Departure of troops from the Balkans
  - . 25 German Res ID - From Werschetz to Salzburg (56 trains)
  - . 6 German ID - From Pancsova to Oderberg (86 trains)
  - . 26 German ID - From Semlin to Salzburg (78 trains)
- . Movements behind the Russian front
  - . 51 ID -From Brody to Czernowitz (45 trains).