

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

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

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## I. The World Situation in Summer 1916

### A. Theaters of Operation on Land and Sea

When the second year of the war ended in high summer 1916, the Central Powers found themselves in the most critical situation they had yet endured in the World War. Back in spring they had still been able to retain the operational initiative. Long before the enemy coalition could throw their enormous superiority in numbers and equipment into the scales, the Germans at Verdun and the Austro-Hungarians at Asiago had thrust their swords into the thick-meshed nets of the opposing positions. But the picture changed as the year wore on. The German attack at Verdun stuck fast. The French had lost 360,000 men dead and wounded while defending the fortress, but the attackers had suffered almost as many casualties in the "Hell of Verdun." Their victory in retaining the forts on the Meuse greatly increased the self-confidence of the French Army, while the Germans left the battle wounded in body and soul. The fight on the glaxis of Verdun flickered on until the end of the year, occasionally blazing up with its consuming flames.

In south Tyrol the offensive was unleashed like an avalanche on 15 May. In one bound it poured over the first Italian positions, over armored works and batteries. A week after the battle started the troops of the Archduke-Successor were on the rocky heights that stood over Asiago. At month's end the Aus-Hung. high command could announce that besides 30,000 Italians and enormous booty they had seized the fortified places of Arsiero and Asiago. But here the attack reached its limit. The enemy, who under the first shock of their defeat had considered the evacuation of Friauli, had an opportunity to throw numerous reinforcements from the Isonzo front into the Venetian mountains. These troops further stiffened the resistance that was already increasing. In order to strike again with full force, the attackers would have to pause to regroup. However, they were hindered by the severe setback suffered by their comrades on the Northeastern front, where the Russians had renewed their activities.

#### The Central Powers are forced onto the defensive

In the spring, when the fate of Verdun seemed to hang on a thread, the Tsar had already lived up to his promises by sending

four corps against GFM von Hindenburg's positions between Lakes Narotch and Wiszniew. This thrust collapsed "in blood and swamp." The major offensive which the Russians were committed to undertake was also supposed to take place north of the Pripyat. Then they received a cry for help from the King of Italy. At the command of the Tsar the commander of the Russian Southwest Front, GdK Brussilov, assembled strong attacking groups along his entire line. On 4 June they opened an attack that was by no means a surprise to the defenders. In Volhynia, on the northern wing of the 700 km long front where Brussilov attacked, the Russians had already deeply penetrated the Aus-Hung. positions on the second day of the battle. Luck had to be given up on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and a gap 15 km wide opened up southwest of the city. This catastrophe at Luck was followed two days later by another on the southern wing of the front, at Okna on the Dniester; in a military sense the defeat at Okna wasn't as great, but was more important politically because it took place on Aus-Hung. soil, at the gates of Hungary and in the immediate vicinity of Romania.

In one week the Aus-Hung. forces on the Eastern front had lost 300,000 men, the majority of them as prisoners. Except for a few thrusts at Baranowicze, the Russians now gave up their plans to attack north of the Pripyat, and sent all available units to Brussilov's Front which in the following weeks continued to deliver blows at various points along the defenders' very brittle lines.

The crisis, which at times seemed almost insurmountable, forced the k.u.k. General Staff to bury their Italian hopes for now. In the evening of 24 June, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Custozza, the Aus-Hung. troops at Arsiero and Asiago pulled back to take up a position 10 km in the rear; the enemy didn't notice that the withdrawal was in progress. However, only a small number of the divisions that thus became available could be sent to the Northeast. The high command was also concerned about restoring the defensive strength of the Isonzo front, which had been weakened in connection with the offensive in Tyrol. Not much time was available to carry this out because G.Lt Conte Cadorna, the enemy commander, was already in mid-June renewing his plans for an offensive in the Karst area.

Therefore after Luck there was no alternative but to turn to our allies for assistance. The German Army provided help to the greatest extent possible, which was limited however by the heavy defensive fighting that developed in the Battle of the Somme. The Entente commanders hadn't been forced to cancel this

offensive because of the Verdun campaign, although they attacked on a front only half as wide as they had originally intended. After a heavy barrage that lasted 6½ days, on 1 July the French and British under Generals Fayolle and Sir Douglas Haig advanced along the Somme. In the next few days the French inflicted a fairly significant defeat on their opponents, who had heavy casualties. However, the attack soon came to a halt and as August approached the French still hadn't taken their first major objective, the ruined city of Péronne. Similarly the British, despite great exertions, were still only half way to their objective, Bapaume. However, the burden on the German Western armies remained very heavy for several weeks. Thus the military leaders of the Central Powers had lost the initiative in the West, Southwest and East, while a new enemy, greedy and well-equipped, was threatening the Transylvania Alps. This was the Romania of Hohenzollern King Ferdinand, which was poised to invade a province whose extended boundaries were almost undefended.

There was also concern about the outlying positions of the great fortress defended by the Central Powers. It was true that the Bulgarian-German front along the Greek border was still rather quiet. The Bulgarians were preparing a summer operation which would be restricted to improving their defensive line. However, a third of their Army had to be held back in the homeland to be prepared to deal with a possible surprise attack by the Romanians, whose plans were still unknown.

#### The situation outside Europe

In Asia Minor the Turks found themselves compelled to carry on an exclusively defensive war on their own territory.<sup>1</sup> Spring brought good tidings from the cradle of mankind, the Land Between the Rivers [Iraq]. On 26 April - a week after the Turks' old instructor and commander, GFM Freih. von der Goltz, had succumbed to typhus - they forced English GM Townshend to capitulate at Kut el Amara (near Ctesiphon) with 13,000 men. Relief attempts by a British Corps advancing up the Tigris had failed. Also unsuccessful was GM Prince Baratov's Russian Expeditionary Corps, which in winter had entered Persia from the Caspian Sea; they were halted in the border passes leading to Iraq northeast of Bagdad, which they were eventually compelled to evacuate. On the other hand, Germany's attempt to incite Persia to revolt against England was a failure. At the end of August Shah Ahmed Kadjar and his country were completely handed

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1 Liman von Sanders, "Fünf Jahre Türkei" (Berlin, 1919), p. 155

over by treaty to the Entente.

In Armenia, Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievitch had opened a surprising advance in mid-winter. He threw the 3<sup>rd</sup> Turkish Army out of their weakly held positions, and took Erzerum (on 16 February), Bitlis (2 March), Trebizond (18 April) and Erzinghian (25 July). Meanwhile the Turkish Vice-Generalissimo Enver Pasha finally decided to send one of the three Armies standing inactive in Thrace against the Grand Duke. However, Turkey's long and incomplete transportation network kept this [2<sup>nd</sup>] Army from arriving in time. The Turks at least were able to recover Bitlis on 18 August and then to keep the Russians under such strong pressure that they had to renounce a further advance to the west. However, for the time being Turkey had no prospect of fully overthrowing this enemy.

In Mesopotamia the British had to suspend major operations for the rest of 1916, but they were busily preparing for an operation in spring of the next year. Meanwhile they expanded the area they were occupying in Persia. Their influence in Arabia also increased from month to month. A German-Turkish force under Djemal Pasha attacked the Suez Canal at the start of August, but it shattered on the defenses which the British had already erected on the Canal's eastern bank. Plans for injuring the British at this very sensitive spot had to be abandoned forever. The partial successes which the Ottoman Empire won on the Tigris and later against the Russians couldn't conceal the fact that their general situation was becoming quite critical.

The heavy strain, however, didn't hinder the Turkish high command from fulfilling their obligations as allies in exemplary fashion by sending an army corps to Galicia. Here the Turks proved themselves to be soldiers of unparalleled bravery and steadiness, just as they had in most other situations.

In the German colonies, Cameroon was forced to surrender to the French and British in February<sup>2</sup>. This left only German East Africa, which however held out throughout the entire summer. By mid-September the gallant defender, Col. von Lettow-Vorbeck, had to pull back into the southernmost part of the colony due to an envelopment attack by British-Indian, Belgian and South African units which later were also joined by Portuguese. Even at its highest point, his troop strength had been just 3,000 Germans

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2 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Actually there was no overall capitulation in Cameroon. Most of the remaining German units retreated into neutral Spanish Rio Muni where they were interned.

and 11,000 natives.<sup>3</sup>

#### The naval situation

The fate of the German colonies was the unavoidable result of the enormous superiority of the Entente - especially Great Britain - at sea. Within the Quadruple Alliance, the Aus-Hung. and Turkish fleets were completely restricted to protecting the coasts of their homelands. The size of the area which the k.u.k. Kriegs-Marine was required to protect increased substantially after the conquest of Montenegro and of northern Albania.<sup>4</sup> The commanders of the enemy fleets operating in the Mediterranean nevertheless held that a sortie by the Aus-Hung. Navy was conceivable. Therefore they assembled their squadrons around Corfu and Malta, but were unable to prevent German and Aus-Hung. submarines from undertaking productive operations in the Mediterranean and Adriatic.

In 1915 the Germans had attempted for the first time to overcome British maritime supremacy and the resultant hunger-blockade with submarine warfare. They declared that the waters around Great Britain and Ireland were a war zone. This threatened not only enemy merchant ships, which were liable to destruction when they entered the area. Since England was misusing vessels flying neutral flags, shipping companies of non-combatant states were also warned about the consequences of coming into the blockaded zone. When the Germans started their war against merchant shipping they possessed just 30 submarines. Nevertheless their success was significant, especially since neutral ships in many cases were afraid to risk entering the war zone. Then on 7 May 1915 the British passenger line "Lusitania", carrying 5400 cases of ammunition, was sent to the bottom; as a result several hundred North American citizens, including women and children, lost their lives. The resultant diplomatic clash with the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, was followed by another in August when three Americans died due to the sinking of the liner "Arabic." The controversies seemed likely to end in a war with America, which the Germans decided they did not want to risk. Therefore the Imperial government ordered that in future submarine warfare would be conducted according to international conventions

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3 Lettow-Vorbeck, "Meine Erinnerungen aus Ost-Afrika" (Leipzig, 1920), pp. 138 ff.

4 Kriegsarchiv (Marinearchiv), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1929-31), p. 324

regarding cruiser operations.<sup>5</sup> Soon thereafter they withdrew their submarines entirely from British waters.

In 1916, for the first and last time in this war the world witnessed the largest fleets in existence clash in full strength on the high seas. When the war started the German naval leadership had hoped that they could reduce the disparity in strength *vis a vis* the British Navy by whittling the latter down in a series of small actions; by the first winter of the fighting they recognized that this strategy wasn't realistic. However, there was no real change in policy until 1916, when Vice Admiral Scheer was placed at the head of the German High Seas Fleet.<sup>6</sup> By sailing his squadron into the Skagerrak he challenged Admiral Jellicoe's British fleet, based in the roadstead at Scapa Flow. The British advance guard pulled back toward the northwest from the German scouting vessels, and drew after them the German main body; this allowed the English dreadnoughts under cover of the evening twilight to attempt to cut off their opponents' retreat to the Bay of Helgoland. Toward midnight, however, Vice Admiral Scheer broke through to the south by ruthlessly employing his battle cruisers and torpedo boats; on the next day he reached his home coast without further damage.

The British had deployed 37 capital ships and 105 lighter vessels, of which 3 battle cruisers, 4 armored cruisers, 2 smaller cruisers and 13 destroyers were sunk.<sup>7</sup> The Germans

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5 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference here is mainly to the London Convention of 1909, which stated that before sinking a merchant vessel (enemy or neutral) a warship was required to determine that the target was carrying prohibited cargo and then to afford the crew time to abandon ship. See N. Martiny, "Bild-Dokumente aus Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (Graz, 1939), p. 133. These rules, of course, were designed before the weaknesses and strengths of submarines in commerce warfare had been tested and understood. Another important factor in the German decision to end the unrestricted U-boat campaign, however, was the growing realization of the planners that their current submarine force was just too small to have a decisive impact, regardless of their initial successes. See V.E. Tarrant, "The U-Boat Offensive 1914-1945" (American edition, New York, 1989), pp. 21-22.

6 Scheer, "Deutschlands Hochseeflotte im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1920), p. 147

7 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original text also erroneously lists one dreadnought (?) among the English casualties.

deployed 21 battleships and 72 lighter vessels; they lost a battle cruiser, an older armored ship, 4 light cruisers and 5 torpedo boats. After two years of forced inactivity the German High Seas Fleet had convincingly proved their technical and moral superiority. However, the Battle in the Skagerrak also demonstrated definitely that the numerical superiority of the British forces over the German could not be overcome. Therefore Vice Admiral Scheer declared immediately after the battle that England would never be forced to sue for peace in an open action at sea, but only through the ruthless employment of the German submarines in economic warfare.

Scheer thus renewed a debate that had been hotly contested by Germany's ruling circles a few months previously. Upon the insistence of military and naval authorities, in February 1916 the German U-boats opened underwater attacks on armed merchant vessels for the second time. On 24 March, Americans were again among the victims when the unarmed passenger vessel "Sussex" was torpedoed; Wilson once more issued a warning in the sharpest terms. The Germans still didn't want war with the Union, and so they again restricted the submarines to following the international rules for cruiser warfare. In connection with these events Grand Admiral von Tirpitz had resigned as Secretary of the Navy.

## ***B. The Political Situation of Both Sides***

### **1. The Central Powers through summer 1916**

To understand the situation of the Central Powers in 1916, it is necessary to glance at political, economic and social developments.

#### Germany

In the German Empire in August 1914 all classes and parties, including the Social Democrats, had joined ranks under the Emperor's watchword, "I don't know parties; I know only Germans." The willingness to sacrifice with which the nation bore all the burdens of the war - in the field and at home - led the philosophical Imperial Chancellor Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg to make use of a poetic expression, stating that the poorest sons of the people had also proven to be the most loyal. The heavy casualties which the Army suffered in the first months of

the war (without winning a decision) were followed by concern about providing the necessities of life as the economic aspects of the struggle developed. Until the summer of 1916 the costs of the war were paid mainly through public loans. Meanwhile from the first day Germany's isolation from the world economy had bitter consequences. The importation of raw materials from enemy countries immediately ended; the Entente also thwarted German trade with neutral states as much as they were able. The Imperial government instituted a wide-ranging plan to control the economy. German ingenuity and technical ability were employed to produce "Ersatz" substitutes for foodstuffs as well as for military equipment. Only thus was it possible for the German people, cut off along with their allies from all the world, to exploit to the maximum the resources in their homeland, thus maintaining their military strength and multiplying methods of waging war. Nevertheless, by 1916 the lack of essential products was already very noticeable. In the "turnip winter" which followed this inevitably had serious social consequences.

Basic questions connected with the war had long ago destroyed the political truce between the parties and divided the German people into different camps; their opposition to each other was strengthened by the economic crisis. Made conscious of their solidarity by serving and suffering in the trenches, broad sectors of the population strove ever more to attain equal rights in the state and society. Their goals were greater participation in government, increased influence of the popular assemblies, introduction of universal suffrage in Prussia, cancellation of repressive wartime measures, and improvement in their economic situation.

In the narrower area of military affairs, it was the question of unrestricted submarine warfare that kept German public opinion agitated. The population was also deeply divided on the issue of war aims, which since late 1914 had no longer been kept separate from partisan political struggles. The proponents of a "Greater Germany" (denounced by their opponents as "Siegfriedler" or believers in peace only with victory) included, but were not restricted to, heavy industry, landed proprietors and the conservative intellectuals. Their opponents were the "Verzicht-friedler" (advocates of a peace of renunciation); primarily members of the parties that would be in the majority in the Weimar era, they were opposed to a war of conquest but supported the defensive struggle which had been announced in August 1914, and strove for a compromise with the Entente. The great majority of the German people was torn

between these two groups, as public opinion swayed back and forth. Already in 1915 a third program became noteworthy; its advocates later formed the "Independent Social Democratic Party" (U.S.P.). They preached opposition to any "imperialistic war" and pursued revolutionary goals. In Switzerland they joined like-minded persons from enemy and neutral countries in an attempt to restore the "International" which had been destroyed when the war started. The most revolutionary elements of this group joined together as the "Spartacists", named after the "Spartacus" letters of their leader Karl Liebknecht; they demonstrated openly on the streets on 1 May 1916. The "Independents" were only weakly represented in the Reichstag, but increasingly gained influence with the masses by organizing marches to protest the war and the resulting deprivations during the summer.

### Austria-Hungary

While the hardships of the war mainly exacerbated social tensions in the nationally homogenous, industrialized German Empire, they naturally caused nationalistic strife among the many peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy.

It is true that when the war started popular enthusiasm in Austria-Hungary, while not as great as in Germany, was still enough in evidence that it seemed to confirm the well-known words of Bismarck: "When Emperor Franz Joseph climbs onto his saddle, the sons of all peoples of his Empire willingly follow him." The achievements of the Army, despite all the setbacks which occurred, were still so considerable even long after the summer of 1916 that they can be regarded only with awed astonishment. However, several months after the outbreak of the war which had unfortunately been characterized by von Bethmann-Hollweg as a decisive clash between Germans and Slavs,<sup>8</sup> it was becoming a major test of endurance for the Danube Monarchy. Symptomatic were incidents when the Army deployed in areas inhabited by Ruthenes and Serbs, in many cases sympathetic to the enemy who were of their own blood, unrest in the Bohemian lands when the Russians were nearby in autumn 1914, and problems which the Army had with young troops of Slavic or Romance speech in the following winter.<sup>9</sup> Mostly these were isolated cases, but

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8 This statement was part of a speech by the Reich Chancellor on 7 April 1913 (Friedjung, "Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus 1884-1914" [Berlin, 1922], Vol. III, pp. 273 ff.)

9 Glaise-Horstenau, "Die Katastrophe - Die Zertrümmerung Österreich-Ungarns und das Werden der Nachfolgestaaten"

they indicated a certain trend.

Even in areas where there was nationalistic disaffection in the first years of the war, only a comparatively small number of intellectuals advocated the destruction of the Empire. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the historic Imperial structure had no desire to see it disappear; it hadn't allowed the individual groups full national autonomy, but provided them rich economic and cultural opportunities. In the field this majority rendered to the Emperor what was the Emperor's. But gradually the masses in the Slavic and Romance areas considered the question, "What will be the result of victory for the Central Powers?" On the horizon it appeared that the picture would remain the same - the hated Dualistic constitution would continue, with the Magyars dominant in Hungary and the Germans on the other side of the Leitha. Naumann and Friedjung were advocating establishment of "Middle-Europe", or even an empire under Prussian-German hegemony stretching from Hamburg to Bagdad! Such prospects could encourage the German-Austrians, who saw them as the embodiment of their hopes of 1848 in a different form, or a way to make amends for the national misfortune of 1866. However, they made even the most moderate representatives of the other nationalities pensive. This facilitated Entente propaganda, which was supported by colonies of emigrants whose spiritual leader by the end of 1915 was undoubtedly the Czech Masaryk.

The effect of these tendencies on the armed forces and the efforts of the high command to counteract them in the Army are discussed elsewhere. Extension of military judicial authority to cover certain crimes committed in the interior provided an opportunity to file military charges against Ruthene, South Slav and Czech politicians. The most famous instance was the prosecution of the Czech politician Kramar. At the insistence of the high command he was arrested in summer 1915; although several former ministers testified in his behalf he was sentenced to death in June 1916. The sentence was then reduced, however, to 15 years' imprisonment.

Within the "Kingdoms and Lands represented in the Reichsrat", which were first officially labeled "Austria" in 1915,<sup>10</sup>

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(Vienna, 1929), pp. 63 ff.

10 The designation "Austria" was first used in an Imperial decree on 11 October 1915, which also prescribed - at the urging of Hungarian Minister-President Graf Tisza - that the double eagle which had symbolized common institutions was to be

political life had practically ceased to exist when the war began. Because of concern about anti-war demonstrations, in August 1914 Prime Minister Graf Stürgkh hadn't summoned the Reichsrat; since then he had ruled on the basis of Paragraph 14 of the constitution, which gave the government full powers in an emergency. Public opinion was regulated by the censors and by police measures; legal civil rights were hemmed in by numerous exceptions to the law. This course was criticized even in conservative circles, but Stürgkh adhered to his course despite all suggestions for the restoration of parliamentary life.<sup>11</sup> Because of his policies, on 21 October 1916 he was shot to death in a Vienna restaurant by the radical Socialist Friedrich Adler, a son of the Socialist leader Dr. Viktor Adler.

Unlike cis-Leithania, which was ruled autocratically, Hungary appeared to be a united state in which the Parliament governed, supported by a strong consciousness of national identity. In reality the parliamentary institutions didn't accurately reflect either the social or national composition of the Kingdom's peoples. However, Minister-President Tisza prevailed over all obstacles due to his fanatic faith in the mission of his nation, his skillful tactics in playing his opponents off against each other, and the influence of his strong personality on the Emperor and the coordinators of the Monarchy's foreign policy. Thus he ensured that Hungary's opinions had substantially greater weight than those of its Austrian sister-state. This preponderance was further strengthened by Hungary's economic situation; despite all treaties, the Hungarians kept their economic affairs separate and in 1916 were still living in comparative comfort while people were suffering want in the mountain and industrial areas of cis-Leithania.

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replaced by two coats of arms. GO von Conrad had spoken very sharply against this alteration.

<sup>11</sup> Glaise-Horstenau, "Katastrophe", pp. 66 ff.

Baleful effects of the dualist system

Prior to the war, the strong position of Hungary and the great age of Emperor-King Franz Joseph had already made any alteration in the dualistic form of the state unthinkable, although it was so hated by many of the nationalities. This situation remained the same even when territorial questions raised by the war once again caused the issue of constitutional changes to become prominent. Thus from the beginning Tisza opposed suggestions for finally solving the Southern Slav problem which were proposed with greater frequency after the overthrow of Serbia and Montenegro; the proposals, which were warmly supported by Conrad, could have led to the creation of a third state - composed of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes - to take its place alongside "Austria" and Hungary within the Habsburg Monarchy. Tisza believed that the Monarchy should be content with the annexation of Mt Lovcen and several bridgeheads south of the Sava and Danube, while Bulgaria would be rewarded with parts of eastern Serbia and Macedonia. What remained of the Serbian Kingdom would continue to lead an autonomous existence, but made dependent as possible upon the Central Powers. In his opposition to having the Slovenes join a "Habsburg Yugoslavia", the Hungarian Minister President received the support of the Germans of Austria, who were concerned about their minorities in the area and about the connections with Trieste.

Tisza was not so completely adamant about the Polish question, which immediately after the outbreak of the war became one of the thorniest issues facing all the combatants. Under pressure from the Western democracies, Russia had to advocate a "Kingdom of Poland" under its authority but with wide-ranging autonomy; the Kingdom was to be increased if possible by annexing Galicia and Posen. The Danube Monarchy, which didn't want to lose Galicia or the support of the Poles within its borders, was compelled to include the "Austro-Polish" solution to its program of war aims. Tisza and the Magyars concurred, as long as Poland wouldn't exist in a "trialist" sense (as an equal partner of "Austria" and Hungary), but instead would still be included among the Austrian lands with considerable self-government. This was called the "sub-dualist" solution. On the other hand, the Reich Germans gave just reluctant approval to the Polish plans of their ally. In summer 1916 they took advantage of the difficult situation of the Danube Monarchy in the East to carry out a proposal more favorable to themselves. The result was the "Polish Manifesto" of 5 November 1916, which we will discuss later.

In close connection with this issue was the concept that the multi-national Habsburg Empire should be rebuilt to give it greater cohesion to face international challenges; despite the resistance of Hungary and the curbs on free speech since the start of the war, this concept continued to have its advocates. However, there were still enormous obstacles to fulfillment of such a reform project. Moreover, the policies advocated by the various nationalities were themselves contradictory. In expressing their desire to rule over the three million Germans in the lands under the Crown of St Wenceslaus (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia), the Czechs based their claims on the "historical rights" of these lands; however, in their attempts to also annex the Slovaks of Hungary they ignored the historical rights of the Crown of St Stephen as well as the Slovaks' own right to determine their destiny. The Germans vehemently demanded that Bohemia should be partitioned into national districts, and made their support of the government contingent upon receiving this concession; however, they refused to contemplate such a reform for the southern Slavic territories in cis-Leithania because of danger to the German upper and middle classes which lived in these areas. Although the Germans found themselves in agreement with the Poles (for different reasons) that Galicia should have a special position, such a solution was strongly opposed by the remaining Slavs of "Western Austria" because they believed (correctly) that it would strengthen the Germans' position in the rest of cis-Leithania. And any reform would of course have to deal with the "Ausgleich" of 1867 which had divided the Monarchy in half, or else major changes were unthinkable.

## 2. The Entente

In the area of diplomacy, the Foreign Minister Baron Burian had made it his principal task from the beginning to "always think about peace." Also Bethmann-Hollweg states in his memoirs that on the Central Powers' side since the start of 1915 were "constantly seeking to determine whether peace negotiations could be initiated."<sup>12</sup> All peace feelers, however, were without result, at least in the first two years of the war.

**France** still was not only seeking to recover Alsace-Lorraine, but was extending its war objectives to the western bank of the

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<sup>12</sup> Burian, "Drei Jahre aus der Zeit meiner Amtsführung im Kriege" (Berlin, 1923), p. 130. Bethmann-Hollweg, "Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen" (Berlin, 1921), Vol. II, p. 54.

Rhine and Turkish territory in Syria; from month to month the country was becoming more dependent economically on Great Britain. In **Italy** support for the war had never been as extensive as it was north of the Alps, and the failure to win success on the Isonzo helped to keep enthusiasm low. Economic and social difficulties increased as the war went on. However, the Italian governments were always able to master the situation. After Salandra's cabinet fell in June 1916 under the impact of the Aus-Hung. offensive, Boselli constructed a ministry from a broader range of parties. Baron Sonnino, the Foreign Minister, stayed in power; he made it clear to friend and foe alike that despite the danger of unrest in the interior he would never accept a premature end to the war if purchased by the renunciation of the national aspirations embodied in the Treaty of London. Anyway, Italy was economically even more dependent on England than France was.

Once the fighting had started, **England** was more determined than its allies to carry on the war at least long enough to destroy Germany's world-wide influence; by annexing German colonies and Turkish territory the English would substantially strengthen their own hegemony in the world. With few exceptions, all of British public opinion consistently followed their leaders. Contrary to all customs, in May 1915 after the failure of the first attacks on the Dardanelles the leader of the opposition party was included in Asquith's cabinet. On 24 April 1916 this government suppressed an uprising of Irish separatists in Dublin by force. On 25 May 1916 they extended conscription, which since the start of the war had applied to unmarried men, to all males without exception. The great majority of the citizens of the Dominions adhered to the war policies of the mother country, while gaining greater autonomy and greater influence on the government of the Empire as a whole. Great Britain felt dangerously and seriously threatened by the presence of the Germans on their Belgian glacis and on the coast of the English Channel, before the gates of Dunkirk and Calais.

Due to constant pressure from England, on 23 February 1916 **Portugal** (which for a long time had been a British dependency) raised the Portuguese flag over 37 German ships that had taken refuge in the Tejo; this caused the Central Powers to declare war on their country. Some time would elapse, however, before Portuguese battalions appeared on the Western front. The number of neutral states in Europe continued to dwindle. Only Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the three Scandinavian kingdoms kept themselves out of the fighting. In **Greece** King Constantine was carrying on a desperate struggle against the efforts of

France and England to draw the Hellenes into the world conflict. However the Western powers, who forced the Greek Army to demobilize on 21 June, would prevail sooner or later, especially since they had strong allies among the local political parties.

At the start of the third year of the war, the weakest link in the chain forged by the Entente was undoubtedly the **Russian** colossus. When the war started, here as elsewhere all parties (including, with some reservations, the various Socialist groups) had declared agreement with the government's policy. However, unity on the political front hardly lasted through the first winter of the war. Then - and especially after the severe defeats of 1915 which caused enormous chaos in the logistical and railroad systems - the parties and political opinion began to divide into three great groups which would eventually determine the fate of the Tsarist regime. On the left the Socialists were already speaking out sharply in spring 1915 against continuing the war. From this point forward their goal was unrest and revolution; they fomented numerous strikes and gradually gained the allegiance of the industrial workers. The Army also was affected somewhat, although the government sought to suppress dissent with strong pressure. Now, moreover, the center protested this government pressure; it was led by the liberal parties which formed a block in the Duma under Milyukov. The center was struggling to obtain democratic freedoms and to transform the country into a parliamentary monarchy; because of their strong nationalist convictions, they were the most fervent supporters of continuing the war together with the Western powers. This group also had its adherents in the army, especially in the officer corps. Only part of the conservative, anti-democratic right still supported the government's war and alliance policies. Another part began to fear that continuing the war would finally cause the fall of the dynasty and the outbreak of revolution. More or less consciously they were working for peace; because Russia's allies were strongly determined to continue fighting, this would have to be a separate peace. Public opinion was soon convinced that the mystically-inclined Tsarina Alexandra Fedorovna and the bizarre monk Rasputin were the principal leaders of this movement. Also Stürmer, who since February 1916 was Minister President and in June succeeded Sazonov in the Foreign Ministry, was considered by the Entente as well as the Central Powers to be an advocate of a separate peace. On the other hand, from month to month the Russian economy became more entangled with that of the Western powers; the Tsar himself never seriously considered seeking a separate peace. He opposed any break with his allies. Moreover, he felt that he was bound by the "oath of 1812", which

he'd taken at the start of the war and which forbade him to conclude peace before the enemy had given up all of the Russian soil which they occupied. The prospect that their enemies would do this voluntarily became ever slighter as the war went on. For the Germans it wouldn't be easy to renounce the Baltic provinces in which many of their countrymen lived; for the Austro-Hungarians it would be even more difficult to give Poland up to the Tsar's Empire of their own free will.

The Entente's allies in the Far East, the **Japanese**, pursued solely their own interests. They considered their participation in the alliance's military operations to be essentially ended with the capture of Tsingtau; thereafter they were content to provide some artillery instructors for the Russians and with delivering a rather limited amount of military equipment. Producing the latter was very advantageous for their economic situation, which had been unfavorable at the start of the war. Meanwhile they were eagerly striving to penetrate China politically and economically. In a treaty concluded on 25 May 1915 the Chinese had to make wide-ranging concessions in the northeast and east of their realm to the Island Empire. The Japanese bought tolerance of this forward policy from the English by promising in a treaty not to conclude a separate peace, and from the Russians by assuring them preference in the delivery of war material. Finally France also looked favorably on Japan's Asiatic policy.

A military party in **China** was making increasing efforts to get their country to enter the war on the side of the Entente. Thus they hoped to escape from Japan's tutelage. Great Britain supported this plan, but encountered decisive resistance from Tokyo, which opposed arming 400,000,000 Chinese.

In general, the problems created by the war seemed so insurmountable that all the states and peoples caught in its stream continued to look to their swords, which they hoped would cut through the unsolvable Gordian knot.

## **II. The Southwestern Front in the First Half of August 1916**

### **A. The Sixth Battle of the Isonzo**

## 1. The Italians prepare a new attack on the Isonzo

### a. Situation on the Southwestern Front at the end of July

In mid-June the Army Group in Tyrol had to break off their victorious advance against the last position of the Italians' mountain front between the Adige and the Brenta so that several divisions could be given up to the Eastern front for the defense against Brussilov's onrushing masses. Thus the initiative was also lost to the enemy on the Southwestern front. Furthermore, the heavy pressure against the defenders of the sally ports leading to the Venetian plains was removed, and G.Lt conte Cadorna could confidently hope that the approximately 350 battalions which he had hurried to this area would soon be able to master the situation, which until now had been quite critical.

The Italians opened counter-thrusts that were supposed to drive the Aus-Hung. troops from their newly-selected line, which included all the key points the latter would need to later resume their offensive, and to throw them back to their original starting points on the plateaus of south Tyrol. These thrusts, though intense, were very costly and almost completely unsuccessful; the Italian leadership soon had to recognize that chances of progress here were scanty. However, Cadorna didn't want to waste the opportunity afforded by the strong emotional surge that ran through Italy's Army and people when they successfully fended off the invasion of their territory, and by the relief afforded by the intervention of the Russians in the East.<sup>13</sup> He decided to break off the fruitless fighting in the mountains as soon as possible and to shift the main body of his Army again to the area which remained the principal objective of Italy's war - the road to Trieste. Strengthened in this decision by the continued advance of Brussilov's armies, and in the knowledge that his allies would soon open a major offensive against the German Western front, in June the Italian commander initiated meticulous and secret preparations for his units to make a surprise strike on the Isonzo.

As long as fighting continued in south Tyrol and on the Asiago plateau, the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army - which had been greatly weakened by giving up their troops - still didn't have to worry that the

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13 Capello, "Note di guerra" (Milan, 1925), Vol. I, p. 279

Italians would simultaneously attack on the mountain front and in the coastal lands. However, the enemy counterattacks on the front of Archduke Eugene's Army Group tapered off at the start of July, and stopped altogether around the middle of the month. The battle continued only in the upper Fleims valley, where an Italian group had penetrated the lines. Quiet now reigned in all other sectors in the southwest, except for local actions. This didn't lighten the burden of the Aus-Hung. leadership, but instead caused great uncertainty. The position was complicated by the fact that the military situation in Galicia and Bukovina, as well as the attitude of Romania, might make it necessary to further weaken the Southwest front. Meanwhile in the West the offensive battle of the English and French on the Somme reached its high point in the first days of July. Under these conditions it was hardly likely that the Italian high command, which anyway was obliged by the agreements at Chantilly to cooperate in a combined general attack on the Central Powers, would remain inactive, watching the struggles of their partners in the East and West. Soon after the sound of battle was stilled in the mountains, many signs were observed on the Tyrolean front - confirmed by intelligence - that the Italian units were re-grouping in the direction of the Isonzo. The Aus-Hung. high command reckoned that the attack in the coastal lands would start in mid-August; on 26 July they ordered Army Group Archduke Eugene to hold a division in reserve near the railroad, where it could be quickly shifted. In general, however, the situation on 5<sup>th</sup> Army's front was still quiet almost until the end of July. The Monarchy was in a difficult military-political situation already, so it was hoped that the clashes on the plateaus of the Venetian Alps had injured the enemy's striking power for a long time. But this deceptive hope wasn't destined to be fulfilled, since the Italian headquarters were attentively watching Austria-Hungary's growing distress. This time the Italians had the more favorable situation. Now the moment seemed to have arrived when they could utilize their great superiority in numbers and military equipment for a sudden thrust in the most profitable direction, through Görz and on the Karst plateau, to win a visible success. The results could have a significant influence on the attitude of Romania.

#### **b. Development of Italian operational plans for 1916**

Since the end of the hard and costly autumn battles of 1915, the Italian high command had been developing new guidelines to successfully resume their bogged-down campaign on the Isonzo. In the winter they were able, with great willpower, to revive

the soldierly spirit and bearing of their troops, which had been shattered by heavy casualties and defeats. In particular they strengthened the flagging self-confidence of the commanding officers.<sup>14</sup> The training of the various branches was substantially revised from the ground up, with new guidelines and regulations based on the war experiences of the French as well as the Italian Army.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in December 1915 a major expansion of the Army was undertaken; most of it was complete by the end of June 1916 (as described in Volume IV). Thanks to these measures, Italy's military strength by mid-summer was more than a third greater (in number of troops) than during the first year of the war. Even greater was the increase in the number of machine guns, medium and heavy artillery pieces, and trench mortars.<sup>16</sup>

Back in February the Italian high command announced to their subordinate generals the decision to have the main body of the Army once again attack on the front near the coast at a time that was yet to be determined. But it wasn't until 14 March (just after the sketchily-prepared and rather pointless local attacks had reached their peak in the Fifth Battle of the Isonzo) that Cadorna issued his guidelines for the upcoming major offensive battle.<sup>17</sup> The plan was further elaborated on 1 April, but the basic concept was unaltered despite the growing danger on the southern Tyrol front.

Consistent with the agreements with his allies, Cadorna's intention was to resume the fighting on the Isonzo in the second half of June, simultaneously with offensives by the French, English and Russians. The operational plan was to take the Görz bridgehead with a direct assault, and in similar fashion to throw the Austrians back from the eastern bank of the Isonzo and to occupy the Doberdo plateau by taking the dominating position at Mt S Michele-S Martino. No further goals were set. At Monfalcone, Plava and Tolmein the only operations would be diversionary thrusts and attempts to pin down the enemy. Ongoing orders for the deployment and use of all arms, especially the artillery and trench mortars, continued to elaborate the high command's original outline.

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14 Capello, Vol. I, pp. 280 ff.

15 Cadorna, "La guerra alla fronte italiana" (Milan, 1921), Vol. I, p. 264

16 Ministero della guerra, "L'esercito italiano nella grande guerra 1915-1918" (hereafter referred to as "Italian official history") (Rome, 1927), Vol. II, pp. 5 ff.

17 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 264

Preparations for the offensive were in full swing when the start of the Aus-Hung. attacks from south Tyrol forced all further measures to make ready for a battle on the Isonzo to be postponed indefinitely.

After the danger of an Aus-Hung. breakout from south Tyrol was over around mid-June, and after the Italian forces on the mountain front west of the Brenta had begun their counter-thrusts, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ asked Cadorna about the prospects for the immediate future. He answered on 26 June that his "basic intention" hadn't changed, and that at the earliest opportunity he would again attack on the Isonzo. Because of casualties and the consumption of ammunition during the fighting in the mountains, it would be necessary to narrow the front under attack; the objective would have to be restricted to improving the Italian position on the banks of the Isonzo by taking the Görz bridgehead.<sup>18</sup> In his written response to G.Lt duca d'Aosta (the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army), Cadorna prescribed as the only possible method "the concentration of an imposing mass of artillery of all calibers on a very narrow part of the front." This was necessary because "only by increasing the weight of the projectiles in the bombardment can we master intelligently-prepared defenses."<sup>19</sup>

By the end of June the situation on the mountain front had meanwhile become so stable that the Italian high command believed they could soon begin the offensive at Görz. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ was ordered to begin preparations for an assault on the Görz bridgehead and Mt S Michele, and to select and prepare positions before the battle for a great number of batteries which would be transferred directly from the mountain front. At the same time the high command reported that after the final termination of the fighting between the Adige and the Brenta they would establish a detailed timetable for moving the units of 1<sup>st</sup> Army that thus became available, along with the strong reserves nearby. These forces, about 10 to 11 divisions with many heavy batteries and trench mortars, would deploy by surprise on the Isonzo, and the offensive would start immediately upon their arrival.

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18 Zingales, "I precedenti della battaglia di Gorizia" (in "Rassenga dell' Esercito Italiano", Jan-Feb 1925, p. 14).

Also Venturi, "La Conquista del Sabotino, 6. Agosto 1916" (Finalborgo, 1925), p. 78

19 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 267

The operation was thus envisaged as a large-scale strategic surprise assault on the Görz bridgehead. In the Italians' favor was the fact that the Aus-Hung. commanders weren't expecting a great new offensive so soon after the end of the costly fighting which had raged for months in the mountains, and that they wouldn't have time to take effective counter-measures. The secretly prepared transfer of the Italian units could be hidden from their opponents at least in the beginning. When the Austrians did become aware of what was happening, it would take them more time to bring reserves from Tyrol to the coastal front than it would take the Italians to shift their forces.<sup>20</sup>

Selection of the areas to be attacked and preparation of points where the attackers could assemble had been carefully carried out between January and July. Already in December 1915 the high command had ordered systematic construction of positions opposite the Aus-Hung. defensive lines, so that the eventual assault would have the greatest possible advantage.<sup>21</sup> The importance of this order was stressed to officers at all levels, and sappers and miners became very active on the Isonzo front. So that troops and equipment could be brought forward without suffering casualties, many deep communication and connecting trenches were constructed and in some instance even shielded. They were prepared not only in the immediate vicinity of the foremost lines, but also far into the rear for the benefit of reserves and of the personnel manning the guns and trench mortars.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, precise information was obtained regarding the Aus-Hung. defensive installations, especially of the fortifications of the Görz bridgehead which the Italians regarded as "models of their type."

To conceal the plans for attacking on the Isonzo and make the

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20 For troops moving through the plains, the distance from Bassano and Verona to Cormons was just 150 to 240 km. The Aus-Hung. reserves, when moving on the shortest route (the mountain railroad - mostly of one track - behind the k.u.k. front) would have to move 500 km between Trent and Dornberg, or 380 km between Trent and Podmelec. Moreover, at Toblach this railroad lay under enemy fire, where only small forces could use it by taking twice the normal transport time. To move large forces it was necessary to divert them through the Brenner Pass and the Tauern rail line, which further reduced their movement speed as compared to that of the Italians.

21 Venturi, p. 47

22 Tosti, "La guerra Italo-Austriaca 1915-1918" (Milan, 1927), pp 172 ff. Zingales, "Gorizia", pp. 10 ff.

surprise more effective, the high command spread rumors about troop transfers in the Val Lagarina for a thrust against Rovereto and about large-scale preparations for an offensive in the Sugana valley-Cadore sector. Fighting in fact did intensify on 21 July in the Fassaner Alps; Cadorna himself came to Feltre on 30 July, where he had a conspicuous meeting with the Minister President. Until 3 August he had reconnaissance carried out in the Primör.

From the available sources it can be concluded that despite the wide-ranging and very detailed preparations of the Italian leaders, they weren't seeking a decisive success by attacking on the Isonzo, but only a limited victory. The large forces which they deployed were out of proportion to the limited objectives. By pounding the defenders' field fortifications with an enormous number of guns and trench mortars, followed by frontal assaults by infantry columns with tremendous numerical superiority, the Italians had a good chance of taking the Görz bridgehead and Mt S Michele. However, their overall plan clearly demonstrates that they were relying on the brutal weight of their equipment rather than the spirit of the attacking troops.

### **c. Deployment and strength of the Italians**

While parts of the Italian 1<sup>st</sup> Army and the divisions of General Mambretti's group were still trying to storm our new positions in the mountains, all preparations for deploying units against the front on the Isonzo were completed. The transfer of some divisions that had become available earlier had already been initiated at the end of June. Thus at the start of July the 24 ID came from 1<sup>st</sup> Army to VI Corps on 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's front; 19 and 47 ID switched from the 5<sup>th</sup> to Aosta's Army.<sup>23</sup> In the first days of July the Italian 5<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Army was dissolved in the Padua-Bassano area; its troops were placed directly under the high command. At the same time Cadorna restored the original boundaries of the armies on the Isonzo. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, whose sector extended from Rombon to a point south of Zagora, was taken over by G.Lt Settimio Piacentini, who hitherto had led 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

When the last attempt of the Italians to recover the positions they had lost in May was shattered on 20 July, Cadorna finally broke off the battle on the mountain front; he designated 4 August as the date when the attack would start on the Isonzo.

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23 The 19 ID went temporarily to VI Corps, and 47 ID to the area around Cividale.

The units that now became available on the Tyrol front were to use all available rail lines and trucks so they could reach the area Cormons-Palmanova-Cervignano in eight days; here they would gather for the offensive in the areas already chosen.

Accordingly the infantry and artillery assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army first gathered in the area Padua-Castelfranco-Vicenza-Bassano by 26 July.

The mass transport, which had been excellently prepared, began on 27 July; it was carried out smoothly. In the first four days the 58 medium and heavy batteries that weren't under Division HQ, as well as 22 trench mortar batteries, went to the Isonzo.<sup>24</sup> Between 31 July and 4 August they were followed first by VIII Corps (with 43 and 48 ID) and then by XXVI Corps (with 23 and 46 ID); both corps had come from the dissolved 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the Cormons area.

Thus when the fighting started on 4 August, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had received seven divisions, some of which had three brigades; also newly assigned was 49 ID, which had been a strategic reserve in the plains west of the Karst plateau. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had a total of sixteen infantry divisions and a dismounted cavalry division. Shortly after the battle started (and by 7 August) the 34 ID also came up from the strategic reserve; along with 10 ID (which came from 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 10 August) they made up the XIV Corps. This corps, and 3 CD from the dissolved 5<sup>th</sup> Army, were also placed under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Finally, between 11 and 17 August the XXIV Corps (4 and 33 ID) arrived from 1<sup>st</sup> Army along with many smaller units.

A total of 10 infantry divisions (with 24 brigades) and 1 cavalry division thus had transferred from the 1<sup>st</sup> and former 5<sup>th</sup> Armies to the sector of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.<sup>25</sup>

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24 Ministero della guerra, "Le Medaglie d'oro" (Rome, 1926), Vol. II, p. 52. There were 74 heavy and 127 medium guns, and 200 trench mortars.

25 Segato, in "L'Italia nella guerra mondiale" (Milan, 1927, p. 254), states that in 23 days 6825 officers, 296,000 men, and 57,134 horses and pack animals had moved to the Isonzo in 61,380 railroad cars and 9810 trucks. The railroad traffic in this short period of time rivaled - in daily intensity and the number of trains involved - the deployment of the allied Central Powers before the offensive at Gorlice in 1915.

The general order of battle on 1 August 1916<sup>26</sup>

Commander-in-Chief = King Victor Emmanuel III  
 Chief of Staff = G.Lt conte Cadorna

1<sup>st</sup> Army [Trent front]

Commander = GLt conte Pecori-Giraldi

- . III Corps - Reinforced 5 ID, reinforced 6 ID
- . Independent - Reinforced 37 ID
- . V Corps - Reinforced 44 ID; 27 ID; 6<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group
- . X Corps - 9, 20, 32 ID
- . Command of Troops on the Plateaus (G.Lt Mambretti)
  - . XXIV Corps - 30, 33 ID
  - . XXII Corps - 25, 28, 29 ID
  - . XX Corps - 4, 13 ID; 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> Alpini Groups
- . XVIII Corps - 10 ID; reinforced 25 ID
- . 2 and 3 CD

TOTAL = 17 inf divs (some reinforced), 2 cav divs, 4 Alpini groups; around 288 bns, 48 sqdns; 640 light, 530 medium and heavy guns; 16 trench mortar batties<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

- . 24 ID had left for the Isonzo by 27 July
- . Sent to the Isonzo by 7 August - XIV Corps (reinforced 10 ID; 34 ID)
- . Also sent to the Isonzo (by 17 August) - XXIV Corps (4 and 33 ID), 3 CD

The following units of the former 5<sup>th</sup> Army had gone to the Isonzo:

- . By 27 July - 19 ID
- . By 7 August - VIII Corps (43 & 48 ID), XXVI Corps (23 & 46 ID)

4<sup>th</sup> Army [Cadore]

Commander = G.Lt Nicolis di Robilant

GM Ferrari's Group; IX Corps (17 & 18 ID); 5<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group; I Corps (1 & 2 ID)

TOTALS = 5 inf divs, 1 Alpini group; around 63 bns; 252 light, 153 medium and heavy guns; 7 trench mortar batties

## Carnic Group ("Zona Carnia")

Commander = G.Lt Lequio

Equivalent to XII Corps (26 & 36 Combined ID)

TOTALS = 2 combined inf divs; 38 bns (14 Alpini, 13 Bersaglieri,

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26 In the original, this material is part of Beilage 7.

27 Total strength for 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies, as well as for the Carnic Group, are from Zingales, "Gorizia", pp. 16 ff.

6 line infantry, 5 Finance); 80 light, 100 medium and heavy guns

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

Commander = G.Lt Settimio Piacentini

. IV Corps - Combined ID ("Saga Sector"), 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Alpini Groups; reinforced 8 ID, reinforced 7 ID

. II Corps - Combined 3 ID ("Plava Sector"), 4 CD (dismounted)

TOTALS = 2 reinforced inf divs, 2 combined inf divs, 1 dismounted cav div; around 62 bns, 24 sqdns; 344 light, 229 medium and heavy guns

3<sup>rd</sup> Army (opposite the Görz bridgehead and on lower Isonzo)

Commander = G.Lt duca d'Aosta

. VI Corps - 45 ID, 24 ID (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army at end of June), 11 ID, 12 ID, 43 ID

. XI Corps - Reinforced 22 ID; 21 ID

. XIII Corps - A combined group; 31 ID

. VII Corps - Reinforced 16 and 14 ID; 1 CD (dismounted)

. Under Army HQ on 1 Aug - 19 ID (from dissolved 5<sup>th</sup> Army), 43 ID

. In transit, arriving between 31 July and the start of the 6<sup>th</sup> Isonzo battle in the Cervignano-Palmanova-Cormons area:

. VIII Corps - 48 ID (only)

. XXVI Corps - 23 & 46 ID

TOTALS at the start of the battle on 6 August - 16 inf divs (some reinforced), 1 dismounted cav div; around 220 bns (including attached Bersaglieri, Bicycle and Finance Bns), 40 sqdns; 728 light, 467 medium and 56 heavy guns; 640 light and 134 heavy trench mortars<sup>28</sup>

Thus opposite the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Isonzo the Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies had 21 inf divs, 2 Alpini groups, and 2 dismounted cav divs; around 282 bns, 64 sqdns; 1072 light, and 752 medium and heavy guns. During the Sixth Battle the following reserves of the Italian high command also arrived on the Isonzo:

. XIV Corps - 10 ID (three bdes), 34 ID (latter though was still in transit from the Bassano area)

. XXIV Corps - 4 and 33 ID; Benevento Brigade

. 3 CD

TOTAL = 4 inf divs, 1 bde, 1 cav div; about 60 bns, 24 sqdns, and 150 guns

#### The units on the Isonzo front and their locations

The sector of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army, which would carry out the attack, stretched from the Adriatic coast to the steep slopes of Mt Sabotino south of Zagora. The general placement of the trenches

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28 Cadorna, "La Guerra", p. 277. According to Tosti (pp. 170 ff.) the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had 1288 guns and 462 trench mortars.

hadn't changed since the autumn battles of 1915. At the focal points of the earlier fighting the foremost lines of the combatants lay quite close to each other, and sometimes utilized the same barriers. The Army's front was just 31 km long; from right to left, it was held by the following troops.

. VII Corps was stationed between the sea and Mt dei Sei Busi (Point 118); it had 31 battalions, 24 squadrons, 148 light and 60 medium and heavy guns, plus 9 trench mortar batteries:

- . 14 ID - Bdes Marche (IR 55 & 56), Alessandria (IR 155 & 156)
- . 16 ID - Bdes Cremona (IR 21 & 22), Lazio (IR 131 & 132)
- . 1 Cav Div (dismounted) - 1 Bde (CR 13 & 30), 2 Bde (CR 4 & 5)
- . Corps troops - Cav Regt 29; Bersaglieri Bike Bns 3, 4 & 11

. XIII Corps was between Mt dei Sei Busi and heights # 164; it had 17 battalions, 79 light and 14 medium and heavy guns plus 9 trench mortar batteries:

- . 31 ID - Bde Chieti (IR 123 & 124); Bersag Regt 15
- . Combined Group - Bde Macerata (IR 121 & 122); Bns III/55 and III/76; Finance Bn 12

. XI Corps held the sector San Martino-Mt S Michele with 42 battalions, 137 light and 60 medium and heavy guns plus 20 trench mortar batteries:

- . 21 ID - Bdes Regina (IR 9 & 10), Pisa (IR 29 & 30)
- . 22 ID - Bdes Brescia (IR 19 & 20), Ferrara (IR 47 & 48), Catanzaro (IR 141 & 142)
- . 23 ID (in reserve) - Bdes Sardegna (Gran Regts 1 & 2), Lombardia (IR 73 & 74)
- . Corps troops - 11 Cav Regt

. VI Corps was opposite the Görz bridgehead with 73 battalions, 261 light and 210 medium and heavy guns plus 40 trench mortar batteries:

- . 12 ID - Bdes Casale (IR 11 & 12), Pavia (IR 27 & 28)
- . 11 ID - Bdes Cuneo (IR 7 & 8), Treviso (IR 115 & 116)
- . 24 ID - Bdes Abruzzi (IR 57 & 58), Lambro (IR 205 & 206)
- . 45 ID - Bdes Toscana (IR 77 & 78), Trapani (IR 144 & 149)
- . 43 ID (in reserve) - Bdes Pescara (IR 211 & 212), Etna (IR 223 & 224)
- . 47 ID (in reserve) - Bdes Campobasso (IR 229 & 230), Avellino IR 231 & 232)
- . Corps troops - Bersaglieri Bike Bn 5

. As Army reserves, G.Lt Aosta had four more divisions available in the area Cormons-Palmanova-Cervignano

- . 19 ID<sup>29</sup> - Bdes Marche, Catanzaro
- . 46 ID - Bdes Udine (IR 95 & 96), Rovigo (IR 227 & 228)
- . 48 ID - Bdes Genova (IR 97 & 98), Taranto (IR 143 & 150)
- . 49 ID - Bdes Pinerolo (IR 13 & 14), Napoli (IR 75 & 76)

Thus at the beginning of the battle on 4 August the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was ready to attack with 203 battalions, 24 squadrons, 750 light guns, 340 medium and heavy guns, and 77 light and heavy trench mortar batteries.<sup>30</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army controlled the same sector as it had before some of their troops had temporarily been attached to Aosta's Army in May. II Corps made up the right wing with the combined 3 ID ("Plava Sector HQ") in the Plava bridgehead and the dismounted 4 CD between Plava and Ronzina. North of Ronzina the reinforced IV Corps (with 7 and 8 ID) was stationed in front of the Tolmein bridgehead and on the heights west of that town. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Alpini Groups held the western edge of the Krn massif, and a combined group ("Saga Sector HQ") blocked the approaches to the Flitsch basin on a line running from the Slatenikbach along the eastern edge of Flitsch to the western slope of the Rombon.

In total, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had three infantry divisions, one combined group, two Alpini groups and one cavalry division with 62 battalions, 24 squadrons, 344 light guns, and 229 medium and

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29 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Per Italian sources, HQ of 19 ID wasn't used in the battle; however, Bde Marche was engaged under 14 ID and Bde Catanzaro under 22 ID and appear under these two HQ earlier in the order of battle.

30 The strength figures given in this chapter are based in part on Zingales' work, "Gorizia." However, it seems that the figures for the artillery are too low; other Italian works show a substantially larger number of guns. For example Cadorna ("La guerra", Vol. I, p. 277), whose totals may come closest to those which will be shown when the official Italian account is published, states that the strength of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's artillery was 728 light, 467 medium and 56 heavy guns (a total of 1251); 640 light and 134 heavy trench mortars (a total of 774). According to Tosti (pp. 170 ff.) the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had 1288 guns and 462 trench mortars. Geloso ("Le Battaglie di Gorizia e della Bainsizza" [Rome, 1929], pp. 22 ff.) gives 3<sup>rd</sup> Army 690 light, 515 medium and 55 heavy guns (a total of 1268) plus 636 light and 132 heavy trench mortars (a total of 768). Finally, Capello (Vol. I, p. 302) mentions that "the enormous deployment of more than 2000 guns was finished."

heavy guns.

Thus on 4 August along the entire Isonzo front the Italians had around 20 infantry divisions (some reinforced), 2 Alpini groups and 2 dismounted cavalry division for a total of about 270 battalions, 48 squadrons, 1100 light guns, and 570 medium and heavy guns.

#### **d. Order of battle of the k.u.k. forces in the Italian theater on 1 August**

##### **A. Army Group Archduke Eugene (HQ at Bozen)**

Commander = GO Archduke Eugene

Chief of Staff = FML Alfred Krauss

District I (Stilfserjoch) = 53 Half Bde (Col Freih von Lempruch) (1¼ bns, 4 SS dets, 3 indep MG dets, 1½ fort arty comps, ¼ tech comp; 2102 foot; 41 fixed guns; 2 inf guns; 10 mobile & 11 fixed MG)

- . Res Bn IV/29; L-Sch Streif Comp 21/III; SS Dets Prad, Schlanders, Stilfs, Taufers; 3 MG dets
- . 2 Res Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4; a det apiece of Fort Arty Bns 1 & 7
- . A det of SB 8; four light TM
- . Under Army Group HQ were defenses at Gomagoi & Nauders

District II (Tonale Pass) (GM Edler von Steinhart)

(4 bns, 2 foot sqdns, 6 SS dets; 16 indep MG dets; 1 batty, 2 fort arty comps; ¼ tech comp. 4225 foot, 4 light mobile and 52 fixed guns; 20 mobile and 57 fixed MG)

- . Res Bns I/29, II/37; IV Bn/L-Sch Regt I; High Mtn Comp 44; a L-Sch Streif Comp; ¼ k.k. Lst Bn 170; ¼ k.k. Lst Bn IV/2; SS Dets Cles, Innsbruck III, Lienz, Malé, Passeier, Ulten; 16 MG dets
- . 1 & 2 Foot Sqdns/Tyrol Mntd Rifle Bn
- . 5 Can Batt/ Mtn AR 8; 1 & 2 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 7
- . ¼ 6 Comp/SB 6; defensive works at Tonale and Pejo
- . 26 light and 6 heavy TM; 3 flamethrower platoons

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

Commander = GO Rohr

Chief of Staff = Col. von Soos

District III (South Tyrol)

Commander = FML von Koennen-Horak

Strength = 12 bns, 7 SS dets, 15 indep MG dets; ¼ sqdn; 3½ batties, 8 fort arty comps; 3 tech comps. 10,823 foot, 34 horse; 16 light mobile and 145 fixed guns; 2 inf guns; 86 mobile

and 71 fixed MG

. Adamello Border Sector (Col Seyfried) = KJ Streif Comp 4; k.k. Lst Bns 160, 166; ½ k.k. Lst Bn 161; 1 MG det; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, ½ 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12; ½ 2 Comp/SB 4; 10 Comp/SB 14; 8 fixed guns

. Judicarien Border Sector, or 50 Half Bde (Col Spiegel) = ¾ of Res Bn I/37; KJ Streif Comps 1 & 5; k.k. Lst Bns 163, 170; SS Dets Bezau, Klausen; "local SS"<sup>31</sup>; 3 & 4 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 7; ¼ of 2 Comp/SB 4; Lardaro defense group; 45 fixed guns

. Riva Border Sector (FML Schiesser was fortress and Sector commander) = Res Bns III/29, V/37; I Bn/LW IR 36; ¼ Res Bn I/37; k.k. Lst Bns 173, 174; SS Dets Bozen, Lana, Sarntal; local SS; 12 MG dets; ½ 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12; 2 & 3 Comps and 3 & 4 Res Comps of Fort Arty Bn 7; 1 & 3 Res Comps/Fort Arty Bn 1; ¼ 2 Comp/SB 4; the fortifications in the Riva area; 92 fixed guns

. Directly under III District HQ = 21<sup>st</sup> Comp/L-Sch Regt II; ½ k.k. Lst Bn 161; ¼ 3 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6; Flak Batty 11, Flak Zug 3; 1 Comp/PB 3; 16 light, 2 medium and 2 heavy TM; 22 grenade throwers, 2 flame thrower platoons; an armed motor-boat on Lake Garda

#### XXI Corps

Commander = FML Freih von Lütgendorf

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Höger

Strength = 23¼ bns, 9 SS dets, 7 indep MG dets; 1¼ sqdns; 25 batties, 4 tech comps; 14,237 foot, 122 horse; 70 light, 9 heavy and 3 very heavy mobile guns; 61 fixed guns; 6 inf guns; 94 mobile and 29 fixed MG

. FML Edler von Guseck's Group = 10,082 foot, 25 horse; 12 guns, 2 inf guns, 48 MG

. 28 k.u. Lst Inf Bde (Col Edler von Schutte) = k.u. Lst Bns V/2, VIII/17, VIII/19, III/20, III/25; ¼ 1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 2

. Indep - k.u. Lst IR 30 [2]; k.k. Lst Bns IV/23, IV (Tyrol), 172 [from District III]; March Bns of Derenai and Staszkievicz; 1 gend. assistenz comp; SS Dets Brixen, Glurns, Gries, Imst, Kitzbühel, Kufstein, Meran I, Reutte I, Vallarsa; 7 MG dets

. Arty Command (Col Koppensteiner) = 1, 2 & 3 Can Batties of Mtn AR 6 (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Batties attached from Corps HQ)

. 3 Comp/SB 8

. Land-Sch Div (GM Englert) = 4155 foot, 97 horse; 46 guns, 4 inf guns; 46 MG

. 88 L-S Bde (GM von Eckhardt) = L-S Regts I [3], II [4]; 1

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

Can Batty/Mtn AR 10  
 . 98 L-S Bde (Col von Sloninka) = L-S Regt III [3] (with Group Guseck); k.k. Lst Bn (Tyrol) I; 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 20  
 . 3 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Rifle Bn; 9 Comp/SB 14  
 . L-S Arty HQ (Major Eimannsberger) = 3 Batty/FHR 8 (from Corps HQ); 2 & 3 Can Batties/Mtn AR 9; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10; 1, 2 & 3 Can Batties/Mtn AR 20; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 9 (last five batties attached from Corps HQ)  
 . Directly under Corps<sup>32</sup> - 4 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 6; 10.4 cm Can Batty 2; 12 cm Can Batty 8; 15 cm How Batties 1 & 12; 24 cm Mor Batty 3; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 3 & 21; 38 cm How Batty 1; 42 cm How Batty 4; Flak Batties 5 & 8. 61 fixed guns. 2 Comp/SB 12, 5 Comp/PB 5. 18 light, 6 medium and 6 heavy TM; 36 light and 2 medium grenade launchers; 2 flamethrower platoons.

## XX Corps

Commander = FML Fürst Schönburg-Hartenstein

Chief of Staff = Col Günste

Strength = 30½ bns, 3 sqdns, 35 batties, 2 fort arty comps, 5 tech comps; 16,400 foot, 348 horse; 136 light, 16 heavy, 10 very heavy mobile guns; 28 fixed guns; 12 inf guns; 138 mobile and 36 fixed MG

. 3<sup>rd</sup> ID (FML Edl von Horsetzky) = 6224 foot, 203 horse; 76 guns, 4 inf guns, 72 MG

. 5 Inf Bde (Col Schöbl) = IR 59 [4], 21 [3]

. 15 Inf Bde<sup>33</sup> (GM Phleps) = IR 14 [5], 50 [4]

. 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 6; 1 Comp/SB 14

. 3 FA Bde (Col Grandowski) = FKR 3 [4], FHR 3 [4], Hvy FAR 3 [2]; attached from Corps HQ: 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 9, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 22, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 24

. 8<sup>th</sup> (KJ) ID (FML von Fabini) = 9587 foot, 145 horse; 77 guns, 8 inf guns, 62 MG

. 58 Mtn Bde (Col Edl von Merten) = KJR 3 [3], 4 [4]

. 180 Inf Bde (FML Edl von Verdross) = KJR 1 [4], 2 [4]

. 2 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Rifle Bn; 8 Comp/SB 14

. 8 FA Bde (Col Petersilka) = FKR 8 [3], FHR 8 [3], Hvy FAR 8 [3]; attached from Corps HQ: 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 5 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 9, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 23; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 5; 24 cm Mor Batties 5, 12

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32 Of the listed batteries, three were being rebuilt at Trent - 15 cm How Batty 1, 24 cm Mor Batty 3 and 30.5 cm Mor Batty 3

33 I Bn/IR 50 moved to 5<sup>th</sup> Army at the start of August. III Bn/IR 14 followed in mid-August (it went with the combined 56 Inf Bde).

. Under Corps HQ - Ski Comps 1 & 2/48. 15 cm Mor Batty 21; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 9; Flak Batties 1 & 4. 1 & 2 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 6. 7 Comp/SB 8; 4 Comp/PB 9, 1 Comp/PB 10. The group of works at Vielgereuth. 28 fixed guns. 16 light, 14 medium and 6 heavy TM; 28 light and 4 medium grenade launchers; 1 flamethrower platoon.

### III Corps

Commander = FML Ritter von Krautwald

Chief of Staff = Col Freiherr von Karg

Strength = 53 bns, 5 sqdns, 51 batties, 2 fort arty comps, 12 tech comps. 31,346 foot, 506 horse; 166 light, 31 heavy and 9 very heavy mobile guns; 23 fixed guns; 2 inf guns; 219 mobile and 38 fixed MG

. 6<sup>th</sup> ID (Richard Müller) = 7567 foot, 116 horse; 55 guns, 6 inf guns, 53 MG

. 11 Inf Bde (Col de Brunfaut) = IR 27 [4], BH IR 2 [3]

. 12 Inf Bde (GM Rudolf Müller) = IR 17 [3]; FJB 7, 9, 22 (But FJB 9 went in mid-August to the Isonzo in combined 56 Inf Bde)

. 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 5; 5 Comp/SB 8

. 6 FA Bde (Col von Smekal) (some batties detached to 10 ID) = FKR 6 [4], FHR 6 [4], Hvy FAR 6 [4]; attached from Corps HQ: 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 1, 4 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 4, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12, 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 13

. 22<sup>nd</sup> LW ID (GM Edl von Kochanowski) = 6650 foot, 95 horse; 52 guns, 6 inf guns, 57 MG

. 18 Inf Bde<sup>34</sup> (Col Laxa) = IR 11 [3], 73 [4]

. 43 LW Inf Bde (Col Ritt von Ellison) = LW IR 3 [3], 26 [3]

. Res Sqdn/DR 12; 5 Comp/SB 3

. 22 FA Bde (Col Nobile de Giorgi) (some batties detached to 10 ID) = FKR 22 [4], FHR 22 [4], Hvy FAR 22 [2];

attached from Corps HQ<sup>35</sup>: 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 8, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 1, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 4, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10; 24 cm Mor Batty 7; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 11; 38 cm How Batty 2

. 28<sup>th</sup> ID<sup>36</sup> (FML Schneider Edler von Manns-Au) = 8302 foot, 91 horse; 40 guns, 6 inf guns, 50 MG

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34 HQ of 18 Inf Bde and IR 11 went with Hrozny's combined ID in mid-August to 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

35 Also attached to 22 FA Bde was half of 30.5 cm Mor Batty 3, which was being rebuilt at Trent.

36 In Mid-August the HQ of 28<sup>th</sup> ID, 55 Inf Bde, the divisional cav, FHR 28, Hvy FAR 28 and 4 Comp/SB 14 went with "Combined" 28<sup>th</sup> ID to 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

- . 55 Inf Bde (Col Rada) = IR 87 [3], 96 [3]
- . 56 Inf Bde<sup>37</sup> (GM Hugo Schmid) = IR 47 [4]; FJB 11; IV Bn/LW IR 37
- . Res Sqdn/DR 3; 4 Comp/SB 14
- . 28 FA Bde (Col von Walzel) (some batties detached to 10 ID) = FKR 28 [3], FHR 28 [4], Hvy FAR 28 [3]; attached from Corps HQ<sup>38</sup>: 12 cm Can Batty 29, 15 cm Can Batty 3, 15 cm How Batty [M.15] 1, 24 cm Mor Batty 1
- . 10<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Mecenseffy) = 8827 foot, 204 horse; 56 guns, 4 inf guns, 59 MG
  - . 20 Inf Bde (Col Edl von Lunzer) = IR 18 [3], 98 [3]; FJB 12<sup>39</sup>
  - . 21 Inf Bde (GM Nowotny) = IR 15 [4], 55 [4]<sup>40</sup>
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 2; 8 Comp/SB 4
  - . (Artillery was batteries attached from rest of III Corps)
- . Corps units = Flak Batties 3 & 7. 3 & 4 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 6. 5 Comp/SB 5, 1 Comp/SB 6, 2 Comp/SB 8, 1 Comp/SB 9, 3 Comp/PB 3, 2 Comp/PB 5, 3 & 6 Comps/PB 8. Group of fortifications at Lafraun. 23 fixed guns. 50 light, 14 medium and 8 heavy TM. 52 light and 1 medium grenade throwers. 2 flame thrower platoons.

XVII Corps (HQ went to 5<sup>th</sup> Army on 21 August)

Commander = GdI Kritek

Chief of Staff = Col Edler von Lerch

Strength = 18 bns, 8 SS dets, 6 indep MG dets, 1 sqdn, 17 batties, ½ fort arty comp, 6 tech comps; 13,742 foot, 121 horse; 42 light, 11 heavy and 3 very heavy mobile guns; 32 fixed guns; 8 inf guns, 103 mobile MG

. 18<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Hrozny) = 8542 foot, 121 horse; 34 guns, 8 inf guns, 36 MG

. 1 Mtn Bde (Col Teus) = Bns I/1, IV/4, I/51, I/63, I/102; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 26

. 13 Mtn Bde (Col Edl von Barza) = Bns I, IV & V/22; III/64, III/BH 4; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 7

. 1 Sqdn/LW UR 5; 6 Comp/SB 1

. 18 Arko (Col Sekullic) = 3 Batty/FHR 6; 1 & 2 Can Batties/ Mtn AR 25; 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 7, 1 How Batty/Mtn

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37 From 56 Inf Bde the HQ, FJB 11 and Bns I/47 and IV/37 LW went with the "Combined" 56 Bde to 5<sup>th</sup> Army. The other 3 bns of IR 47 went there with Hrozny's Combined ID.

38 Also attached to 28 FA Bde was half of 30.5 cm Mor Batty 3, which was being rebuilt at Trent.

39 FJB 12 went with 2 Mtn Bde to 5<sup>th</sup> Army at the start of August

40 III Bn of IR 55 went with 2 Mtn Bde to 5<sup>th</sup> Army at the start of August

## AR 26

. 181 Inf Bde (GM von Vidalé) = 3743 foot, 1 MG. Bns X/14, X/59, III Res/37; k.k. Lst Bns 164, ½ of IV (Tyrol); ½ bn of the Upper Austrian Vol Rifles; two MG dets

. Corps troops = IR 102 [3: but 2 bns left on 6 Aug for 5<sup>th</sup> Army]; four MG dets; SS Dets Bludenz, Kaltern, Landeck, Meran II, Rattenberg, Reutte II, Sterzing, Zillertal. 1 Batty/FKR 28; 10.4 cm Can Batty 4, 10.5 cm Can Batty 9, 12 cm Can Batty 31; 15 cm How Batties 18, 63; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 10; a 35 cm can batty; Flak Batty 6. ½ 2 Res Comp/Fort Arty Bn 1. 7 Comp/SB 4, 1 Comp/PB 2. Bridging Bn 2 [2 comps]. Caldonazzo defensive work. 24 fixed guns; 4 light and 8 medium TM; 18 light and 2 medium grenade launchers; 1 flamethrower platoon

Directly under 11<sup>th</sup> Army (the two Bdes went to 5<sup>th</sup> Army between 8 and 10 August)

. 2 Mtn Bde (Col Panzenböck) = 2460 foot, 25 horse; 8 guns, 12 MG. Bns III/8, II/70; BH FJB 8; ¼ 1 Sqdn/Dalm Mtn Rifle Bn; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 6, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11

. 8 Mtn Bde (GM Wossala) = 3293 foot, 25 horse; 8 guns, 8 inf guns, 20 MG. Bns IV/24, III/35, IV/58, III/85; BH FJB 5; ¼ 1 Sqdn/UR 12; 4 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 7

. Also - 25 fixed guns (at Trent). 5 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Regt 1. The following were salvaging captured Italian guns: 15 Res Comp/Fort AR 3, 8 Comp/Fort AR 6, 1 to 4 Ma Comps/Fort Arty Bn 1, 4 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4. Flieger Comps 7, 8, 17, 21, 23, 24. Balloon Det 10 (Flieger Comps 7 & 8 and the Balloon Det went to 5<sup>th</sup> Army at the start of August).

TOTALS for 11<sup>th</sup> Army - 144 ¾ bns, 24 SS Dets, 28 indep MG dets, 11 sqdns, 136 ½ batties, 20 ½ fort arty comps, 30 tech comps, 6 flieger comps, 1 balloon det. 92,301 foot, 1181 horse; 446 light, 67 heavy and 25 very heavy mobile guns; 314 fixed guns; 58 inf guns, 782 mobile and 177 fixed MG; 134 light, 44 medium and 28 heavy TM; 156 light and 9 medium grenade launchers; 11 flame-thrower platoons.

Corps Roth (the Tyrol eastern front)

Commander = GdI Ritter von Roth

Chief of Staff = Col Ritter von Langer

Artillery Commander = GM Edler von Terboglav

Strength = 45½ bns, 19 SS dets, 31 indep MG dets, 1¾ sqdns, 31 batties, 12 fort arty comps, 6¾ tech comps; 39,025 foot, 196 horse; 102 light, 16 heavy and 3 very heavy mobile guns; 198 fixed guns; 6 inf guns; 243 mobile and 90 fixed MG; 74 light, 6 medium and 4 heavy TM, 12 light grenade launchers, 3 flame-thrower platoons

- 1) District IV (Fassaner Alps-Pordoi) (FML Edler von Scholz)
- . 90<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Scholz) = 7991 foot, 25 horse; 79 guns, 2 inf guns, 80 MG
    - . 55 Mtn Bde (GM Edl von Spielvogel) = FJB 23; Res Bns II/29, IV/37; Lst Bn 169; SS Dets Auer, Campitello, Cavalese, Feldkirch, Rankweil; 2 MG dets; 1 inf gun det; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 16; 1 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 1. 6 Comp/PB 5. 18 fixed guns, 8 light TM
    - . 179 Inf Bde (Col von Partyka) = Bn II/L-Sch III; KJ Streif Comp 3; k.k. Lst Bns 38, 39, 159, "Urban"; SS Dets Dornbirn, Kastelruth, Moena, Nauders, Pozza, Welschnofen; 7 MG dets; 8 Batty/FKR 3, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14; 15 cm How Batty 6; a det of Fort Arty Regt 2. The Moena defense work. 35 fixed guns; 14 light TM; one flamethrower platoon
    - .  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6
    - . 90 FA Bde (Col Smrcek) - Batteries shown above
  - . 57<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Heinrich Goiginger) = 8167 foot, 99 horse, 53 guns, 73 MG
    - . 9 Mtn Bde (Col Lercher) = Bns III/49, III/74, IV/84, IV/87; Maj Edl von Schönner's Bike Bn; four MG dets;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 12; 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 19; attached from Corps HQ: 2 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 2, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 3, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 14,  $\frac{1}{2}$  15 cm How Batty 59,  $\frac{1}{2}$  30.5 cm Mor Batty 16. Paneveggio defensive work. 8 fixed guns
    - . 10 Mtn Bde<sup>41</sup> (Col Korzner) = Bns I/48, I/62, I/90, II/92, III/BH 1;  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4. All batties attached from Corps HQ: 1/Hvy FAR 3, 5 Can/Mtn AR 14, 2 Can/Mtn AR 16, 1 How/Mtn AR 14;  $\frac{1}{2}$  10.4 cm Can Batty 7
    - .  $\frac{3}{4}$  3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 7 Comp/SB 6, 6 Comp/PB 8
    - . Detachments of Fort Arty Bns 1, 2, 5; k.k. Lst Det 8/2
- 2) District V (Buchenstein-Carinthian border) - Identical to the Combined Division "Pustertal" (FML Ludwig Goiginger)
- Strength = 22,867 foot, 72 horse; 187 guns, 4 inf guns, 180 MG
- . 96 Inf Bde (Col Vonbank)
    - . 21 Mtn Bde (Col Edl von Maendl) = Bns I/KJR 2, V/BH 1, V/BH 2; k.k. Lst Bn 165; SS Dets Enneberg, Gröden; three MG dets; one inf gun det;  $\frac{1}{4}$  5 Sqdn/DR 6; 7 Batty/FKR 7, 4 Batty/FKR 8,  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 How Batty/Mtn AR 8; 4 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 1; 1 & 7 Comps/SB 14; 21 fixed guns
    - . Lt Col Freih von Pasetti's Group = III Bn/KJR 3; KJ

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41 10 Mtn Bde left with Hrozny's Combined ID to join 5<sup>th</sup> Army; Bns I/48, I/62, I/90, and III/BH 1 left with the Bde.

Streif Comp 6;  $\frac{1}{2}$  II Bn/LW IR 5; three Alpine dets; k.k. Lst Bns III (Tyrol), 162, 167; Valparola Garrison Det; eight MG dets; 5 Batty/FHR 8, 3 &  $\frac{1}{4}$  4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 14;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 How Batty/ Mtn AR 8;  $\frac{1}{2}$  15 cm How Batty 43,  $\frac{1}{4}$  15 cm How Batty 59,  $\frac{1}{2}$  30.5 cm Mor Batty 12; one 24 cm mortar, 20 fixed guns . Lt Col Ritt von Barth's Group -  $\frac{1}{2}$  II Bn/LW IR 5; V Bn/LW IR 37; k.k. Lst Bn 168; SS Det Bregenz; Garrison Det Son Pauses; three MG dets;  $\frac{3}{4}$  1 How Batty/Mtn AR 8,  $\frac{1}{2}$  12 cm Can Batty 7,  $\frac{1}{2}$  15 cm How Batty 43;  $\frac{1}{2}$  6 Comp/SB 6

. Under 96 Bde HQ - Fortified works at Buchenstein & Tre Sassi (between them had 11 fixed guns); 26 light, 6 medium and 2 heavy TM; 4 grenade launchers

. 56 Mtn Bde (Col Edler von Sparber)

. 51 Half Bde (Lt Col Rotter) = LW IR 36 [2]; II Bn/KJR 2; BH FJB 3; two Alpine dets; SS Dets Innsbruck II, Silz, Welsberg; three MG dets; one inf gun det; 8 Batty/FKR 16;  $\frac{3}{4}$  4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14;  $\frac{1}{4}$  15 cm How Batty 59,  $\frac{1}{2}$  30.5 cm Mor Batty 12; 1 & 3 Ma Comps and a combined comp of Fort Arty Bn 4;  $\frac{1}{4}$  6 Comp/SB 6. Fortified work at Plätzwiese. 41 fixed guns.

. Col Haslehner's Group = II Bn/104; two Alpine dets; k.k. Lst Bns II (Tyrol), 29, 171; SS Dets Innsbruck I, Sillian; one MG det; 5 Can Batty/FHR 3;  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14;  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 How Batty/Mtn AR 8; 3 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 1; 2 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4; a combined Lst arty det. Fortified work at Landro. 25 fixed guns

. Col Ritt von Zach's Group = I & III Bns/104; I Bn/Hon IR 311; two Alpine dets; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12;  $\frac{1}{2}$  2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14; a combined fort arty det. Fortified work at Sexten. 15 fixed guns

. Col Pengov's FA Bde - Batteries attached as shown above

**TOTALS for** Archduke Eugene's Army Group - 195  $\frac{1}{2}$  bns, 53 SS dets, 78 indep MG dets, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  sqdns (2 of which were dismounted), 168 $\frac{1}{2}$  batties, 36 fort arty comps, 37 $\frac{1}{4}$  tech comps, 6 flieger comps, 1 balloon det. 137,653 foot, 1377 horse; 552 light, 83 heavy and 28 very heavy mobile guns; 605 fixed guns; 6 inf guns; 1092 mobile and 298 fixed MG; 208 light, 50 medium and 32 heavy TM; 168 light and 9 medium grenade launchers; 14 flamethrower platoons. There were also 195 March comps not yet assigned, with about 41,000 riflemen.

**B. 10<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = FML Scotti (temporary)

Chief of Staff = Col. von Spitzmüller (temporary)

Sector I, or 94<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Lawrowski) = 15,470 foot, 107 horse; 113

guns, 6 inf guns, 74 MG

- . Col Fasser's Group = II Bn/7; ½ IV Bn/28; FJB 30; High Mtn Comps 1 & 2/94; Salzburg Vol Rifle Bn; 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 17

- . 25 Mtn Bde (Col Konstantin Ritt von Wasserthal) = Bns I & III/7, V/14, III/57; FJB 8; High Mtn Comp 25; a combined Inf Bn and combined FJB (both made up of trained, extra March comps); Lst Bns 10, 30; 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10; 1 Can Batty/ Mtn AR 17

- . 57 Mtn Bde (GM Freih von Henneberg) = IR 28 [2]; III Bn/18; High Mtn Comp 57; k.k. Lst Bn 148; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11; 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 17

- . 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; Res FKR 94 [4], Res FHR 94 [3]; 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 1, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 2

- . Attached from Army HQ = 12 cm Can Batty 30, one 15 cm L/40 marine cannon; 15 cm How Batty 57, 15 cm Mor Batties 3, 6, 7; 21 cm Mor Batty 5; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 19; three 9 cm fixed cannon züge; four 7 cm mtn can, nine 47 mm marine can, two 8 cm flak guns. 7 Comp/SB 3, 5 Comp/PB 7. 4 light and 4 medium TM; 10 small and 2 medium grenade launchers; 2 flame-thrower platoons

Sector II, or 92<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Edl von Krasel) = 6613 foot, 85 horse, 44 guns, 32 MG

- . 187 Lst Inf Bde (Col Edl von Mihanovic) = High Mtn Comp 92; k.k. Lst Bns 42, 152, 157; ½ Young Schützen Bn; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 5

- . 26 Mtn Bde (Lt Col Wolf) = High Mtn Comp 26; k.k. Lst Bns 43, 149, 151; a combined Inf Bn (from extra trained March comps); 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 5, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 27

- . ¾ 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4

- . Attached from Army HQ = 12 cm Can Batty 13, ½ 12 cm Belgian Can Batty 2, an improvised 12 cm can half batty, one 15 cm L/40 marine cannon; 15 cm How Batty 11, the 15 cm Belgian How Batty, 15 cm Mor Batty 13 (detached to Sector III), an improvised 15 cm mor half batty; 24 cm Mor Batty 2; one 9 cm fixed cannon zug; four 9 cm fixed can, two 8 cm flak guns; 6 Comp/PB 3, "technical Inf Comp 187"; 2 light TM, 1 flamethrower platoon

Sector III, or 59 Mtn Bde (Col Edl von Dietrich) = 7650 foot, 29 horse, 72 guns, 56 MG

- . Group Fella = ½ Ma Bn 96; High Mtn Comp 13 of (Mtn) LW IR 4; k.k. Lst Bns 40, 41; k.u. Lst Bn I/7; Carinthian Vol Rifle Regt [2½]

- . Group Raibl = IR 7 [2]; Comb FJB 20 (formed from extra March comps of the Bn); High Mtn Comp 14 of (Mtn) LW IR 4

. 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 15; 5 Batty/FHR 17, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 15, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 28; ½ 30.5 cm Mor Batty 18

. Attached from Army HQ = ½ 12 cm Belgian Can Batty 2; two 12 cm "minimal-shield" cannon, one improvised 12 cm can batty; one 15 cm L/40 marine can; two 10 cm armored how; 15 cm Mor Batty 4, 42 cm How Batty 3; two 47 mm marine can, one 8 cm flak gun; k.k. Lst Sapper Det 4/3; one flamethrower platoon; Armored Train X

Sector IV, or 27 Mtn Bde (GM Greiner) = 7601 foot, 20 horse; 70 guns, 2 inf guns, 45 MG

. Group Flitsch = BH IR 4 [3]; half a combined Ma bn; High Mtn Comp 13 of LW IR 27; ½ k.k. Lst Bn II/26

. Group Golobar Planina = FJB 20; half a combined Ma bn; k.k. Lst Bns ½ II and all of III/26

. Group Za Grebenom Planina = Bn IV/BH IR 4

. Group Duple Planina = k.k. Lst Bn I/26

. ¼ 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; 1 to 4 Can Batties and 2 How Batty of Mtn AR 3; 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 11; 21 cm Mor Batties 2, 3; ½ 30.5 cm Mor Batty 18

. Attached from Army HQ = Eight 12 cm "minimal-shield" can, two 10 cm armored how; 15 cm How Batty 17; two 37 mm marine can, four 47 mm marine can, one 7 cm can, one 8 cm can, nine 9 cm fixed can züge, one 8 cm flak gun. 3 Comp/SB 11. 2 light TM; 10 light and 4 medium grenade launchers, 1 flame-thrower platoon

Directly under 10<sup>th</sup> Army = Flieger Comp 16

**TOTALS for 10<sup>th</sup> Army** - 42 bns [23 field, 15 Lst, 4 volunteer], 10 high mtn comps, 3 sqdns, 46 mobile batties [28 light, 11 medium, 7 heavy], 18½ fort arty comps, 6 tech comps, 1 flieger comp, 1 armored train. 37,340 foot, 241 horse, 299 guns [220 light, 62 medium, 17 heavy], 8 inf guns; 138 mobile and 69 fixed MG; 8 light and 4 medium TM, 20 light and 6 medium grenade launchers, 5 flamethrower platoons

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

Commander = GO Boroovic

Chief of Staff = FML von Le Beau

Sector I, or XV Corps

Commander = GdI Edler von Stöger-Steiner

Chief of Staff = Col Theodor Edler von Körner

Strength = 19 bns, 1½ sqdns, 28 batties, 4 tech comps; 21,550 foot, 260 horse, 117 guns, 16 inf guns, 80 MG

- . 50<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Gerabek) = 10,800 foot, 150 horse; 57 guns, 8 inf guns, 44 MG
  - . 3 Mtn Bde (Col Edl von Tlaskal) = Bns II/18, IV/30, IV/37, III/46, IV/80; two extra inf comps; 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 5, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 13
  - . 15 Mtn Bde (Col Koschak) = Bns IV/33, II/34, I/61, II/66, I/91; 1 extra inf comp; High Mtn Comp 50; Streif Comp 1/15; 3 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 13
  - . 4 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Rif Bn; 8 Comp/SB 13
  - . 50 FA Bde (Col Ritt von Romer) = Res FKR 50 [5]; 1 & 2 Batties/Res FHR 50
- . 1<sup>st</sup> ID (FML Schmidt Edl von Fussina) = 10,750 foot, 110 horse; 20 guns, 8 inf guns, 36 MG
  - . 7 Mtn Bde (GM Ströher) = Bns II/5, IV/25, IV/53, III/86; BH FJB 6; 6 extra inf comps; Gend Streif Comp II/50; 1 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 13
  - . 22 Lst Mtn Bde (Col von Colerus) = BH FJB 4; k.k. Lst Bn 155; k.u. Lst Bns V/4, IX/19; 4 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 5
  - . ½ 1 Sqdn/UR 12; 4 Comp/SB 13
  - . 1 FA Bde (Lt Col Gallistel) = 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 1
- . Corps troops = Heavy FAR XV [2]
- . Attached from Army HQ = 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 13; 10.4 cm Can Batty 1; 15 cm How Batty 34; 15 cm Mor Batties 1 & 8; three 9 cm fixed can batties; four 7 cm mtn can; 8 cm Flak Zug 3; three 8 cm improvised flak guns. 2 Comp/PB 8. 4 medium and 6 heavy TM; 22 light grenade launchers.

## Sector II, or XVI Corps

Commander = FZM Wurm

Chief of Staff = Col Graf

Strength = 30 bns, ¾ sqdn, 36 batties, 6½ tech comps, 3 flieger comps, 1 balloon det; 29,730 foot, 58 horse; 183 guns, 8 inf guns, 116 MG

- . 62<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Novak von Arienti) = 11,830 foot, 58 horse; 42 guns, 51 MG
  - . 205 k.k. Lst Bde (GM von Reinöhl) = k.k. Lst IR 409 [3]; k.k. Lst Bn 8; ¼ 3 Sqdn/DR 14
  - . 209 k.u. Lst Bde (Col von Pacor) = k.u. Lst IR 2 [2]; k.u. Lst Bns VI/4, III/5, II/8, IV/26, VI/30, III/31; ¼ Res Sqdn/ HR 10 (2<sup>nd</sup> Regt and Bns IV/26, VI/30, III/31 with 58<sup>th</sup> ID)
  - . ¼ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 6 Comp/SB 13
  - . 62 FA Bde (Col Vollgruber) = Res FKR 62 [4], Res FHR 62 [4]
- . 58<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Erwin Zeidler) = 11,550 foot; 42 guns, 8 inf guns, 45 MG
  - . 4 Mtn Bde (Col Adalbert von Dani) = Bns II/52, III/69 (both with 62<sup>nd</sup> ID); LW IR 37 [3]

- . 5 Mtn Bde (Col Mitlacher) = IR 22 [3]; LW IR 23 [3], plus an indep Ma Bn of LW IR 23
- . 2 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6 (actually in Sector VI, Trieste); 7 Comp of SB 9
- . 58 FA Bde (Col Richter) = Res FKR 58 [4], Res FHR 58 [4]; 6 Batty/FHR 17
- . 121 Lst Inf Bde (Col Kouff) = 6350 foot, 20 MG. FJB 2; k.k. Lst Bns 6, 37, IV/39, 75, 83
- . Corps troops = Heavy FAR XVI [3]
- . Attached from Army HQ = 3 & 4 Batties/Res FKR 1; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 12; 10.4 cm Can Batty 13; one 15 cm L/40 marine can; one 15 cm L/50 marine can; 15 cm Can Batty 6, 15 cm Fixed Can Batty 9; 15 cm How Batties 2, 26; 15 cm Mor Batties 10, 15; 21 cm Coastal Mor Batty 1; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 4; ten 7 cm mtn can; two 8 cm casemate can; two 9 cm fixed can batties; two 9 cm fixed can züge; one 8 cm automatic flak batty; four 8 cm flak züge. 7 Comp/SB 1, 8 Comp/SB 3, 3 Comp/SB 6; ½ of k.k. Lst Sapper Det 3/3; 4 Comp/PB 7. Flieger Comps 2, 4, 19; Balloon Det 8. 67 light, 6 medium and 26 heavy TM; 4 small grenade launchers; 3 flamethrower platoons.

## Sector III.a, or VII Corps

Commander = GdK Archduke Joseph

Chief of Staff = Col Eisner-Bubna

Strength = 27 bns, 29 batties, 6 tech comps, 1 flieger comp, 2 balloon dets; 21,250 foot, 164 guns, 14 inf guns, 10 MG

- . 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Lukachich) = 8800 foot; 52 guns, 8 inf guns, 48 MG
  - . 39 Hon Inf Bde (Col Stadler) = Hon IR 3 [3], 4 [3]
  - . 81 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Ledniczer) = Hon IR 1 [3], 17 [3]
  - . 6 Comp/SB 14 (Div cav, Res Sqdn/HR 3, detached to Trieste, Sector IV)
  - . 20 Hon FA Bde (Col Pohl) = Hon FKR 20 [4: 2 can and 2 how batties], Hon FHR 20 [4], Hon Hvy FAR 20 [4]<sup>42</sup>
- . 17<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edl von Gelb) = 12,450 foot, 64 guns, 52 MG
  - . 33 Inf Bde (Col Steinsberg) = IR 39 [4], 61 [3]
  - . 34 Inf Bde (Col Boleslaw Wolf) = IR 43 [4], 46 [3]
  - . 5 Comp/SB 7 (Div cav, Res Sqdn/HR 16, detached to Trieste, Sector IV)
  - . 17 FA Bde (Col Braun) = FKR 17 [5], FHR 17 [4], Hvy FAR 17 [3]
- . Attached from XV Corps - 3 Can Batty/Hvy FAR XV
- . Attached from Army HQ - 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12, 15 cm automatic Can Batty 1, 15 cm Can Batties 4, 7; one 15 cm L/50 marine can,

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42 But one heavy how batty of Hon Hvy FAR 20 was being re-armed at Vienna.

one 15 cm turret how; 15 cm Mor Batty 16, 24 cm Mor Batty 6, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 7; eight 7 cm mtn can, two 8 cm flak züge. 1 Comp/ SB 1, 3 Comp/PB 4, 3 Comp/PB 7, 1 Ma Comp/PB 3. Flieger Comp 12; Balloon Dets 1, 13. 108 light, 4 medium and 38 heavy TM; 10 small grenade launchers; 2 flamethrower platoons.

## Sector III.b

Commander = FML Edler von Schenk (of 9<sup>th</sup> ID)

Chief of Staff = Major Freiherr von Wolf-Schneider

Strength = 22 bns, 1 sqdn, 23 batties, 7 tech comps, 1 flieger comp, 1 balloon det; 18,400 foot, 162 horse, 120 guns, 10 inf guns, 82 MG

. 9<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edl von Schenk) = 7900 foot, 162 horse; 4 guns, 8 inf guns, 36 MG

. 17 Inf Bde (Col Wanek) = IR 91 [3], 102 [3] (but 102<sup>nd</sup> IR was with Archduke Eugene's Army Group in Tyrol)

. 60 Inf Bde (GM Ritt von Gruber) = IR 30 [3], 80 [3]

. Res Sqdn/UR 12; 5 Comp/SB 2

. Hvy FAR 9 [2]<sup>43</sup>

. 24 k.k. Lst Mtn Bde (GM von Zhuber) = 5000 foot, 22 MG. k.k. Lst IR 11 [3], 27 [3]; artillery detached: 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12 with VII Corps, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21 with XVI Corps

. 59 Inf Bde (from 43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID) (Col Kosel) = 5500 foot, 1 inf gun, 24 MG. IR 24 [3], 41 [4]

. 43 FA Bde (from 43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID) (Col Michalek) = 56 guns. FKR 43 [4], FHR 43 [4], Hvy FAR 43 [2]

. Attached from Army HQ = Res FKR I [2]<sup>44</sup>; 6 Can Batty/FHR 8, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 16; one 12 cm L/35 marine can, one 12 cm L/40 marine can, two 15 cm L/40 marine can, one 15 cm L/50 marine can; 15 cm automatic Can Batty 2, 15 cm Fixed Can Batty 10; 15 cm Russian Can Batties 1, 2; 15 cm Mor Batty 14; 21 cm Mor Batties 4, 6; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 2; one 47 mm marine can, six 7 cm mtn can; two 9 cm fixed can züge; two 8 cm flak züge. 4 Comp/SB 1, 3 & 4 Comps/SB 2, 5 Comp/PB 3, 5 Comp/PB 10. Flieger Comp 28, Balloon Det 12. 45 light, 4 medium and 25 heavy TM; 18 small grenade launchers; 1 flamethrower platoon.

## Sector IV (Trieste Coastal Area)

Commander = Counter-Admiral Freiherr von Koudelka

Strength = 5 bns, 3 sqdns, 4 batties, ¼ tech comp; 4570 foot, 280 horse; 52 guns, 37 MG

. See Bn 2; Lst Bike Bn Trieste; Vol Rifle Bns Marburg IV,

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43 One battery of Hvy FAR 9 was in Vienna to be re-armed; the rest of 9 FA Bde was with 48<sup>th</sup> ID in the northeastern theater of operations.

44 The 3 & 4 Batties of Res FKR I were with XVI Corps

Laibach VI, Trieste VII; Lst Watch Bn Trieste, Police Bn Trieste; 12 coast defense dets, 18 gendarmerie and 17 finance watch posts; 10 marine MG dets  
 . Res Sqdn/HR 3, Res Sqdn/HR 16, 2 Ma Sqdn/LW UR 6  
 . Ten 7 cm marine can, twelve 47 mm marine can, one 15 cm L/32 marine can, two 15 cm L/35 marine can, three 8 cm Russian field can batties; one 9 cm fixed can batty; four 7 cm marine flak can, three 8 cm flak can  
 . ¼ of a pioneer comp

Sector V (Fiume Coastal Area)

Commander = GM von Istvanovic

Strength = 1 ½ bns, ½ batty; 1900 foot, 2 guns

. k.u. Lst Eta Bn VII/26; k.k. Lst Watch Comp Volosca; Young Rifle Comp 3/IV; several gendarmerie, gendarmerie Lst assistenz, border police and border finance watch dets; one 9 cm fixed cannon zug

The Army's reserve (in the Comen area):

43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID (GM Fernengel) = 5020 foot, 147 horse; 2 inf guns, 24 MG

. 86 LW Inf Bde (Col Meisel) = LW IR 20 [3], 22 [3]

. 6 Sqdn/LW UR 1; 4 Comp/SB 7

**TOTALS for 5<sup>th</sup> Army** = 110 bns (78 field, 28 Lst and 4 volunteer rifle), 7 ¼ sqdns, 120 ½ batties (78½ light, 35 medium and 7 heavy), 24 tech comps, 5 flieger comps, 4 balloon dets. 102,400 foot, 1025 horse; 638 guns<sup>45</sup>, 52 inf guns, 439 MG, 333 TM (220 light, 18 medium and 16 heavy); 54 small grenade launchers, 6 flamethrower platoons

Reinforcements to 5<sup>th</sup> Army during the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo (a total of 28 bns, 1¼ sqdn, 8 batties):

a) From Archduke Eugene's Army Group in Tyrol

. On 8 August at St Daniel-Comen - IR 102 [2 bns: a third bn stayed in Tyrol]

. On 10 August in the Wippach valley at Prvacina-Dornberg - 8 Mtn Bde (GM Wossala) = Bns IV/25, III/35, IV/58, III/85; BH FJB 5; ¼ 1 Sqdn/UR 12; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 16

. On 10 Aug at Podmelec - Bn I/50

. On 11 Aug at Podmelec and Grapa (east of Tolmein) - 2 Mtn Bde (Col Panzenböck) = Bns III/8, III/55, II/70; FJB 12, BH FJB 8; ¼ 1 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rif Bn; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 24

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45 Total of guns includes all the fixed, flak and other special pieces; there were 491 light, 131 medium and 16 heavy guns.

- . On 11 Aug at Podmelec - Bn I/48
- . From 13 to 16 Aug at Podmelec - Combined ID HQ (GM Edler von Hrozny), which took over the designation "57<sup>th</sup> ID" on 22 August; had 18 Inf Bde (Col Laxa) with IR 11 [4], 47 [3]
- . From 13 to 16 August at Prvacina-Reifenberg - The rest of the combined division:
  - . 10 Mtn Bde (Col Korzer) = Bns I/62, I/90, III/BH 1
  - .  $\frac{3}{4}$  3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 7 Comp/SB 6
  - . 57 FA Bde (Lt Col Hanzu) = 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 25, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 3, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 5; 15 cm How Batty 43

b) From Carinthia (10<sup>th</sup> Army)

On 13 Aug at Prvacina-Dornberg - k.k. Lst Inf Bns 42, 43

## c) From the Russian theater of operations

On 13 August in Prvacina-Dornberg - Bns IV/20, I/21

Reinforcement to 5<sup>th</sup> Army between the end of the Sixth Isonzo Battle and the end of August (a total of 37½ bns, 2½ sqdns, 45 batties):

## a) From Archduke Eugene's Army Group in Tyrol

- . From 17 to 20 Aug at St Daniel-Prvacina-Dornberg - 28<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schneider von Manns-Au)
  - . 55 Inf Bde (Col Rada) = IR 87 [3], 96 [3½]
  - . 56 Inf Bde (GM Hugo Schmid) = Bns III/14, I/47, IV/LW 37; FJB 9, 11
  - . Res Sqdn/DR 3; 4 Comp/SB 14
  - . FHR 28 [4], Hvy FAR 28 [3]; 8 Batty/FKR 3, 7 Batty/FKR 7, 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 22
- . On 22 Aug at Podmelec - XVII Corps HQ

## b) From the Russian theater of operations

- . On 20 Aug at Podmelec - Infantry of 44<sup>th</sup> LW ID (FML Nemeczek)
  - . 44 LW Bde (GM Schönauer) = [Mtn] LW IR 4 [3], 27 [3]
  - . 87 LW Bde (GM Jellenchich) = LW IR 2 [2], 21 [3]
- . On 20 Aug at Prvacina - The rest of 44<sup>th</sup> LW ID
  - . Res Sqdn/DR 10
  - . 44 FA Bde (Col Edl von Ellenberger) = FKR 44 [3], FHR 44 [4]; 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 44
- . From 26 Aug in the Haidenschaft-Hl. Kreuz-Gaberje-Samaria area - 16<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Schariczner)
  - . 31 Inf Bde (GM von Szende) = IR 2 [4] only
  - . 32 Inf Bde (GM von Koschatzky) = IR 31 [4]; Bn IV/64
  - .  $\frac{1}{2}$  3 Sqdn/HR 2
  - . 16 FA Bde (Col Paul) = FKR 16 [2], FHR 16 [4]

- c) From the Balkan theater of operations  
 . From 30 Aug at Podmelec - k.u. Lst IR 1 [3]  
 . From 30 Aug at Prvacina - k.u. Lst IR 4 [2]

In addition, during and after the battle in August the 5<sup>th</sup> Army received 21 batteries (10 light, 4 medium and 7 heavy), 2 fliieger comps and 1 balloon det from other Army sectors, from the Pola Military Harbor, and from the interior.

#### D. Pola Military Harbor Area

Commander = Vice-admiral Ritter von Chmelarz

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Ritter von Obermayer

Strength = 9 bns, 2 mobile batties, 2 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp; 10,200 foot; 550 guns; 18 mobile and 96 fixed MG

- . The security garrison
  - . k.k. Lst IR 5 [3]; k.k. Lst Bn 5; k.u. Lst Bns V/8, II/27, V/29; Sea Bns 1, 3
  - . 5 Batty/FKR 25; an 8 cm Russian can batty; eight 9 cm fixed cannon batties; 1 flak platoon
  - . 4 Fort Arty Bde (FML Hlavacek) = 13 line, 6 reserve and 8 march comps of Fort Arty Regt 4
  - . 4 Comp/SB 6. Gendarmerie posts and Finance Watch Dets
- . Coastal sectors Parenzo-Rovigno and Albona - 7 coastal defense dets, Gendarmerie posts, Finance and Cable guards
- . Lussin Island - 1 infantry det, 1 marine Lst det; 2 Comp/Fort Arty Regt 4; Gendarmerie posts, Finance and Cable guards

**TOTALS for** the units in the Italian theater of operations as of 1 August 1916 - 357 bns, 10 high mtn comps, 51 SS dets, 78 indep MG dets, 25 sqdns, 355 batties, 81 fort arty comps, 97¼ tech comps, 12 fliieger comps, 5 balloon dets, 1 armored train. 287,593 foot, 2650 horse; 2731 guns, 117 inf guns, 2150 MG; 208 light, 50 medium and 32 heavy TM; 168 light and 9 medium grenade launchers; 14 flamethrower platoons

#### e. Units and preparations of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army

The change in the situation on the Italian front, caused by developments in the East, had forced the Aus-Hung. high command at the start of July to transfer two divisions from the Army Group in Tyrol to GO von Boroevic's weakened Army. At this time the first signs were detected that the Italians were again starting to take interest in this battlefield. But the new and increasing dangers in the eastern part of the Monarchy made it necessary to take wide-ranging security measures at the cost of all other fronts. The k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army thus could only enjoy

their increased strength for a short time. After a few days they already had to send 187 Lst Inf Bde, which had been distinguished in all the battles on the Isonzo, to 10<sup>th</sup> Army in Carinthia. Immediately thereafter the combat-tested 106 Lst ID was called to the northeastern theater of operations.

Thus the combat strength of the defenders of the Isonzo fell at the end of July to its lowest level. The situation compared to that during the early summer fighting in Tyrol was even more critical, since now all the Monarchy's strength and resources was flowing to the East, while what was going on behind the enemy front in the Southwest - now so unnaturally quiet - was a great riddle.

#### The deployment at the start of August

As an emergency measure to fill the badly diminished ranks, the high command assigned to 5<sup>th</sup> Army 41 extra March companies from the Army Group in Tyrol; they were barely sufficient to keep the divisions deployed on the Karst capable of fighting. Since HQ of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ couldn't count on any further reinforcements, they had to institute a deployment that would provide for unforeseen events. During July the k.k. Landsturm Infantry Regiments 11 and 27, which had brilliantly withstood their ordeal by fire at the start of the month and could rely on a regular flow of replacements, were organized under the HQ of 24 Lst Mtn Bde; for the time being they were deployed on the Army's southern wing. FJB 2 and the k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalions 37 and 75, which also were getting regular replacements, were combined with k.k. Landsturm Bns 6, IV/39 and 83 as the 121 Lst Inf Bde under XVI Corps.

On 1 August, therefore, XV Corps held Sector I with 19 battalions and 28 mobile batteries on a front of 25 km - 50 ID stood between Krn # 2245 and the Isonzo west of Tolmein and 1 ID was farther south in the Tolmein bridgehead and on the eastern bank of the river as far as Auzza. XVI Corps held Sector II with 32 battalions and 36 mobile batteries on a front of 35 km - 62 ID was stationed between Auzza and Mt Santo, and 58 ID (of three brigades) in the Görz bridgehead and along the eastern bank of the Isonzo as far as the mouth of the Wippach. VII Corps held Sector III.a with 27 battalions and 29 mobile batteries on a front of 9 km - 20 Hon ID was stationed from the Wippach to the southern edge of San Martino, and 17 ID from there to Heights # 118 of Mt dei sei Busi (inclusive). Sector III.b was held by 9 ID (reinforced by 24 Lst Mtn Bde) on the edge of the Karst at Vermeigliano and as far as Duino

(inclusive); 59 Inf Bde (from 43 LW ID) served as the Sector's reserve behind the southern wing. Thus Sector III.b held a line of 13 km with 22 battalions and 23 mobile batteries. The only units left to GO Borojevic as an Army reserve were the 6 battalions of 86 LW Bde and HQ of 43 LW ID, which were stationed on the plateau of Comen.

Therefore at the start of August the 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ held the front between the Krn and the sea with 8 divisions, or just 106 battalions (a third of which were Landsturm). Total strength was 102,400 riflemen with 440 light, 144 medium and heavy guns, and 220 light and 113 medium and heavy trench mortars.<sup>46</sup>

On 4 August the attacking 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army with at least 203 battalions and 1250 guns was opposed along its front by just 78 battalions (including the Army reserve) and 384 guns of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### The defensive positions

Since winter, everything possible had been done to systematically strengthen the defensive installations. The hastily created shelters of 1915, and the walls made of stones and sandbags, had developed by summer 1916 into proper battle positions. It is true, however, that in many sectors the work was hampered because time was needed to ensure that the troops were well trained, or because of the proximity of the enemy, the peculiarities of the terrain, or the constant shifting of units from one sector to another. Despite all the toil and noteworthy diligence, it still hadn't been possible to create a position running along the entire front that was able to meet all the requirements. As always, the most unfavorable positions were on the Karst plateau, where the foremost line often covered positions won during various actions, and had to be laboriously protected against dangerous fire from the flanks or the rear. By moving the front line forward in some areas, or backward in others to eliminate salients, a second line was gradually created; it would be able to serve as a switch position for a defeated garrison in case the enemy broke through the main line of battle, and as a base for reserves who were supposed to counterattack. The lines of communication leading to the rear

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46 Counting the artillery in the two coastal sectors (Trieste and Fiume) the total number of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's guns was somewhat larger than it had been at the end of May. When all the fixed, flak and special guns were added in, there were 491 light, 131 medium and 16 heavy pieces.

ran alongside dug-outs, caverns and "Dolinen" that afforded shelter; they were also protected by walls of sandbags or stones which took the place of trenches. Thus a system of defense in greater depth was beginning to develop.

A description of the battleground as it appeared before the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo is provided by the following extract from a paper written by GM Anton Ritter von Pitreich, at that time Chief of the Operational Detachment at 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ<sup>47</sup>:

"As previously, the main effort was directed at creating proper trenches. Since the two sides were deployed so close to each other, it was necessary to strongly occupy the foremost line of resistance so that powerful frontal fire could be offered; the line was supported by positions 50 to at most 100 meters in the rear from which machine guns could provide flanking fire. Carving trenches out of the stony Karst was very difficult work. Nevertheless, as time went on the earlier stone walls mostly disappeared, or were replaced by at least two rows of sandbag breastworks. Considerable use was also made of gun shields. Since the hard surface of the Karst almost completely precluded the building of dugouts as protection against bad weather and shrapnel, recourse was had to shields that were subject to splintering - mostly boards covered with corrugated iron or roofing felt - despite all the danger that this entailed. Also wire mesh was strung out to deflect hand grenades. Here it was quite difficult to strike an adequate compromise between the understandable desires of the garrison and the dictates of reason. Special emphasis was given to preparation of numerous traverses. Finally, the construction of obstacles also involved considerable difficulty, since it usually wasn't possible to anchor them firmly. Only by constantly installing new equipment (Spanish riders and traps made of wire mesh) was it possible to provide the necessary protection."

"These remarks pertain primarily to the position on the Doberdo plateau, which was the most difficult part of the entire fortified zone. Fortification of the other sectors was substantially more complete. The bridgehead at Görz in particular, but also the one at Tolmein, can be regarded as masterpieces of contemporary field fortifications. In these sectors it was also possible to better provide for

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47 This is from an unpublished manuscript dealing with the war on the Isonzo.

the comfort of the troops. Much of this success was due to wise use of electric power. Particularly useful were the machines used to bore into the stone, but other machines provided light, ventilation and heat to ease the soldiers' heavy burden. Civil engineers working under their Landsturm obligation had many opportunities to prove their ability and usefulness."

"However, because of the great size of the area in which the work was made difficult by the stony ground, the available labor force was hardly sufficient to maximize the defensive strength of the first position. Therefore the efforts of the higher echelons to ensure the long-term security of the Isonzo front as a whole by creating lines further to the rear were successful to just a very limited extent. Moreover, time and resources were also expended in constructing the necessary lines of communication behind the fighting troops, especially in the extended area of the Bainsizza, Lom and Kal plateaus, which lacked roads and had little water."

"Enhancement of the logistical and transportation facilities in this area was therefore given high priority. There was considerable progress on this project during the winter and spring; most of the work here was done by Russian prisoners of war, who couldn't be employed in the dangerous areas nearer to the front. A total of about 20,000 prisoners were available. But here also it was impossible to fulfill all goals. One assignment followed immediately after another, and all of them seemed urgent."

"The same problem affected employment of the limited number of our own laborers (about 20,000) who were being used to build up the front lines. Around this time the first limited attempts were made to actually construct rear area lines. Mostly, however, orders to move ahead with this project were fulfilled only on paper. Anyone trying to locate the much-discussed second and third lines wouldn't have found much. The commanding generals didn't think it was advisable to intervene intensively, since they didn't want their subordinates to become obsessed with the rear areas; moreover they didn't want to be responsible for diverting scanty resources away from the considerable work that still needed to be done on the first line."

"Only because of favorable terrain was it possible to provide the defenders of the Wippach valley with a second

line of resistance five kilometers behind the Görz bridgehead. This line ran from Mt S Gabriele through Sv Katarina and Grazigna, along the edge of the heights directly east of the city of Görz, through San Marco, and on the eastern bank of the Vertojbica to the Wippach; on the left bank of the latter stream the line ran through S Grado di Merna to reach the northern slope of the Comen plateau. Here the trenches were provided with a continuous row of obstacles. However, the continuation of the second line in the north past Mt Santo and Height # 652 toward Plava, and in the south toward the fortifications on the Karst plateau, left much to be desired (to say the least)."

"On the Doberdo plateau there was a switch position that could be occupied only in case of necessity; it ran from San Martino generally south through Marcottini to the Debeli vrh. Work had begun farther to the rear on a continuous line of battle on the eastern edge of the Vallone-Brestovica valley; in the south it would block the Brestovica valley through Point # 208 as far as Heights # 144; it was supposed to lean against the first position by Heights # 77 next to the Southern Railroad. The disadvantage of this line was that the western edge of the Vallone is higher than the eastern edge."

"The three lines described above were still for now of very limited value as defenses, and there were hardly any other defensive installations in the Army's rear. Usually only March formations were available to initiate and carry out the necessary labor. The technical troops on the scene (a total of 36 companies and 15 stone-boring platoons) worked only on the first position. The project which took the most time and trouble was the understandable effort to construct caverns as shell-proof shelters for all the defenders of the Karst. Considerable progress was made on this venture; at least it was sufficient to prolong the ghastly lives of the men in their underground prisons, which were so damp and hellish. The conditions were reflected in the large number of sick troops, which constantly weakened the strength of VII Corps to an inordinate degree. An entire book could be filled with descriptions of all the improvisations developed through the years to make life bearable for these unwilling dwellers in hell. It would be a great injustice, however, to cast gloom over the spirit of the excellent troops who here were placing their lives at stake for the existence of their common fatherland. In proud awareness of the

victories won in the battles of the past and of the measures taken to strengthen the front, it was possible to await future events with confidence despite the numerical weakness of the garrison."

**f. The battle plan of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army and measures to conceal their intentions**

For the main attack on the Isonzo, the Italian high command provided only general guidelines and orders for the deployment of reinforcements. Detailed planning and implementation was entrusted to the leader of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, who was the most skillful and diligent of Italy's Army commanders.

According to the battle plan of G.Lt Aosta, the offensive would be initiated on 4 August with a diversionary attack by the reinforced VII Corps against the southern wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army in the Selz-Monfalcone sector, which had already been assaulted in July. The resumption of fighting in this area wouldn't be unusual and could be considered a continuation of the earlier operation. However, the point of this measure was to divert the attention of the Austrians and to draw their reserves away from the sector that was actually to be penetrated.

The main attack would be carried out on 6 August by two powerful battle groups. One of these was G.Lt Capello's VI Italian Corps. With four tightly massed divisions (and two more behind them as reserves) he would thrust with his northern wing in the narrow area Mt Sabotino-Heights # 188, and with his southern wing toward Podgora. The goals were to break through the front of the Görz bridgehead and to advance to the river. The group in the center (between Oslavija and the town of Grafenberg) would pin down the Aus-Hung. garrison on the Pevma heights. At this point neither G.Lt Cadorna nor the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army set any goals beyond the capture of Görz.

The second battle group was XI Corps with three divisions. They would simultaneously capture Mt S Michele, which was considered the southern bulwark of the Görz bridgehead. In the center of the Karst sector the XIII Corps would be ready to intervene in the operation as needed.<sup>48</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army north of Mt Sabotino would play only a secondary role. They would prevent their opponents from shifting units to the sector of the front that was under attack. In the opinion of the high command the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army wasn't strong enough to attack with infantry; therefore they would maintain strong pressure on the Aus-Hung. lines of north of Mt Sabotino

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48 Tosti, p. 171

by launching a heavy bombardment of the positions when the main assault started. Also, troops in the rear areas by Tolmein would pretend to be preparing for a larger operation.

Evaluation of the situation by HQ of k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army

Although the Aus-Hung. high command had noted the transfer of seven Italian brigades from the Tyrol front to the Isonzo in July, they reckoned that the Italians wouldn't make a major attack before mid-August. They over-estimated the damage that had been done to the enemy, and its impact, in almost two months of fighting in the mountains; they believed that the Italians would resume their original plans for an assault through Görz and on the Karst when the intervention of Romania - which now could scarcely be prevented - became reality.

In fact the situation in front of Boroevic's Army didn't seem to be substantially changed. There were no tell-tale signs of preparation for a major offensive battle (such as bombardment by new batteries, increased rail or truck traffic, or other events occurring in the enemy's rear areas). Fighting stayed within the usual limits of trench warfare; only the enemy's air activity was a little greater than usual. It was more significant that since 25 July a number of radio stations belonging to high-echelon Italian HQ in the Padua-Vicenza-Bassano area had ceased operating, and that since 27 July our aerial observers had reported larger troop and column movements in the Bassano-Feltre-Treviso area.

The uncertainty of the situation was caused by the measures which the Italian high command had taken - down to the smallest details - to keep their plans secret for as long as possible. Above all, the larger movements (whether on foot or by vehicles) were undertaken during hours of darkness. Because of these effective measures<sup>49</sup>, our observers didn't notice that in the days around the end of July there was a substantial reinforcement of the Italian artillery and trench mortars in front of the Görz bridgehead and in the plains west of Mt S Michele.

Another important reason why the suspicious quiet along the front didn't awaken the defenders' mistrust was the absence of any large number of Italian deserters. Usually the appearance of these individuals was the surest sign that a great offensive battle was imminent.

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49 The measures included substantial camouflage for lines of communication behind the front and far into the interior, sprinkling roads with water to prevent the appearance of dust clouds, training the men to watch for airplanes whenever they were on the march, etc. (Capello, Vol. I, p. 298)

The enemy was in a position to hold their foremost attacking troops in readiness at the most important points in the sector within storming distance of their intended targets, protected against artillery and trench mortar fire; therefore they had an opportunity to surprise the defenders. This factor, along with the generally favorable overall situation and heavy numerical superiority, made the surprise attack a tempting option that was likely to succeed. If an initial victory was won as planned, wider ranging goals could be pursued later. The true objective of the offensive was Görz, but because of experiences in earlier battles the Italian commanders didn't prematurely mention this name; the stated goal at the start was merely the capture of the bridgehead west of the city.

## **2. Loss of the Görz bridgehead**

### **a. Opening actions on 4 and 5 August**

Since 2 August enemy artillery activity, which hitherto had been directed only against the Görz bridgehead and the positions on the Karst, was extended to the entire front of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army. However, it didn't increase in strength. Traffic was somewhat heavier behind the Italian front, but wasn't moving in a particular direction and seemed mainly restricted to supply trains. In general, relative peace was still prevailing on the front near the coast.

Then around 10:00 AM on 4 August the Italian artillery opened a very heavy bombardment by guns and trench mortars against the entire southern part of the Doberdo plateau; for a while this increased to drum-fire in the sector east of Selz, at Mt Cosich, and on the Monfalcone ridge. It appeared that the enemy wanted to resume their efforts in this sector, where they had been unsuccessful four weeks earlier. Around 2:00 PM infantry of both reinforced divisions of VII Corps (14 and 16 ID) advanced to attack. Batteries of 43 FA Bde, stationed west of the Hermada Heights, laid down well-directed defensive fire; along with a marine artillery group at Duino, firing from the flank, they forced the Italian storming columns to go to ground. Only after the enemy repeated the assault on a broad front with parts of seven regiments were they able (toward 6:00 PM) to take several trenches by Selz and on the Monfalcone ridge. After fighting which raged back and forth, and in which the east Galician IR # 80 performed gallantly, the Italians had to

evacuate all the positions of the k.u.k. 60 Inf Bde during the evening. They left behind 230 prisoners and 2 machine guns.<sup>50</sup> During the night, which passed relatively quietly, the commander of Sector III.b (FML Edler von Schenk) prepared for new thrusts by holding ready 59 Inf Bde, the sector's reserve, at Jamiano and Brestovica in the western parts of their widely scattered lodgings.

North of the sector which had been attacked, and as far as Görz, the enemy infantry remained quiet on this day. Toward midnight of 4-5 August a mine was exploded by sappers of the k.u.k. 58 ID on the Gorjna ridge west of Al Ponte; in the sortie which followed a small detachment from k.u. Lst IR # 2 destroyed an Italian mine gallery and several saps.

The tense situation was finally clarified on 5 August. Prisoners taken during the night had asserted that a massive Italian offensive was imminent. A number of other unmistakable signs provided confirmation. Already in the morning the artillery fire against the northern part of the Doberdo plateau gave a definite impression that it was being systematically directed and included a great number of hitherto unidentified batteries. A bombardment, mainly by guns of heavy caliber, began at noon and lasted into the night. It was directed at the southern edge of the Karst (the area attacked the day previously) and the positions on the hills east of Monfalcone, at Mt S Michele, and especially at the Görz bridgehead, its bridges and the city itself. Great fires broke out; there was considerable damage as well as casualties which included some of the civilian population. Large-scale troop movements were noticeable in the Isonzo plains behind the Italian front, and there was increased traffic on the railroad tracks from Casarsa toward Udine and Cormons. In the evening an Italian battalion made reconnaissance thrusts by Kote 111 and on the Selz-Doberdo road, but they were easily repulsed.

Realizing that the fighting about to commence would probably be severe, GO Borojevic asked Teschen to considerably reinforce his heavy artillery; he stated that what he needed most were two heavy mortar and three heavy field howitzer batteries.

#### **b. The surprise attack on the bridgehead**

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50 On this day the casualties of 60 Inf Bde were 120 dead, 470 wounded and 120 missing.

The night of 5-6 August was rather quiet, but went by with great tension. It was followed by a clear, high-summer Sunday morning. Then around 6:45 AM the Italian artillery and trench mortars on the entire front from Tolmein to the coast opened fire simultaneously with the greatest intensity. In a short time the heights between Mt Sabotino and the plains by Lucinico, as well as the city of Görz and its suburbs, were engulfed by dust and smoke. Troops at the observation points on the heights which ringed the Görz basin to the east soon could see nothing but an enormous gray-brown screen of smoke, out of which thunder was constantly growling, and flashes of light indicated where shells were landing and bursting. Meanwhile high in the air the heavy rounds from the more distant Italian batteries were screaming and gurgling on their courses; far behind the front they struck the command posts of our higher HQ and the lines of communication, interrupting traffic on their way to the front and causing confusion among the reserves and the logistical installations stationed in towns and camps.

#### The opposing forces

Early on 6 August, the units in 58 ID's sector were deployed as follows.

- . From the Isonzo through Mt Sabotino to Oslavija, three and a half battalions of 4 Mtn Bde defended the northern wing of the bridgehead.
- . From Oslavija through the wooded heights of Pevma to the heights west of Grafenberg, three battalions of the k.k. 121 Lst Inf Bde held the central sector.<sup>51</sup>
- . Farther south, 5 Mtn Bde was stationed with three battalions on the Podgora and at the fortified bridges near Lucinico, and with two battalions along the Isonzo as far as the mouth of the Wippach.
- . Seven battalions of 58 ID were held back in reserve in the towns in the Wippach valley.

Nearly half these troops belonged to Landsturm battalions that had not yet been tested in battle. The garrison of the bridgehead consisted of three Landwehr, one March and five Landsturm battalions. The unfavorable composition of the units was due to the fact that 58 ID had given up a Common Army brigade for the offensive from south Tyrol. Furthermore, four more good Common Army battalions (drawn from both mountain brigades) had to be given to 62 ID to guard the Plava-Zagora

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51 These three battalions of 121<sup>st</sup> Bde (k.u. Lst Bns I and II/2, III/31) belonged normally to the k.u. 209 Lst Inf Bde of 62 ID.

sector, which was considered especially important. On the other hand, of these four battalions attached to 62 ID two were stationed in reserve behind that Division's southern wing, so that they could quickly intervene in the bridgehead if necessary. Including the fixed pieces, 58 ID had a total of just 87 guns, without very much ammunition.

These 18 ½ battalions and 87 guns of 58 ID, which under the command of GM Erwin Zeidler had defended the Görz sector gloriously since the start of the war, were now opposed by the Italian VI Corps. The enemy attacked with six divisions (some reinforced), supported by a massed artillery of about 500 guns plus 400 trench mortars. They had a fourfold superiority in battalions and an almost sixfold superiority in guns (not counting the trench mortars); at the key points in the fighting this superiority increased to a staggering mismatch, which should ensure success. Moreover, the Italians were informed about the situation in the bridgehead down to all minor details. Three Dalmatian officer-candidates went over to the enemy by Mt Sabotino on 13 July, and were able to divulge rather worthwhile information about their sector. In the night of 31 July-1 August two Italian-speaking and one Czech officer-candidates deserted to the enemy. They brought with them a plan of the defensive installations on the Podgora, and reported the strength and composition of the bridgehead garrison, the location of the command points, and the lack of reserves. They also pointed out to the enemy the errors that they had made in the battles to date. It's possible that this systematically-prepared treachery hastened the start of the attack (so that the Italians would be able to use the knowledge they'd gained before reinforcements could be brought up). Moreover, it enabled the enemy to successfully implement their carefully-laid plans; many important bastions of the defense would fall in a few hours.

#### The Italian onslaught

The heavy fire lasted for many hours, and to a large extent demolished the trenches of the first and second lines, while breaking up all lines of communication. Around noon the enemy artillery increased their destructive work by delivering drumfire against the principal targets on Mt Sabotino and the Podgora. This bombardment stamped the last barriers into the earth, battered the machine gun positions which had been carved out of the rock and reinforced with concrete, and obstructed the entrances into the caverns. The sentries were either killed, wounded or demoralized. The positions in the Görz bridgehead were now just completely shattered piles of ruins, surrounded by

smoke, dust and confusion. Then the storming columns of the Italian VI Corps simultaneously attacked the entire front of the bridgehead around 4:00 PM.

The first wave of Capello's attackers, organized in three groups, advanced while especially accurate batteries and trench mortars were still firing on the foremost Aus-Hung. line.<sup>52</sup> Thus the defenders, hindered by dense smoke and dust, didn't notice that the main weight of fire from the Italian batteries had shifted to the second line, or that the enemy infantry were advancing. On the northern wing of VI Corps a striking group of three brigades from the 45 Italian ID (22 battalions) struck Mt Sabotino, which was defended by one battalion of Dalmatian Croats from LW IR 37. The Italian masses took the Dalmatians by surprise and overran them. Moreover, the enemy didn't pause after entering the first line (as they had done in earlier battles) but immediately advanced along the Mt Sabotino ridge toward S Valentino-S Mauro. But they didn't venture to move into the nearby Isonzo valley against the crossing points at Salcano. These events unfolded so quickly that the defenders' reserves didn't have time to work their way out of the damaged exits from the caverns. In this manner many troops fell into captivity.<sup>53</sup>

Simultaneously with the Mt Sabotino group, the right wing of VI Italian Corps (18 battalions of 11 and 12 ID) struck the southern part of the bridgehead. On the main Podgora ridge, on both sides of Heights # 240, two battalions of the heroic "Zara" LW IR 23 stood fast against the Italian columns that swarmed about them on all sides. Also at the fortified bridges by Lucinico the garrison were able to hold the rear lines against several attacks in overwhelming strength by 12 Italian ID. On the other hand, immediately to the north the enemy were able to establish themselves on the crest of the Kalvarienberg at Kote 184. The enemy groups intended to then pivot against the eastern slope of the Podgora, but were thwarted by the defenders. As the Italian masses engulfed the southern bulwark of the bridgehead defenses, the situation became critical. A brigade of 11 ID, which had thrust into the valley between the Podgora and the Pevma Heights, broke through the southern wing of 121 Lst Inf Bde between Al Ponte and the heights west of

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52 Capello, Vol. I, pp. 295 ff.

53 General Venturi, then commanding 45 ID, states in his work (pp. 130 ff.) that 1200 men were taken prisoner. The total casualties of his own division were 1186 men (116 dead, 853 wounded and 217 missing).

Grafenberg; they took possession of the northern slope of the Podgora at Points # 206 and 157. In a short time several Italian detachments were standing here near the Isonzo, which was just 300 to 500 meters from their foremost battle lines. Patrols even crossed to the eastern bank over the bridges at Al Ponte and Grafenberg. Smaller groups thrust south into the town of Podgora and thus into the rear of LW IR 23.

The central group of VI Italian Corps, eight battalions from 24 ID, was unable to overcome the gallant resistance of the garrison of the sector Piumica valley-Heights # 188-Oslavija, and remained lying in front of our positions. On the other hand, about two Italian battalions penetrated the southern part of the Church Ridge; thrusting down a ravine they reached the town of Pevma and the Isonzo.

#### The situation at day's end

When HQ of 58 ID reviewed the situation in the bridgehead in the evening, they found that Capello's divisions had broken through the fortifications at three places. On Mt Sabotino 45 ID had advanced to the line S Valentino-S Mauro. Remnants of the garrison were still fighting at the entrances to the caverns behind the enemy front; reserves sent to the area were clinging to the steep slopes above Salcano. One group in a cavern defended themselves until 8 August; then they were finally flushed out and taken prisoner by the enemy. The defenses in the Isonzo valley were still standing. Between the Piumica valley and Oslavija two battalions of 4 Mtn Bde (Landwehr from Dalmatia and Landsturm from the Eger-Land) were holding their original positions, although the enemy were threatening their flanks and rear on the right from the area of S Mauro and on the left from Pevma.

In an equally dangerous situation was the gallant k.u. Lst IR # 2, which was stationed on the heights west of Pevma although almost cut off from the Isonzo by the enemy at Pevma and south of Al Ponte. Under very difficult conditions, a group under Col. Noë (the commander of LW IR 23) had until now repulsed all assaults on Heights # 240 but was now encircled on all sides, including the rear, since the enemy had broken into the town of Podgora. Noë's communication with the garrison of the bridges was maintained only through a small gap in the enemy ring.

The situation of 58 ID was very serious but not hopeless. Their commander hadn't given up plans for continuing to hold the bridgehead as long as the enemy could still be hurled back, as

they always had been before. It had been repeatedly demonstrated in the trench warfare on the Isonzo that seemingly untenable tactical positions could be restored, and very unfavorably situated parts of the front maintained, if a gallant garrison under determined leadership could hold out until reinforcements intervened.

### **c. Counterattacks in the Görz bridgehead**

Already in the morning of 6 August GO Boroëvic had directed an order to all sector commanders in which - referring to the overall situation - he emphasized the importance of still holding onto the positions which had been stubbornly defended for over a year. In the evening, when the situation after the first day of heavy fighting had been half-way clarified, the subordinate commanders were informed that it was especially their duty "not to pull back a single step and to eventually recover the lost ground with counterattacks."

The next measures of the HQ of 58 ID sprung from this concept. The seven battalions in reserve in the Wippach valley began to march to the front after they finished eating. Since all the roads and towns in the the Görz basin and Wippach valley, as well as the city and the Isonzo bridges, remained under heavy fire, it wouldn't be possible to counterattack until darkness fell.

Upon the first news that the Italians had entered the bridgehead, the weak units available in Görz were deployed to secure the city and the crossing points over the Isonzo in the sector between Pevma and Podgora.<sup>54</sup> Enemy patrols were driven away. At the same time the offices responsible for civil administration, logistics and rations were ordered to evacuate the city.

By evening the XVI Corps HQ, which themselves had no reserves, deployed the reserve units of 58 ID which had been stationed behind the southern wing of 62 ID; they sent Battalion III/69 to Salcano and II/22 to the military firing range east of Görz.

Meanwhile the reserves of 58 ID from the Wippach valley had

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54 The units were the 4<sup>th</sup> Comp of PB 7 (which would be responsible for blowing up the bridges if necessary), a company of 121 Lst Inf Bde, two and a half march companies of LW IR 37, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Company of SB 9.

arrived in Görz. Until darkness fell the enemy artillery and trench mortars continued to pound the smoke-shrouded positions. The divisional and brigade HQ in the city also remained under very heavy fire. Whenever a gust of wind cleared away the clouds of dust for a few moments, the defenders of the Podgora sent up signals to call for help from the city.

Despite the overriding importance which recovery of Mt Sabotino would have on the further fate of the bridgehead, it wasn't possible to immediately employ the main body of the available reserves for this mission. To protect the left flank of any counterattack toward Mt Sabotino a substantial part of the units (which anyway weren't very plentiful) would have to be used to mop up the bank of the Isonzo from Pevma to Podgora. The situation of the garrison of the southern bulwark of the bridgehead in particular made quick intervention here necessary.

Col. Adalbert von Dani was leading the Division in place of GM Zeidler (who was on leave). He intended to use the reserves and reinforcements which had arrived by evening - a total of nine battalions - to cut off the three sack-shaped penetrations which the Italians had driven into the front in the direction of the Isonzo.

#### Partial success of the counterattack

During the night, and in the morning hours of 7 August, the task of driving the Italians out of the area they'd penetrated by Al Ponte-Grafenberg-Podgora town was carried out with success. The counterattack from the north was entrusted to six companies of the k.k. 121 Lst Inf Bde (k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalion IV/39 and one company apiece of Battalion III/69 and of LW IR 23). At the same time 5 Mtn Bde struck from the south with Battalions VII/22, II and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of III/LW IR 23 to recover Podgora town and the area which the Italians had penetrated south of Podgora Heights.

An advance over the bridges between Al Ponte and Podgora wasn't possible because of strong Italian machine gun fire. The enemy had already penetrated to the southern edge of the latter town. Therefore part of 5 Mtn Bde's attack group assembled in the darkness on the western bank after using the railroad and highway bridges. From here they launched an attack to make contact with Col. Noë on the Podgora.

There were many obstacles to the cooperation of the units of the two brigades. But in very difficult fighting, which lasted

until morning of 7 August, they succeeded in recovering the northern part of the Podgora Heights and Podgora town. The k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalion IV/39 was especially distinguished. Of the Italians who'd advanced from this area to the Isonzo, about 2000 were taken prisoner.<sup>55</sup>

In the Pevma sector, by evening the k.u. Lst IR 2 (with its own forces) had driven the enemy back from Pevma town. The original positions were recovered throughout the sector, except on the right wing where fighting continued around the Church Ridge. Finally toward midnight of 6-7 August all of the line was again in the hands of the defenders; 800 Italians, including a battalion commander, were taken prisoner. Many machine guns were also taken.

To recapture Mt Sabotino the HQ of 4 Mtn Bde had 4¾ battalions available (II/LW IR 37, II/22, FJB 2, ¾ of III/69 and k.k. Lst Bn 83). One and a half battalions would attack over the railroad bridge at Salcano; the main body would cross over on an improvised bridge east of Pevma, since the enemy had already reached the plank bridge at San Mauro. Because the crossing points remained under enemy fire throughout the night, and it was necessary to use reserves provided by 121 Lst Inf Bde, the counterattack didn't open until daybreak. It encountered strong enemy units, while our artillery was unable to provide support because of lack of ammunition. Around 8:00 AM the Italians were able to take Heights # 188, from where they could now strike the western flank of 4 Mtn Bde's counterattacking group. To the northeast of this penetration the k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalion 6, still holding out in the Piunica valley, was in danger of encirclement from both the right and the left; they had to abandon the position which they had so gloriously defended. The right wing of the Oslavija sector also had to pull back. Units earmarked for the counterattack had to be used to build a new front from the ridge south of Oslavija through Point # 165 to the road, and on Ridge # 138 to the mouth of the Piunica Brook. Battalion II/22, which had stormed forward on the left wing of the attacking group to the steep slope of Mt Sabotino above San Mauro, was cut off; after a gallant defense they were taken prisoner. Since the units were weakened, and artillery ammunition was practically exhausted, it was impossible to continue the attack against the Italians, whose numerical superiority was increasing. New masses of enemy

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55 Sketches taken from a captured Italian staff officer indicated that the enemy was informed about many details of the defenses in the bridgehead, based on statements made by deserters.

troops were continuously being thrown into the fray. The battalion sent to attack through Salcano (II/LW IR 37) was unable to advance over the eastern angle of Mt Sabotino.

#### **d. The unequal struggle on 7 August**

Already on 6 August the HQ of XVI Corps had alerted the March unit which had completed training (about 3800 riflemen) in their camps; some were sent marching toward Tivoli (east of Görz) and the rest to Haidenschaft, where they arrived in the afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Also on the 6<sup>th</sup>, Corps HQ received from 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ authority over LW IR 22, which was stationed at Comen in the Army's reserve; this Regiment came forward in the night of 6-7 August to Batuje, where it arrived in the morning.

At the conclusion of the counterattacks in the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> the situation on the southern wing of the bridgehead had been restored on an emergency basis, but due to the lack of reserves there was no guarantee that the troops would be able to stand up to further massive Italian attacks. And anyway the situation was much more unfavorable in the northern part of the bridgehead, where the narrow area between the positions still being held with difficulty and the river - as well as the steep slopes - made it almost impossible to assemble and prepare reserves so near to the enemy on Mt Sabotino. Now the price was paid for errors in locating the positions at the start of the war, under pressures caused by time and by the scantiness of the force available. The shallowness of the bridgehead made it questionable whether it could be held under all circumstances after the fall of Mt Sabotino.

Such was the situation facing GM Erwin Zeidler when he came to Görz in the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>, called back from a brief furlough. He still hoped that this time he could overcome the danger threatening the bulwark, just as he had done in previous battles. But all the reserves of 58 ID had been committed, and the power of resistance of the troops fighting in the diminished bridgehead was approaching its end. Only the timely arrival of strong reinforcements, powerfully supported by artillery, could perhaps have turned around the critical situation. All immediate decisions were based on the need to gain time so that the situation in the bridgehead could improve, and to hold out until fresh troops could arrive to provide the basis for the defense of the second line.

Around 10:00 AM the Army's entire reserve (the HQ of 43 LW ID

and 86 LW Bde plus LW IR 20) was placed under XVI Corps. They were expected to arrive at 6:00 AM on 8 August at Dornberg and then would be sent by Corps HQ to Cernizza.

Meanwhile events in the bridgehead again took an unfavorable turn. The Italians who'd been halted in the morning by our counterattacks received fresh units and renewed their assault along the entire line. The troops of 4 Mtn Bde hanging onto the slopes of Mt Sabotino between S Valentino and S Mauro had to withstand very heavy storms. LW IR # 22, which had been placed by Corps HQ under 58 ID and sent into the Rosen valley, was now supposed to make another attempt to recover the key position on the right wing, Mt Sabotino. But this Regiment was only three battalions strong (and thus weaker than the attacking group which had made the attempt earlier), and was worn out from marching the night before; it was hardly in a position to win a major success, especially since the artillery still suffered from a lack of ammunition. Meanwhile the area penetrated by the enemy had grown larger, and there was no way to tell how much stronger the Italian onslaught would become. Therefore it would have been risky to stake everything on a desperate counterattack in the north while the situation in the south was still uncertain and no further reinforcements were immediately available. GM Zeidler, faced with enemy attacks that were gathering strength by the hour, canceled the planned operation by LW IR 22 on Mt Sabotino and held the Regiment in reserve; one battalion was placed on the Isonzo next to the Pevma bridge, and the other two at Tivoli in the Rosen valley.

#### A massive new assault by VI Italian Corps

The loss of Heights # 188 in the morning and the evacuation of the first line at Oslavija forced 121 Lst Inf Bde to again give up the southern part of the Church Ridge in their sector and to bend back their right wing. On this line the situation remained the same until the afternoon. Around 3:00 PM the enemy began to advance in thick crowds over the abandoned Church Ridge. In the night of 6-7 August General Capello had brought a fresh division (43 ID) to the sector between Heights # 188 and the Ridge, and had ordered that a massive assault against the k.k. 121 Lst Inf Bde should be mounted in the afternoon by three divisions (43, 24 and 11 ID). The goal was to finally break the Austrians' resistance on the hills by Pevma and to reach the Isonzo in one bound.<sup>56</sup> The 45 Italian ID would support this assault with a thrust on the flank out of the Piumica valley to the south; they

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56 Zingales, "Gorizia", p. 188

would fall upon the rear of their opponents in the direction of the Isonzo bridges.

By 4:00 PM the first powerful Italian blow had collapsed with bloody casualties in front of the positions of the k.u. Lst IR 2. Now one massive assault followed another until darkness fell. Since 4 Mtn Bde, attacked in front and on the flank, had to give up some ground, the Pevma sector also had to slightly pull back their right wing. By midnight the weak garrison on the hills of Pevma had thrown back twelve attacks delivered in almost overwhelming strength; hundreds of prisoners remained in the hands of the defenders. However, the latter had also suffered heavy casualties and had lost half of their original men. No reinforcements were available, so the heroic Landsturm battalions of the 121<sup>st</sup> Brigade had to continue sacrificing themselves to the bitter end.

Fighting with incomparable stubbornness, the troops of 5 Mtn Bde had likewise been able to fend off the Italian onslaughts. In the morning Capello had reinforced the two attacking divisions here (11 and 12 ID) with parts of 47 ID, so that now the entire VI Corps was attacking in the bridgehead; they had six divisions (some of which had three brigades) against a total of 18 Aus-Hung. battalions. On the southern part of the Podgora the enemy had already reached Heights # 184 on 6 August; around noon on 7 August they had pushed back the garrison of the bridge defenses to the railroad embankment. Now 5 Mtn Bde HQ asked for the return of several companies of LW IR 23 which were still in the sector of 121 Lst Inf Bde. But all troop movements were very slow, and there were great obstacles to issuing orders. All attempts to estimate time frames were inaccurate. An unbroken rain of shells continued to fall on the front, on Görz city, and the approach routes. 58 ID had deployed their last man. For the moment XVI Corps HQ had available only five March companies, which had reached Tivoli after a long trek and were resting there. Nevertheless Col. Noë, defending the Podgora with his Dalmatians, was still bravely holding on as was the Bohemian k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalion 75 at the bridge defenses. A counterattack to recover the southernmost part of the Podgora was scheduled to start after darkness fell (9:00 PM).

Conditions in Görz had become unbearable. The command posts were constantly under very heavy fire. Communications to the rear and to the artillery could no longer be maintained, and it was impossible to determine the situation at the front. Measures would have to be taken to prepare for a forced retreat. Also the artillery would have to be instructed how to support

the front and the intended counterattacks, and in general about the situation. All this was no longer possible in Görz, and therefore the divisional HQ was moved to St Peter, along with HQ of 5 Mtn Bde.

The deterioration of the situation forced XVI Corps HQ to await the arrival of LW IR 20, but this unit wouldn't be ready to attack until dawn on 9 August at the earliest. If the western bank of the Isonzo meanwhile had to be evacuated, Corps HQ ordered that 58 ID should in the worst-case scenario take up a position on the eastern bank and prevent the enemy's further advance directly on the river. This instruction was consistent with an order of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which had arrived in response to a situation report at 4:00 PM: "In the most unfavorable situation the line of the Isonzo is to be held whatever happens." By Salcano the line S Valentino-S Mauro was to be retained if at all possible, so that this small bridgehead could serve as a sally port. However, it was now already clear that a protracted operation west of the Isonzo was no longer feasible.

By evening 58 ID HQ knew that the heights east of Oslavija would have to be evacuated under enormous enemy pressure, so that the positions in the diminished bridgehead north of the town of Pevma had to be protected with a switch line running to the Isonzo. Around 9:00 PM on 7 August Col. Noë started to counterattack on the southern part of the Podgora, simultaneously from Heights # 240 and from the fortified bridges.

#### **e. Evacuation of the bridgehead**

In the course of the afternoon on 7 August the enemy had brought into play an overwhelming attacking force, and it increased by the hour. Twelve Italian infantry regiments had already been identified in the fighting against 58 ID by noon. However, even against these masses - now deployed in a very narrow area - the garrison still held on through three hours of battle.

At Army HQ in Adelsberg there was still hope that the endurance and stubbornness of the troops would prevail against this Italian onslaught. The Army's obstinate commander ordered in the afternoon that the compressed bridgehead should be held by energetic measures, but that any costly setback should be avoided because of the scantiness of the available forces. If it became necessary to pull back, then the eastern bank of the Isonzo should be held. All bridges upstream as far as the ones

at Salcano would in this case be blown up.

The situation at Pevma hadn't substantially changed by evening. Strong and fresh enemy units assembled on Mt Sabotino. The heights at Oslavija, the Podgora, and the fortified bridges were subjected to unending attacks; five Italian regiments stormed against the two last-named positions. Our diminished garrison (most of the battalions had less than half their authorized strength) displayed wonderful gallantry; this is all the more praiseworthy because the simplest soldier by this time must have recognized that the possibility of maintaining resistance in the bridgehead which had been stubbornly defended for so long was now at an end. In general the higher command echelons were no longer directing the fighting, and the entire weight of the gigantic struggle was borne by the few lower-level commanders who were still unwounded, and who had proved themselves in many battles. Also the artillery, which in the earlier fighting around the Görz bridgehead had substantially influenced the outcome, after the evening of 6 August was no longer in a position - because of the lack of ammunition - to provide meaningful support to the steadfast infantry. The handful of remaining serviceable guns in the bridgehead, which had been deployed in several positions for close-up and flanking fire, had long been silenced.<sup>57</sup> The few batteries east of the river stood constantly under a very heavy rain of shells from the much larger force of Italian artillery, which the capture of Mt Sabotino had provided with the best observation point overlooking the entire Görz area.

During the two days of enormous fighting in the bridgehead, the enemy opposite 62 ID at first limited their activity to lively artillery fire, that occasionally escalated into drumfire on the front from Globna to Zagora. Not until about 4:30 PM on 7 August did the Italian II Corps open a surprise infantry attack at Paljevo with strong forces; however, this operation was soon shattered in front of the trenches of IR # 22. Stricken by the machine guns of the Dalmatian regiment and by the batteries of

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57 According to the Chief of Staff of 58 ID at that time, Col. Ritter von Pohl, the available ammunition on 7 August 1916 was 40 rounds for each field and mountain cannon, 18 for each light howitzer, and 10 for each heavy howitzer. On 8 August the corresponding figures were 112, 56 and 30 rounds. This means that on 7 August our artillery effectively had no ammunition, and on 8 August they had very little. (Pohl, "Noch einmal der Fall von Görz", in the *Österr. Wehrzeitung* for 27 August 1926)

62 ID, the Italian attacking group fled back after suffering substantial casualties. Now the enemy artillery again opened a powerful new bombardment against Zagora-Paljevo and the strong point on Heights # 383; it continued until darkness fell.

The heavy fighting which also characterized the battle raging on the Karst south of Görz, which continued into the second day of the action, didn't make the picture of the situation any more favorable to Army HQ. From all parts of the front there were cries for reserves; there was a great shortage of manpower and ammunition. The last available battalions were on their way to the most seriously threatened sector (Görz); in the next few days the only units expected from the high command were two battalions of IR # 102, coming with the greatest possible haste from Tyrol. Thus the hope that Mt Sabotino could be recovered, or that the situation in the Görz bridgehead could be restored by some other means, had completely disappeared. Moreover, the front on the Doberdo plateau meanwhile had become brittle and was cracking.

On 7 August the high command decided to send 2 and 8 Mtn Bdes from Tyrol to 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ. Until they arrived and could intervene, several more days would elapse for the hard-pressed Isonzo front. Until then the important thing was to prevent the enemy from breaking through. Such an event would have dire consequences for the Italian theater of operations, particularly at a time when the Northeastern front was heavily engaged and there was danger of hostile intervention by Romania. It was therefore necessary to do everything possible to stabilize the situation in the southwest.

#### The decision to evacuate the bridgehead

Further resistance in the Görz bridgehead would now only substantially increase the casualties; under certain circumstances it could even lead to a catastrophe. These considerations led 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to the decision that the Görz bridgehead, after a year of heroic defense, would have to be evacuated. However, they hoped that the garrison would be able to offer resistance again directly on the eastern bank of the river. XVI Corps HQ was given orders to this effect in the late evening of 7 August. The decision of how long to remain in the Görz bridgehead and when to evacuate was delegated to GM Zeidler, commanding 58 ID, with the restriction that he wasn't to allow the fighting strength of the defenders to be worn down to their destruction.

Preparations to evacuate the bridgehead had already been initiated on 6 August. First all of the crossing points had been prepared for destruction. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, Division HQ had issued orders for a possible retreat, indicating that the bridges were to be left intact until the troops had crossed to the eastern bank, and stating how the new sector would be built. Batteries would be deployed in a "second position" (east of Görz). Behind the front the city was being systematically evacuated; the foremost - and most endangered - batteries had already been moved to their new positions.

The final hope - that Col. Noë's counterattack would improve the situation on the Podgora - wasn't realized. In the beginning he did gain some ground from Triangulation Point 240 in the direction of Hill # 284; however, due to the reduced strength of the units (the companies of LW IR 23 numbered just between 30 and 60 men) the attack ran to ground soon after midnight. There was no chance that it could succeed, since the Italians were constantly throwing new men into the fight.<sup>58</sup>

In the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> the enemy also recognized that the defenders couldn't resist much longer. The Duke of Aosta had visited the HQ of the attacking group and personally ordered G.Lt Capello to seek a decision on the next day. In the morning of 8 August the reinforced and already successful wings of VI Italian Corps would mount a pincers assault, seeking to envelop the remnants of the bridgehead garrison from the north and south. Capello intended to reach the Isonzo so that the crossing points, especially the bridges at Salcano, could be captured intact.

At exactly the same hour (1:30 AM on 8 August) when these orders were being issued in the enemy camp to the Italian divisions, GM Zeidler was compelled, with a heavy heart, to implement the evacuation of the bridgehead and to prepare for further resistance on the eastern bank of the Isonzo. Because of the difficulty in transmitting orders, the crossing of the river couldn't be completed under cover of darkness. Step by step the exhausted remnants of the heroic Division (not many more than 5000 men out of the original 18,000), withdrew to the eastern bank of the Isonzo while fighting against a larger enemy force that just kept increasing. They abandoned to the Italians the battlefield, which had been watered by their blood in many glorious defensive victories.

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58 Zingales, "Gorizia", p. 188

The last units in the bridgehead were three battalions of 121 Lst Inf Bde, who covered the withdrawal of the northern wing (4 Mtn Bde) to the eastern bank; these three battalions were engaged against three Italian divisions on the heights west of Pevma. At the same time several small battle groups of 4 Mtn Bde were offering desperate resistance on the stony slopes of Mt Sabotino against the enemy's thrust in the direction of the Salcano bridges. The garrisons of the fortified bridges, of the Podgora and of the Al Ponte sector (parts of 5 Mtn Bde and of 121 Lst Inf Bde) made their retreat over the permanent and temporary bridges with relative ease. Now the last troops of 121 Lst Inf Bde who were in contact with the enemy were ordered to make a fighting withdrawal over the river. During the morning they were able to reach the eastern bank to the west of Görz, but had heavy casualties; meanwhile the LW IR 22, attached to 121 Lst Inf Bde, also deployed along this position. The Isonzo bridges, except for one at Salcano, were blown up. However, the destruction of the highway bridge at Lucinico wasn't complete, so that it could still serve as a crossing point for infantry and cavalry.

Some guns had been deployed in the bridgehead on the western bank, just behind the battle lines, to provide flanking and direct support fire. Only six of them could be withdrawn. Of the others, three were destroyed in action, four were blown up, and nine had their breech mechanisms and sighting devices removed. Therefore just six usable guns fell into enemy hands. The two heavy batteries that had been stationed on the western edge of the city had already pulled back in the night of 6-7 August. The majority of the other batteries followed them behind the second position in the night of 7-8 August. Only one field howitzer and two and a half field cannon batteries remained on the plains south of Görz.

### **3. The battle on the Karst plateau of Doberdo (6-8 August)**

#### **a. XI Italian Corps attacks Mt S Michele on 6 August**

While the fighting by Görz reached a dramatic height, the battle was also in full flame on the Karst front. The Italian commanders regarded Mt S Michele, which dominated the Görz basin and the Karst plateau of Doberdo, as the southernmost bulwark of the bridgehead. Its capture would not only compel their opponents to abandon Görz, but also to evacuate the Karst positions west of the Vallone valley.

The thrust planned by the Italian XI Corps on the northern part of the Karst was intended primarily to support the operation at Görz and to prevent the Aus-Hung. units, especially their artillery, from intervening in the battle there. If Mt S Michele was captured, the Aus-Hung. positions in the plains south of Görz, and the city itself, would be seriously imperilled. The two Italian corps facing the Karst farther south (XIII and VII) would assist the offensive by XI Corps by continuing the operations they'd already begun on 4 and 5 August.

The principal Italian assault on the Karst was directed against the area from the mouth of the Wippach to Position 111 (on the road between Sagrado and Doberdo). Here the foremost lines of 20 Hon ID left the Isonzo next to Boschini and ran over the summits of Mt S Michele to the depression southwest of S Martino; the neighboring 17 ID held trenches on both sides of the Sagrado-Doberdo road as far as Mt dei sei Busi (inclusive).

Under the k.u.k. VII Corps, five and a half battalions of 81 Hon Inf Bde occupied 20 Hon ID's front; behind them a battalion of 39 Hon Inf Bde was stationed in the Vallone valley, and the rest of this Brigade was farther back in their camps on the Karst plateau north of Kostanjevica. 17 ID had the entire 33 Inf Bde (seven battalions) at the front; behind them 34 Inf Bde had one battalion at Doberdo and two in the Vallone trenches west of Oppachiasella. The other four battalions of 34 Bde (two each from IR # 43 and 46) were in the Kostanjevica-Sergeti area.

Opposite these four brigades the Italians were attacking with much larger forces. From the Isonzo at Peteano down to a point north of S Martino the Italian 22 ID was stationed with four brigades; farther south, to the Heights # 164, was 21 ID.

Besides these two units at the front, XI Corps had 23 ID in reserve.<sup>59</sup> On both sides of the Sagrado-Doberdo road and in the area to the south as far as Mt dei sei Busi the XIII Corps was attacking with a combined group and 31 ID in the first line.<sup>60</sup> Altogether the Italian attacking group opposite the k.u.k. VII Corps (not counting reserves) had ten or eleven brigades, some of them reinforced by Bersaglieri infantry and bicycle battalions.<sup>61</sup>

#### The assault by Italian artillery and infantry

As at Görz, the Italian artillery opened a powerful fire of all calibers at 7:00 AM on 6 August against the positions on the plateau and the areas where the reserves were stationed, as well as against the command posts and transportation routes. In a few hours the Italians' 76 light and 48 heavy batteries opposite the Karst front destroyed the product of months of painful labor, until in some places only traces remained of the defensive installations. Around noon the majority of the enemy guns were directed against the summits of Mt S Michele; in drumfire of unprecedented intensity, which was joined by trench mortars of the heaviest caliber, the enemy completed their destructive work in the area which they planned to penetrate. The mountain which was the lynchpin of the front for the Aus-Hung. VII Corps seemed ripe for attack by 4:00 PM.

Out of the impenetrable clouds of dust and smoke which engulfed the entire Karst, the Italian infantry now set forth in thick masses against the entire front of 20 Hon ID and against the northern wing of 17 ID. The enemy storming columns pushed into the trenches on the summits of Mt S Michele; they didn't meet much resistance from the defenders, many of whom they found buried alive or wounded in the caverns and other positions. The enemy detachments also reached our trenches on the northern slope of the mountain and south of S Martino. Only the right wing of 20 Hon ID held on, supported by well-aimed flanking fire from the batteries stationed in the Görz plain. Soon enemy groups were thrusting through the brittle front on the upper

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59 Zingales, "Görz", p. 196

60 "Le Medaglie d'oro", Vol. II (appendices after p. 42). Also Ministero della guerra, "Le Grandi Unità nella guerra Italo-asiatica 1915-1918" (Rome, 1926), Vol. I.

61 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The combined group in XIII Corps had 9 battalions. However, under XI Corps the extant Italian order of battle only lists three brigades in 22 ID rather than four (perhaps another brigade was temporarily attached?).

part of the ridge as far as the second line; when they arrived there, however, they didn't further exploit their initial success but began to bring their units to order in the conquered trenches and to call up reinforcements. The Italian infantry tried to roll up from the sides the parts of 81 Hon Inf Bde which were still in the foremost lines, but they were unsuccessful. Therefore it was possible to initiate preparations for a counterattack.

Archduke Joseph had meanwhile decided to recover Mt S Michele by deploying his entire Corps reserve. 17 ID would have to manage as well as possible with its own resources, since the situation on the northern wing of the Corps, where the enemy advance was threatening our artillery, required immediate attention. Already during the afternoon the Corps' reserve (two battalions each of IR # 43 and 46 and of Hon IR # 4) had been sent marching toward the Vallone valley. Around 6:15 PM they were ordered to prepare during the night for a concentric attack against the enemy who'd occupied Mt S Michele; it would be carried out at dawn. Until then the reserves of 20 Hon ID which had hurried to the scene would by themselves have to prevent the Italians from advancing further from Mt S Michele toward the east.

Just an hour after the penetration, half of a Honved battalion was able to drive the enemy from the eastern summit of the mountain with a daring thrust. Smaller reserve forces supported the fight at S Martino and by the group of 20 Hon ID which was almost cut off on the northern wing. Toward evening the last three battalions of the divisional reserve arrived at Cotici. Because the front was threatening to collapse at several points, 20 Hon ID HQ couldn't risk waiting to mount a coordinated counterattack against the most important sector by the total of four battalions, which were coming up gradually. Under the pressure of time, as each group of troops arrived they were hurled quickly into the fighting wherever the need happened to be greatest. Thus one battalion arrived just in time to throw back an enemy force which had already advanced toward Cotici; they captured 300 Italians and in a counterattack once more recovered the eastern summit of Mt S Michele (which meanwhile had been lost). Other reserve companies drove back the enemy who'd reached the Crnci brook, half way between S Martino and Cotici, then intervened in the battle which was burning hotly north of S Martino. Finally one of the last battalions to arrive carried out a heavy nighttime action, in which they succeeded in driving the Italians from the northern slope and restoring communications with the right wing of 20 Hon ID at Boschini. South of S Martino, which was retained despite very

heavy mass attacks, all the positions without exception remained in our hands down to Mt dei sei Busi. Although in some places on both sides of the road to Doberdo the Italians had penetrated the line, 17 ID drove them back by hastening reserves to the scene for counterattacks. They also took 400 men prisoner. Thus the Italians' eagerness to attack in this sector was considerably diminished before darkness fell.

Since Corps HQ had already used their entire reserve for the counterattack on Mt S Michele, GO Boroovic ordered that one regiment of 59 Inf Bde, which was stationed as a reserve behind FML Schenk's less-endangered sector, should be placed under VII Corps. By the morning of 7 August this unit (IR # 41) reached the area south of Kostanjevica, along with several of VII Corps' March companies.

On the southern wing of the Karst front on 6 August, the Italian VII Corps attacked our position at Selz, on the Monfalcone ridge and at Bagni after a strong bombardment that lasted for a day. The Italians made three attempts, mainly with 14 ID, to penetrate Heights # 121 and # 85, but they were defeated by the stubborn resistance of the k.u.k. 60 Brigade. More than 130 Italians were captured in these actions. Meanwhile the heavy Italian batteries constructed on the lagoons by the mouth of the Sdobba [Isonzo] bombarded the command posts of the higher HQ and important traffic junctions on the Karst plateau of Comen, especially the Nabresina railroad station.

5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which by the evening of 6 August had given up all their reserves except for LW IR # 20, had to fight to win time, holding the front as well as possible until the arrival of reinforcements. Only by exerting all their strength could they hope to survive this critical period of time. Therefore the Army commander expressed his will in an explicit command that the positions which had been defended so long and so successfully must continue to be held under all circumstances. However, even at the apparently confident Army HQ the customary belief in victory was this time shadowed by doubt that help from fresh units might not arrive in time. GM Anton Pitreich writes that: "The burden of responsibility lay heavy upon the Army commander in the evening of this day. Outwardly he displayed confidence that his own forces couldn't be beaten, but he could not be so sure within himself. He knew how his front had been weakened to the greatest possible extent for the benefit of the Monarchy's other threatened battlefields. Would his trust in his own resources finally prove to be an exaggerated miscalculation?"

**b. The last fighting around Mt S Michele on 7-8 August**7 August

The six battalions from the Corps reserve which VII Corps HQ prepared during the night of 6-7 August started their concentric counterattack as dawn was just breaking. Two battalions of IR 46 were to thrust from the south (out of the S Martino-Crnici area), while two battalions apiece from Hon IR 4 and IR 43 came from the east and (along the S Michele ridge) from the northeast; the objectives were the summits occupied by the enemy.

The latter group of four battalions overran the Italians with irresistible force and recovered the eastern summit as well as the adjacent parts of the foremost line on both sides. However, the battalions of IR 46 were barely able to cross the line S Martino-Crnici in the glare of Italian searchlights which enabled the enemy to deliver heavy flanking fire from Heights # 197 and from the batteries at Sdraussina. The men could only reach the second line, which ran approximately along the S Martino-Cotici carriage road, where they dug in.

By daybreak the enemy turned with all their strength against the northernmost four battalions on the eastern summit, who were still unsupported on either side and didn't have secure communications with the rear area. After a short but very intense bombardment, two fresh Italian regiments (from a brigade which hitherto had been in reserve) attacked the front and flank of the advanced group. VII Corps' batteries were unable to provide sufficient support to the defenders because communications were interrupted and because there was a temporary shortage of ammunition. The gallant Magyar and Romanian battalions of IR 43 and Hon IR 4 had to again evacuate the eastern summit of Mt S Michele, but held on fast in the Dolinen which made up a supporting line on the reverse slope. Here they had some protection against the enemy's overwhelming artillery and got some well-executed help from their own; they prevented the larger enemy force from advancing any further.

The attempt to recover Mt S Michele had failed. Perhaps a second counterattack by the attached IR 41 and additional Corps reserves, if carefully prepared, could have broken through. However, with the available forces a prolonged occupation of Mt S Michele was hardly possible. Therefore no further attempt was

made to decisively change the situation. However, the counter-attack had at least averted the immediate danger in this area and prevented a further enemy advance to the east.

At S Martino and in the sector of 17 ID repeated Italian attacks collapsed under the defenders' artillery and machine gun fire. At points which the enemy managed to penetrate they were quickly thrown out again in hand-to-hand fighting.

South of Mt dei sei Busi troops of 14 Italian ID thrust against Heights # 85 in the early morning hours; they were pushed back in a counterattack by 60 Inf Bde. For the rest of the day the enemy was content here to just heavily bombard the positions.

Although the k.u.k. VII Corps hadn't recovered Mt S Michele on 7 August, they had put an end to the immediate danger of a breakthrough in this most important part of the Karst; the enemy didn't attempt to cross the crest of the mountain toward the east. The intervening space between the Italian lines on the summit and our new positions on the reverse slope could be easily observed, and so the Aus-Hung. batteries kept it under destructive fire. Therefore the situation of 20 Hon ID was for the time being unaltered.

5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ had no more reserves available and couldn't honor Archduke Joseph's request at noon on 7 August for reinforcements. Bearing in mind the situation at Görz, GO Boroevic had instead ordered that everything should be done to restore the situation in 20 Hon ID's sector with the resources already available. Only in the evening of this day was it decided to send the first reinforcements, when they arrived, to VII Corps; these would be two battalions of IR # 102 from Tyrol, which were coming to Comen, and Battalion III/86 of 7 Mtn Bde, which XV Corps was able to send from the Tolmein area because they were not under attack.

Already during 7 August the enemy had tried to exploit their success of the day before on the summit of Mt S Michele by pushing into the S Martino area. Since a further advance over Mt S Michele was unsuccessful, HQ of XI Italian Corps sent two fresh brigades through Sdraussina to support the front of 22 ID.<sup>62</sup>

### 8 August

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62 Zingales, "Gorizia", p. 197

On 8 August the fighting reached its peak around the ruins of S Martino, where the lines which had been pulled back onto the eastern slope of Mt S Michele linked up to those which had existed earlier.

The Italians opened the operation in the early morning hours with two strong attacks from the summit of Mt S Michele; both collapsed with heavy losses in front of the new line of resistance on the eastern slope. Italian thrusts on the northern slope of the mountain (southeast of Heights # 124) were also repulsed.

To back up 20 Hon ID, which by now had suffered casualties of half their authorized strength, a battalion of the Corps' reserve (I/41) went to the Cotici area. The rest of IR 41 moved ahead in the Vallone valley next to Devetaki.

After it was learned early on the 8<sup>th</sup> that the Görz bridgehead was being evacuated, the XI Italian Corps began to assault S Martino with fresh troops, starting at 10:00 AM. By 9:00 PM the new attacks had collapsed with bloody casualties in front of the positions of the "Szekesfehervar" Hon IR 17; then the heavy fighting died out. The attempt to break through at S Martino had failed, and all positions were retained. South of S Martino the Italians left the front of 17 ID undisturbed after their misfortunes on the preceding days. Also in front of 9 ID at Selz and Monfalcone the enemy restricted their activities to two weak infantry assaults plus sudden strong bursts of artillery fire; these actions had no affect on the situation.

Meanwhile however the position of XVI Corps had taken a turn that would have a decisive effect on further operations on the Karst plateau.

Until the afternoon of 8 August the commander of 20 Hon ID, GM von Lukachich, still intended to make a final attempt to recover the summits of Mt S Michele in the night of 8-9 August, which would have enabled 58 ID to hold onto the eastern bank of the Isonzo. This plan had to be abandoned for good, when it was learned that XVI Corps was evacuating the Isonzo bank. Thus the northern flank of VII Corps would become exposed and placed in a precarious situation. Furthermore, the reinforcements which had been assigned to VII Corps for the attack on Mt S Michele were now diverted into the Wippach valley.

In the evening of 8 August all reserves still held by VII Corps were hastily sent to occupy the left bank of the Wippach,

ensuring the safety of the connection with the left wing of XVI Corps on the northern edge of the Karst plateau. One battalion of these Corps reserves would support the northern wing of 20 Hon ID at the mouth of the Wippach. Four March Battalions were directed to the Merna area, where they would guard the Wippach and maintain communications with 58 ID on the eastern bank of the Vertojbica.

#### **4. The crisis of the battle**

##### **a. Unfavorable situation on the Isonzo by Görz on 8 August; occupation of the second position east of the city**

Until noon on 8 August GO Borojevic had hoped that with reinforcements brought from the entire area of his Army he could stabilize the situation by Görz long enough so that he wouldn't have to give up the city, which was an objective of the Italians especially for political reasons. Therefore he ordered that the eastern bank of the Isonzo was to be held under all circumstances. Further reinforcements would be sent here from other parts of the front.

But now the Army commander's attention was focused mainly on Mt S Michele, which was the key point for the further defense of the Isonzo. He placed the rest of the reserves from 9 ID's sector (two battalions of IR 24 with HQ of 59 Inf Bde) under HQ of VII Corps.

After the evacuation of the bridgehead in the morning of 8 August the weak remnants of 58 ID occupied the eastern bank of the Isonzo, which hadn't been prepared for prolonged defense. To support them the Bukovina LW IR # 22 was inserted in the center of the Division's front between the bridge at Pevma and the communications bridge at Grafenberg. Three especially diminished battalions from the evacuated bridgehead (III/69, k.k. Lst Inf Bn 75 and a March Bn of LW IR 23) were ordered to guard the second position east of Görz, and one battalion (k.k. Lst Bn IV/39) was in reserve in the area of Kemperlisce (next to the road and railroad in the Wippach valley). The remnants of k.u. Lst IR 2, which had been the last to leave the bridgehead and weren't in condition to fight, were taken from the front and

sent to rebuild in the Cernizza area.<sup>63</sup>

Except for the area immediately next to the city of Görz, where the number of possible crossing points was greatest and therefore special care had to be taken to secure the eastern bank, the Isonzo between Salcano and the mouth of the Wippach was thus covered by just a thin chain of outposts manned by the remnants of the bridgehead garrison. In this season the river south of Görz was no real barrier, and could be waded almost everywhere. Here in the St Andrä sector the k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalion VI/30 were stationed with their right wing next to the Lucinico bridge, which they were supposed to finish destroying. In the adjacent sector to the south - from Salcano to the mouth of the Wippach - the k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalion IV/26 were still holding their original positions along the bank of the Isonzo.

Prolonged defense of the positions on the bank upstream from St Andrä, which had scarcely been prepared and had an inadequate garrison, would have been possible only if there was strong artillery support; even if this were the case, casualties would be heavy. When the battle started our artillery was already too weak to contest the Italian offensive, delivered with so much greater strength; the situation had only worsened since 6 August. Some guns had been lost in the bridgehead, and the majority of the artillery had just switched their positions. Perhaps because it hadn't been possible to salvage the telephone wires from the first position, there was a lack of communications equipment; therefore it was very difficult to coordinate the fire of the batteries now deployed behind the second position.

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63 The 121 Lst Inf Bde had entered the fighting with about 3000 riflemen. When its units came out of the bridgehead, the k.u. Lst IR 2 had 150 men left, k.u. Lst Bn III/31 had about as many and k.k. Lst Bn IV/39 had 500. The Brigade had lost a total of 2200 men (75% of its strength); half of these casualties had been killed or wounded. Through early 8 August the Brigade had taken 1900 Italian prisoners, who belonged to eight different regiments.

The Italians cross the Isonzo near Görz

Since the early morning hours the massive Italian artillery continuously kept all the crossing-points over the river, the entire eastern bank, and the city of Görz under very heavy fire. Everywhere the steep slopes on the western banks were higher than those on the opposite side, where prolonged occupation by the garrison was impossible. The troops were totally exhausted after fighting day and night in unbroken combat since 6 August, and their battle positions weren't well-sited. Protected by powerful artillery fire, the enemy infantry now swarmed in crowds over the Oslavija Heights and the Podgora toward the Isonzo. The Italians were an easy target, and did suffer casualties from our batteries; but there weren't enough guns - and above all not enough ammunition - to stop them.

There was an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the highway bridge at Lucinico, which had only been damaged by the first explosion. The gallant pioneers were working under very heavy fire from artillery, and also suffered casualties from nearby Italian machine guns.

Around noon a battalion of 12 Italian ID waded over the river at a shallow point where the water level was very low, and established a foothold on the eastern bank. Covered by smoke and dust, further detachments of Italian infantry later crossed over on the bridge, which was still passable, and set up a small bridgehead along the river's edge.

The diminished battalions of 58 ID were deployed only in small groups at the crossing points and along the intervening parts of the bank; they were massed more strongly in the most important areas. It proved impossible to concentrate these groups against the points of penetration because this would have left wide stretches of the river unguarded. k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalion VI/30 immediately counterattacked at the highway bridge, but their commander and many officers fell in the action. After a short time our own batteries opened an effective fire on the enemy who'd dug in along the eastern bank, but new Italian units were constantly arriving. Our artillery fought very well. However, as so often in these difficult days, despite the easy enemy targets and the great need of our own infantry (who were expending their last strength) the gunners had to be sparing with their scanty ammunition.

Along the front upstream from Lucinico there was no decisive change in the situation on 8 August; the enemy reached the

western bank in the afternoon with strong units but didn't hazard a crossing attempt. However, matters became critical at the two bridges south of Lucinico, and farther downstream. On the 5 km long sector between the railroad bridge and the mouth of the Wippach, which now was held by just two Landsturm battalions, in the afternoon the enemy forded and swam over the river. Farther south, at St Andrä, they brought bridging material down to the bank. Constantly bringing up fresh units, the Italians occupied the eastern bank of the Isonzo and pushed back the weak Hungarian Landsturm somewhat.

In accordance with repeated orders of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ that the eastern Isonzo bank was to be held regardless of losses, 58 ID HQ instructed the commander of 5 Mtn Bde, Col. Mitlacher, to throw the Italians back over the river.<sup>64</sup> The Brigade assigned this task to three battalions - one from LW IR 22 (which came from Görz), the k.k. Lst Bn IV/39, and Bn I/41 (of VII Corps, which had come from the Vallone valley and was ordered to march through Savogna to St Andrä). Because of the deterioration of the situation at Görz, XVI Corps HQ simultaneously alerted LW IR 20, which had reached Cernizza after a night march, and sent them to the eastern edge of the Panowitz Woods. The March formations of XVI Corps would go to Schön Pass and k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalion VII/4 (which was arriving by railroad from Herzegovina) would go to Vogersko.

Meanwhile HQ of 5 Mtn Bde had begun the combined attack toward the crossing points with the troops at their disposal. But even before these men reached the battlefield, Col. Noë - who was in charge of the southern part of Görz - pushed the enemy back to the river with his Dalmatians. Toward evening it seemed that the Italians, who at first had tried to approach the city, would for now just hold onto the railroad embankment between the bridge and Görz's southern station. A more determined enemy, with such large forces, would already have reached Görz long ago, or advanced as far as St Peter.

#### Retreat of 58 ID to the second position

By 6:00 PM it was clear that the exhausted troops could only maintain the very costly resistance on the river bank for a few more hours. Each hour of fighting involved heavy casualties. The oncoming reinforcements (5 battalions and 13 March companies) wouldn't be able to intervene until night, and it

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64 HQ of 58 ID had moved in the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> from St Peter to Vogersko; HQ of 5 Mtn Bde had stayed in St Peter.

couldn't be expected that these units could decisively improve the situation. The position on the Isonzo could be held only with the support of a powerful force of artillery equal to the enemy's, that would have been able to check the Italian infantry, suppress the enemy batteries, and effectively bombard the Italians' approach routes and assembly points. The position was rendered even more difficult by the fact that all supplies sent to the fighting troops had to be brought over terrain which was everywhere visible to the enemy and subjected to their well-aimed fire. When 58 ID HQ asked FZM Wurm (commanding XVI Corps) to be allowed to withdraw to the second position, he therefore passed the request on to Army HQ. GO Boroevic agreed, and ordered that the retreat begin at 10:00 PM.

By evening the enemy was firmly established with several battalions east of the highway and railroad bridges. The gap in the Isonzo defenses was widening on both sides, and in the south reached to Savogna. Opposite the bend in the river west of Salcano the enemy began to prepare for another crossing.

Already during the afternoon, before the arrival of the order to withdraw, the HQ of 58 ID had taken measures to ensure the security of the second position. They were concerned for the safety of their weak force (at most 6000 men with a few guns) on the 12 km long front between Mt Sabotino and the mouth of the Wippach, and therefore sent the scanty reserves and some of the reinforcements to the second line. However, the first line on the Isonzo was still being held, and preparations were being made to close the gap by St Andr a in a systematic night-time counterattack by 5 Mtn Bde.

The second position had been occupied earlier by some worn out battalions of 58 ID. To support the troops still fighting on the Isonzo, these battalions were joined by LW IR 20 and the Hungarian Landsturm Infantry Battalion VII/4, which arrived in the evening. Furthermore, IR 102 (with 2 battalions) came up to this line during the night of 8-9 August; they had been sent from VII Corps in place of IR 24. The batteries stationed between the Isonzo and the second position changed positions during the night.

Around 11:00 PM the HQ of 58 ID received the order to retreat from the Isonzo to the second position, which they were to defend very stubbornly. Neither HQ nor the troops were unprepared. 5 Mtn Bde HQ canceled preparations for the counterattack on the Italian bridgehead at St Andr a. During the night of 8-9 August the quiet and orderly withdrawal was carried

out without noteworthy interference from the enemy. The last detachment still on the Isonzo's west bank - II Battalion of LW IR 37 in the Salcano bridgehead - evacuated their position; sappers from 62 ID effectively destroyed the wide spans of the stone railroad bridge. A proud product of Austrian engineering expertise sank into the waters of the river.<sup>65</sup>

North of Görz the 62 ID didn't have to withstand any infantry attacks during the day. The front of 209 Lst Inf Bde was subjected to artillery fire, which in the evening escalated to drumfire before dying out.

The defenders of the Görz bridgehead had covered themselves with eternal glory during the three days of fighting, and displayed the highest soldierly virtues. In these bitter hours they were given admiring recognition by their commander.

#### **b. The decision to evacuate the Doberdo Karst plateau**

The enemy's advance over the Isonzo in the afternoon of 8 August could have led to a breakthrough, with unforeseeable consequences for the entire military situation of the Monarchy. Withdrawal of the front to the second position in the Wippach valley east of Görz not only made the defenders' line longer (and hence weaker), but also placed the southern wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Karst plateau in danger of envelopment from the Görz plains. The Italian commanders had a chance to concentrate their overwhelming forces for a rapid thrust into the Wippach basin; they could overrun FZM Wurm's troops - who'd lost a third of their strength in the fighting to date - before reinforcements could arrive from Tyrol; the latter weren't expected until the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> at the earliest. The collapse of the front on the Karst and on the Bainsizza plateau could lead to a catastrophe. Creation of a new front, pulled back from the Isonzo north of Görz in an area where there were currently relatively few troops, would require the commitment of significantly more units than the k.u.k. high command had available in all the theaters of operation.

Such a defeat could be avoided only if the new front in the Wippach valley could be held until the reinforcements arrived.

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65 See Scheda in the Austrian portion of "Das Ehrenbuch der Feldeisenbahner" (Berlin, 1931), p. 340; also Veith, "Der Isonzoverteidigung bis zum Falle von Görz" (in "Mil. wiss. Mitt.", Vienna; 1931 edition, p. 1059).

This in turn was possible only if the front on the Doberdo plateau, which jutted ahead far to the west, was systematically pulled back to a shorter line. This would save troops and ensure a firm and direct connection with the position of XVI Corps in the Wippach valley.

And so in the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> GO Boroevic decided to systematically evacuate Mt S Michele and the adjacent positions to the south, and to base the defense on the eastern edge of the Vallone valley. Around 8:30 PM Army HQ issued orders to implement this decision. Regarding his plans, GO Boroevic sent the following report to the high command:

"The combat strength of the garrison of the Görz bridgehead has sunk by 66%, and of 20 Hon ID by 50%. Since the enemy was able to ford the Isonzo today with two battalions south of Görz, and since the river in most sectors is no barrier, the direct defense of its long bank is an illusion which would lead to the destruction of the group. Army HQ has thrown all available reserves into the Wippach valley. For the time being these units, along with 58 ID, are sufficient to hold the second position until reinforcements arrive. XVI Corps has been ordered to pull the bridgehead garrison back to the second positions, and to just watch over the Isonzo. Tonight VII Corps, starting with the artillery, will start to shift into the area east of the Vallone (as far as a point north of the Crni hrib) and FML Schenk's Group into the area east of the line Crni hrib-Debeli vrh. We expect the withdrawal to the prepared second position to be finished by the night of 9-10 August. I ask you to consider whether the Army should not get further reinforcements, since new Italian units continue to arrive from the Tyrol front (to date we have identified seven brigades); the stubbornness of the fighting here, the fact that attacks against the more easily-defended parts of the front have slackened off, and other signs indicate that the enemy is seeking to win a popular success. Currently our 13½ brigades (of which 5 hardly count any more) are opposed by over 26 enemy brigades and a significantly larger force of heavy artillery. Although my decision was difficult, I believe it was necessary so that we can continue to fight with a prospect of success."

The AOK approved the decision of the Army commander. Since getting the first reports of the serious situation in the Görz bridgehead and on Mt S Michele they had been fully aware of the weakness of the Isonzo defenses; already on 7 August they had ordered the immediate sending of 8 and 2 Mtn Bdes, plus one

battalion each of 3 and 57 ID (I/50 and I/48) from Tyrol to the Isonzo.

On the 8<sup>th</sup>, GO Archduke Eugene's Army Group was informed that the situation of 5<sup>th</sup> Army would make it necessary for him to send further units in the next few days. Army Group HQ was expected to provide especially well-proven troops in divisional strength; they would start to move after the transfer of 2 Mtn Bde was complete. Furthermore, the AOK decided to send two battalions of 48 ID from the northern theater of operations to 5<sup>th</sup> Army's sector at the same time.

Despite the difficult situation, Army HQ's order to pull back the front was surprising and unwanted to the sector commanders on the Karst. In the short summer night it would be hardly possible to carry it out immediately without suffering significant losses, at least of guns and equipment. At the request of VII Corps, Army HQ therefore altered the instructions, so that the infantry wouldn't start to move until the night of 9-10 August. Only the artillery, especially the medium and heavy batteries, would begin immediately to shift their positions; this would be accomplished in stages, so that some artillery fire would continue without interruption. It would be possible to also bring back most of the ammunition and other supplies stored on the Doberdo plateau and in the Vallone valley. Along with the troops of VII Corps, the adjacent right wing of FML Schenk's sector would also withdraw in the night of 9-10 August; they would evacuate the front Mt dei sei Busi # 118-Mt Cosich # 113 and go back to the line Debeli vrh # 140-Crni hrib # 164. This new line would remain linked on the left with the old positions running along the Monfalcone ridge down to the south (which were being retained), and on the right with VII Corps' new position along the Vallone valley near Nova Vas.

### **c. Cadorna's plan to continue the attack over the Isonzo**

From the Italian military literature it can be deduced that Cadorna had "considerable doubts about the success" of the attack on the Görz bridgehead and that "his original plan went no further than to occupy the west bank of the Isonzo with VI Corps."<sup>66</sup> In fact the high command had made no systematic preparations for continuing the offensive over the river, and had even turned down a suggestion by the commander of the main

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66 Capello, Vol. I, p. 300

striking group (G.Lt Capello) to have cavalry and bicyclists ready to pursue in case their opponents did withdraw over the Isonzo. All the evidence indicates that the Italian supreme HQ regarded a quick thrust past Görz into the Wippach valley, which under the circumstances could have led to the immediate collapse of the entire Aus-Hung. Isonzo front, as too risky before the heights north of Görz and Mt S Michele on the Karst had been secured. This hesitation may have been largely due to the fact that the Italian generals were completely in the dark about the weak condition of the hastily-prepared positions of the k.u.k. XVI Corps east of Görz.

Not until the afternoon of 8 August, when Capello's leading troops were already established on the west bank of the river and feeling their way toward Görz and the adjacent plain, was the Italian high command convinced that their opponents wouldn't be able to defend the line right next to the river, and that the successes they had won to date with relative ease could be exploited with a pursuit aimed at wide-ranging objectives. 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army was instructed that VI Corps should thrust energetically at their opponents, who "were beginning to fall apart" and had "no reserves" available; they should pursue into the sector Mt S Gabriele-Panowitz Woods-S Marco-Ovcja Draga. The three southern corps should overcome Aus-Hung. resistance on the Karst plateau and advance to the Vallone valley as well as along the Wippach. The advance into the Görz basin would be accompanied by light artillery and "should come to a halt only when confronted by impregnable barriers."<sup>67</sup>

In carrying out the thrust onto the east bank of the Isonzo, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, which hitherto hadn't taken part in the offensive, was assigned a decisive role. Taking advantage of the distress of the k.u.k. XVI Corps in the Görz sector, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would defeat this Corps' weak force at Plava and, in conjunction with the left wing of Aosta's army, thrust over the Kuk # 611 toward Mt Santo, which simultaneously was to be taken by parts of VI Corps from the south. The entire artillery of II Corps and the medium and heavy batteries of VI Corps (which were still in position north of the Piumica valley and west of the evacuated Görz bridgehead) would prepare for this attack with a bombardment. IV Corps would pin down Aus-Hung. units at Tolmein with diversionary attacks.

Cadorna's concept was to hurl into the fight all units already on hand, plus reinforcements which were still arriving. The

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67 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 287

objective was to first push the front of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army back to the line Idria River (as far as the Tribusa valley 2 km east of the Cepovan valley) - Ternova plateau - Modrasovec # 1305 - Dornberg - Eisernes Tor - Trstelj # 643 - Hermada # 323.

#### **d. The "missed opportunity" to break through the Aus-Hung. front**

In the afternoon of 8 August a group of mobile troops was formed behind the southern wing of VI Italian Corps, after a new demand by the Corps commander.<sup>68</sup> Their mission was to cross the Isonzo as soon as possible, fall upon the "fully broken" Aus-Hung. troops and "capture the opposing artillery."<sup>69</sup> This pursuit group assembled by evening and crossed the Isonzo south of Lucinico soon after midnight. However, at daybreak the squadrons had already stumbled upon rear guards from 58 ID at the outer works of the new position, just two to three kilometers on the other side of the river; they couldn't break through.

For the 9<sup>th</sup>, Cadorna had ordered Capello's main body to cross to the eastern bank and attack the new Aus-Hung. positions. For this purpose, in the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army divided the six divisions which hitherto had made up VI Corps into two corps. The 24, 43 and 45 ID stayed with VI Corps; the 11, 12 and 48 ID now formed VIII Corps. Both were placed under G.Lt Capello.

The planned operations were:

- . II Corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would strike the Kuk ridge from the Plava bridgehead with 3 ID;
- . VI Corps would have 45 ID (five brigades strong) attack the Mt Santo - Mt S Gabriele - Sv Katarina front; 43 ID farther south would advance on both sides of the Görz cemetery and through the Castagnavizza monastery toward the forest-covered ridge in the Panowitz Wood;
- . VIII Corps would send 48 ID through Görz against the chain of hills south of the highway through the Rosental (# 171) and San Marco (# 227), and 12 ID into the plain against the positions on the hills east of Vertojba;
- . A division apiece from the latter two corps (24 and 11 ID)

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68 The group had 11 squadrons, 2 bicycle battalions, 2 platoons of machine guns on armored cars, and 1 battery (Tosti, p. 181).

69 Zingales, "Gorizia", pp. 191 ff.

would assemble on the eastern bank of the Isonzo, south of S Mauro and at St Andr a respectively; they would prepare a bridgehead to back up the other units.

This plan of attack, which we learned about from captured documents, wasn't carried out successfully on the 9<sup>th</sup> because unforeseen delays hindered the advance of most of the units before they could develop a general offensive. The Italian commanders were already underestimating their opponents, whose fighting strength seemed to have been broken; but instead of launching an immediate and ruthless pursuit, as demanded in Cadorna's order, both VI and VIII Corps came to a halt as they attempted to cross the river on this decisive day. The reasons given on the Italian side for the difficulties in crossing the river (and repairing the bridges) were the unfavorable terrain on the banks, the lack of roads, the strong current in the stream, and - primarily - the fire which the Aus-Hung. artillery directed against the area. However, it seems that the Italian corps commanders and also 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ slowed down the crossing of the majority of their units, despite the constant urging of the high command, because the troops they'd already sent ahead to pursue and scout sent back very contradictory reports during the day. Along with events that unfolded on Mt S Michele in the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>, this problem led the generals to fear that they might be hit by a large-scale counterattack as they crossed the river. Not until the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> did they receive sufficient confirmation that the Austro-Hungarians were settling into a second position.

In Capello's group, eight battalions from VIII Corps were the first to advance over the Isonzo early on the 9<sup>th</sup>, at the crossing points which had already been prepared. Their mission was to occupy G orz and the heights immediately east of the city. They were immediately subjected to heavy fire, which compelled them to advance cautiously. Also in VI Corps' area only small parts of 45 ID were able to cross the Isonzo at Salcano. They stayed in place until the evening of this day, because the slopes of Mt Santo and of Mt S Gabriele were occupied by opponents "who were by no means shaken up, but rather very watchful."<sup>70</sup>

#### Consolidation of the Austro-Hungarian defenses

The majority of both VI and VIII Corps still remained west of the Isonzo on this day. The bloodied and worn-out troops

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70 Zingales, "Gorizia", p. 194

guarding the Görz area could thank this omission for the fact that they could enjoy at least a few hours rest in the new, hastily prepared positions after three days of costly fighting. They stood at the very limits of their strength; lack of nourishment and sleep during the combats to date would have threatened them with complete physical collapse if the enemy had once more attacked using fresh forces from their numerous reserves. Since the Austro-Hungarians themselves had no reserves worth mentioning behind their new front, any such attack would almost surely have led to a catastrophe. However, the transfer of the defenders of the Görz sector to the second line had been carried out by early on the 9<sup>th</sup> without interference from the Italians. By tarrying for one day on the eastern bank of the Isonzo they'd made it possible for LW IR 20 and IR 102 to come up; these regiments now provided a firm foundation for the second position. The HQ of XVI Corps had moved from Dornberg to Selo.

In the evening before, XVI Corps HQ had already ordered a new organization for the Wippach valley sector. The authority of 58 ID, with 4 Mtn Bde and the troops of 86 LW Inf Bde, was restricted to the northern part of their original front, from Mt S Gabriele (whose summit lay behind the front) down to Heights # 171 southeast of Görz. HQ of 43 LW ID, with parts of 121 Lst Inf Bde and of 5 Mtn Bde, plus IR 102, took over the adjacent part of the front running south as far as the Wippach at Merna.

And so the unexpected pause in the fighting was advantageous to the defenders; every day, every hour was a significant gain. But the soldiers in front of Görz were still faced with a difficult time before the approaching reinforcements could enable them to overcome the crisis of the battle.

Throughout 9 August Capello's six divisions - behind which yet another, the 46 ID, was getting ready to fight - failed to advance despite the ever more strident orders of their high command. Meanwhile the II Italian Corps carried out its instructions to launch a flanking thrust from the Plava bridgehead. Their opponents, defending the sector between Globna and Zagora, were three battalions under the k.u. 209 Lst Inf Bde. Two of these battalions were actually Common Army units (III/22 and II/52) attached from 58 ID. Since the war started almost all the Italian plans of attack included as important objectives a breakthrough at Plava and a thrust over the Kuk in the direction of the three "holy mountains" north of Görz - Mt Santo, Mt S Gabriele and Mt S Daniele. This time also it was hoped that the half-open door on the road to Trieste

could be forced open here.

Artillery preparation for the assault began at 7:30 AM. The bombardment of the areas of Paljevo and Zagora soon escalated to drumfire which destroyed the barriers and shelters. Around 1:00 PM the fire reached a very great intensity; the center of the Zagora position was engulfed in flame, and the attack was awaited at any moment. However, the infantry assault didn't open until 7:30 PM, after the bombardment had lasted for twelve hours. Until 9:30 PM the Italians made four attacks against the hotly-contested Heights # 383 and three against the Zagora sector. In the second thrust on Zagora, parts of 3 ID's attacking group (of five battalions) broke into our lines. Without any support, Battalion III/22 threw the enemy out again with a brilliant counterattack. The third attack collapsed completely, with heavy casualties, in front of the trenches of this gallant battalion. Battalion II/52, which held onto the strong point on Heights # 383 against all the Italian attacks, was equally successful.

Therefore on this critical day the danger to the k.u.k. XVI Corps was dissipated by the stubbornness of their battle-tested troops. The misfortune of 3 Italian ID at Plava on the 9<sup>th</sup>, since they were attacking in isolation, was due also to the inactivity of the divisions on the northern wing of Aosta's Army, which according to Cadorna's orders were supposed to simultaneously strike north from the narrow part of the valley at Salcano.

#### **e. Events on the Karst plateau on 9 August**

The evacuation of the Doberdo plateau, ordered by 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ on 8 August because of the situation of XVI Corps, was initially to be completed by the k.u.k. VII Corps in the night of 9-10 August. After Archduke Joseph's objections to the immediate withdrawal of the front were heeded, the prince began the re-deployment of the artillery, especially the medium and heavy batteries, behind the new position in the night of 8-9 August. The rest of the artillery wouldn't withdraw until the night of 9-10 August, while the infantry took up a new "position" which hitherto had been called the third line. It ran from the loop in the Wippach at Merna through Pri Stanti and climbed up to Heights # 212, which dominated the northern exit from the Vallone valley. From here it ran, bending back somewhat, along the smooth slopes west of Lokvica; Oppachiasella was left ahead of the front, which extended to Heights # 208 at Nova Vas. From

these heights, bending at almost a right angle, the line stretched to the point where it linked up with the second line of 9 ID (Sector III.b) on the Crni hrib # 164 southeast of Doberdo. The portion of the front between Heights # 208 and the Crni hrib had no prepared barriers or trenches, and would have to be readied for defense. The shelters already available on the eastern edge of the Vallone valley were lower than the Doberdo plateau; therefore it was intended that they would be used only as an advanced outpost with a small garrison to cover the new battle line.

Just as the enemy wanted to secure the heights north of Görz by a thrust at Plava, they planned to support the southern wing of the attacking group at Görz by continuing the assault on Mt S Michele on 9 August.

Before the Italians started to move, around 8:00 AM the Hon IR "Nagyvarad" # 4, acting on their own initiative and without artillery preparation, launched a surprise thrust of their own. In an operation of unparalleled boldness they once again recovered the eastern summit of Mt S Michele. Fearing that this was the start of a major planned counterattack by VII Corps, the enemy immediately directed fire from all their batteries onto this sector and sent all available reserves toward Mt S Michele. The gallant Regiment soon had to give way to overwhelming pressure, especially since most of our artillery had already moved back and couldn't provide sufficient support. However, the spirited action had hobbled the Italians, who made no further attacks on the remaining positions on the summit.

On the other hand, the extreme right wing of 20 Hon ID - which was still anchored on the Isonzo - was the target of enemy attacks. After a very strong bombardment by artillery and trench mortars, and repeated mass attacks by 23 ID with three specially-picked brigades against the flank and rear, in the early afternoon the Italians finally penetrated into the second line of the northern wing of 20 Hon ID on the northern slope of Mt S Michele. Here the defenders continued to offer gallant resistance, along with the troops hanging onto the mountain's eastern slope, until the time scheduled for the withdrawal. All further attempts by the enemy to break through on the northern slope of Mt S Michele were in vain. Even the limited success gained by the Italians was due to the fact that the defenders were no longer supported by the batteries which earlier had been stationed in the plain north of the Wippach. To protect the northern flank of the VII Corps, during the 9<sup>th</sup> the bridges over the lower course of the Wippach at Rubbia and Merna were blown

up, and the southern bank was occupied by March formations of 17 ID.

Throughout the day the Karst front, down to the sea, stood under very heavy fire from artillery and trench mortars. In the afternoon the Italian 21 ID attacked toward S Martino, where Hon IR # 17 withstood a total of nine new assaults; these attacks failed, as did those which XIII and VII Corps directed against the positions of our 17 and 9 ID. The enemy finally ceased their fruitless efforts around 7:00 PM. When darkness fell the storm of the battle everywhere stopped raging.

The evacuation of the Doberdo plateau by the k.u.k. VII Corps began as ordered after midnight; it wasn't perceived by the enemy. Rear guards stayed back on the evacuated line from Mt S Michele through S Martino and the heights of Mt dei sei Busi to Mt Cosich. They would conceal the retreat and later would delay the enemy advance.

"Completely unconquered, the VII Corps was forced to evacuate the battlefield which had been watered by the blood of many thousands of their best men. However, for all times Mt S Michele will remain a prominent memorial in the history of the k.u.k. armed forces, and especially in the story of Hungary's gallant warriors."<sup>71</sup>

#### **f. The k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army after occupation of the second position**

Further heavy fighting was expected in the Plava area based on the events of 9 August. Because of the site of the new position, the southern wing of 62 ID - and especially Mt S Gabriele - was of heightened importance. For the Italians, thrusts into the Wippach valley would remain dangerous as long as they weren't in possession of this bastion of the new defensive front, which dominated the Görz basin. Moreover, if Mt S Gabriele were lost, the Aus-Hung. positions on the Dol Ridge and the entire existing front on the western edge of the high ground around Bainsizza would become untenable. This would substantially worsen 5<sup>th</sup> Army's already critical situation; therefore Army HQ already began to take appropriate measures here on 9 August.

But the leadership was still beset by the tormenting lack of

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71 Anton Pitreich (in his unpublished manuscript)

reserves. Of the reinforcements authorized by the high command, by 9 August just two battalions of IR 102 (of 9 ID) had arrived in the battle area from Tyrol; contrary to their original assignment to VII Corps, Army HQ sent them to Bukovica and placed them under XVI Corps. The rest of the units coming from Tyrol were still on the railroads. Because of the new dangers and the enhanced importance of the Bainsizza plateau, these reinforcements from the Tyrol Army Group would have to be sent to the most-threatened areas as quickly as possible. GO Boroevic told XVI Corps HQ: "Army HQ places the greatest emphasis on continuing to hold the Plava area and to maintaining secure communications between this sector over Mt Santo and Mt S Gabriele to 58 ID's new position. Therefore the next reinforcements will arrive at Chiapovano - Battalion I/50 at 9:30 PM on the 10<sup>th</sup>, the first elements of 2 Mtn Bde (which will be placed under 62 ID) early on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and Battalion I/48 in the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup>. By the 13<sup>th</sup> a total of seven battalions and two mountain batteries will have all arrived at Chiapovano. I confidently expect that the positions of 62 ID will be held thanks to the proven leadership of the commanders and the tremendous bravery of all the troops, especially the stubborn defenders of Plava-Zagora."

As further reinforcement for XVI Corps, the 8 Mtn Bde would begin to arrive at Reifenberg in the afternoon of 10 August; initially they would deploy in the Cernizza area. The high command enquired about the planned use of the oncoming reinforcements; Army HQ responded, and also included an analysis of the situation, as follows:

"Transport of the assigned reinforcements is taking substantial time. Thus by now just one battalion has arrived here from Tyrol. The first parts of 8 Mtn Bde will detrain on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Under the pressure of events, I can't say today exactly what use we will make of the reinforcements as they arrive; this will depend on the situation at that time. Currently the most favorable conditions exist on the Karst plateau; the situation there has been consolidated so far that it has even been possible to draw a few troops from the area to support Sector II. The units in the Görz plain are still getting organized and dug in; all available resources are being used to plug holes in the line. Careful attention must be paid to events on the Bainsizza plateau, where a decisive attack against our positions at Plava is imminent. Until now it was possible to hold this plateau with a total of eight battalions, aided by the fact that the Isonzo served as a barrier just ahead of the front. If a powerful enemy

thrust from Plava is successful now, there would be no further troops we could use to close the 18 km gap in the line that would develop. Therefore a large part of the new units will have to be used to consolidate this front. Simultaneously with the build-up of the position in front of Görz, where 8 Mtn Bde will be employed when they arrive tomorrow, the next units to detrain (independent Battalions I/48 and I/50) will therefore be sent through St Luzia to Chiapovano so they can support the Bainsizza plateau. We will be able to report about the deployment of the regaining units when they actually arrive."

However, when the enemy was inactive in the Görz sector on 9 August the leadership began to hope (with some reason) that when the reserves finally arrived they would be able to turn the situation in our favor.

## 5. The battle's second phase (10-16 August)

### a. The enemy probes toward the new defensive front (10 August)

Cadorna had ordered G.Lt Capello on 9 August that he should "give his troops wings"<sup>72</sup> so that they would win the heights east of Görz in a rapid advance; these orders remained in vain. It wasn't until late afternoon that the main body of VI Italian Corps began to cross the river at points which had been prepared in the meantime. This movement was soon disrupted by the fire of the Aus-Hung. batteries, and the troops ceased their advance when darkness fell. By evening the Italians had reached the railroad on the line Salcano-Görz-St Peter, and farther south the Vertojbica Brook.

With justice, Cadorna in his memoirs later condemned the hesitant probing tactics of VI Italian Corps in the Görz basin: "There is no doubt that the heights east of the city and those east of the Vertojbica would have already fallen on 9 August, if they had been attacked on this day as ordered by the high command. Thus our success wasn't exploited. Many of our lower-ranking generals lacked a feeling for the tactical importance of the moment. Few had hoped that they would be able to cross the Isonzo. When we had occupied Görz, they believed they had won a great success; they didn't realize that this was indeed a moral success, but had almost no military value as long as we didn't also possess the heights which threatened the city from the east."

#### XVI Corps

The night of 9-10 August passed quietly. In early morning the Italian infantry advanced out of Görz against the western edge of the Pannowitz Woods and against Heights # 171 (south of the Rosental Road); however, they were checked by our fire and began to dig in. Around 9:30 AM, after a short but powerful preparatory bombardment by artillery and trench mortars, two brigades of 45 Italian ID moved from Salcano toward the positions of 4 Mtn Bde on the southwestern slope of Mt S Gabriele. The enemy penetrated the trenches of a March company at Sv Katarina, but were hurled out in a bitter melee thanks to the intervention of Battalion III/69. Since the situation

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72 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, p. 289

remained dangerous, a battalion of the divisional reserve<sup>73</sup> was placed under Col. Dani. The attack was renewed after 11:00 AM and extended south as far as Heights # 171. After a bombardment of many hours carried out by guns of all calibers plus numerous heavy trench mortars, parts of four divisions (45, 43, 11 and 24 ID) thrust forward. By noon the Italians were falling back in disorder; they left more than 100 prisoners in the hands of the defenders. The enemy's setback and casualties were apparently quite significant, because they made no further serious attacks in the Wippach valley during the day.

On the other hand, heavy new fighting developed by Plava. Since daybreak the Italian artillery directed devastating fire against the positions of 209 Lst Inf Bde and the area behind the Bde's lines. Around 1:00 PM, after the artillery preparation had increased to drumfire, the infantry attack was unleashed upon Zagora. At every point where the Italians penetrated the line they were thrown out in hand-to-hand combat. Then the drumfire immediately resumed. New assaults followed between 3:00 and 4:00 PM, but this time they collapsed under the defenders' fire. After repeated artillery bombardments the enemy attempted another thrust in the evening, but their troops barely came out of their trenches. With noteworthy stubbornness the Italians tried to achieve by a night-time surprise attack what they couldn't accomplish during the day. The detachments they sent forward at 11:00 PM and again at 2:00 AM were spotted in time, and defeated by the Dalmatians of Infantry Battalion III/22 in a melee. The positions at Paljevo and the strong point on Heights # 383 were heavily bombarded, but there were no infantry assaults here. In the fighting which lasted until the morning hours of the 11<sup>th</sup>, the breakthrough attempts by II Italian Corps at Plava came to a conclusion.

Behind the threatened front of 62 ID, 2 Mtn Bde arrived in the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> at Chiapovano<sup>74</sup> along with two more battalions from Tyrol (I/48 and I/50). Also, at noon the 58 ID transferred to 62 ID Battalion I/91 (which on the day before had been attached to help their right wing on Mt S Gabriele). The intervention of these reinforcements in the Britof area on 11 August ended the immediate danger to the widely-extended sector of 62<sup>nd</sup> Division. They deployed their reserves so that if necessary they could also support the right wing of 58 ID.

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73 This was Battalion III/86, which on 8 August had arrived from XV Corps along with Battalion I/91.

74 The 2 Mtn Bde had detrained at Podmelec.

5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was planning to also afford relief to XVI Corps by shifting their sector boundary with VII Corps to the north (from the Wippach at Pri Stanti to the point where the Wippach bends forward north of Raccogliano). Since the artillery on hand was still insufficient to deal with major attacks, Army HQ was requested to provide more guns, equivalent to a division's artillery.

VII Corps and 9 Infantry Division

Although the k.u.k. VII Corps had been stationed in very close contact with the enemy, at daybreak on 10 August they carried out their withdrawal to the new positions on the western edge of the Karst plateau of Comen as planned and without interference.

Before the scheduled start of the evacuation around midnight, in late evening the Italians attempted a thrust in the dark against the front of 17 ID; on both sides of Kote # 111 on the highway they penetrated the Hungarian trenches. Although by this time the garrison at the front had practically no artillery support, parts of 33 Inf Bde threw themselves upon the Italians and drove them back in a counterattack. Therefore the withdrawal could take place without any further enemy intervention. The Italians didn't try to attack. Finally around 8:00 AM their patrols, along with small detachments from Mt S Michele, Heights # 197 and Mt dei sei Busi, began to move cautiously toward the east. During the morning they came upon the rearguard, who executed a fighting retreat from the Doberdo plateau through the Vallone valley.

On the southern wing of 9 ID, in the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> troops from 34 Italian ID attacked the Heights # 121 and # 85 after strong drumfire; they were repulsed by 60 Inf Bde. The planned withdrawal of the sector garrison from Selz to the line Debeli vrh-Crni hrib could then be carried out around midnight, unnoticed by the enemy. 17 Inf Bde left a rearguard west and south of Doberdo. In the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> the Italian artillery sent heavy fire against the evacuated positions. Detachments of Italian 16 ID didn't advance toward Doberdo until almost noon, and slowly pushed the rearguard of 17 Inf Bde back to the new positions.

Around 3:00 PM very heavy drumfire suddenly broke out against the positions which the k.u.k. 60 Inf Bde still held on the Monfalcone ridge down to the coast; as in the evening before there were new thrusts by Monfalcone town. Until 7:00 PM the Italians attacked Heights # 121 and # 85 with about eight battalions of their 14 ID. In the first and second onslaughts they were able to penetrate the foremost lines at some points, but were beaten back by parts of the Galician Infantry Regiments 30 and 80, and suffered heavy casualties. After a long and especially severe bombardment of the hotly-contested Heights # 121 another enemy thrust was expected; however the Italian infantry apparently could no longer pick up the courage they needed for such a venture.

5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ had no doubt that prolonged occupation by FML Schenk's Group of the remaining parts of the position which jutted out west of the Vallone valley, especially on the Crni hrib and Debeli vrh, wouldn't be possible. However, by withdrawing the line in stages they would gain time so at least a start could be made in preparing the planned new shorter lines; they ran from the heights west of Nova Vas through Point # 208 to the south past Lake Doberdo, then through Heights # 144 - Pietra rossa - Heights # 77 to the Lisert swamp. Since the work would take two days to complete, and since Army HQ didn't want the troops to suffer a setback while deployed ahead on the heights on both sides of Lake Doberdo, they ordered in the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> that this part of the front would be moved back in the night of 11-12 August.

The reduction in the length of the Karst front by occupation of the second position made it possible to relieve the badly-reduced infantry of 20 Hon ID; they went back to the Comen area in the Corps' reserve. In their place, 59 Inf Bde occupied the northern sector of the new position along a line from the Wippach at Raccogliano through Pri Stanti and the Nad logem Heights # 212 to a point about 1000 paces northwest of Lokvica, where it linked up with 17 ID. As reserves, two battalions of IR 43 stayed at Kostanjevica, and IR 46 stayed at Lipa.

#### **b. Reconnaissance thrusts against the new positions of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army (11 August)**

The fighting which occurred along the new Aus-Hung. front in the Wippach valley on 10 August caused the Italian high command to recognize that the opponents whom they believed had been beaten were still capable of determined resistance.

Cadorna issued orders to continue the offensive.<sup>75</sup> In the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would take charge of all troops in the Görz sector as far as the Wippach. G.Lt. Piacentini, commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, would energetically resume the attack in the Görz area from the Wippach to the Idria, and push his opponents back to the line Dornberg - Madrasovec # 1505 - lower course of the Tribula; thus the left wing of the troops attacking on the middle Isonzo would remain bent back on the Bainsizza plateau south of Tolmein. Conquest of the Tolmein bridgehead was deferred for a later time; for now the plan was

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75 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. I, pp. 297 ff.

just to pin down Aus-Hung. forces in this area. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's first task was to determine whether their opponents were holding the lines with just a rearguard or intended to offer prolonged defense. If 2<sup>nd</sup> Army encountered a rearguard they were to concentrate in the Wippach valley and throw them back without delay; however, against a strong position they should prepare a systematic attack. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on the Karst was to remain in close contact with 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in the Wippach valley while advancing through the Vallone valley toward the line Dornberg - Iron Gate - Trstelj # 643 - Hermada # 323. To reinforce the units assigned to this operation the Italian high command, convinced that an Aus-Hung. attack in Tyrol was no longer to be feared, ordered 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ to immediately send a strong corps to the Isonzo. XXIV Corps (with 4 and 33 ID) was chosen for this purpose.

#### Course of the fighting

There were lively actions in the Görz area in the night of 10-11 August (in addition to the night actions at Plava described above). The garrison on the slopes of Mt S Gabriele also had to repulse several Italian thrusts. Troops of 45 ID repeatedly stormed against LW IR 37 at Sv Katarina and farther north. Around 5:00 AM the enemy finally managed to penetrate a small part of the front; they were thrown out in a bitter hand-to-hand fight by the counterattacking Battalions III/IR 69 and II/LW IR 37. Here 160 Italians, including 10 officers, remained in our hands as prisoners. The enemy rallied for another attack, but this time they were soon checked by the destructive fire of our batteries.

East of Görz troops of 86 LW Inf Bde (in the sector of 121 Lst Inf Bde) repulsed a weaker attack on the left wing of 58 ID around 4:00 AM. Drumfire from heavy caliber guns was directed against Sv Katarina around 11:00 AM. However, an Italian attack which started at noon was nipped in the bud, and was never developed. The fact that artillery ammunition was finally arriving in sufficient amounts made it easier to defend against assaults even by much larger numbers.

At the same hour, 43 Italian ID directed an attack against the front of 121 Lst Inf Bde between Heights # 171 and the northern edge of the Pannowitz Woods; it also collapsed under the artillery and machine gun fire of the defenders. After suffering heavy losses the enemy pulled back behind the railroad.

While fighting subsided almost entirely in 121 Lst Inf Bde's sector in the afternoon, very heavy artillery and trench mortar fire engulfed the sectors of 4 and 2 Mtn Bdes on Mt S Gabriele, the Dol Ridge, and Mt Santo. However, with sudden bursts of fire the watchful batteries of 58 and 62 ID dispersed the Italian troops who were assembling to attack north of Sv Katarina, so the enemy didn't attack on this day. The offensive strength of the Italians had been expended for 11 August.

Since new attacks were expected at night, the relief of 4 Mtn Bde by three battalions of 8 Mtn Bde (all of which was on the scene by evening), which had already started on 10 August, was continued. The parts of 4 Mtn Bde that had been relieved were kept near the front; they wouldn't move farther back to rest until the ongoing fortification of the defenses in the Ossegliano-Schön Pass area was further accomplished. The remaining two battalions of 8 Mtn Bde were held in readiness for the time being north of Vogersko. The sector of 121 Lst Inf Bde was extended north to the Görz-Grazigna road. Two battalions of the garrison here (I/LW IR 20 and k.k. Lst Bn 83) were placed under 121 Lst Inf Bde.

The fighting to date had inevitably led to mixing troops from various units. It was necessary to bring the deployment within the sectors into agreement with the normal order of battle as soon as possible. 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ instructed XVI Corps to thus reorganize the defenders of the Wippach valley sector on 11 August. At the same time k.u. Lst IR # 2 was to be rebuilt from remnants of the original troops plus k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalions IV/26, IV/30 and III/31.

There were no major operations on the Karst plateau on 11 August. The Italian corps gradually occupied the Doberdo plateau with their advanced guards during the day; here and there they made weak reconnaissance thrusts against the new positions. Thus several battalions entrenched in front of the Lad logem # 212 and farther south in front of VII Corps' line as far as the Debeli vrh. Attacks against these heights in the afternoon were defeated by 17 Inf Bde. The Italian artillery was noticeably quiet; probably they were busy changing their positions for the offensive against the new front. Only the enemy's air activity had significantly increased in the last few days.

#### The analysis by 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ

Although the level of fighting by Görz and on the Karst was

considerably less on 10 and 11 August than it had been in preceding days, and although the first reinforcements had meanwhile arrived on the battlefield, the situation of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army was still quite serious. Army HQ anticipated immediate attacks by the reinforced Italian main body in the Wippach valley and on the Karst plateau, seeking a decision. It was hardly likely that the Italian high command wouldn't seek to exploit their first great success during a war that had now already lasted for 15 months.

Even counting the combined division from Tyrol which the k.u.k. high command intended to send, plus two battalions which were coming by rail from the k.u.k. 10<sup>th</sup> Army and the northeastern theater of operations, the Aus-Hung. units on the Isonzo were still heavily outnumbered by the Italians. In the fighting to date between Plava and the sea, 13 enemy infantry and 2 cavalry divisions had been identified - a total of 30 infantry and 4 cavalry brigades. Four more infantry divisions were stationed behind the front, and the Italian high command could bring three or four more from Tyrol to the Isonzo by mid-month without any danger. With the troops of their IV Corps, the total potential force was thus around 25 divisions. Counting the k.u.k. XV Corps and 27 Mtn Bde of the k.u.k. 10<sup>th</sup> Army, the defenders had a total of 22 brigades.<sup>76</sup>

The lack of artillery was especially severe. This problem, along with the temporary shortage of ammunition, had compelled Army HQ to move several light batteries from the sectors that hadn't been attacked to the most-threatened area (the Wippach valley). But only three mountain batteries had arrived as real reinforcements.

Based on these calculations, GO Borojevic felt it was necessary to send the following evaluation of the situation by wire to the high command in the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup>:

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76 In the evening of this day the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army (excluding XV Corps, which hadn't taken part in the fighting of the last few days) had just 44,500 riflemen of whom 11,500 were recent reinforcements (5 bns from 8 Mtn Bde, 2 from 2 Mtn Bde, 2 from IR !02, and Bns I/48, I/50 and III/86). The total number of combat troops at the battle front was 56,000 men. Casualties so far were 4400 men from 62 ID, 8300 from 58 ID, 3500 from 121 Lst Inf Bde, 6000 from 20 Hon ID, 6000 from 17 ID, 1400 from 9 ID (not counting IR 102), 1700 from 24 Lst Mtn Bde, and 4500 from 43 LW ID. Thus the battle had already cost 36,000 men. (Anton Pitreich, Manuscript)

"I believe that the enemy, encouraged by their success at Görz, will do everything they can to exploit the triumph in great strength. They are constantly and quickly shifting their units to our lower Isonzo front, which so far has remained relatively intact. I believe it's urgently necessary to sufficiently reinforce the Isonzo Army in time. Today it seems that a dangerous situation, that could menace Trieste, can hardly be avoided. Our experience has been that the transport of our troops takes a long time; if not initiated until the moment when there are already certain signs that the front is weakening, such reinforcements could perhaps arrive too late. The Isonzo Army will always carry out their mission to the end. But I, as their commander, feel compelled to be prepared for unforeseen circumstances. Three more divisions, if sent now, can do more good than a larger number sent after irreparable damage is done. I believe I can say that throughout the war I have known how to make use of the resources available, and it is painful for me to ask for help that might not be needed. However, I believe that the conscientious report above shouldn't be regarded as nervousness, from which in my unbroken confidence I am free. I respectfully request a timely decision."

### **c. The Italian attempts to break through at Görz and the northern edge of the Karst (12-13 August)**

By evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> the enemy had largely completed the forward deployment of their artillery in front of the new Aus-Hung. positions, and prepared their units to continue the offensive. In the Wippach valley, 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army inserted XXVI Corps between VI and VIII Corps; this new HQ was given 43 ID from VI and 48 ID from VIII Corps. Thus three corps stood ready to attack in the Görz basin between Salcano and the Wippach - VI (with 45 and 24 ID), XXVI (43 and 48 ID), and VIII (12 and 46 ID). Behind them the 11 ID was in reserve.

The Italian high command asked their subordinates whether their opponents at Görz now intended to carry out a prolonged defense or whether the positions were just held by a rearguard. The answer was that the Austro-Hungarian "rear guard" was made up of strong units in well-prepared positions. Because of the general situation, however, they should be attacked without delay. Based on this evaluation by their generals, the high command decided to continue the general offensive. The next major objective of the Görz group was to break through the Aus-Hung.

front on both sides of the road from Görz to Schön Pass.

#### The fighting on 12 August

After a relatively quiet night, heavy new fighting erupted on 12 August in the Wippach valley and on the northern part of the Karst plateau.

G.Lt Capello, commanding the attacking troops in the Görz basin, made his first effort against the front of 58 ID. This attempt to storm the sector of 121 Lst Inf Bde around 3:45 AM collapsed completely - after just 45 minutes of fighting - under immediate defensive fire from artillery and machine guns. The Italians pulled back to their own trenches, having failed to even reach the barriers.

Around 7:00 AM the enemy made a second assault on heights # 174 and 171 (on both sides of the Rosental Road). There was bitter fighting along this area of the front until noon. Several times the Italians managed to penetrate some parts of the trenches; they were thrown out in actions which raged back and forth. Only a sector about 100 paces wide on Heights # 174 (which was sited ahead of the rest of the front) had to be relinquished to the enemy. Here they dug in with many machine guns. Since we lacked the strength for a counterattack against the much larger Italian force, a back-up position was established about 150 meters farther east. After a short pause in the noon hours, heavy thrusts were resumed against the front of 121 Lst Brigade. On Heights # 174 the enemy repeatedly penetrated a sector about 100 paces wide, but by evening they were finally repulsed. These attacks had led to the bloodiest fighting of the last few days. Fire from the Italian artillery and trench mortars was overwhelming. It was followed by wave after wave of infantry, that could only be brought to a halt in bitter hand-to-hand fighting.<sup>77</sup>

The northern brigade sector of 58 ID on the slopes of Mt S

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77 The following figures bear true witness to the intensity of the fight in this narrow area. After the action about 500 dead Italians were counted in front of Heights # 174. More than 20 officers and 200 men from four Italian regiments were taken prisoner. The defenders' casualties were also very large; k.k. Landwehr Regiments 22 and 23 had lost 10 officers and 262 men killed, 22 officers and 537 men wounded, and around 500 men missing or taken prisoner. Several companies had lost half their authorized strength.

Gabriele was also heavily bombarded during the morning. In particular the hotly-contested heights at Sv Katarina stood under drumfire. However, the only area attacked by infantry was the small hill of Grazigna (Point 126), which rises from the plain by the Görz cemetery; after penetrating the line, the Italians were hurled out again after a very short time and had to leave prisoners behind.

The Italian attack in the sector of 58 ID lasted into the night of 12-13 August. FJB # 2 repulsed a strong thrust at Damber (south of Sv Katarina) soon after midnight. The gallant garrison in the sector of Heights # 174 (parts of Landwehr Regiments 22 and 23) repulsed yet another assault (the seventh since the fighting started) during the night.

The divisions of VIII Italian Corps were stuck fast in front of 43 LW ID; their attempt to cross the Vertojbica Brook was shattered.

On 12 August the XVI Corps was assigned some reinforcements which arrived by rail at Prvacina on the 13<sup>th</sup>. These were Battalions IV/20 and I/21 from the Russian theater of operations and k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalions 42 and 43 from Carinthia. They would deploy in the Vogersko-Paskonisce area at the disposal of the Corps commander.<sup>78</sup>

Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army, the artillery occupied their new positions in the plain south of Görz and on the Doberdo plateau by early on 12 August. At daybreak they opened fire against the positions of the k.u.k. 59 Inf Bde on the rocky knoll Nad logem (Point 212), which dominates the northern end of the Vallone valley.

Supported by many heavy trench mortars, the enemy guns in the plain and on the Karst concentrated their fire on the foremost heights, seeking to inflict heavy casualties on the garrison, who weren't protected by installations or caverns. Around noon the left wing of XI Italian Corps began to attack the defenders of the hill with 23 ID, both frontally and by envelopment from the north. They broke into the completely destroyed trenches of the k.u.k. 59 Inf Bde. Wild fighting surged back and forth, and lasted throughout the afternoon. Cut off from any support, the gallant Bukovina IR # 41 sought to recover the heights from the much larger enemy force with numerous counterattacks. Thanks to

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78 Battalions IV/20 and I/21 later joined 10 Mtn Bde when it arrived as part of GM Edler von Hrozny's Combined Division.

their very stubborn resistance and to brilliant individual feats of arms, the brave Regiment was finally able to hold onto a line about 600 meters east of their original positions. It ran over the ridge between Pri Stanti and a point northwest of Lokvica; the connection with 17 ID's line was maintained. In the night of 12-13 August the 59 Inf Bde was relieved by reserves of VII Corps and assembled in the Dornberg area in the Army's reserve.

Along the other parts of the Karst front, on this day there were only outpost skirmishes with the Italians, who gradually and cautiously established themselves along the eastern edge of the Vallone valley.

As ordered, the intermediate position on the Doberdo plateau, as well as the positions on Hills # 121 and # 85 of the Monfalcone Ridge, were evacuated in the night of 11-12 August without interference from the enemy. The new line linked up with that of VII Corps on Heights # 208 (southwest of Nova Vas). On the 12<sup>th</sup> the enemy felt their way slowly up to the new positions; also the Italian artillery began to bombard the most important points along and behind the new front.

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the high command responded to the analysis of the situation submitted by 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ the evening before. They stated that prolonged defense of the favorably-situated front which the Army currently held would be decisive for the outcome in the Southwest, and of great importance for the overall military and political situation. However, further reinforcements for 5<sup>th</sup> Army in the immediate future would consist only of a relatively small number of units which would slowly arrive from other parts of the Southwest front. Hrozny's Division, which would begin to arrive on the 13<sup>th</sup>, would be followed by yet another brigade from Tyrol. More couldn't be promised at this time. Therefore the HQ of 5<sup>th</sup> Army must strive above all to restore to their former sturdiness the parts of the Army which had to pull back due to the recent events, using economical leadership and the HQ's well-proven and energetic influence on their subordinates.

#### Events on 13 August

Changes in the arrangement of the units of XVI and VII Corps were initiated by early on 13 August. On the northern wing of VII Corps the regiments of 59 Inf Bde, which had been badly weakened the day before, were relieved in the sector from Bridge # 45 (north of Raccogliano) to a point west of Lokvica; they were replaced by two battalions of IR 43 and the rest of 17 ID

(34 Inf Bde). In the area to the south, 20 Hon ID returned to the front; they occupied the Oppacchiasella sector with 39 Hon Inf Bde and the line running farther south - to a point past the Nova Vas-Doberdo road - with 81 Hon Inf Bde. Two battalions stayed north of Kostanjevica as the Corps' reserve. VII Corps HQ moved to Comen.

Under 58 ID, Col. Rath's 8 Mtn Bde had taken over the former sector of 4 Mtn Bde; in the sector to the south Col. Meisel's 86 LW Inf Bde HQ replaced Col. Kouff's 121 Lst Inf Bde HQ in command of the regiments there. After being relieved, 4 Mtn Bde moved to Ossegliano; 121 Lst Inf Bde took over a sector under 43 LW ID. Under 62 ID, three battalions of 2 Mtn Bde took over the Zagora-Mt Santo front, which hitherto had been nearly denuded of troops; the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade was still coming forward. Battalions I/48 and I/50 arrived from Tyrol and were stationed at Britof to back up the southern wing of 62 ID.

After the very costly attacks on the heights east of Görz, which had lasted into the night, the Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army restricted their activity on 13 August to artillery fire of varying strength against the Aus-Hung. positions between Plava and the Wippach. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, however, resolutely continued their attack on the northern part of the Karst, and especially on its northern edge where the heights at Nad logem # 212 and Fajti hrib # 432 dominate the entire Wippach valley.

From the early morning hours, the Italian artillery bombarded principally the k.u.k. batteries which were active in the Lokvica-Wippach River area. Meanwhile the Italian divisions of XI and XIII Corps held their infantry ready to attack the covering troops of the k.u.k. VII Corps. For a second time the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army tried to break through the new positions on the Karst plateau. Already in the morning several battalions of 23 ID repeatedly thrust along the Wippach at Pri Stanti, so that here they could hit the flank of the defenders dug in along the heights. All attacks failed.

Around 2:00 PM the enemy extended their activity to the entire sector of 17 ID as far as Lokvica; after an hour of drumfire by guns of all calibers plus trench mortars, which reached great intensity, their infantry advanced. One mass attack followed another until 7:00 PM. When the sixth onslaught subsided, 34 Inf Bde with the distinguished Regiments 46 and 43 still firmly held the scarcely recognizable trenches on the northern rim of the Karst plateau and on the edge of the heights. On the other hand, the Italians attacking south of Heights # 212 had used

overwhelming force to push the Temesvar IR 61 out of their line of resistance. But by the time darkness fell a spirited counter-thrust by this Regiment and the divisional reserves (which had rushed to the scene) hurled the enemy back to the edge of the heights along the Vallone valley.<sup>79</sup> West of Lokvica the well-tried IR 39 stood up to two strong attacks. Farther south the enemy restricted actions against 20 Hon ID and 9 ID to strong artillery and trench mortar fire; under its protection their infantry moved closer to our new positions. But there was no infantry fighting on the southern part of the Karst plateau this day.

In the Wippach valley and in the sector of 62 ID the enemy had only carried out bombardments on 13 August. At Plava it was learned from eavesdropping on Italian radio broadcasts that the enemy troops in the sector were being reinforced; here we would have to expect new assaults.

Because of the heavy fighting on the northern wing of VII Corps, Army HQ sent two of their four available battalions (IV/20 and I/21) to Temnica in the Army's reserve.

When the fighting died down everywhere with the approach of darkness, and the new front in general was still intact, there was cautious optimism that the lines could be held with the units on hand until intervention by GM Hrozny's Combined Division, whose first trains arrived at Podmelec on 13 August. With improvised truck columns the transportation of this Division through Chiapovano to the Ternova area was expedited. Here they would be able to go to either the Plava-Mt S Gabriele sector or the Wippach valley, depending on which was endangered.

#### **d. Overcoming the crisis of the battle (14 August)**

Hitherto the enemy had only selected individual sectors in which to continue their limited thrusts, designed to shake up the still somewhat brittle positions and cause the whole front to collapse. Now they made a final attempt with the majority of the units in both their Armies on the Isonzo to carry out a general offensive against the front of XVI and VII Corps between Plava and Oppacchiasella.

#### XVI Corps

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79 "61 in Waffen - Kriegs-Album des k.u.k. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 61, 1914-1917" (Temesvar), pp. 210 ff.

The conjecture, based upon messages intercepted on 13 August, that there would soon be new Italian attacks at Plava would soon be proved correct. In the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> the artillery of II Italian Corps opened extremely heavy fire on the positions between the strong point on Heights # 383 and the Isonzo at Zagora. After several bombardments which escalated to drumfire, around noon large Italian forces began to attack. The assaulting waves collapsed under the concentrated fire of 62 ID's batteries. Toward 3:30 PM, after another strong bombardment, the enemy made several new attacks; however, their striking power was already crippled, and all further attempts to penetrate the trenches of the stubborn defenders were nipped in the bud.

In the Wippach valley the Italians had used the relative pause in activity on the day before to bring up new units, relieve worn-out troops, and restore order to their badly intermingled forces.

Drumfire against Sv Katarina by heavy caliber guns had already started in the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, and at dawn on 14 August it was extended to the entire sector of 8 Mtn Bde. After more than twelve hours of artillery preparation, with strong support by trench mortars, the assault on Sv Katarina began at 6:00 AM. The first enemy onslaught failed. A second mass attack around 10:00 AM penetrated several trenches, but the intruders were all thrown out thanks to a counterattack by Battalions I/48 and III/55.

Throughout the morning artillery fire continued against the other parts of 58 ID's front and against the right wing of 43 ID; around noon it escalated to very powerful drumfire. At 1:00 PM the Italian infantry attacked in great strength, organized in depth, on the front from Heights # 171 through St Peter to Vertojba. On Heights # 171, on the road from St Peter, at Point # 95 and on the hill next to the houses at Sober the Italian columns penetrated the practically-destroyed trenches. At Point # 171 the enemy were immediately driven out by local reserves. In the other sectors, counterattacks during the afternoon also recovered all the positions. In front of Vertojba, where armored cars accompanied the attacking Italians, all storming attempts collapsed under artillery fire.

After a short pause to rest, around 5:00 PM the front in the Wippach valley again came under heavy artillery fire, which became ever stronger. At 7:00 PM there was a third attack at St Peter. Subjected to a barrage from the Aus-Hung. batteries, the

attacking Italian infantry were already suffering very heavy casualties as they advanced. Nevertheless, enemy detachments were able to establish themselves in several trenches just south of a triangle formed by railroad tracks at St Peter. Here a furious melee developed, in which the Italians were finally defeated and thrown back. More than 300 prisoners from three regiments remained in our hands.

In the dark of night (around 9:30 PM) there was another assault on the position on the heights between Point 95 and Sober, but it was broken by the defenders' resistance. Equally futile was an attack launched at almost the same time (after short but heavy artillery fire) on both sides of the Rosental Road. At the end of this day of major fighting all positions from Plava to the Wippach were still firmly held by the fighters of the k.u.k. XVI Corps.

The actions on 14 August had solidified the troops' confidence in the strength of their new positions in the Wippach valley and restored their belief in their psychological superiority to the attackers, despite the latter's advantage in numbers and equipment. This recovery was of incomparable worth and led to a conviction that nothing more was to be feared for the front in the Wippach valley, now or in the future.

### VII Corps

During this successful fighting in the Wippach valley, on 14 August Aosta's Army continued with great intensity the attack they had already started on the 12<sup>th</sup> against the northern edge of the Comen plateau. VII Corps was thus engaged constantly. In the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> fresh Italian units were deployed opposite Lokvica and at Oppacchiasella. In the night hours the 34 Inf Bde repulsed an enemy attack at Pri Stanti without much difficulty; some armored cars that supported the infantry were driven back by our artillery fire. Northwest of Lokvica 17 ID carried out an operation to improve the layout of the front; on the southern wing of this Division a night-time Italian thrust was detected in time and smashed by artillery before it could get under way.

Because of the continuous fighting, and mindful of the condition of the troops who now had been in action for nine days, in the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> Archduke Joseph demanded that Army HQ should provide reserves in the strength of at least one combat-ready brigade as soon as possible. This would enable him to carry out the urgently-needed relief of his regiments, which were near

exhaustion.

At daybreak on 14 August, 33 Inf Bde and the northern wing of 20 Hon ID once more were under heavy fire from artillery and trench mortars; around noon this escalated to very strong drumfire. Weak thrusts on the northern wing against IR 46 were repulsed. However, large enemy forces were observed moving forward from the Vallone valley, so it was clear that the Italians were still preparing to break through.

As expected, a powerful Italian offensive on a broad front from the Wippach to the center of 20 Hon ID opened after noon. North of the edge of the Karst plateau the Infantry Regiments 43 and 46 were able to withstand the massive assault in close-up combat. However, south of the crest as far as Lokvica the enemy host penetrated the positions of 33 Inf Bde; they weren't checked, along a line running from Lokvica to the north, until the last two battalions of the divisional reserve intervened. This also caused difficulties for the northern wing of the neighboring 20 Hon ID, where Hon IR "Debreczen" # 3 had at first thrown back all attacks; now the wing had to bend back toward Lokvica. Two battalions of the Corps' reserve (IV/20 and I/21)<sup>80</sup> were hastily deployed in readiness on the Pecinka Heights # 291 - directly northeast of Lokvica - and the last reserves of 20 Hon ID were shifted behind the Division's northern wing to prevent the threatened collapse of the front. Army HQ also ordered that all available reserves of 43 LW ID should be sent toward the right wing of VII Corps. Because of the critical situation in the Wippach valley, for now only the k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalion VII/4 could be sent to Temnica. Therefore Army HQ placed under VII Corps the 59 Inf Bde, which was in the Dornberg area in the Army's reserve, and immediately sent two of its battalions toward the front. The remainder would follow in the Lipa area on 15 August.

Meanwhile the situation in the center of VII Corps was clarified. The enemy also was at the end of their strength and could achieve no more. By evening the Italian detachments which had penetrated the farthest to the east had been pushed back behind a line reaching from Heights # 218 (on the crest east of Nad Logem) to Point 205 on the road about 700 paces west of

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80 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Earlier the text stated that as of 13 August the Battalions IV/20 and I/21 were in 5<sup>th</sup> Army's reserve, not the Corps'. It's not clear whether there is an error here or whether the Battalions had meanwhile been released from Army control.

Lokvica; here it linked up with the trenches still held by 20 Hon ID. Honved Infantry Regiments 3 and 4 had repulsed thrusts by many battalions at Oppacchiasella and west of Nova Vas, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. In the late afternoon an assault on the northern wing of 17 ID had collapsed in front of IR 46. Then the exhausted attackers ceased their efforts; only the hurricane of fire from their batteries and trench mortars raged on into the darkness of night.

Thus the troops of VII Corps had honorably withstood a day of major fighting and dangerous crises. The outcome of the severe fighting, as in XVI Corps' sector, strengthened the confidence of officers and men. The sure knowledge that reinforcements were arriving to continue the fight also strengthened the power of resistance of the sorely-taxed troops.

18 Inf Bde of GM Hrozny's Combined Division (later 57 ID) had detrained at Podmelec on the 12<sup>th</sup>; during the night of 14-15 August they all arrived in the Ternova area. The second half of this Division, 10 Mtn Bde, had been diverted from Assling to Podmelec through Laibach. They were supposed to arrive at Prvacina-Reifenberg on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and then would assemble at Dornberg as a powerful reserve near the hottest point of the fighting. The high command also informed 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ that the Combined Division would be followed by FML Schneider Edl. von Manns-Au's 28 ID from Tyrol and FML Nemecek's 44 LW ID from the northeastern theater of operations. The prospect of being reinforced by these two divisions, both of which had proven themselves to be experienced Isonzo-fighters in the autumn battles of 1915, further strengthened the Army's unshaken confidence that they would carry through this battle also to a successful conclusion. The danger of a breakthrough, which would have had unforeseeable consequences for the entire strategy of the Central Powers, was finally at an end.

### **e. The last day of heavy fighting in the Sixth Isonzo Battle**

#### XVI Corps

On 15 August the Italians at Plava, after the heavy fighting of the day before, were very cautious. Finally after darkness fell an enemy battalion made a surprise attack on our positions at Zagora. The alertness of the defenders shattered this attempt.

In the Wippach valley the heavy fighting which had been

interrupted late in the evening of 14 August was resumed early in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>. At Vertojba a battalion of 43 LW ID repulsed one Italian assault, and then a second which immediately followed. After this preliminary thrust, around 11:00 AM the enemy artillery again opened fire, which rapidly gathered strength and indicated that an infantry attack was imminent. In fact the last great general Italian assault followed around noon; the target was the front, eight kilometers long, from Sv Katarina to Vertojba. This was the largest breakthrough attempt yet mounted against the new front in the Wippach valley.

At Sv Katarina the enemy penetrated the line of two companies. On Heights # 174 the Italians suffered very heavy casualties from defensive fire while they were still moving up for their assault. When they reached the barriers they were already faltering, and were thoroughly defeated here in hand-to-hand combat. On Heights # 171 south of the Rosental Road enemy detachments suddenly penetrated the sectors of two companies around 1:15 PM; by 2:00 they were thrown out again by LW IR 23 and fled back to their starting points, with very heavy casualties. Also south of 58 ID, on the right wing of 43 LW ID, the enemy were able to enter our lines at St Peter after very strong artillery and trench mortar fire; by 3:00 PM the LW IR 20 and parts of IR 102 recaptured the position.

Thus the general attack was thwarted in the early hours of the afternoon. Only a few trenches by Sv Katarina were still in the enemy's hands. Restoration of the situation in this important part of the front was the objective of the next operation. First the 58, 62 and 43 Divisions concentrated their artillery fire against the point of penetration; they were effectively supported by the trench mortars of 58 ID. Observers on Mt S Gabriele soon could determine that the Italians were suffering enormous casualties and starting to fall back in small groups. Around 7:00 PM Battalions I/48 and IV/24 of 8 Mtn Bde stormed forward. In their first onslaught they recovered the largest part of the trenches that had been occupied by strong Italian units. The garrison fled back in disorderly crowds, which were struck in the flank by 62 ID's artillery and decimated. An Italian regimental commander plus 7 officers and 90 men from seven different battalions fell into our hands, along with 6 machine guns. The enemy still held a small piece of the front. Here they were finally driven away by 9:00 PM in bitter hand-to-hand fighting, in which parts of FJB 2 and of BH FJB 5 also participated. An Italian brigade, in reserve at Salcano, was supposed to intervene in this heavy combat, but failed to

advance because of the effective fire of our batteries.

The last mighty attempt by the Italians to break through in the Wippach valley had been shattered by the heroic resistance of the k.u.k. XVI Corps. The striking power of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, which had suffered enormous losses, was blunted. But the sacrifices of the very exhausted defenders were also quite significant; in the Sv Katarina sector alone they had lost more than 500 men killed or wounded.

### VII Corps

In the three preceding days the k.u.k. VII Corps had been engaged in very heavy combat against much larger Italian forces (about 10 to 11 brigades of their XI and XIII Corps). In the night of 14-15 August they repulsed attacks by weaker units right next to the Wippach, and prevented attempts by the Italians to inch closer to the lines west of Lokvica and at Oppacchiasella. The neighboring sectors were asked to provide support with their heavy batteries to counteract the concentric fire which in the last few days of the battle had been delivered by groups of Italian medium and heavy artillery stationed at Valisella, Rubbia, Ronchi and Monfalcone against the northern part of the Karst plateau. However, before this support could become effective the Italians opened a strong bombardment of the sector between Oppacchiasella and the Wippach. In particular the part of the front west of S Grado di Merna and Lokvica as well as the area east of Oppacchia-sella were subjected to the strongest fire from guns and trench mortars. Around 1:00 PM the fire was further concentrated against the area on both sides of Lokvica, and soon afterwards the enemy infantry, which was deployed in depth, began their attack. The extreme right wing of 20 Hon ID west of Lokvica stood fast and drove back the Italians' storming columns; farther south however, half way between Oppacchiasella and Lokvica, the enemy was able to set foot in our trenches. By 6:00 PM the Hon IR "Nagyvarad" # 4 was able to throw back the intruders in tough man-to-man combat. Soon afterward the Italian artillery thundered in the twilight with great intensity against 20 Hon ID; troop concentrations at Oppacchiasella and west of Nova Vas indicated that another breakthrough attempt was in the offing. However, the Italian infantry had suffered such heavy casualties in the afternoon fighting that they didn't venture any further attempt this day.

17 ID wasn't involved in any noteworthy action. In the late afternoon two strong columns of infantry advanced out of the Vallone valley against the heights north of Lokvica; apparently

they weren't aware of the actual situation at the front. The columns were allowed to come near the trenches of 17 ID, and then were struck and destroyed by artillery and machine gun fire at close range. In the night of 15-16 August the exhausted troops of 33 Inf Bde in the sector north of Lokvica were relieved by parts of 59 Inf Bde (which had recuperated) and by Battalions IV/20 and I/21 which had been attached to VII Corps the day before. 33 Inf Bde moved back to a camp at Temnica.<sup>81</sup> The southern part of the Karst front enjoyed a day of relative quiet, since the Italians here were inactive.

The city of Trieste was attacked by an Italian bomber squadron in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>; many bombs were thrown aimlessly, and killed several persons. When the three naval airplanes of the Trieste Naval Air Station quickly attacked the Italian squadron and engaged two of the bombers in combat, the others immediately fled, as did an enemy torpedo boat flotilla which had appeared in front of the Trieste minefield but didn't offer battle.<sup>82</sup>

The defensive victory on this day had further enhanced the spirit of the troops. Confidence continued to rise in the evening, when 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ assigned to VII Corps the 56 Inf Bde of 28 ID, which was arriving from Tyrol and expected to detrain at Prvacina on 16 August.

#### **f. The last actions on the Karst plateau; the Sixth Isonzo Battle dies out**

North of the Wippach the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army had already abandoned their attempts to break through the k.u.k. XVI Corps on 16 August. They just directed occasionally heavy gunfire against the flashpoints of the new front (at Sv Katarina, on both sides of the Rosental Road, and in the St Peter-Vertojba sector). There were no more infantry attacks. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the artillery activity also slowly died down. On the other hand the battle south of the Wippach flared once more to a substantial height on 16 August.

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81 "61 in Waffen", p. 211

82 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - For more particulars of the naval air action, see Sokol, "Seekrieg", Vol. I, pp. 448-449. The attackers on the 15<sup>th</sup> were actually a mixed group of French and Italian planes. One French bomber was shot down. Sokol provides day-to-day descriptions of the activities of individual naval planes and pilots.

Except for an unsuccessful surprise attack on our positions at Lokvica, the night of 15-16 August passed quietly; the relief of 33 Inf Bde could be implemented without interference. In the morning it appeared that the battle might already be ending here also. Then around 9:30 AM very heavy artillery and trench mortar of all calibers was suddenly unleashed against the entire battle front. The concentrated, massive bombardment by the Italian guns reached an enormous intensity along the positions west of S Grado di Merna and in the sector between the northern edge of the Karst and Oppacchiasella. Around 11:00 AM fresh Italian units began their attack. Northwest of Lokvica the deeply deployed enemy force was shattered by the well-directed defensive fire of VII Corps' artillery, which forced them to flee back. The storming columns in front of 20 Hon ID also were brought to a halt already on the barriers. Italian detachments which penetrated a few points near Oppacchiasella were thrown back in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. A thrust directed against the northern wing of 17 ID (34 Inf Bde) at 1:00 PM also collapsed completely.

But the enemy's striking power was still not completely broken. Around 4:00 PM there was a final, coordinated mass assault against the entire front of VII Corps. Thanks to excellent cooperation between the artillery on the Karst and several artillery groups in neighboring sectors, the attackers suffered very heavy casualties under the coordinated defensive fire and never were able to penetrate the front. Nonetheless the tireless Italian battalions in the Oppacchiasella sector rallied once more for a fourth assault; it suffered the same fate as the earlier attempts. Finally the brave and stubborn attackers tried to punch through the front of 20 Hon ID around 9:30 PM under cover of darkness. This operation was also thwarted by Hon IR 4. Thus after twelve hours of combat the final action of the Sixth Isonzo Battle for VII Corps ended with a glorious defensive victory. This success was won not only by the infantry, who were still indomitable after five days of very heavy battle, but also by our distinguished artillery, who won the decision thanks to skill and selfless devotion.

The flames of battle died out on 17 August. A surprise assault around 6:00 AM on the southern wing of 20 Hon ID won the enemy a temporary success when they occupied a relatively small part of the trench. A counterattack by nearby reserves drove them out quickly. Further attempts to approach the defenses were prevented by destructive fire aimed at the Italian assembly areas. Around noon an enemy thrust against the sector of IR 43 on the northern edge of the Karst heights was repulsed. Now the

Italian high command finally ordered that all further assaults should be halted. The bloody and stubborn contest on the Isonzo front was over for now. The strength of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army had been very badly damaged. All the replacement troops of XVI and VII Corps had been used up.

The majority of the reinforcements which the k.u.k. high command had promised the endangered Isonzo front were now arriving in 5<sup>th</sup> Army's sector. 10 Mtn Bde of GM Hrozny's Combined Division finished detraining at Prvacina-Reifenberg by evening of 16 August. They were followed on 17 August by 56 Inf Bde of 28 ID (also from Tyrol), and in the next day by HQ of 28 ID plus 55 Brigade. Starting on 20 August transport trains brought 44 LW ID from the Russian theater of operations, followed closely by the trains of 16 ID. Although the immediate use of these strong forces was no longer urgently necessary, their presence behind the front was essential so that the worn-down units could be quickly and completely restored to order, and so that the front's power of resistance could be enhanced as soon as possible.

5<sup>th</sup> Army had been greatly worn down during the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo. Their total losses (killed, wounded, sick and missing) were 41,000 men in two weeks; the casualties of the attackers were about a third greater.<sup>83</sup>

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83 The casualties of 5<sup>th</sup> Army were as follows:

- . XV Corps - 16 officers and 1034 men (57 dead, 289 wounded, 32 missing or POW, 672 sick)
- . XVI Corps - 233 officers and 18,425 men (1249 dead, 9056 wounded, 6446 missing or POW, 1907 sick)
- . 43 LW ID - 40 officers and 1896 men (256 dead, 732 wounded, 711 wounded or POW, 237 sick)
- . VII Corps - 367 officers and 14,099 men (1688 dead, 7056 wounded, 5179 missing or POW, 543 sick)
- . 59 Inf Bde - 70 officers and 1846 men (126 dead, 545 wounded, 1245 missing or POW)
- . Group Schenk - 71 officers and 3395 men (337 dead, 2231 wounded, 216 missing or POW, 682 sick)
- . Reinforcements, plus Sectors IV and V - 10 officers and 333 men (6 dead, 1 wounded, 336 sick)
- . TOTAL = 807 officers and 41,028 men (3719 dead, 19,910 wounded, 13,829 missing or POW, 4377 sick)

The post-war Italian literature provides varying figures about their casualties. Zingales ("Gorizia", p. 203) gives the total losses for the Italian armies in the sixth Isonzo battle as 1745 officers and 49,473 men. The work "Medaglie d'oro"

### **g. Review of the Sixth Isonzo Battle**

The Aus-Hung. high command hadn't reckoned with an outbreak of heavy fighting on the Isonzo so soon after the south Tyrol offensive was broken off. They thought that the enemy, who must have suffered greatly through their defeats in the mountains, wouldn't make an immediate counterattack; under great pressure from Russia, they believed that there was no cause for concern about the security of the Southwest front, which after all hadn't been substantially weakened to help the northeastern theater of operations. The high command remained of this opinion even when XVI Corps HQ confirmed at the end of July that there were signs of an impending major Italian offensive. They also refused to change their minds when on 3 August a foreign diplomat very clearly warned the government at Vienna about the possibility of an immediate counterattack by the Italians. Two days later the German high command informed the k.u.k. AOK that according to current reports the Italians were in a position to immediately throw fourteen battle-ready divisions against the Isonzo. The constantly increasing tension in the Northeast played a large role in causing the leaders of Austria-Hungary's war effort to pay little heed to all these warnings. In their preparations against Romania, as well as their efforts to preserve the security of the Italian front, they were living from hand to mouth. When the attack was unleashed on the Isonzo, the defenders were in a much more difficult situation than they'd been in the earlier battles.

#### Reasons for the Italian success

The Italian armed forces had thoroughly evaluated all the military lessons learned since the autumn fighting in 1915. The army which entered the sixth battle had been refreshed and reinforced by personnel from the country's enormous reservoir of manpower and provided with more than enough equipment of all types, especially artillery and trench mortars; it also had higher morale and better tactical skill than the forces engaged in the earlier battles.

The deployment of strong Italian forces on the Isonzo was kept strictly secret and was brilliantly organized. The defenders

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(Vol. II for 1916, p. 151) gives about the same figures - 1759 officers and 49,473 men. Tosti (p. 158) estimates Italian casualties for August 1916 as 21,360 dead and 52,950 wounded.

didn't notice the buildup and were taken by surprise. This ensured at least an initial success for the large-scale operation.

The first goals of the attacking 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army, in whose area 17 infantry and 1 cavalry division had assembled by the start of the battle, were the Görz bridgehead and the Mt S Michele sector. To oppose the 9 km long Görz bridgehead, four divisions were deployed in the first line with two in reserve; the foremost waves were held ready a short distance from the Austrian positions in shell-proof shelters. To prepare for the infantry assault, between 29 July and the start of the battle the Duca d'Aosta received 52 more medium and heavy batteries in addition to the artillery already at hand. Thus on 6 August the Italians could open fire with 70 light batteries (261 guns) and 80 heavy batteries (with about 210 heavy and medium guns), plus 40 trench mortar batteries.<sup>84</sup>

This powerful attacking group was opposed in the Görz bridgehead, and the adjacent front running south down to the Wippach, by 58 ID. It was composed of 18 ½ battalions, of which only seven were from the Common Army or Landwehr. The rest were Landsturm troops, some of whom had never been in a major action. A more serious deficiency, however, was the weak artillery; the Division had just 87 guns with completely inadequate ammunition.<sup>85</sup>

Because of the Italian bombardment of the approach routes and the bridges, the reserves coming from the Wippach valley weren't able to support the nine battalions of the bridgehead garrison during the day; thus the garrison had to bear the full brunt of the first onslaught of the 48 battalions of VI Italian Corps

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84 The reinforced 45 ID, which attacked Mt Sabotino, alone had 51 light and 171 medium and heavy guns, 18 heavy and 48 light trench mortars, and five sections of land-torpedo-throwers. For each kilometer of the front to be attacked (which was 2500 meters long), there were 68 medium and heavy and 20 light guns. Moreover, to keep the Aus-Hung. batteries on the Bainsizza plateau from providing flanking fire there were also 56 medium and heavy guns under II Italian Corps.

85 The 87 guns included 11 old fixed pieces and 10 heavy M.80 cannon. There were 300 round available for each field gun. By comparison, it should be noted that when 58 ID defended Görz in the six weeks of combat in fall 1915 (the third and fourth Isonzo battles) they finally had more than 24 battalions and 180 guns.

deployed in the foremost lines. The overwhelming bombardment had destroyed the installations and killed a great number of the defenders; the masses of Italian infantry delivered the *coup de grace* to the surviving remnants. The soldiers who made their way with difficulty out of the shattered shelters and caverns, and the weak artillery, could accomplish nothing against such heavy odds. They all did their duty to the end, but their sacrifices were in vain due to the weakness of the defending artillery and the lack of ammunition. Counterattacks had to be carried out in the darkness to take advantage of the reserves' moral superiority over the Italian infantry, and also to prevent intervention by the much stronger enemy artillery. During the day any employment of the reserves would be pointless because of the disparity in numbers.

Thus the counterattacks in the southern part of the bridgehead took place at night, and they did restore the situation. On the other hand, the counter-thrust on Mt Sabotino, which didn't take place until morning, was a failure. Perhaps on 6 August it would still have been possible to recover this hotly-contested point with the reserves brought up from the Wippach valley. Before entering the battle, however, the reserves would have been subjected to strong artillery fire while moving through the city and over the bridges. And even if they had attacked and succeeded, a prolonged occupation of the mountain without further reinforcements was hardly possible due to the limitations placed on the artillery by the ammunition shortage.

The Italians' careful preparation of the operation and the surprise opening of the offensive can be rated exemplary. The enemy's precise knowledge of all the details of the defensive installations was certainly an advantage. This was the result of months of exhaustive reconnaissance. Moreover, immediately before the attack on Görz some deserters provided the Italians with valuable information. However, it is false to assert - as some have done - that the fall of Görz was the result of treason. The Görz bridgehead fell first and foremost because of the attackers' enormous superiority in numbers and armaments; it was the victim of a powerful battle of material resources.

#### Limited nature of the Italian success

The next days proved, however, that this Italian success was strictly limited. Despite their superiority they were unable to exploit it strategically. After the fall of Mt Sabotino, defended by just one battalion, they could have thrust to Salcano and thus entered Görz from the north. Instead they

remained stationary above the Isonzo bridges and allowed themselves to be drawn into a fire fight with the remnants of the defenders who were still clinging to the rocky cliffs; for three whole days they didn't venture another attack here. This respite was of extraordinary use to the defenders. Among other advantages, it allowed them to evacuate supplies that were of vital importance to the Army.<sup>86</sup>

By slowness in pursuit, the enemy also gave 58 ID time to evacuate their rear guard position on the eastern bank of the Isonzo. In the night of 8-9 August the remnants of the Division, about 5000 men, reached the second position directly east of Görz without any interference. Here they held a long line between Mt S Gabriele and the Wippach, supported for the time being by just six battalions of the Army's reserve. Most of the gallant troops, exhausted after three days of unbroken combat, fell immediately into a deep sleep.

Now Cadorna needed to intervene with great decisiveness. The road lay open for his divisions to overrun their opponents in a very favorable direction. It should have been evident that the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army didn't have any further reserves available, since in three days of battle no substantial reinforcements had appeared either on the Karst or at Görz. Perhaps the door to Trieste could have been smashed open; at least a deep penetration into the Wippach valley would have inevitably led to the fall of the mighty bastion on Mt S Gabriele and of Mt S Michele. The hesitation of the Italian generals on 9 and 10 August and their decision to attempt to take the heights north of Görz with a difficult envelopment attack over the Isonzo between Salcano and Plava were of extraordinary importance for the whole future course of the war along the river.

Just the expectation, fully justified by events, that the

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86 In the Görz area east of the Isonzo there were well-constructed depots with about 1,000,000 kg of supplies for men and horses (enough to fill 100 freight cars). Despite a continuing bombardment of the warehouses and nearby roads, and a lack of vehicles, the supplies were successfully moved between midnight of the 6<sup>th</sup> and noon on the 8<sup>th</sup>. This operation involved many acts of quiet heroism. Until August 14 the 58 ID and the reinforcements arriving from Tyrol and the Eastern front had to rely on these supplies for their rations and other needs, which shows the importance of their preservation. At the same time, about 3000 civilians were brought out of Görz.

Italians would eventually send their massive forces forward through Görz was enough to compel GO Boroovic to evacuate the positions on the Doberdo plateau, which jutted far ahead of the new line to the north and thus required too many troops for their defense. Thus the tension reached its high point during the battle. All the advantages were in the hands of the attackers, who could have won a major victory. Their failure to take advantage of the situation provided a valuable lesson for the defenders: in the future, just as in the past, it was possible to avoid defeat by taking chances that would have been fatal against a less methodical opponent.

Thus after over a year of warfare the Army of King Victor Emanuel had won their first noteworthy success by the capture of Görz and the blood-soaked battlefield of Doberdo. Reports of this victory enhanced the hitherto-lowly standing of the Italians among their allies. For the moment the sea of calamity which had engulfed Austria-Hungary for several weeks seemed to be deepening. However, it soon became apparent that the defenders had avoided a major defeat and despite heavy casualties had checked the advance of their powerful enemies. Trieste was still far removed from the tips of Italian bayonets, and even the Italian press called the capture of Görz a "momentary pleasure."

Austria-Hungary's watch on the Isonzo had successfully endured another test of its unshakeable sturdiness. It would be almost unfair to single out one group of troops which were especially distinguished. It is true that the infantry accomplished the impossible, but the children of St Barbara with their inadequate guns took part in the fighting alongside the infantry and were no less heroic. Despite the involvement of the artillery in every part of the battle, they were unable because of the enemy's numerical superiority to keep their comrades in the trenches from having to undergo heavy sacrifices. The defenders of Görz and Doberdo also suffered because of the numerical disparity of the two sides in the air war. GM Pitreich writes in his unpublished notes that "The Army's air units in the summer of 1916 were a mirror-image of the Monarchy's economic situation. When the battle started 5<sup>th</sup> Army had just one modern airplane available. At this time the air forces were confronting a severe equipment crisis. The anti-aircraft were in even worse shape; there was no barrier to the enemy airmen. The troops had to rely on camouflage for defense."

As for the command structure, the lack of an overall headquarters to control all the units on the Southwest front

(since before the start of the May offensive) was a distinct disadvantage. It is true that the Army Group HQ at Bozen had a keen concern for the urgent needs of the Isonzo Army and didn't leave them in the lurch. However, unified command of all the defenses from the Ortler Pass to the Adriatic would have made it easier to release reserves and deploy them in timely fashion. Shortly afterwards GO Archduke Eugene was once again made commander of the entire Southwest Front as another result of this unequal battle, which nevertheless was so glorious for the Aus-Hung. armed forces.

## ***B. Events in Tyrol in August 1916***

### **1. Tyrol becomes a secondary front**

In the first third of July the Italians had failed in their counter-offensive against the new front created by Archduke Eugene's Army Group at the end of the June fighting. Thereafter Cadorna had decided to continue the attack in the Isonzo area.

Accordingly the Italian high command first moved one infantry division from 1<sup>st</sup> Army and two from the dissolved 5<sup>th</sup> Army to the Isonzo. On 20 July the Italians failed in their last attempt to recover the positions they'd held at the start of the May offensive; then on 27 July they initiated the massive transport from the south Tyrol to the Isonzo front which we have already described.

Thus the Italian front in the Trent area was significantly weakened, by a total of 23 brigades. The changed situation was already apparent to Archduke Eugene's Army Group HQ because the fighting had died down and the enemy's only activity was to build up their positions. Therefore plans were at first under consideration for some thrusts designed to improve the siting of our defensive front. Such attacks were being planned in the Tonale area, against Mt Pasubio, on the border crest south of the Val Sugana, in the vicinity of the Rolle Pass, and at Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Because of the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, which broke out on 6 August, the Isonzo became the most important sector in the Italian theater of operations. The crisis which immediately developed for the defenders of Görz and the Karst plateau made it necessary for further units to transfer from Tyrol. Army Group HQ therefore found themselves forced to postpone their planned operations for better times.

At this time the Aus-Hung. command was in serious trouble. New onslaughts were expected on the Northeastern front, which still hadn't recovered from the heavy blows of the Brussilov offensive. A new enemy, Romania, was emerging in the Southeast. And on the Isonzo the defenses which had withstood five earlier heavy battles were shaking. In this tense situation on all fronts the high command looked mainly to Archduke Eugene's Army Group to provide reinforcements for the hard-pressed 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

An obvious way to free substantial forces for the Isonzo would be to further withdraw the front in south Tyrol to the positions held in May. However, GO Conrad informed Army Group HQ on 9 August that a retreat by 11<sup>th</sup> Army shouldn't be contemplated at this time. Such a measure would not only cancel the advantage gained by occupying the present positions (which were in a more favorable location both for defense and for future attacks), but would also injure the confidence of the troops who had conquered this area with so much effort.

Army Group HQ did make the requested reinforcements available for 5<sup>th</sup> Army during the course of the sixth Isonzo battle, but not without showing concern for their own front. It was true that ever more of the Italian brigades which had hitherto been identified in the Trent area were now moving to the Isonzo; however, the Italians' lively activity opposite the Fleims valley indicated that the enemy had no intention of restricting themselves entirely to the defensive in south Tyrol.

The reserves which Army Group HQ had drawn behind the front in the last days of July - 2 and 8 Mtn Bdes - were the first to leave for the Isonzo (between 8 and 10 August). They were followed by GM Hrozny's combined Division, built from 10 Mtn Bde (of GdI von Roth's Corps) plus two regiments from 11<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>87</sup> On 12 August events on the Isonzo already made it necessary to make available a further brigade, 56 Inf Bde; on the following day the AOK requested yet another division.

To make these transfers possible, 28 ID was pulled from the front of III Corps. 13 Mtn Bde was taken from the Val Sugana sector; eventually the HQ of XVII Corps also left this part of the front for the Isonzo. 28 ID now was made up of 55 Inf Bde and 13 Mtn Bde. However, when they entrained for the Isonzo they brought only 55 Inf Bde, because in the meantime the pause in fighting by Görz and the arrival there of 44 LW ID made it possible to leave 13 Mtn Bde in Tyrol as a reserve of the AOK.

Thus during August Archduke Eugene's Army Group had given up 35 battalions, 2½ squadrons and 22 batteries. The following chart compares the relative strength of the Army Group on 1 and 15 August.

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<sup>87</sup> After the transfers were carried out, this Division was designated the 57 ID. The original Division with this number became 90 ID; FML Heinrich Goiginger took command of the 90<sup>th</sup>, as well as of District IV.

	On 1 August	On 15 August	Reduction
Riflemen.....	137,500.....	115,500.....	22,000
March troops.....	41,000.....	25,000.....	16,000
Machine guns.....	1216.....	1102.....	114
"Musketen".....	170.....	165.....	5 <sup>88</sup>
Infantry guns.....	66.....	51.....	15
Cavalrymen.....	1440.....	1100.....	340
Light mobile guns.....	571.....	473.....	98
Light fixed guns.....	441.....	460.....	+19
Heavy mobile guns.....	117.....	98.....	19
Heavy fixed guns.....	147.....	135.....	12
Total for guns.....	1276.....	1166.....	110

## 2. Continuation of the Italians' Fleims valley offensive

Since both sides were withdrawing units, in August the combat operations on both the western and southern fronts of Tyrol diminished to a minimal point. On the Aus-Hung. side they were restricted to small actions in District II and by 11<sup>th</sup> Army; their goal was to make the Italians uneasy and to bring back prisoners to aid in the evaluation of enemy troop movements.

Such thrusts on the Tonale Pass, in the Pasubio area, in the Posina basin, in the Astico valley, next to the C Maora and in the Sugana valley brought in a total of 8 officers and 400 men plus 9 machine guns. A night attack by the south Styrian IR 87, which was carried out next to the Cra Zebio on 6 August, inflicted unpleasant casualties on the Italians and curbed their attempts to draw closer to this sensitive part of the front.<sup>89</sup>

However, the Italian high command intended that while preparing to resume the offensive on the Isonzo they would carry out Cadorna's standing instructions since the start of the war that the advance on the Karst should be assisted by diversionary attacks in Tyrol. The geographical situation, which was favorable to the Italians, would enable them to carry out these

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88 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For the "Musketen", unique weapons which were a cross between a rifle and machine gun, see Hermann Cron, "Die Organisation des deutschen Heeres im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1923), pp. 47-48. The Germans organized two battalions armed with these weapons, which however ultimately proved to be unsatisfactory.

89 Ministero della guerra, "Brigate di fanteria" (Rome, 1926), Vol. IV, p. 295

operations by surprise.<sup>90</sup>

As previously, the Italian high command's dearest wish would have been to recover the Col Santo and Kempel Ridge, which since mid-June had been the goal of all the Italian offensive operations on the plateaus. However, the failure of the earlier attempts indicated that considerable preparations would be needed to achieve this goal; the plan would have to be carried out at a later date.<sup>91</sup> Instead Cadorna decided to continue with the offensive in the Fleims valley. The main purpose of this operation was to divert the Austrians' attention from the Isonzo. The same deceptive purpose was behind Cadorna's journey to Feltre (described above).

#### The Fleims valley battlefield

The onslaught of the Italian 17 ID and of GM Ferrari's Group against the Fleims valley had already started on 2 August. In the following days attacks were carried out chiefly against the positions of 9 Mtn Bde between the Travignolo valley, the Little Colbricon (2512 m) and the western summit of the Colbricon (2608 m). They failed, as did a new attempt which the Tevere Brigade carried out against the Col di Boche area between 4 and 6 August.

Because of this setback the Italian generals decided to lengthen the attacking front toward the west and bring up further units so that they could break through from the south, over the Fassana crest. Thus the mountains west of the Colbricon, which until now had just been guarded by a few Landsturm companies and Stand-Schützen detachments, became the theater of heavier fighting. The main crest of the Fassana Alps stretches from the twin summits of the Colbricon as a granite cliff toward the west; its upper portion rises like a wall over its less abrupt southern slope. The few gaps (most of them at elevations of more than 2100 meters), and the intervening peaks (C di Ceremana, C di Cece, C di Valmaggiore and the Coltorondo) were the objectives of the next Italian attacks. At the Forcella di Coldose the crest bends to the southwest, where the granite mountains of the C Busa Alta, the Gardinal and the Cauriol guard the important Sforcella di Sadole Pass. Here also heavy fighting developed in August, and continued until winter arrived.

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90 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, p. 1

91 "Le medaglie d'oro", Vol. II, p. 219

HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, commanding in the Cadore, was once again entrusted with directing the new Fleims valley operation. So that there would be unified command, the XVIII Corps on the northern wing of the adjacent 1<sup>st</sup> Army was placed for tactical purposes under 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

The plan of attack was as follows. In the reinforced 17 ID of IX Corps, Col. Garibaldi's Group would carry out feint assaults against the Costabella and in the S Pellegrino valley; the real attacks would be delivered by one brigade in the Col di Bocche area and another south of the Travignolo valley. GM Ferrari's Group was taken out of this sector and shifted farther west against the crest between the Forcella di Cece and the Forcella di Coldose. Their three battalions were joined by seven battalions from 15 ID (XVIII Corps), which had arrived in the Val Cia from the south during August. The Italians had a total of 32 battalions ready to attack the southern part of the Fleims valley front in the second half of August.

Here the 90<sup>th</sup> Division was stationed on the Aus-Hung. side. On their western wing 55 Mtn Bde occupied the crest from Montalon to the C di Cece with three battalions and 830 Stand-Schützen; farther left, as far as the Lusia Heights (2491 m) was 9 Mtn Bde, with six battalions and 140 Stand-Schützen. Col. Covin's Group, four battalions and 670 Stand-Schützen, was between the Col di Bocche and P. le Selle. The northern wing of 90 ID (179 Inf Bde) wasn't involved in the fighting that now burst out.

Operations on the Fleims valley front were initiated on 18 August with a successful attack by Col. Covin's Group; they widened the Bocche position, which thrust forward like a wedge toward the Italian lines. In this part of the front conditions had thus been improved for the defenders. However, the ever more obvious preparations of the Italians to thrust against the Fassana crest caused the Aus-Hung. generals great concern, since the Fleimstal front had been weakened by the departure of 10 Mtn Bde. The new Italian plans were made clear by the direction of their marching troops and by the lively truck traffic in the Vanoia valley; detachments were slowly being shifted along the crests of the Tognola and the Fossernica. Skirmishers in no-man's land delayed this movement as much as possible.

#### Course of the Italian attacks

Weak Italian thrusts were mounted on 22 August in the Travignolo valley and the Colbricon area in an attempt to divert the defenders' attention. Meanwhile, however, 90 ID was shifting

all available troops to the endangered front on the Fassana crest, to at least deepen the thin line of sentries at the most important points.

The Italian offensive opened on 23 August; its weight was first directed against the front between the C di Ceremana to the Coltorondo. Despite massive artillery support, all attacks by GM Ferrari's Group on this and the following day were in vain. Then the Italians shifted their attention to an attempt to rip a hole in the Fleims valley front farther west; starting on 25 August they sent three battalions against the area of Mt Cauriol.

The steepest slopes of this mountain are on the northern sides; it is more easily approached from the southwest and southeast. Moreover the Cauriol was an easy target for the concentrated artillery fire of the attackers. Thus despite the very stubborn counter-fire by the garrison, which suffered heavy casualties in this narrow area, by 28 August the Italians had made their way to the mountain summit and to the gap immediately to the north, as far as the dead ground directly in front of the Aus-Hung. positions. Finally, in the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> they overwhelmed the small detachment on the summit, which couldn't be reinforced due to the endless artillery barrage.<sup>92</sup> Reserves who hurried to the scene were able to seal off the area of penetration and to retain the Cauriol gap, so that the area won by the Italians was strictly limited. Nevertheless, the loss of the Cauriol was a major setback for the defenders. From this observation point, 8½ kilometers in a straight line from Predazzo, the Italians now saw everything that happened in the Fleims valley and could direct a long-range bombardment against the villages and roads. Therefore GdI Roth decided to try to recover the mountain summit. From other areas of his Corps he began to assemble three battalions for this counterattack; Army Group HQ would reinforce them with three battalions from 11<sup>th</sup> Army (including some Landes-Schützen)<sup>93</sup>. In any event, the situation in District

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92 The position on the summit was held by one officer and 40 men of the Lower Austrian IR 49. Here 11 men (4 of them heavily wounded) fell into the enemy's hands; 20 wounded were evacuated. (Ehrenbuch der Hesser, Vol. II, p. 260.)

93 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This planned counterattack was never carried out, for reasons explained when the narrative of the campaign against Italy is resumed at the end of this Volume. There are discrepancies between the two sections of the book - the number of battalions deployed by Roth is later given as four (not three), and there is no mention of reinforcements to

IV at the end of August was far from stable.

Also in District V the Italians had won a local success, east of the road in the valley between Toblach and Cortina d'Ampezzo. Here on 29 August two company sectors on the steep, forested slopes were lost. South Slavic deserters had shown the enemy the way. The penetration was soon sealed off, but there was no attempt to recover the lost position because there was a shortage of mountain-trained troops and because all reserves were pinned down on the Fleims valley front.

Minor fighting occurred along the other parts of Corps Roth's front during August. In the Col di Lana area, on 5 August a detachment of the Aus-Hung. 21 Mtn Bde made a surprise attack on the hotly-contested strong point on the ridge. They were able to take it, but could hold it only until 7 August against the superior numbers of the Italian reserves brought to the scene, and against the concentrated, massed fire of the Italian artillery.

### **III. Actions in the East from the end of July to the End of August**

#### ***A. Creation of the Hindenburg Front***

The development of the military situation, in particular the severe setbacks at Luck and Okna, had naturally made a deep impression in the interior of the Habsburg Monarchy. The suddenness of the collapse and the magnitude of the catastrophe and of the casualties (which understandably were rumored to be even greater than they were) were alarming. The growing military dependence on Germany, an inevitable result of the large-scale help which the Germans provided in the northeast, was also disturbing. The impact was felt in different ways by individuals, depending on their position within the state and their nationality. The sharpest criticism was directed against the military leadership. The feeling in the Hungarian parliament was unanimous: "With few exceptions, the misfortunes can be traced to the generals!" Opinion west of the Leitha was similar. Public opinion wouldn't be satisfied by the removal of some of the subsidiary commanders. The positions of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and especially of his Chief of

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be provided by Army Group HQ. In fact, it was the latter HQ that canceled the counterattack.

the General Staff were under heavy pressure. When the Emperor sent one of the generals of his own circle, FML Ritter von Marterer, to Teschen one week after the catastrophe at Luck, it was believed that Conrad's hour had already come. Actually at this time the commander in Bosnia, GdI von Sarkotic, was asked whether he would be willing to take over as Chief of the General Staff; a similar question was sent to the commander of the Isonzo front, GO Borojevic. Discussion regarding Conrad's possible dismissal continued into autumn. On 25 September the Emperor raised the issue with the Archduke-Successor, who suggested considering Generals Alfred Krauss, von Arz and von Csicseric<sup>94</sup>. Finally, however, it was decided not to take this drastic step, in considerable part because the high-minded Commander-in-Chief FM Archduke Frederick remained true to his Chief of Staff even in these hours of misfortune.

After Luck the loss of confidence in the high command, which had never been particularly beloved, also caused authoritative circles in Vienna and Budapest to willingly support the efforts of Imperial Germany to establish a "Hindenburg-Front" in the East, along with an allied high command with the German Emperor at its head.

The question of whether to entrust GFM von Hindenburg with overall command of the entire Eastern front was already an important point in the diplomatic correspondence between Vienna and Berlin at the start of July.<sup>95</sup> On 4 July the staff at the Ballhausplatz inferred that another reason for the proposal coming from Berlin was a desire to limit the influence of the Chief of the German General Staff, GdI von Falkenhayn, on the conduct of the war.<sup>96</sup> In the event, Falkenhayn's position would quickly be undermined. In his diary entries the General himself blamed his loss of prestige primarily on the opposition of Reich-Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, with whom he had quarreled in May 1916 about the direction of the submarine campaign. It is certain, however, that Falkenhayn had also lost the confidence of the Army and of all Imperial German official circles. Meanwhile the aged warrior Hindenburg was ever more becoming the "Hero of the Nation", as he was called by his Emperor in a celebration on the steps of Kovno cathedral. Falkenhayn naturally recognized that he would suffer from the efforts being made to more strongly put the personality of the Field Marshal

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94 Werkmann, "Deutschland als Verbündeter" (Berlin, 1931), pp. 87 ff.

95 "Akten des Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchivs"

96 Zwehl, "Erich von Falkenhayn" (Berlin, 1926), pp. 210 ff.

in the foreground. At the command of his Supreme Warlord, Falkenhayn did act as an advocate of the idea of establishing a "Hindenburg-Front" between the Baltic Sea and the Romanian border. However, he had no very great regret at the Berlin meeting on 18 July when Conrad firmly rejected the plan.

Emperor Franz Joseph and his Foreign Minister Burian concurred with Conrad's position. It is true that several days previously, in a conference chaired by the Monarch there was talk of "the opportunity to unify the command structure along the entire front"; this was supposed to make it easier "to deploy all the troops on the defensive line from a central point without wasting time in negotiations."<sup>97</sup> It was envisioned that Hindenburg would command from this central point. However, the government at Vienna had no intention of completely excluding the Aus-Hung. high command from leadership of the war against Russia. Instead the Ballhausplatz advocated a somewhat unclear proposal, by which Hindenburg would command the entire Eastern front under the personal direction of Archduke Frederick; Conrad would more or less be excluded from the picture.<sup>98</sup> To these proposals, Archduke Frederick replied that in his opinion the best course would be to place Hindenburg under the joint control of the two high commands.

#### Further negotiations with the Germans

Meanwhile the tension on the Russian front continued to increase in the second half of July; at the same time Romania's attitude became more threatening with each passing day. Between the Pripyat and the Carpathians there were already 18 German divisions, closely intermingled with Aus-Hung. troops; more would have to join them if Romania attacked. On 23 July the German Emperor, at his HQ in Charleville, informed his Aus-Hung. ally: "Events on our common Eastern front compel me to travel to Pless in a few days to confer with Field Marshal Hindenburg. I request that you also invite Archduke Frederick and General von Hötendorff to join me for this conference."<sup>99</sup> It seems to me

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97 From a note by Burian to his representative at the AOK (Count Thurn) sent from Vienna at 6:30 PM on 18 July 1916 ("Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv")

98 From a note by Ambassador Freiherr von Musulin to Thurn's representative (Ritter von Wiessner), sent from Vienna on 22 July; also see a note from Thurn (at Teschen) to Burian on the same day. (*Ibid.*)

99 The telegram should have read "Conrad von Hötendorf", not "General von Hötendorff."

that the situation in the East is so serious that special measures must be taken, for which I will then need your consent."

On the same day GdI Falkenhayn made a surprising proposal to his Aus-Hung. colleague. He proposed that Hindenburg - instead of commanding the northern wing of the East front as he had until this time - should take over the front between the Pripyat and Dniester. Conrad, who had just returned from an audience at Vienna, declared himself ready to ask his monarch to support this proposal. Emperor Franz Joseph gave his consent on the 24<sup>th</sup>. However, Hindenburg objected because he believed that the proposed solution would have actually reduced his influence. The plan was abandoned.<sup>100</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup> Falkenhayn visited Teschen and returned to his first proposal. The entire Eastern front should be placed under the Field Marshal; he in turn would obey the orders of the German OHL, which would make no major decisions without approval from Teschen. Conrad once more turned down the idea; the German State-Secretary von Jagow believed that this episode represented just an attempt by Falkenhayn to ruin the whole project by overstretching its goals.<sup>101</sup> Conrad stated that he had "only been authorized by the Emperor to negotiate on the basis of earlier suggestions. The current method of commanding through both high commands had already proved effective. With all due respect to Hindenburg, his promotion would be regarded in the k.u.k. Army as a new sign that they were being patronized. Instead of the encouragement they were hoping for, the result would be mistrust and disquiet. The Slavic nationalities in particular would be displeased; their damaging contention that the whole war was just a fight between Slavs and Germans would be bolstered. He had no personal grievance, but as Chief of the General Staff was obliged to uphold the prestige of the Monarchy, the Army and the AOK without reservations."<sup>102</sup>

The Army's Commander-in-Chief, Archduke Frederick, was as always objective and free from personal sensitivity; on the 27<sup>th</sup> he reported to the Emperor at Schönbrunn regarding the latest

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100 Cramon, "Unser österreichisch-ungarischer Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg" (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Berlin, 1922), pp. 66 ff. Also Falkenhayn, "Die Oberste Heeresleitung 1914-1916 in ihren wichtigsten Entscheidungen" (Berlin, 1929), pp. 229 ff.

101 Per a note from Thurn (at Teschen) to Burian on 27 July ("Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv")

102 Cramon, "Bundesgenosse", p. 68

disagreement between the two Chiefs of Staff. The 86 year-old ruler could not but conclude that the latest form of the German proposal went too far. Still on the 27<sup>th</sup>, he informed the high command of his views through a letter from GO Freiherr von Bolfras: "His Majesty places the common cause above any consideration of prestige and is prepared to adopt any German proposal that will favorably resolve the question of command on our Northeastern front. However, the All-Highest wish is that the contentions on both sides must be thoroughly discussed during the meeting which His Majesty the German Emperor is holding at Pless so that an agreement can be found."

#### The decision on the command question

On 27 July the meeting to resolve the question took place at Pless; in attendance were the German Emperor, Archduke Frederick, the German statesmen Bethmann-Hollweg and Jagow, and Generals Hindenburg, Conrad and Ludendorff. Falkenhayn, who said he wasn't well, remained in his quarters.<sup>103</sup> After briefly consulting with the others who were present, Conrad paid Falkenhayn a visit to outline the proposed compromise solution. GFM Hindenburg, who would hand his own Army Group HQ over to GO von Eichhorn, wouldn't receive command over the entire Eastern front; however, he would take over the majority of the front (the Army Groups of Eichhorn, GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria and GO von Linsingen, as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> k.u.k. Army). He would follow orders from the German OHL, which in turn would promise to issue no instructions affecting the area south of the Pripyat without the concurrence of the k.u.k. AOK. Moreover, Falkenhayn and Hindenburg would agree that while running affairs north of the Pripyat they would "to the extent possible" always take into account the situation of Archduke Karl Franz Joseph's Army Group, which would remain directly under the Aus-Hung. high command. The AOK would be obliged to "first take into account the intentions of GFM von Hindenburg" while deploying the Archduke's units. Each of the high commands retained the right to withdraw troops from Hindenburg's front for other theaters of operations when necessary. Emperor Franz Joseph agreed to these conditions on 29 July.

Resolution of the difficult negotiations was due mainly to the Commander-in-Chief Archduke Frederick, who "always displayed the same calm and kindness to everyone" despite the nervousness that

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103 Note from Thurn (at Teschen) to Burian at noon on 28 July ("Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv")

was evident among the others.<sup>104</sup> The solution which he himself favored (as noted above), had been to create the Hindenburg Front under the control of both high commands, but there were too many practical disadvantages standing in the way.

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104 See the note from Prince Gottfried zu Hohenlohe (the Aus-Hung. Ambassador at Berlin) to Burian on 31 July (in the "Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv").

**B. Orders of Battle in the August Fighting****1. Austro-Hungarian and German forces under the AOK as of 28 July 1916**

a) **Army Group Archduke Karl** (12<sup>th</sup> Army HQ)

Commander = FML Archduke Karl Franz Joseph

Chief of Staff = Prussian GM von Seeckt

Officer on Special Assignment = Col. Freiherr von Waldstätten

**7<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = Freiherr von Pflanzer-Baltin

Chief of Staff = Col. Ritter von Zeynek

**XI Corps**

Commander = FML Edler von Habermann

Chief of Staff = Lt Col. Otto von Redlich

Strength = 29 bns, 4 sqdns, 23 batties, 5 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 20,103 foot, 320 horse; 96 guns, 105 MG, 7 inf guns

. Lt Col Papp's Bde (5700 foot, 26 MG) = k.k. Lst Gendarme Regt [2]; Gendarme Sperr Det; k.u. Lst IR 5 [3]; k.u. Lst Bn IV/8, k.u. Lst Eta Bn IV/1; a volunteer bn

. 215 Inf Bde (Col von Berzeviczy; 3100 foot, 19 MG, 2 inf guns) = k.k. Lst Bns 23, 24, 63; k.u. Lst IR 20 [3]

. Artillery supporting the above two bdes (36 guns) = 3 & 4 Batties/Hon FKR 1; 4 Batty/FHR 24; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 3; 1, 2 & 3 Can Batties/Mtn AR 4; Heavy How Batty 47; two 9 cm cannon

. 40<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Edler von Nagy) = 9200 foot, 160 horse; 58 guns, 47 MG, 5 inf guns

. 79 Hon Inf Bde (Col Kobek) = Hon IR 29 [2½], 30 [2]; II Bn of Hon IR 19

. 80 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Sreter) = Hon IR 6 [3], 19 [2]

. 5 & 6 Sqdns/Hon HR 8; 3 Comp & 1 Ma Comp of PB 7

. 40 Hon FA Bde (Col Anton von Hellebronth) = 1 & 2

Batties/ Hon FKR 1; 3 & 4 Batties/Hon FHR 4; 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 13; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 18; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 27; 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 4; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 22; Heavy How Batties 40, 45

. Major Russ' Group (1800 foot, 2 guns, 13 MG) = k.k. Lst Bn 150; k.u. Lst IR 33 [1]; Lt Col Szolniki's Comb Bn; Russ' Det; Russ' Mtn Can Batty

. Corps units (300 foot, 160 horse) = 1 & 2 Comps/k.k. Lst Eta Bn 513; Kriegerkorps "Czernowitz"; Gendarme Sqdn; 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5; 2 Comp/SB 2; 2 & 4 Comps/SB 11; Flieger Comp # 1

## Brudermann's Cavalry Group Command

Commander = FML Ritter von Brudermann

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Edler von Dragoni

Strength = 6 bns, 9 sqdns, 7 batties; 1¼ tech comps; 4300 foot, 1300 horse; 38 guns, 41 MG

. 3<sup>rd</sup> Cav Div (Col Ritter von Szivo, temporary) (1500 foot, 1300 horse; 12 guns, 21 MG)

. 10 Cav Bde (Col Ritter von Szivo) = DR 3 [2], UR 7 [2]

. 17 Cav Bde (Col Edler von Kirsch) = HR 1 [3], UR 4 [2]

. Comb I &amp; II Cav Rif Bn/3, III Cav Rif Bn/3; one forestry comp

. Horse Arty Bn 3 [3]

. 68 Inf Bde (from 34 ID; Col Greger) (2800 foot, 16 guns, 20 MG) = IR 33 [3]; FJB 28; 4 Batty/FHR 5, 3 Batty/FHR 24, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 20

. Under Group HQ = ¼ 9 Comp/SB 9, ½ 2 Comp PB 3; 4 Comp/PB 15

## Group Rudolf Krauss

Commander = FML Rudolf Krauss

Chief of Staff = Major Hatzl

Strength = 15½ bns, 1 sqdn, 13 batties, 2 ½ tech comps; 9000 foot, 120 horse; 69 guns, 62 MG, 6 inf guns

. 202 Hon Inf Bde (Col von Savoly; 3200 foot, 24 MG, 4 inf guns) = Hon IR 306 [2], 307 [3]

. 34<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Rudolf Krauss) = 4200 foot, 120 horse; 69 guns, 36 MG, 2 inf guns

. 67 Inf Bde (GM von Lauingen) = IR 29 [3], 101 [3]; FJB 24

. 2 Res Sqdn/HR 3; 1 Comp/SB 10, 2 Comp/SB 13, ¼ 2 Comp/PB 3; Armored Train # XI

. 34 FA Bde (Col Hönig) = FKR 34 [4], FHR 34 [4]; 1 &amp; 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 34; 1 &amp; 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 9; 3 Can Batty/ Mtn AR 26

. Under Group HQ (1600 foot, 2 MG) = k.k. Lst Bn 153; Major Alzner's Comb Bn, Capt Hubaczek's Comb Bn; 2 &amp; 3 Comps/k.k. Lst Bn 494

## German Carpathian Corps (in Army reserve)

Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Conta

Chief of staff = Prussian Major von Unruh

Strength = 10 bns, 14 sqdns, 1 cav rif bn, 18 batties, 2 tech comps; 9400 foot, 1860 horse, 65 guns, 113 MG

. German 2 Jaeger Bde (reinforced) (Col Ernst von Below)<sup>105</sup> (10 bns, 3 sqdns, 15 batties, 2 tech comps; 8400 foot, 360 horse, 56 guns, 105 MG) = Jaeger Regts # 3 [4], 4 [3], 5 [3]; 2 & 4 Sqdns/

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105 On 7 August the 2 German Jaeger Bde became 200<sup>th</sup> ID under GM Boëss

UR 1; one other sqdn; miscellaneous batties

. 8<sup>th</sup> Cav Div (GM von Fluck) = 1000 foot, 1500 horse, 9 guns, 8 MG

- . 13 Cav Bde (Col Wilhelm von Schram = DR 7 [3], UR 8 [2])
- . 15 Cav Bde (Col Edler von Dokonal) = DR 2 [3], UR 11 [3]
- . Cav Rifle Bn 8, Horse Arty Bn 2 [3]

Units directly under 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ =  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  6 Comps/SB 3; 8 Comp/SB 12; Flieger Comps 13, 30

**TOTALS** for 7<sup>th</sup> Army = 61½ bns, 28 sqdns, 61 batties, 13¼ tech comps, 3 Flieger comps, 1 armored train. 42,800 foot, 3600 horse, 268 gun, 321 MG, 13 inf guns

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

Commander = GO von Kövess

Chief of Staff = GM Konopicky

#### VIII Corps

Commander = FZM Ritter von Benigni

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Max Freiherr von Pitreich

Strength = 22 bns, 1 ½ batties, 23 batties, 3 tech comps; 22,800 foot, 180 horse, 113 guns, 87 MG, 6 inf guns

- . 59<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Kroupa) = 9300 foot, 60 horse, 55 guns, 39 MG
  - . 6 Mtn Bde (Col Gustav von Hellebronth) = Bns I/6, III/38, IV/42, IV/50, IV/81;  $\frac{1}{4}$  1 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rifles
  - . 18 Mtn Bde (GM Skvor) = Bns III/31, II/60; FJB 3, 15, 26;  $\frac{1}{4}$  2 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rifles
  - . 3 Comp/SB 14
  - . 10 FA Bde (Col Czapp) = FKR 10 (4), FHR 10 (4); 1 & 2 Batties/Hvy FAR 10
- . 44<sup>th</sup> LW ID (FML Nemecek) = 13,500 foot; 80 horse, 44 guns, 48 MG, 6 inf guns
  - . 44 LW Bde (GM Schönauer) = [Mtn] LW IR 4 [3], 27 [3]
  - . 87 LW Bde (GM Jellenchich) = LW IR 2 [3], 21 [3]
  - . Res Sqdn/DR 10; 4 Comp/SB 12
  - . 44 FA Bde (Col Edler von Ellenberger) = FKR 44 [3], FHR 44 [4]; 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 44; 10.4 cm Can Batty 8
- . Corps troops (14 guns) = Hvy How Batties 3, 54; 15 cm Mor Batty 5; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 14; 5 Comp/SB 4; Armored Train # II

#### I Corps

Commander = GdK Karl Freiherr von Kirchbach

Chief of Staff = Col Demus

Strength = 21½ bns, 6 sqdns, 26 batties, 3 tech comps; 17,600 foot, 520 horse, 115 guns, 57 MG, 8 inf guns

- . 30<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Jesser)<sup>106</sup> = 5800 foot, 160 horse, 57 guns, 14 MG
  - . 16 Bde (Lt Col Karl Lerch) = FJB 1, 13, 16, 27 [# 1 had 4 comps with remnants of FJB 1, 7 (March Comp), 14; # 16 also had 4 comps, remnants of FJB 9 (March Comp), 16, 18]
  - . Col Hostasch's Bde = IR 97 [2] only
  - . 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 1; ¼ of 6 Comp/SB 3
  - . 30 FA Bde (Col Stepanescu) = FKR 30 [4], FHR 30 [4], Hvy FAR 30 [3]; 5 Batty/FHR 15
- . 42<sup>nd</sup> Hon ID (FML Snjaric) = 9300 foot, 180 horse, 46 guns, 40 MG, 6 inf guns
  - . 72 Bde (from 36 ID) (Col Budiner) = IR 16 [4], 53 [3]
  - . 83 Hon Bde (GM von Bekic) = Hon IR 25 [2], 26 [1], 27 [1], 28 [1]
  - . 3 & 6 Sqdns/Hon HR 10; 7 Comp/SB 7, ¾ 9 Comp/SB 9
  - . 42 Hon FA Bde (Col Scholz) = Hon FKR 42 [3], Hon FHR 42 [3], Hon Hvy FAR 42 [3]; 1 & 2 Batties/Hon FHR 40
- . 51<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (GM Foglar) = 2500 foot, 12 guns, 3 MG, 2 inf guns
  - . 200 Hon Bde (Col von Farkas) = Hon IR 300 [1], 305 [1½]
  - . 51 Hon FA Bde (Col Basch) = 3 & 4 Batties/Hon FHR 51; 3 Batty/Hon Hvy FAR 51
- . Corps troops (180 horse) = 1 & 2 Sqdns/Hon HR 4; 4 Comp/PB 15

#### Group Hadfy

Commander = FML von Hadfy

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Stromfeld

Strength = 17 bns, 18 sqdns, 18 batties, 2 tech comps; 12,300 foot, 2640 horse, 84 guns, 74 MG, 7 inf guns

. Col Kranz's Group = k.k. Lst Bn 17, k.u. Lst Bns VI/3, VIII/30

. 21<sup>st</sup> LW ID (GM Podhajsky) = 8700 foot, 240 horse, 53 guns, 46 MG, 7 inf guns

. 41 LW Bde (Col Schwanda) = LW IR 6 [3], 7 [3]

. 42 LW Bde (Col Chwostek) = LW IR 8 [3], 28 [3]

. 1 & 2 Sqdns/DR 14; 2 Comp/PB 9

. 21 FA Bde (Col Franz Gross) = FKR 21 [5], FHR 21 [4], 1 & 2 Batties/Hvy FAR 22

. 5<sup>th</sup> Hon CD (FML Freiherr von Apor) = 1300 foot, 2400 horse, 27 guns, 28 MG

. 19 Hon Cav Bde (GM von Jony) = Hon HR 1 [4], 8 [4]

. 23 Hon Cav Bde (Col Graf Lubienski) = Hon HR 6 [4], 7 [4]

. Cav Rif Bns I & II/5; 1 Comp/SB 12; Armored Train # VIII

. Major Knall's Hon FA Bde = 6 Batty/Hon FKR 40; 2 & 4 Batties/Hon FKR 51; 6 Batty/FHR 29; 1 & 2 Batties/Hon FHR 51

. Under Group HQ (4 guns) = Hvy How Batty 58

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106 The 215 Inf Bde HQ, assigned to 30<sup>th</sup> ID, was detached to XI Corps.

*German Group Kraewel*

Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Kraewel

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major Piedel

Strength = 16½ bns, 17 sqdns, 35 batties, 4 tech comps; 14,100 foot, 1580 horse, 119 guns, 92 MG

. Aus-Hung. 6<sup>th</sup> Cav Div (GM Edler von Schwer) = 2600 foot, 1300 horse, 27 guns, 30 MG

. 5 Cav Bde (GM Kopecek) = DR 6 [2], 8 [2]; 1 & 3 Sqdns of DR 5; 3, 4, 5 & 6 Sqdns of LW UR 6

. 14 Cav Bde (Col Adler) = DR 11 [2], HR 11 [3]

. Cav Rifle Bns I, II & III/6; IV Bn/IR 96

. Lt Col Van Goethem's FA Bde = Horse Arty Bns 6 [3], 8 [4]; 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 34

. *German* 119<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Behr) = 6 bns [IR 58 and Res IR 46; other regt (46<sup>th</sup> line) detached], 1 sqdn, 11 batties [FAR 237, etc.], 2 tech comps; 7000 foot, 80 horse, 42 guns, 41 MG

. Attached to 119 ID were parts of *German* 105<sup>th</sup> ID - 3 bns [IR 129], 1 sqdn, 4 batties, 2 tech comps; 2800 foot, 80 horse, 16 guns, 10 MG

. Also attached were eight Hungarian guns - 2 & 3 Batties of Hon FKR 3

. GM Leide's Group (under HQ of *German* 119 ID) (1700 foot, 120 horse, 14 guns, 11 MG) = LW IR 5 [3; from 30 ID]; a March comp of LW IR 23, a March comp of k.k. Lst IR 23; a comb sqdn from HR 16; 2 Batty/FKR 15, 2 Batty/FHR 15; 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 36

. Under Kraewel's Group HQ (12 A-H guns) = 10.4 cm Can Batties 6, 11; 15 cm How Batties 4, 62; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 13

Directly under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

. 5<sup>th</sup> ID (in reserve) (GM von Felix) = 7300 foot, 200 horse, 58 guns, 30 MG

. 9 Bde (Col Trimmel) = IR 54 [2], 93 [1½]

. 10 Bde (GM Adalbert von Kaltenborn) = IR 1 [1], 13 [3]

. 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 4

. 5 FA Bde (Col von Senkowski) = FKR 5 [6], FHR 5 [3], Hvy FAR 5 [3]

. Also - 10.4 cm Can Batty 8 (with 4 guns); 2 Ma Comp/PB 7, 1 Ma Comp/PB 10; Flieger Comps 26, 29; Armored Train # I

**TOTALS** for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army = 83½ bns, 44½ sqdns, 115 batties, 14 tech comps, 2 Flieger comps, 2 armored trains. 74,100 foot, 4120 horse, 493 guns, 342 MG, 27 inf guns

**German South Army**

Commander = Bavarian GdI Graf von Bothmer

Chief of Staff = Bavarian Lt Col Ritter von Hemmer

## Aus-Hung. XIII Corps

Commander = FML von Csicseric

Chief of Staff = Col Csoban

Strength = 29 bns, 20½ sqdns, 27 batties, 5 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 16,560 foot, 2580 horse, 124 guns, 93 MG, 12 inf guns

. 15<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Teisinger) = 6900 foot, 220 horse, 30 guns, 36 MG, 4 inf guns

. 29 Bde (GM Ritter von Weiss-Tihanyi) = IR 65 [2], 66 [2]

. 30 Bde (GM Leide) = IR 5 [3], 60 [6]

. 5 &amp; 6 Sqdns/HR 15; 5 Comp/SB 11

. 15 FA Bde (Col Primavesi) = FKR 15 [3], FHR 15 [3], Hvy FAR 15 [3]

. 36<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Nöhring) = 6600 foot, 260 horse, 65 guns, 35 MG, 8 inf guns

. 75 Hon Bde (from 38 Hon ID) (Col Freiherr von Than) = Hon IR 21 [2], 22 [2]; ½ 2 Sqdn/HR 2; Hon FKR 5 [4]; an improvised battery

. 13 Inf Bde (Col Edler von Löw) = IR 52 [3], 78 [3]

. 1 &amp; 2 Sqdns/Hon HR 10; 3 Comp/SB 13

. 36 FA Bde (Col Freiherr von Bibra) = FKR 36 [4], FHR 36 [4], Hvy FAR 36 [3]; 12 cm Can Batty 28

. 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav Div (GM Freiherr von Abele) = 800 foot, 2100 horse, 60 guns, 5 MG

. 3 Cav Bde (Col Freiherr von Spiegelfeld) = HR 6 [4], 16 [4]

. 16 Cav Bde (Col Anker) = HR 3 [4], UR 5 [4]

. Cav Rifle Bn I/2; Horse Arty Bn 2 [3]

. Corps troops (2400 foot, 4 guns, 17 MG) = Hon IR 302 [3; from 51 Hon ID]; March Bn/LW IR 5; k.u. Lst Eta Bns IV/14, II/31; 7 Batty/FKR 16; 1 Comp/SB 5; 1 Ma Comp/PB 4; 2 Comp/PB 7; Flieger Comp 11

## Aus-Hung. VI Corps

Commander = GdI von Arz

Chief of Staff = Col Joseph Huber

Strength = 15½ bns, 4 sqdns, 21 batties, 2 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 12,400 foot, 360 horse, 101 guns, 45 MG, 8 inf guns

. 12<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Hinke) = 7500 foot, 200 horse, 58 guns, 30 MG, 7 inf guns

. 23 Bde (GM Ritter von Metz) = IR 20 [1], 56 [2]

. 24 Bde (Col Johann Schubert) = IR 3 [2], 57 [1], 100 [4]

. 3 &amp; 4 Sqdns/LW UR 4; 5 Comp/SB 1

. 12 FA Bde (Col Andersch) = FKR 12 [5], FHR 12 [5], Hvy FAR 12 [3]

. 39<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Blasius von Dani) = 4900 foot, 160 horse, 43

guns, 15 MG, 1 inf gun

- . 77 Hon Bde (Col Lengerer) = Hon IR 9 [1], 11 [2]
- . 78 Hon Bde (Col Daubner) = Hon IR 10 [2], 16 [½]
- . 1 & 2 Sqdns/Hon HR 15; 3 Comp/SB 5; Hon Pioneer Det 39
- . 39 Hon FA Bde (Col Riedl) = 1 & 4 Batties/Hon FKR 3, Hon FHR 39 [4]; 1 & 2 Batties/Hon Heavy FAR 39
- . Corps troops = Flieger Comp 18

German divisions directly under Army HQ...

. 1<sup>st</sup> Res ID (G.Lt Zietlow) = 10,900 foot, 240 horse, 32 guns, 54 MG

- . 1 Res Bde = Res IR 1 [3], 3 [3]
- . 72 Res Bde = Res IR 18 [3], 59 [3]
- . 4 Sqdn/Gd UR 2; one tech comp
- . Artillery = 8 batteries (including Res FAR 1)
- . 48<sup>th</sup> Res ID (G.Lt von Oppeln-Bronikowski) = 11,200 foot, 240 horse, 41 guns, 108 MG
- . 95 Res Bde = Res IR 221 [3], 222 [3]
- . 96 Res Bde = Res IR 223 [3], 224 [3]
- . Res Jaeger Bn 20; Res Cav Sqdn 48; two tech comps; k.u. Lst Sapper Detachment 1/III
- . Artillery = 11 batties (including Res FAR 48)

Aus-Hung. Corps Hofmann

Commander = FML Hofmann

Chief of Staff = Col Pawlowsky

Strength = 32 bns, 5 sqdns, 27½ batties, 3 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 35,900 foot, 600 horse, 171 guns, 119 MG, 10 inf guns

- . 54<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Daniel) = 17,900 foot, 240 horse, 69 guns, 56 MG, 6 inf guns
- . 131 Bde (GM Blum) = LW IR 19 [3], 35 [3]
- . 132 Bde (Col Edler von Bolzano) = IR 81 [3], 88 [4]; FJB 32
- . 2 & 4 Sqdns/DR 5; 7 Comp/SB 11
- . 54 FA Bde (Col Hubischta) = Res FKR 54 [4], Res FHR 54 [5]; Hvy How Batty 51; fourteen 8 cm cannon
- . 55<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Unschuld) = 16,400 foot, 240 horse, 70 guns, 63 MG, 4 inf guns
- . 129 Bde (Col Baukovac) = Hon IR 309 [4], 310 [4]
- . 130 Bde (Col Stanoilovic) = IR 103 [4], Hon IR 308 [4]
- . 5 & 6 Sqdns/DR 5; 3 Comp/SB 12
- . 55 FA Bde (Col Kubesch) = Res FKR 55 [4], Res FHR 55 [5]; 1 Batty/Res Hvy FAR 55; Hvy How Batty 53; eight 8 cm cannon, eight 9 cm cannon
- . Corps troops (1600 foot<sup>107</sup>, 120 horse, 32 guns) = Ukrainian

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107 Original showed 16,000 foot as "Corps troops", a

Rifle Regt [2]; a combined cav sqdn; 7 Batty/FKR 28, 10.4 cm Can Batty 12, 12 cm Can Batty 21, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 8; 2 Comp/PB 4; Flieger Comp 9. Also 3 *German* batties and five *German* 5.7 cm cannon

Aus-Hung. IX Corps

Commander = FML Kralicek

Chief of Staff = Col von Krammer

Strength = 35 bns, 5½ sqdns, 45 batties, 10 tech comps, 1

Flieger comp; 37,000 foot, 620 horse, 283 guns, 133 MG, 18 inf guns

. 38<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Molnar) = 8200 foot, 80 horse, 24 MG, 4 inf guns

. 76 Hon Bde (Col Karleusa) = Hon IR 23 [3], 24 [3]; II Bn of Hon IR 22

. ½ of 2 Sqdn/HR 2; 2 Comp/SB 10

. 38 Hon FA Bde (GM Werz) = Hon FHR 38 [4]; 1 Batty of Hvy Hon FAR 38

. 19<sup>th</sup> ID (FM Böltz) = 17,100 foot, 300 horse, 73 guns, 61 MG, 8 inf guns

. 37 Bde (Col Augustin) = IR 35 [3], 75 [4]

. 38 Bde (GM Steiger) = BH IR 1 [3]; FJB 5, 6; LW IR 29 [3]

. 4 & 6 Sqdns/DR 14; 5 Sqdn/LW UR 1; 6 Comp/SB 9; one comp of miners

. 19 FA Bde (Col Regnier) = FKR 19 [5], FHR 19 [4]; Hvy FAR 19 [3]; ten 8 cm cannon

. 32<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Willerding) = 11,700 foot, 240 horse, 56 guns, 48 MG, 6 inf guns

. 63 Bde (Col Brunader) = IR 23 [4], 70 [3]

. 64 Bde (Col Gaksch) = IR 6 [3], 86 [3]

. 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 8; 6 Comp/SB 2; one miner comp

. 32 FA Bde (Col Moc) = FKR 32 [4], FHR 32 [4], Hvy FAR 32 [3]

. Corps troops (126 guns) = 6 Batty/FKR 15, 6 Batty/FKR 33; Hvy How Batty 28; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 1, 17; four 9 cm cannon; k.k. Lst Sap Dets 1/1 and 1, 2 and 4/2; 1 Comp/PB 7; Flieger Comp 25. Also 12 *German* batties and twenty two *German* 5.7 cm cannon

Directly under South Army (5400 foot) = *German* Lst IR 34, 35 and 36; two *German* Flieger detachments

**TOTALS** for South Army = 145½ bns, 37 sqdns, 140 batties, 24 tech comps, 6 Flieger comps/dets. 129,360 foot, 4640 horse, 762 guns, 575 MG, 48 inf guns

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typographical error (TRANSLATOR)

Directly under Army Group Archduke Charles...

- . German 209 Inf Bde (GM Stehr) (from 105 ID, in reserve) (5900 foot, 27 guns, 20 MG) = IR 21 [3] and 122 [3] and seven batties
- . Two German Flieger detachments

**TOTALS** for Army Group Archduke Charles = 296½ bns, 109½ sqdns, 323 batties, 51¼ tech comps, 11 Flieger comp/dets; 3 armored trains. 252,160 foot, 13,360 horse, 1550 guns, 1258 MG, 88 inf guns

b) Independent **2<sup>nd</sup> Army**

Commander = GO von Böhm-Ermolli

Chief of Staff = GM Dr Bardolff

IV Corps

Commander = GdI Schmidt von Georgenegg

Chief of Staff = Col Edler von Merizzi

- Strength = 20½ bns, 2 sqdns, 16 batties, 1½ tech comps; 1 Flieger comp; 20,600 foot, 240 horse, 98 guns, 74 MG, 2 inf guns
- . 14<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Horvath) = 20,600 foot, 240 horse, 66 guns, 74 MG, 2 inf guns
    - . 27 Bde (GM von Schilhawsky) = IR 71 [6], 72 [4½]
    - . 28 Bde (Col Alfred von Zeidler) = IR 48 [5] only
    - . 66 Bde (GM Brauner; from 33 ID) = IR 26 [5] only
    - . 1 & 2 Sqdns of HR 5
    - . 14 FA Bde (Col von Ripper) = FKR 14 [3], FHR 14 [4]; 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 14; FKR 33 [3]
  - . Corps troops (32 guns) = 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 31; 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 33; 15 cm Mor Batties 12, 20; eleven 8 cm cannon, seven 9 cm cannon; ½ 2 Comp/SB 9, 3 Comp/PB 9; Flieger Comp 8

V Corps

Commander = FML Goglia

Chief of Staff = Col Freiherr von Catinelli

- Strength = 16 bns, 2 sqdns, 20 batties, 2½ tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 15,500 foot, 240 horse, 105 guns, 74 MG, 2 inf guns
- . 31<sup>st</sup> ID (GM Lieb) = 12,000 foot, 240 horse, 58 MG, 2 inf guns
    - . 61 Bde (Col Trojan Bacsilla) = IR 32 [4], 69 [4]
    - . 62 Bde (Col Rehwald) = IR 44 [4] only
    - . 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 8
  - . 54 Inf Bde (Col Dolbitzky; from 27 ID) (3500 foot, 16 MG) = IR 67 [4] only
    - . 31 FA Bde (Col Schirz) (105 guns) = FKR 31 [6], FHR 31 [4]; 1 & 2 Batties/Hvy FAR 31; 3 & 4 Batties/FKR 27; FHR 27 [4]; 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 27; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 15; three 8 cm cannon, two 9 cm cannon
  - . Corps troops = 1 Comp/SB 8, ½ 2 Comp/SB 9, 4 Comp/PB 3;

## Flieger Comp 3

Group Kosak (27<sup>th</sup> ID HQ)

Commander = FML Kosak

Chief of Staff = Major Ritter von Förster-Streffleur

Strength = 44 ½ bns, 6 sqdns, 25 batties, 3 tech comps; 27,900 foot, 480 horse, 101 guns, 169 MG, 4 inf guns

. 53 Inf Bde (Col Lederer; from 27 ID) (5000 foot, 24 MG, 2 inf guns) = IR 25 [3], 34 [4]

. Col Schmidbacher's Group (4500 foot, 22 MG) = BH IR 3 [4]; Cav Rif Bns I & II/4; k.k. Lst Bn II/31

. 27 FA Bde (Col Seewald) (46 guns) = 1 & 2 Batties/FKR 27, 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 27, 1 & 5 Batties/FKR 33, 2 & 3 Batties/FHR 33, 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 33; Hvy How Batty 39

. 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID (GM Kratky) = 14,600 foot, 160 horse, 61 guns, 107 MG, 2 inf guns

. 1 Lst Inf Bde (GM Edler von Severus) = IR 85 [3]; II Bn/76; Res Bn/BH IR 3; k.k. Lst IR 1 [1], 2 [1 ½]; 5 Sqdn of DR 14. 1 Res FA Bde (GM Hess) = Res FKR 1 [4], Res FHR 1 [3], 1 Batty/Res Hvy FAR 1

. 49 Bde (Col Küttner) = IR 84 [3½]; Bn IV/19; Ma Bn of IR 85; k.k. Lst IR 6 [3], 31 [2], 32 [2]; k.k. Lst Bn I/22

. 110 Lst Bde (Col Knösser) = Bn I/4; k.k. Lst IR 25 [3]; ½ Res Bn of k.k. Lst IR 22

. Res Sqdn/UR 1

. 106 FA Bde (Col Meckel) = 1 & 3 Batties/Res FKR 106, 1 & 4 Batties/Res FHR 106, 4 Batty/FKR 14, 1 & 2 Batties/FKR 25, 2 Batty/FHR 25

. 111 Lst Bde (GM Maag; in Group reserve) (3800 foot, 16 MG) = Bns I/19, III/25, I/67, III/83; Ma Bn of IR 34

. Directly under the Group (320 horse) = 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 15; 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 2; 3 Comp/SB 4, 6 Comp/SB 8, 3 Comp/PB 10

## XVIII Corps

Commander = FML Czibulka

Chief of Staff = Col von Benes

Strength = 11 bns, 2 sqdns, 10 batties, 3 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 10,500 foot, 220 horse, 42 guns, 56 MG, 2 inf guns

. 25<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Boog) = 10,550 foot, 220 horse, 42 guns, 56 MG, 2 inf guns

. 50 Bde (Col von Watterich) = IR 4 [3]; FJB 10; k.k. Lst IR 22 [2]; k.u. Cav Rif Bn 12

. Col Wagner's Group = IR 19 [2], 76 [3]; FJB 25

. 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 5; 5 Comp/SB 6, 4 Comp/PB 2

. 25 FA Bde (Col Edler von Filz) = 3 & 4 Batties/FKR 25, 3 Batty/FHR 25, 2 & 4 Batties/Hvy FAR 25, 3 Batty/FKR 14, 2 & 4 Batties/Res FKR 106, 2 & 3 Batties/Res FHR 106

. Corps troops = 4 Comp/SB 4; Flieger Comp 14

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

. 1 Lst Huss Bde (Col Cescsi-Nagy; in Army reserve) (650 horse)  
= k.u. Lst HR 1 [2], 2 [2]

. Army troops (80 horse) = 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 8; Armored Trains  
IV, VI and VII

**TOTALS** for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army = 92 bns, 16 sqdns, 71 batties, 10 tech  
comps, 3 Flieger comps, 3 armored trains. 74,550 foot, 1910  
hose, 346 guns, 373 MG, 10 inf guns

**c) Army Group Linsingen**

Commander = Prussian GdI von Linsingen (with rank of a GO)

Chief of Staff = Prussian Col Hell

**1) Armeegruppe Marwitz**

Commander = Prussian GdK von der Marwitz

Chief of Staff = Prussian Col Marquard

Corps Dieffenbach (HQ of 22 *German* ID)

Commander = Prussian G.Lt Dieffenbach

Chief of Staff = Württemberg Captain Wolfgang Muff

Strength = 44¾ bns, 7 sqdns, 38 batties, 4 tech comps, 2 Flieger  
comps. 35,900 foot, 730 horse, 178 guns, 201 MG, 6 inf guns

. FML Hordt's Group (HQ of 33<sup>rd</sup> ID)<sup>108</sup>

. Aus-Hung. 46 LW ID (GM von Urbanski) = 6200 foot, 200  
horse, 62 guns, 37 MG

. 91 LW Bde (GM Frauenberger) = FJB 17, 31; LW IR 15  
[2], 32 [4]; Trupkovic's Combined IR [1 ½]

. 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 4; 3 Comp/SB 1

. 46 FA Bde (Col Exner) = FKR 46 [4], FHR 46 [3], 1  
Batty/Hvy FAR 46, 4 Batty/FKR 11, 3 Batty/FHR 11, 1  
Batty/FHR 25, 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 25

. The Group of Prussian GM Hülsen (succeeded on 1 August by  
Prussian GM Gronau)

. Aus-Hung. 65 Bde (Col Friedrich Elder von Tomanek;  
from 33 ID) (7000 foot, 250 horse, 12 guns, 34 MG) =  
IR 12 [3], 83 [4]. 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 5. 1 & 4  
Batties/FHR 33

. Aus-Hung. 92 LW Bde (Col Freiherr von Scholten,  
temporary) (6400 foot, 23 guns, 45 MG, 2 inf guns) =  
IR 42 [3]; LW IR 13 [1], 16 [1], 31 [2]; k.u. Lst IR  
13 [2]. 3 Batty/FKR 7, 5 Batty/FKR 11, 1 Batty/FHR

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108 Half of 33<sup>rd</sup> ID (65 Inf Bde) had been relieved and was  
moving to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

- 46, 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 7, 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 25. 5 Comp/PB  
4
- . Aus-Hung. 48<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Prince Schwarzenberg) = 9900 foot, 200 horse, 49 guns, 37 MG, 4 inf guns
    - . 11 Mtn Bde (Col Hugo Fischer von See) = Bns IV/3, I/10, IV/20, I/21, IV/77, III/BH 3
    - . 12 Mtn Bde (Lt Col Khayll, temporary) = Bns I/3, II/37, II/57, I/93, II/100
    - . 1 Sqdn/DR 15, 1 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Rif Bn. 7 Comp/SB 2
    - . 9 FA Bde (Col Alfred Elder von Filz) = FKR 9 [4], FHR 9 [4]; 10.4 cm Can Batty 5; Hvy How Batties 30, 60
  - . German 22<sup>nd</sup> ID - The troops were split up along the Aus-Hung. parts of the front, or held behind the Austrians in reserve; a small part was also attached to 43 German Res ID (and is counted in total below under that command): 8 bns [IR 82, 83 and 167], 1 bike comp, 1 sqdn [1/CR 6], 8 batties [FAR 11 & 47], 1 tech comp; 6400 foot, 80 horse, 32 guns, 48 MG. Divisional HQ led Corps Dieffenbach.
    - . Corps troops = Flieger Comps 5, 22

Corps Falkenhayn (HQ of German XXII Res Corps)

Commander = Prussian GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn

Chief of Staff = Württemberg Col Wöllwarth

Strength = 23¾ bns, 12 sqdns, 27 batties, 3 tech comps; 16,300 foot, 1120 horse, 112 guns, 124 MG

- . Group Runckel
  - . Aus-Hung. 7<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Baumgartner) = 7000 foot, 150 horse, 58 guns, 33 MG
    - . 14 Bde (Col von Falkhausen) = IR 38 [2], 68 [3]; FJB 21
    - . 71 Bde (Col von Lesic) = IR 37 [2], 79 [2½]
    - . Lst Huss Bn 10 [2]; 1 Comp/SB 13
    - . 7 FA Bde (Col Scheucher) = FKR 7 [3], FHR 7 [4], Hvy FAR 7 [2]; 9 Batty/FKR 16, 4 Batty/FHR 11; Hvy How Batty 61
  - . Aus-Hung. 21 Cav Bde (Col Graf Spannochi; from 4 CD) (100 foot, 600 horse, 5 guns, 6 MG) = DR 15 [2], UR 1 [4]; one sqdn of Cav Rif Bn II/7; 3 & 4 Batties/Horse Arty Bn 4
  - . German 43<sup>rd</sup> Res ID (GM von Runckel) = 13 bns, 4 sqdns, 13 batties, 2 tech comps; 9200 foot, 370 horse, 49 guns, 85 MG (totals include some small detachments from 22 ID)
    - . 85 Res Bde = Res IR 201, 202
    - . 86 Res Bde = Res IR 203, 204
    - . Cavalry OB lacking; artillery included Res FAR 43

Group Beckmann

Commander = Prussian G.Lt Beckmann

Chief of Staff = Prussian Captain von Jagow

Strength = 9 bns, 25 sqdns, 16 batties, 2 tech comps; 8200 foot, 2640 horse, 61 guns, 72 MG

. German 108<sup>th</sup> ID (G.Lt Beckmann) = 9 bns [IR 97 & 137 plus Res IR 265], 3 sqdns [Res DR 1], 9 batties [FAR 243], 1 tech comp; 8200 foot, 340 horse, 34 guns, 38 MG

. Cavalry Group Leonhardi (HQ of Aus-Hung. 4<sup>th</sup> CD) (FML Freiherr von Leonhardi with Lt Col Freiherr von Handel as Chief of Staff)

. Aus-Hung. 7<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Graf Marenzi) = 600 horse, 15 guns, 8 MG

. 11 Cav Bde (GM Edler von Mold) = DR 10 [2], UR 2 [2]

. 20 Cav Bde (Col Freiherr von Bleyleben) = DR 12 [2], UR 3 [1]

. Horse Arty Bn 7 [4]

. Aus-Hung. 18 Cav Bde (GM Leiter; from 4 CD) (800 horse, 8 guns, 2 MG) = DR 9 [3], UR 3 [4]; 1 & 2 Batties/Horse Arty Bn 4

. Prussian 2 Gd Cav Bde (Col von Arnim) = 8 sqdns [Gd UR 1 and 2], 1 batty [2 Horse/Gd FAR 1], 1 tech comp; 900 horse, 4 guns, 4 MG

Directly under Armeegruppe Marwitz (14 guns) = 10.4 cm Can Batty 15, Armored Train IX; German - 6 batties, 1 Flieger detachment

**Totals** for Armeegruppe Marwitz = 77½ bns, 44 sqdns, 58 batties, 9 tech comps, 3 Flieger comps/dets, 1 armored train. 60,400 foot, 4490 horse, 365 guns, 397 MG, 6 inf guns

## 2) 4<sup>th</sup> Army

Commander = GO von Tersztyanszky

Chief of Staff = GM Berndt

Corps Szurmay

Commander = FML Szurmay

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Röder

Strength = 16¼ bns, 21 sqdns, 23 batties, 3 tech comps; 13,400 foot, 2000 horse, 100 guns, 80 MG

. 10<sup>th</sup> Cav Div (GM Viktor von Bauer) = 1400 foot, 1500 horse, 12 guns, 20 MG

. 4 Cav Bde (Col von Horthy) = HR 10 [4], 13 [4]

. 8 Cav Bde (GM von Mouillard) = HR 9 [4], UR 12 [4]

. I & II Cav Rif Bns/10; 10 Horse Arty Bn [3]; 4 Comp/PB 4

. 11<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Obauer) = 6000 foot, 200 horse, 31 guns, 26 MG

. 4 Bde (Col Prey) = IR 90 [1½] only

. 22 Bde (Col Hauser) = IR 58 [3], 95 [1½]

. 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 1; 5 Comp/SB 13

. 1 FA Bde (Col Steinbach) = FKR 11 [3], 1 & 2 Batties/FHR

- 11, 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 11, 6 Batty/FHR 16
- . 70<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Goldbach) = 6000 foot, 300 horse, 57 guns, 34 MG
  - . 207 Hon Bde (Lt Col Dominig) = Hon IR 312 [2], 313 [2]
  - . 208 Hon Bde (Col Lähne) = Hon IR 314 [2], 315 [2], Tyrol Jaeger Comp 5/N<sup>109</sup>
  - . Hon Huss Bn 70 [2]; 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5
  - . 70 Hon FA Bde (Col Skotak) = Res Hon FKR 70 [4], RHFHR 70 [3]; 1, 3 & 4 Batties/Res FHR X; 10.4 cm Can Batty 10, Heavy How Batty 2

## X Corps

Commander = FML von Csanaday

Chief of staff = Lt Col Rasky

Strength = 23 bns, 7 sqdns, 26 batties, 4 tech comps; 15,600 foot, 603 horse, 116 guns, 72 MG

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Jemrich) = 5650 foot, 300 horse, 34 guns, 23 MG
  - . 3 Bde (GM Anton Klein) = IR 40 [3]; FJB 4
  - . 19 Bde (GM von Iwanski) = IR 82 [2]; FJB 29; TJ Comp 2/N
  - . 7 Sqdn/HR 2, 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 3; 4 Comp/SB 10
  - . 2 FA Bde (Col Edler von Rosenzweig) = 3 & 4 Batties/FHR 2, 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 2; Res FKR X [4]
- . 13<sup>th</sup> LW ID (FML Edler von Kalser) = 3700 foot, 140 horse, 26 guns, 14 MG
  - . 26 LW Bde (Col Ritter von Zygladowicz) = LW IR 14 [3], 25 [3]
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 5; 6 Comp/SB 11, 1 Comp/PB 9
  - . 23 FA Bde (Col Schulhof) = FKR 13 [3]; 2 Batty/FHR 13, 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 13
- . 37<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Haber) = 6250 foot, 190 horse, 56 guns, 35 MG
  - . 73 Hon Bde (Col von Pillepic) = Hon IR 13 [2½], 18 [2]
  - . 74 Hon Bde (Col Pogany) = Hon IR 14 [3], 15 [2]; TJ Comp 1/N
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 5; 4 Comp/SB 5
  - . 37 Hon FA Bde (Col Seh) = Hon FKR 4 [3], HFHR 37 [4], Hvy HFAR 37 [2]; 5 Batty/HFKR 5, 5 Batty/HFKR 8; 15 cm Can Batty 5

Directly under Army HQ...

- . 25 LW Bde (Col Wurja; in reserve) (3400 foot, 11 guns, 20 MG) = LW IR 1 [3], 24 [3]; 1 Batty/FKR 13, 3 Batty/FHR 13
- . Reserve infantry (3400 foot, 24 MG) = IR 89 [1 bn, from 11 ID], German IR 378 [3]

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109 The Tyrol Jaeger Comps "#/N" were made up of Italian-speaking Tyrol Kaiser Jaeger.

. ½ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 7 (50 horse); k.k. Lst Sap Dets 5/2, 1/3, 2/3; k.u. Lst Sap Dets 2/IV, 3/IV; 3 Comp/Bridging Bn 1; Flieger Comps 10 & 20; Armored Trains # III, IX<sup>110</sup>

**TOTALS** for 4<sup>th</sup> Army = 49¼ bns, 28½ sqdns, 51 batties, 13 tech comps, 2 Flieger comps, 2 armored trains. 35,800 foot, 2680 horse, 227 guns, 196 MG

3) Group Lüttwitz (reinforced X German Corps) which was directly under Army Group HQ

Commander = Prussian G.Lt Walter Freiherr von Lüttwitz

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major Drechsel

. 20<sup>th</sup> ID (G.Lt von Schöler) = 9 bns [IR 77, 79, 92], 1 bike comp, 2 sqdns [5 & 6/HR 17], 12 batties [FAR 10 & 46], 2 tech comps; 6400 foot, 240 horse; 48 guns, 69 MG

. 19<sup>th</sup> ID (G.Lt von Schmettau until 1 Aug, then GM von Hülsen) = Just 3 of its own bns [IR 74], 1 bike comp, 2 sqdns [2 & 3/HR 17], 12 batties [FAR 26 & 62], 2 tech comps; attached was the Aus-Hung. IR 94 [3; from 29<sup>th</sup> ID]. Total strength was 4300 foot, 200 horse, 48 guns 36 MG

. 121<sup>st</sup> ID (GM von Ditfurth) = 9 bns [IR 60; Res IR 7 & 56], 2 sqdns [2 & 3/JPR 12], 9 batties [FAR 241, etc.], 2 tech comps; 6700 foot, 300 horse, 36 guns, 54 MG

. Aus-Hung. 29<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schön) = 11,000 foot, 100 horse, 45 guns, 70 MG

. 57 Bde (Col Barwik) = IR 74 [3], 92 [3]; Bn II/94

. 58 Bde - No units until the arrival of Col Rudolf Klein on 10 August

. German 37 Bde (Col von Roeder) = 6 bns [IR 78 & 91]

. Res Sqdn/HR 2; 4 Comp/SB 3

. 29 FA Bde (Col Ritter von Sostaric) = FKR 29 [4], FHR 29 [4]; 1 & 2 Batties/Hvy FAR 29; four German 5.5. cm cannon

. Corps troops (all German) = 5 batties (28 guns), 1 Flieger det

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110 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Armored Train # IX is listed, apparently in error, under both 4<sup>th</sup> Army and (earlier) under Leonhardi's Cav Group; perhaps one of the references to IX should be to Armored Train VIII (this is just speculation).

**4) Armeegruppe Bernhardi**

Commander = Prussian GdK von Bernhardi

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major von Dommes

*German divisions directly under Armeegruppe HQ...*

. Rusche's Combined ID = 8 bns [IR 419, 432; LW IR 133], ½ sqdn, 3 batties, 2 tech comps; Aus-Hung. artillery was also attached - FKR 2 [3], 5 Batty/FKR 10, 4 Batty/FHR 13, 2 Batty/Res FHR X; Heavy Batty 27. Total strength was 4600 foot, 30 horse, 38 guns, 47 MG

. 107<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Hahndorff) = 9 bns [Res IR 52, 227 & 232], 1 sqdn [3/UR 1], 8 batties [FAR 213, etc.], 1 tech comp; 8100 foot, 130 horse, 32 guns, 41 MG

Aus-Hung. II Corps

Commander = FML Kaiser

Chief of Staff = Col Purtscher

Strength = 19 bns, 4 sqdns, 26 batties, 4 tech comps; 18,000 foot, 490 horse, 134 guns, 98 MG, 4 inf guns

. 41<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (GM Schamschula) = 9700 foot, 230 horse, 52 MG, 68 guns, 2 inf guns

. 40 Hon Bde (Col Freiherr von Benz-Albkron) = Hon IR 31 [3], 32 [2]

. 82 Hon Bde (Col Ritter von Sypniewski) = Hon IR 12 [3], 20 [3]

. 5 & 6 Sqdns/Hon HR 4; 1 Comp/SB 11, 2 Comp/PB 10

. 41 Hon FA Bde (Col Capp) = Hon FKR 7 [4], HFHR 41 [4], Hvy HFAR 41 [4], Res FK Bn VI [2]

. 4<sup>th</sup> ID [GM Pfeffer] = 8300 foot, 260 horse<sup>111</sup>, 62 guns, 46 MG, 2 inf guns

. 7 Bde (Col Ritter von Steinitz) = IR 99 [2]; LW IR 30 [1]

. 8 Bde (Col Köckh) = IR 8 [2], 49 [3]

. 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 5; 1 Comp/SB 2, 5 Comp/PB 9

. 4 FA Bde (GM Machaczek) = FKR 4 [4], FHR 4 [4], Hvy FAR 4 [2]; 7 Batty/FKR 14, 6 Batty/FHR 15

Corps Fath

Commander = GdI Fath

Chief of Staff = Col Ludvig

Strength = 50½ bns, 17½ sqdns, 55 batties, 10 tech comps.

42,500 foot, 2170 horse, 253 guns, 227 MG, 2 inf guns

. Group Kneussl (under Bavarian G.Lt von Kneussl)

. Polish Legion (GM von Puchalski) = 12 bns [1 & 3 Bdes,

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111 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Strength of cavalry in 4<sup>th</sup> ID is omitted in the original; here it has been extrapolated from II Corps' total strength.

- each of 2 regts], 2 foot sqdns, 5 batties, 2 tech comps;  
4400 foot, 21 guns, 15 MG
- . Aus-Hung. 26<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM Edler von Wieden) = 4200 foot, 150 horse, 63 guns, 15 MG
    - . 52 LW Bde (Col Scholze) = LW IR 9 [1], 10 [2]
    - . 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 2; 5 Comp/SB 9
    - . 26 FA Bde (Col Reichenauer) = FKR 26 [4], FHR 26 [4], Hvy FAR 26 [2]; 5 Batty; FKR 27; two *German* fixed batties
  - . Aus-Hung. 45<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM von Stöhr) = 8000 foot, 210 horse, 51 guns, 2 inf guns
    - . 89 LW Bde (Col von Habermann) = LW IR 18 [2], 33 [2]
    - . 90 LW Bde (Col Vitzthum, temporary) = LW IR 17 [3], 34 [1]
    - . 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 3; 5 Comp/SB 14
    - . 45 FA Bde (Col Wolff) = FKR 45 [4], FHR 45 [4]; 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 2; one 8 cm cannon
  - . *Bavarian* 11<sup>th</sup> ID (G.Lt Ritter von Kneussl) - Some of the troops were split up along the front of Kneussl's sector and the rest were grouped as reserves farther back. There were 9 bns [IR 3 & 22, Res IR 13], 4 sqdns [Chevauleger Regt 7], 10 batties [FAR 21, etc.], 2 tech comps; 8200 foot, 500 horse, 42 guns, 66 MG
  - . Group Clausius (under Prussian G.Lt Clausius)
    - . Aus-Hung. 53<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM von Pongracz) = 8900 foot, 110 horse, 48 guns, 33 MG
      - . k.u. 127 Lst Bde (GM Tanarky) = Lst IR 6 [3], 19 [2]
      - . 128 Lst Bde (Col Guha) = k.k. Lst Bns 44, 76; k.u. Lst IR 3 [2]
      - . ½ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5; Ma Comp of SB 13
      - . 53 FA Bde (Col Adler) = Res FKR 53 [4], Res FHR 53 [3]; Hvy How Batties 5, 20, 46; 15 cm Mor Batty 18
    - . *German* Combined ID Claudius = 9 bns [IR 150; LW IR 349, 350], 8 sqdns [41 Cav Bde with CR 5, UR 4], 7 batties, 1 tech comp; 8800 foot, 1200 horse, 28 guns, 74 MG
  - . Corps troops = 2 Comp/SB 1, 1 Ma Comp/PB 5
- Armeegruppe reserves...
- . 51 LW Bde (Col Rustler) (3400 foot, 11 MG) = LW IR 11 [2], 12 [1]
  - . 2<sup>nd</sup> Bde of the Polish Legion (Col von Haller) = 6 bns [two regts], 8 sqdns [2 regts]; 1600 foot, 540 horse, 9 MG
  - . 1 Comp/PB 8; *German* - 11 batties [38 guns], 2 Flieger dets
- Totals** for Armeegruppe Bernhardi = 95 ½ bns, 31 sqdns, 110 batties, 18 tech comps, 2 Flieger dets; 78,200 foot, 3360 horse,

495 guns, 433 MG, 6 inf guns

5) Cavalry Corps Hauer (directly under Army Group Linsingen)

Commander = GdK Freiherr von Hauer

Chief of Staff = Lt Col Ritter Fischer von Ledenic

Strength = 8 cav rifle bns<sup>112</sup>, 55 sqdns, 15 batties, 5 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp; 5000 foot, 3750 horse, 70 guns, 82 MG

. 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Div (GM Chevalier de Ruiz) = 2400 foot, 1150 horse, 19 guns, 30 MG

. 6 Cav Bde (Col von Pongracz) = HR 7 [4], 14 [4]

. 7 Cav Bde (Col Edler von Pollet) = HR 4 [3], 12 [4]

. Horse Arty Bn 1 [4]; three 8 cm cannon

. 9<sup>th</sup> Cav Div (GM von Le Gay) = 2600 foot, 1200 horse, 16 guns, 28 MG

. 1 Cav Bde (Col von Weisz) = DR 4 [4], 13 [4]

. 9 Cav Bde (GM Freiherr von Sessler) = DR 1 [4], UR 6 [4]

. Horse Arty Bn 9 [3]; four 8 cm cannon

. Bavarian Cav Div (G.Lt von Hellingrath) = 1400 horse, 13 guns, 44 MG

. 1 Cav Bde (Edler von Schutes) = Heavy CR 1 [4], 2 [4]

. 4 Cav Bde (Ritter von Poschingen) = UR 1 [4], 2 [4]

. 5 Cav Bde (Freiherr von Egloffstein) = Chevauleger Regts 1 [4], 6 [4]

. Horse Arty Bn 5 [3]; two technical detachments

. Corps troops (22 guns) = Hon Horse Arty Bn 1 [3]; 1 & 2 Batties/FHR 2; 4 Comp/SB 8, 3 Comp/SB 9, 1 Ma Comp/PB 9; Flieger Comp 27

**TOTALS** for (3), (4) and (5) [Lüttwitz, Bernhardi and Hauer] = 141 bns, 94 sqdns, 173 batties, 30 tech comps, 7 Flieger comps/dets; 111,600 foot, 7950 horse 770 guns, 744 MG, 6 inf guns

6) German Group Gronau (reinforced XLI Reserve Corps)

On 30 July this Group left the control of Army Group Linsingen and was assigned to Prince Leopold's Army Group. The precise unit strengths are not available.

Commander = Prussian GdA von Gronau

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major Bronsart von Schellendorf

. Divisions - Combined 9 CD, 82 Res ID, 5 CD, Gd CD, 81 Res ID

. Also Landwehr and Landsturm troops that together were about a division in strength

7) Army Group reserves (all German)

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112 In Hauer's Corps, each Aus-Hung. cavalry regiment had a cav rifle bn of 3 or 4 foot squadrons.

. 86<sup>th</sup> ID (G.Lt von Wernitz) = 6 bns, 1 bike comp, 1 sqdn, 6 batties; 4800 foot, 100 horse, 24 guns, 26 MG  
 . 10<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM von Stocken) = 8 bns (including I & II Bns of IR 46 that were arriving), 1 sqdn, 8 batties; 7600 foot, 150 horse, 32 guns, 56 MG  
 . Also - Bn III/46; Res IR 217 [3], LW IR 33 [3; arriving]; 6000 foot, 36 MG

**TOTALS** for Army Group Linsingen (not including Gronau) = 289 bns, 168½ sqdns, 326 batties, 52 tech comps, 12 Flieger comps/dets, 3 armored trains; 226,200 foot, 15,370 horse, 1418 guns, 1455 MG, 12 inf guns

d) One unit that was rebuilding, at the disposition of the AOK...

(On 1 August the AOK ordered 61<sup>st</sup> ID to move to Transylvania. The first train transport left on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.)

61<sup>st</sup> ID (GM von Grallert) = About 3000 foot, 90 horse, 22 guns, 10 MG

. k.u. 16 Lst Bde (Col Bernatsky) = k.u. Lst IR 17 [3], 29 [2]

. k.u. 19 Lst Bde (Col von Szabo) = k.u. Lst Bns III/1, II/3, I/4, I/6, II/12, IV/19

. ¾ 2 Sqdn/Dalmatian Mounted Rifle Bn; 6 Comp/SB 7

. 61 FA Bde (Col von Dobner) = Res FKR 61 [4]; 3 Batty/Res FHR 61

**TOTALS** for the allied forces under the AOK in the Russian theater of operations (not including Group Gronau) = 688½ bns, 294¾ sqdns, 725 batties, 114¼ tech comps, 26 Flieger comps/dets, 8 armored trains. 559,100 foot, 20,930 horse, 3336 guns, 3096 MG, 110 inf guns

## 2. Austro-Hungarian units north of the Pripyat

XII Corps (under Woyrsch's *German Army*)

Commander = GdI Ritter von Henriquez

Chief of Staff = Col Freiherr Zeidler-Daublebsky von Sterneck

Strength = 28 bns, 4 sqdns, 23 batties, 4 tech comps; 28,800 foot, 450 horse, 127 guns, 108 MG, 4 inf guns

. 16<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Schariczzer) = 12,300 foot, 250 horse, 61 guns, 37 MG, 2 inf guns

. 31 Bde (GM von Szende) = IR 2 [4] only

. 32 Bde (GM Koschatzky) = IR 31 [4], 64 [4]

. 3 & 4 Sqdns/HR 2; 5 Comp/SB 12, 2 Comp/PB 2

. 16 FA Bde (Col Paul, temporary) = FKR 16 [5], FHR 16 [4],

Hvy FAR 16 [2]  
 . 35<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Podhoranszky) = 16,500 foot, 200 horse, 66 guns, 71 MG, 2 inf guns  
 . 69 Bde (GM von Baitz) = IR 62 [4], 63 [4]; k.u. Lst Bn I/34  
 . 70 Bde (Col Funk) = IR 51 [4], k.k. Lst IR 51 [3]  
 . 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 2; 5 Comp/SB 10, 6 Comp/SB 12  
 . 35 FA Bde (GM Gröschl) = FKR 35 [6], FHR 35 [4]; 2 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 35

24<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Urbarz) (Under 10<sup>th</sup> German Army) = 8600 foot, 150 horse, 37 guns, 42 MG  
 . 47 Bde (Col Kemmel, temporary) = IR 9 [4], 45 [2]  
 . 48 Bde (GM von Kralowetz) = IR 10 [2], 77 [2]  
 . 3 & 4 Sqdns/LW UR 3  
 . 24 FA Bde (Col Uherek) = FKR 24 [3]; 1 & 2 Batties/FHR 4; Hvy FAR 24 [3]

3. The Russian Southwest Front (69 inf, 23 cav divs)  
 Commander = GdK Brussilov  
 Chief of Staff = G.Lt Klembovsky

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Army**

Commander = GdI Letsch (13 ½ ID and 7 CD)

#### IV Sib Corps

. 9 Sib Rif Div = 33, 34, 35, 36 Sib Regts; 9 Sib Arty Bde  
 . 10 Sib Rif Div = 37, 38, 39, 40 Sib Regts; 10 Sib Arty Bde

#### XXXI Corps

. 75 ID = IR 297 Kovel, 298 Mstislav, 299 Dubrin, 300 Zaslavsk; 75 Arty Bde  
 . 83 ID = IR 329 Buzuluk, 330 Zlatoust, 331 Ora, 332 Oboyan; 83 Arty Bde

. Stankevich's Detachment - Composition unknown, bde-sized

#### III Corps

. 73 ID = IR 289 Korotoyav, 290 Valuiisk, 291 Trubchev, 292 New Archangel; 73 Arty Bde  
 . 5 Rif Div = Rifle Regts 17, 18, 19, 20; 5 Rifle Arty Bde

#### IV Cav Corps

. 1 Kuban Coss Div (3 regts) = Kuban Coss Regts 2<sup>nd</sup> Uman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Poltava, 2<sup>nd</sup> Taman; artillery unknown  
 . 3 Cav Div = DR 3 Novorossisk, UR 3 Smolensk, HR 3 Elisavetgrad; 3 Horse Arty Bn  
 . 2 Combined Coss Div = 16 & 17 Don Coss Regts; Line (Kuban) & Volga (Terek) Coss Regts; Orenburg Coss Horse Arty Bn

- . 5 Don Coss Div = 27, 28, 29, 33 Don Coss Regts; 6 Don Coss Horse Arty Bn
- Volodchenko's Cav Corps
  - . 1 Trans-Baikal Coss Div = T-B Coss Regts 1<sup>st</sup> Argun, 1<sup>st</sup> Chita, 1<sup>st</sup> Verkhne-Udin (and one more?); T-B Horse Arty Bn
  - . 16 Cav Div = 17 Chernigov & 18 Nezhin HR; 17 New Archangel & 18 Novomirgorod HR; unknown artillery
- Combined Corps
  - . 27 ID = IR 105 Orenburg, 106 Ufa, 107 Troitsk, 108 Saratov; 27 Arty Bde
  - . 78 ID = IR 309 Ovrutschk, 310 Szatsk, 311 Kremieniec, 312 Valilkov; 78 Arty Bde
- XLVI Corps
  - . 77 ID = IR 305 Laishev, 306 Mokshan, 307 Spassk, 308 Cheboksary; 77 Arty Bde
  - . 100 ID = IR 397 Zaporozhe, 398 Nizhne Dnieprevsk, 399 Nikopol, 400 Khortilsk; 100 Arty Bde
- I Turkestan Corps
  - . 1 Tkstn Rif Div = 1, 2, 3, 4 Turk. RR; 1 Turk. Arty Bde
  - . 2 Tkstn Rif Div = 5, 6, 7, 8 Turk. RR; 2 Turk. Arty Bde
- Independent divisions...
  - . 4 Finn Rif Div = 13, 14, 15, 16 Finn RR; 1 Finn Arty Bde
  - . 3 Cauc Coss Div = Coss Regts 1<sup>st</sup> Ekaterinodar, 1<sup>st</sup> Kizlyar-Greben; Ossetia & 1<sup>st</sup> Dagestan Horse Regts; 3 Cauc Coss Horse Arty Bn
- Special Army**
- Commander = GdK Bezobrazov (8 ID, 3 CD)
- XXX Corps
  - . 71 ID = IR 281 New Moscow, 282 Alexandria, 283 Pavlogard, 284 Pengrov; 71 Arty Bde
  - . 80 ID = IR 317 Drissa, 318 Chernoyar, 319 Bugumil, 320 Chembarsk; 80 Arty Bde
- I Corps
  - . 22 ID = IR 85 Vyborg, 86 Vilmanstrand, 87 Neushlot, 88 Petrov; 22 Arty Bde
  - . 24 ID = IR 93 Irkutsk, 94 Yenisei, 95 Krasnoyarsk, 96 Omsk; 24 Arty Bde
- I Guard Corps
  - . 1 Gd ID = Gd IR Preobrazhensk, Semenov, Ismailov, Jaeger; 1 Gd Arty Bde
  - . 2 Gd ID = Gd IR Moscow, Grenadier, Pavlov, Finland; 2 Gd Arty Bde
- II Guard Corps
  - . 3 Gd ID = Gd IR Lithuania, Kexholm, St Petersburg, Volhynia; 3 Gd Arty Bde
  - . Gd Rifle Div = 1, 2, 3, 4 Gd Rifle Regts; Gd Rif Arty Bde

## Gd Cav Corps

- . 1 Gd CD = Chevalier & Horse Gd Regts; Tsar & Tsarina Gd Cuirassier Regts; 1 Gd Horse Arty Bn
- . 2 Gd CD = Horse Gren Gd, Tsarina Gd Uhlan, Gd Dragoon & Tsar Gd Hussar Regts; 2 Gd Horse Arty Bn
- . 3 Gd CD = Tsar Gd Uhlan, Grodno Gd Hussar, Tsar Gd Cossack & Combined Gd Cossack Regts; 3 Gd [?] Horse Arty Bn

**8<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = GdK Kaledin (8 ID, 3 CD)

## XXXIX Corps

- . 102 ID = IR 405 Ligov, 406 Shchegrov, 407 Sarai, 408 Kuznets; 102 Arty Bde
- . 125 ID = IR 497 Bilets, 498 Orgiev, 499 Olviopol, 500 Ingul; 125 Arty Bde

## XXIII Corps

- . 20 ID = IR 77 Tenguin, 78 Navaguin, 79 Kura, 80 Kabarda; 20 Arty Bde
- . 53 ID = IR 209 Bogorod, 210 Bronits, 211 Nikolsk, 212 Romanov; 53 Arty Bde

## XL Corps

- . 2 Rif Div = 5, 6, 7, 8 Rifle Regts; 2 Rifle Arty Bde
- . 4 Rif Div = 13, 14, 15, 16 Rifle Regts; 4 Rifle Arty Bde

## VIII Corps

- . 14 ID = IR 53 Volhynia, 54 Minsk, 55 Podolia, 56 Zhitomir; 14 Arty Bde
- . 15 ID = IR 57 Modlin, 58 Praga, 59 Lublin, 60 Zamosc; 15 Arty Bde

## V Cav Corps

- . 11 Cav Div = DR 11 Riga, UR 11 Chuguiev, HR 11 Izyum; 12 Don Coss Regt; 11 Horse Arty Bn
- . 3 Orenburg Coss Div - Composition unknown

Independent 12 CD = DR 12 Starodub, UR 12 Belgorod, HR 12 Akhtyrk; 3 Orenburg Coss Regt; 2 Don Coss Horse Arty Bn

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

Commander = GdK Sakharov (12 ½ ID, 3 CD)

## V Corps

- . 7 ID = IR 25 Smolensk, 26 Mogilev, 27 Vitebsk, 28 Polotsk; 7 Arty Bde
- . 10 ID = IR 37 Ekaterinburg, 38 Tobolsk, 39 Tomsk, 40 Kolivan; 10 Arty Bde

## XLV Corps

- . 2 Finn Rif Div = 5, 6, 7, 8 Finn RR; 2 Finn Arty Bde
- . 126 ID = IR 501 Sarapul, 502 Christopol, 503 Chirgin, 504 Verkhne Ural; 126 Arty Bde

## XXXII Corps

. 101 ID = IR 410 Kurachev, 402 Ust Medvidit, 403 Volsk, 404 Kamishin; 101 Arty Bde

. 105 ID = IR 417 Lugan, 418 Alexandrov, 419 Atkars, 420 Serdob; 105 Arty Bde

#### V Siberian Corps

. 50 ID = IR 197 Lesnot, 198 Alexander Nevsky, 199 Kronstadt, 200 Kronshlot; 50 Arty Bde

. 6 Sib Rif Div = 21, 22, 23, 24 Sib RR; 6 Sib Arty Bde

#### XVII Corps

. 3 ID = IR 9 Old Ingria, 10 New Ingria, 11 Pskov, 12 Velikiye Luki; 3 Arty Bde

. 35 ID = IR 137 Nezhin, 138 Bolkhov, 139 Morshansk, 140 Sarai; 35 Arty Bde

#### VII Corps

. 13 ID = IR 49 Brest, 50 Bialystok, 51 Lithuania, 52 Vilna; 13 Arty Bde

. 34 ID = IR 133 Simferopol, 134 Feodosia, 135 Kerch-Enikol, 136 Taganrog; 34 Arty Bde

. Saratov Inf Bde - Composition unknown

#### Independent divisions...

. Combined Cav Div = DR 19 Archangel, HR 16 Irkutsk; 1 & 2 Trans-Amur Cav Regts; artillery unknown

. Trans-Amur Cav Div = 3, 4, 5, 6 Trans-Amur Regts; artillery unknown

. 7 Cav Div = DR 7 Kinburn, UR 7 Olviopol, HR 7 Belarus; 11 Don Coss Regt; 7 Horse Arty Bn

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

Commander = GdI Shcherbachev (15 ID, 2 CD)

#### VI Corps

. 4 ID = IR 13 Belosersk, 14 Olonets, 15 Schlüsselburg, 16 Ladoga; 4 Arty Bde

. 16 ID = IR 61 Vladimir, 62 Suzdal, 63 Uglits, 64 Kazan; 16 Arty Bde

#### XVIII Corps

. 23 ID = IR 89 Belomorsk, 90 Onezhsk, 91 Dvina, 92 Pechersk; 23 Arty Bde

. 37 ID = IR 145 Novocherkask, 146 Tsaritsyn, 147 Samara, 148 Caspian; 37 Arty Bde

#### XXII [Finnish] Corps

. 1 Finn Rif Div = 1, 2, 3, 4 Finn RR; 1 Finn Arty Bde

. 3 Finn Rif Div = 9, 10, 11, 12 Finn RR; 3 Finn Arty Bde

#### XVI Corps

. 41 ID = IR 161 Alexandropol, 162 Akhaltzykh, 163 Lenkovan-Nasheburg, 164 Zakatal; 41 Arty Bde

. 47 ID = IR 185 Bash Kadiklaya, 186 Avlanduz, 187 Avars, 188 Kars; 47 Arty Bde

## II Corps

- . 26 ID = IR 101 Perm, 102 Vyatsk, 103 Petrozavod, 104 Ustchug; 26 Arty Bde
- . 43 ID = IR 169 Novo Troitsk, 170 Molodetchensk, 171 Kobrinsk, 172 Lidsk; 43 Arty Bde

## II Cav Corps

- . 9 Cav Div = DR 9 Kazan, UR 9 Bug, HR 9 Kiev, Ural Cossack Regt 1; 9 Horse Arty Bn
- . 6 Don Coss Div - Composition unknown

## Independent divisions...

- . 3 Turkestan Rif Div = 9, 10, 11, 12 Turkestan Rif Regts; 3 Turkestan Arty Bde
- . 108 ID = IR 429 Riizhsk, 430 Balksy, 431 Tikhvin, 432 Baldaya; 108 Arty Bde
- . 113 ID = IR 449 Kharkov, 450 Zmiev, 451 Piryatin, 452 Krolevets; 113 Arty Bde

**9<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = GdI Lechitzky (12 ID, 5 CD)

## XXXIII Corps

- . 1 Trans-Amur ID = 1, 2, 3, 4 T-Amur Regts; 1 T-A Arty Bde
- . 2 Trans-Amur ID = 5 & 6 T-Amur Regts; 20 & 22 Turkestan Rifle Regts; 2 Trans-Amur Arty Bde

## XLI Corps

- . 74 ID = IR 293 Izhora, 294 Berezina, 295 Svirsk, 296 Grazovets; 74 Arty Bde
- . 3 Trans-Amur ID = 7, 8, 9, 10 T-Amur Regts; 3 T-A Arty Bde

## XIII Corps

- . 12 ID = IR 45 Azov, 46 Dnieper, 47 Ukraine, 48 Odessa; 12 Arty Bde
- . 19 ID = IR 73 Crimea, 74 Stavropol, 75 Sevastopol, 76 Kuban; 19 Arty Bde

## XI Corps

- . 11 ID = IR 41 Seleguin, 42 Yakutsk, 43 Okhotsk, 44 Kamchatka; 11 Arty Bde
- . 32 ID = IR 125 Kursk, 126 Rylsk, 127 Putivl, 128 Stary Oskol; 32 Arty Bde

## III Cavalry Corps

- . 10 Cav Div = DR 10 Novgorod, UR 10 Odessa, HR 10 Ingria; Orenburg Coss Regt 1; 3 Don Coss Horse Arty Bn
- . 1 Don Coss Div = 9, 10, 13, 15 Don Coss Regts; 1 Don Horse Arty Bn
- . 1 Terek Coss Div = 2<sup>nd</sup> Gors-Mozdok, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunzha-Vladikavkaz, 2<sup>nd</sup> Volga & 2<sup>nd</sup> Kizlyar-Greben Regts; artillery unknown

## Independent divisions..

- . 79 ID = IR 313 Balashov, 314 Novy Oskol, 315 Glukhov, 316

Khvalin; 79 Arty Bde

. 82 ID = IR 325 Tsarev Gurev, 326 Bielgerazh, 327 Korvan,  
328 Novo Uzen; 82 Arty Bde

. 103 ID = IR 409 Novo Koper, 410 Usman, 411 Sumy, 412  
Slavyansk; 103 Arty Command

. 117 ID = IR 465 Yurzhum, 466 Malmizh, 467 Kinburn, 468  
Narim; 117 Arty Command

. Caucasian Native Horse Div = 2<sup>nd</sup> Dagestan, Kabardine  
Tartar, Chechen, Circassian, Ingush Regts; unknown  
artillery

. Ussuri Coss Div = DR Primorsk; 1<sup>st</sup> Nerchin Coss Regt;  
Ussuri Coss Regt; 1<sup>st</sup> Mountain Horse Arty Bn

Arriving by train at Southwest Front...

I Sib Corps

. 1 Sib Rif Div = 1, 2, 3, 4 Sib RR; 1 Sib Arty Bde

. 2 Sib Rif Div = 5, 6, 7, 8 Sib RR; 2 Sib Arty Bde

## ***C. The Battle of Kovel***

### **1. The attacks by Letsch's Army, 28 July-3 August**

When the Stavka's attempts to achieve a decisive success over the German Eastern armies had failed for good in the first half of 1916, the Chief of Staff GdI Alexeiev decided to switch the main effort of the Tsarist Army to the area south of the Pripyat. He would seek a decision with a large-scale offensive by the Southwest Front, that would culminate in a powerful assault on Kovel. GdK Brussilov scheduled his offensive to open on 28 July. To oppose the six Russian armies with around 69 divisions (not counting opolcheniye formations), the Aus-Hung. high command had about 62 divisions (including 20 German); this figure included the German Group of GdA von Gronau, which was under Linsingen's orders for tactical purposes. Thus the difference in strength, measured by numbers of divisions, wasn't substantial. Other circumstances, however, tilted the balance significantly to the attackers' advantage. A full-strength Russian division had 16 battalions, while those of the Central Powers had just 9 to 12 battalions. Above all, moreover, Brussilov had achieved local numerical superiority by deploying his units at critical points along the front, especially in front of Kovel. Army Group Linsingen, which was expecting the heaviest onslaught by the enemy, had 30 divisions (15 German) against 33 Russian. But against the four divisions in G.Lt Freih. Walter von Lüttwitz's Group, along with two neighboring units of GdK von Bernhardt, the Russians had massed ten infantry and three cavalry divisions.<sup>113</sup>

#### Actions on Gronau's and Hauer's fronts

As part of the offensive by Southwest Front that opened on 28 July, Brussilov had given GdI Letsch's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army two assignments:

- . to cut off the Germans at Pinsk with a pincers attack, and
- . to break over the Stokhod to Kovel with his main body.

For the operation on the northern wing, two corps were drawn

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113 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Per Beilage 4, the allied units on this front were the 19, 20, 107, 121 and Rusche's German ID plus the k.u.k. 29 ID. Their opponents were the Russian I and II Guard, I, XXIII and XXXIX Corps (each of 2 divisions) plus the Guard Cavalry Corps of 3 divisions. (12<sup>th</sup> Russian CD was initially also in this sector, but moved to the south.)

from General Ragosa's neighboring Army, but they still weren't ready on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Therefore in the next few days there was no significant increase in fighting for Gronau's Group. However, the assembly of III Russian Corps south of the Pripyat and of IV Siberian Corps north of the river didn't stay hidden from the German commanders, who thus could easily anticipate their opponents' plans. The 1 LW ID was sent to reinforce Gronau. After 29 July, when the latest Russian attempt to break through at Baranowicze was again shattered, GO von Woyrsch figured that he wouldn't face further major attacks for some time; at most he would have to deal with minor, local enemy thrusts. The German leadership therefore felt they would be able to transfer troops from Woyrsch's Army to the sectors farther south that were now under heavy pressure.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> the Russians initiated their attack, mainly against 81 and 82 Res ID, with powerful artillery fire; parts of XLI Corps began to cross the Pripyat downstream from the mouth of the Stokhod. IV Sib Corps moved against the German positions on the Oginsky Canal.<sup>114</sup> But the attackers couldn't achieve any success. As part of the reorganization of the chain of command on the entire Eastern front, in the evening the German OHL was compelled to relieve Linsingen's over-taxed Army Group, engaged in very bitter fighting in front of Kovel, from having to be concerned about Pinsk. Prince Leopold's Army Group would coordinate the defense against the enemy in this forward position; Gronau's Group was placed under their command.

In front of GdK Freih. von Hauer's Cavalry Corps, the enemy also became somewhat more active on 30 July. The Bavarian CD, on the northern wing, threw back Russian patrols which were feeling their way over the Stokhod. But Hauer's sector was spared any serious attacks until mid-August.

#### Actions of Corps Fath - 28 July

Early on the 28<sup>th</sup> the enemy opened preparatory artillery fire against the entire front of Bernhardi's Armeegruppe. To conduct the defense within GdI Fath's Corps there were two HQ. In the northern sector of the defenses, which stretched from the junction with Hauer's Cavalry Corps on the Loknica Brook to Smolary, G.Lt Clausius had his own German division plus GM von Pongracz's Aus-Hung. 53<sup>rd</sup> Division. In the southern sector, commanded by Bavarian G.Lt Ritter von Kneussl, the troops were

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114 Klembovsky, "A Strategic Study of the World War 1914-1918" (in Russian; Moscow, 1920), p. 82

deployed as follows:

- . GM von Stöhr's 45 LW ID was between Smolary (where a Bavarian battalion was posted) and the Sarny-Kovel railroad line with 90 LW Bde;

- . GM Edler von Wieden's 26 LW ID guarded the area around the railroad with 52 LW Bde;

- . Two battalions of 11 Bav ID were in front of Hulewicze, and finally

- . Two brigades of the Polish Legion held the line down to the Corps boundary.

89 LW Bde had been pulled behind 45 LW ID as the Corps' reserve; the remaining Bavarian battalions were also in reserve to intervene where needed.

The rain of shells from the enemy batteries was heaviest in the sector south of the railroad, then at Smolary and in the Stobychwa-Zarecze area. At Zarecze the Russians had retained a small bridgehead on the western bank of the Stokhod since the latest fighting at the river-crossing points. It wasn't yet possible to determine where the enemy's main effort would take place. In any event, GdI Fath - with the approval of Bernhardi - had the Army Group's reserve (51 LW Bde) ready at Powursk for eventual deployment south or north of the railroad. Moreover, GdK Bernhardi brought up two Bavarian battalions from Mielnica. On the previous day he'd already stationed 2 Polish Brigade as a reserve behind the sector held by the other Poles. Here, however, the enemy artillery fire soon slackened.

On the other hand, long-range guns and bombs from airplanes pounded the town of Powursk; in the morning the 4 Finn Rif Div and parts of I Turkestan Corps began to attack between Hulewicze and the railroad.<sup>115</sup> But the Bavarians stationed to the left of the Polish Legion offered strong resistance; they also held on to the Hulewicze estate, which was an advanced strong point on the other side of the Stokhod.<sup>116</sup>

In the sector of 26 LW ID an exciting fight raged around a fortified bridgehead which we held on the eastern bank next to the destroyed railroad bridge; it was still connected with the main position on the western bank by a plank bridge.<sup>117</sup> At noon

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115 Klembovsky, p. 81

116 Stengel, "Das k. bayr. 3. Infanterie-Regiment" (Munich, 1924), pp. 74 ff. Mayer, "Das k. bayr. 22. Infanterie-Regiment" (Munich, 19230, pp. 62 ff.

117 Wisshaupt, "Die 52. Landwehr-Infanterie-Brigade im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Reichenberg, 1928), pp. 408 ff.

the Russian overran the worn-down garrison from LW IR 9 in their ruined fortification; only a few of the brave defenders reached the western bank. However, the attempt by the enemy to continue their advance was decisively checked. Effective mortar and trench mortar fire once more drove the Russians out of the trenches on the eastern bank, where a gallant band from the 9<sup>th</sup> Landwehr were still holding out. The hotly-contested strong point couldn't be held indefinitely, and so in the night the plank bridge was blown up.

While this fighting went on south of the rail line, the enemy kept the entire line of the Corps farther north under fire. Considerable movement was detected on the other side of the Stokhod; G.Lt Clausius got the impression that the Russians were preparing a heavy attack against Zarecze. 53 ID reported that their positions had been considerably damaged. At noon Russian detachments felt their way forward against 45 LW ID. GdI Fath had plentiful reserves available to guard against all possibilities. He could use them with confidence because the defenders of the first line south of the railroad had been able to resist all attacks with their own units and hadn't required any reinforcement. Thus in the afternoon at G.Lt Kneussl's request he was given LW IR 33 from the Corps' reserve to support 45 LW ID, and LW IR 12 moved north from Powursk to the junction between Kneussl's and Clausius' groups (behind the Smolary area); moreover, two Bavarian battalions were also stationed by the junction point. G.Lt Clausius moved LW IR 18 (from the Corps' reserve), along with another one and a half German battalions, to the Zarecze area where they backed up 53 ID. Meanwhile GM Stöhr had already brought a Russian thrust to a halt east of the Stokhod. The southern wing of 53 ID also repulsed the attackers (north of Smolary); however, they couldn't be driven off of the western bank. Enemy artillery continued to fire around Zarecze in the darkness to prevent the re-building of the ruined defensive installations. 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army hadn't achieved any great success during the day; Corps Fath had carried on the defense without committing any reserves.

#### Corps Fath on 29 July

The Russians repeated their attacks on the 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>118</sup> Only the Polish sector on Fath's southern wing remained undisturbed. Because of developments in FML Kaiser's neighboring Corps, GdK Bernhardt transferred 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Brigade back again to Mielnica. Overnight the 1 Turkestan Rif Div had occupied the numerous

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118 Klembovsky, p. 82

islands that filled the streams in the Stokhod valley at Hulewicze; during the day they heavily assaulted the Bavarians and GM Wieden's Landwehr, but were bloodily repulsed. Finally a counter-thrust by II Bn of the Bavarian 22 IR drove out the Turkestanis who'd dug in along the western bank. North of the railroad the XLVI Russian Corps (77 and 100 ID) as well as 78 ID tried to break through the allied line on the Stokhod with powerful blows. In 45 LW ID's sector, however, the "Rzeszow" LW IR 17 held onto their hard-pressed positions along the entire length of the front. In front of Smolary, which remained a focal point of the fighting into the night, a group under Bavarian Col. Grossmann thwarted all the efforts of the enemy. The Russian masses who ran against the adjacent southern wing of 53 ID (128 Lst Inf Bde) were equally unsuccessful in overcoming the determined resistance of the Landsturm troops. Division Clausius' sector as far as Bol. Obzyr was pinned down by enemy batteries; Stobychwa was pounded by gas shells.

In the afternoon the Russians thrust out of their bridgehead east of Zarecze against the center of 53 ID; they captured the town and thus broke through the defensive line of the k.u. 127 Lst Inf Bde.<sup>119</sup> The Bde commander, GM Tanarky, counterattacked from the west with three battalions; meanwhile, however, the enemy had also spread out from Zarecze to the south, where they occupied a sand dune. Therefore 128 Lst Inf Bde had to bend back their left wing behind this rising ground. The task of driving the enemy from the sand dune and closing the gap between the two Brigades was assigned to the Corps' reserve, LW IR 18; they were followed as a backup by a Bavarian battalion from Cerkowka. Group Tanarky and LW IR 18 gained ground, but only slowly. Therefore GdI Fath was compelled to also send 53 ID the HQ of 89 LW Bde with LW IR 12 from Cerkowka, despite the combat that was raging in front of Smolary; to replace the latter troops, the HQ of 51 LW Bde with LW IR 11 was brought up from Powursk. By evening Tanarky's group, with help from two battalions of Division Clausius and the Bavarian battalion, reached the western edge of Zarecze. Thus the allied troops had established a loose line to seal off the area penetrated by the enemy. GdI Fath ordered that the front should be restored before the Russians were reinforced. For the coming day, GdK Bernhardt assigned G.Lt Clausius two German Landwehr battalions that had arrived at Grywiatki. Moreover, Clausius brought up a

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119 Wisshaupt, "Aus den Kämpfen des Korps GdI Fath bei Stobychwa-Zarecze, Juli 1916" (Öst. Wehrzeitung, Issues 15, 31 and 32 of 1926); "Geschichte des 1. Ermländischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 150" (Zeulenroda, 1932), Vol. I, pp. 271 ff.

battalion of Saxon Landwehr infantry from his northern wing.

#### Corps Fath on 30 July

The counterattack resumed at daybreak on 30 July, but there was already a setback around 6:00 AM. The Russians, who had fallen upon the right wing of Clausius' Division at Stobychwa town, simultaneously thrust ahead south of the Stobychwa Brook and caused the left wing of Tanarky's group to waver. Their German neighbors and a battalion from LW IR 11 helped them to again solidify the front. Not until afternoon were all the troops deployed in a half-circle around Zarecze ready for a fresh, coordinated advance, and all the reinforcements in place (two battalions of German LW IR 33 from Grywiatki<sup>120</sup> and a battalion of Saxons sent by G.Lt Clausius). 53 ID HQ gave GM Tanarky command over three attacking groups which had been created in the sector between the sand dune and the Stobychwa valley. The sand dune was to be recovered by Col von Habermann (89 LW Bde HQ) and the original positions at Zarecze by Col Olbrich and the central group, while the enemy who'd advanced south of the Stobychwa Brooke would be driven back by Col Rustler (51 LW Bde HQ). Counting the shrunken remnants of 127 Lst Inf Bde, a total of about twelve battalions were available.

However, success was meager. The northern group were able to capture parts of the old trenches, and the central group advanced somewhat toward Zarecze; in between, however, the Russians held onto stubbornly defended strong points. Moreover, Habermann was unable to advance against the sand dune. The enemy's powerful resistance was explained by the fact that prisoners were brought back from the regiments of two divisions (77 and 78 ID). The Corps commander GdI Fath ordered GM Pongracz that before continuing the attack he should enclose the enemy with a continuous front and then should make his main goal the recovery of the sand dune.

The thrusts which the Russians carried out during the day against Group Kneussl were clearly diversionary maneuvers; they were checked by our fire.

#### Corps Fath's operations from 31 July

The attack against the enlarged bridgehead at Zarecze wasn't resumed early on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The troops were exhausted; several

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120 LW IR 33's battalions belonged to 1<sup>st</sup> LW ID, which was being sent to Group Gronau.

reports from the foremost line even questioned their ability to defend themselves. GdI Fath therefore looked around for reinforcements. Since Armeegruppe HQ no longer had any reserves, more troops could come only from Kneussl's Group. The Bavarian General was against giving them up, since a new Russian thrust along the railroad toward Powursk was very probable. In the afternoon GdK Bernhardi finally agreed to place 2 Polish Brigade under the Corps' southern wing, and to procure from Linsingen the help of a German battalion which had been stationed in the Army Group's reserve west of Powursk in case it was needed. Now GdI Fath could finally set LW IR 33, which hadn't been employed by 45 LW ID, in motion toward Cerkowka. Meanwhile Col Rustler had prepared an operation with limited goals; he took two strong points south of the Stobychwa Brook from the Russians, whose only activity during the day was to open annoying bombardments. Thus the old positions were fully restored on the northern wing of 53 ID. In the evening, and at dawn the following day, the enemy suffered a bloody rebuff at Smolary.

On 1 August the action at Zarecze dragged on without a decision; because of the exhaustion of the troops and the substantial casualties, the Corps commander decided in the evening to halt the attack and to restrict the mission to holding the line already reached. On the next day GdK Bernhardi ordered that G.Lt Clausius should make further plans for the recovery of the sand dune. The fighting that had lasted for several days in Fath's sector died down into artillery duels. The enemy's attempt to burst through the allied line on the Stokhod had cost them severe casualties; protected by the flag of the Red Cross they recovered their dead and wounded.

## **2. The onslaught of Bezobrazov's and Kaledin's Armies, 28 July-3 August**

### **a. The allies pull back from the bend in the Stokhod**

#### 28-31 July

GdK Bezobrazov's "Special Army", newly-created for the thrust to Kovel, began to attack early on 28 July. XXX and I Corps, assigned to his northern wing, thus encountered the portion of Armeegruppe Bernhardi adjacent to Corps Fath and stretching south to Swidniki; it was protected by FML Kaiser's II k.u.k. Corps, by GM Hahndorff's 107 German ID, and by parts of GM

Rusche's Division. In front of Kaiser's left wing was stationed the southernmost unit of 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of I Turkestan Corps. However, since GdI Letsch was directing his efforts against the crossing points on the Stokhod at Hulewicze and farther north, GM Pfeffer's 4 ID and the neighboring Polish Legion only had to endure strong artillery fire. During the day there was no movement by the enemy infantry in front of 4 ID that would indicate they had any intention of attacking.

XXX Russian Corps of Bezobrazov's Army directed their main effort against the positions of GM Schamschula's 41 Hon ID, which were the farthest advanced in the bend of the Stokhod and subject to effective flanking fire from two sides by the Russian artillery. Shells of all calibers hammered craters in the midst of the trenches which had been dug in the unstable sandy soil in the middle of the Honveds' sector. In the afternoon an infantry assault by 71<sup>st</sup> Russian Division west of Arsenowiczzy drove parts of Hon IR 20 back to their second line. A counterattack with one and a half battalions was initiated by GM Schamschula; it took place in a thick forest, and by evening it hadn't broken through. The troops were only able to support the detachment which had been thrown back earlier. Therefore the Corps commander ordered the troops to prepare for sustained resistance over night; he augmented GM Schamschula's reserves behind the wavering front with a battalion of 4 ID (IV/8) which was sent to Podlesie. Intending to immediately build on their success, the Russians tried to extend the attack from the point of penetration north to the extreme left wing of 41 Hon ID; however, the attempt had barely begun when it was shattered by the steadfast defenders.

The Russian I Corps fell upon the Honveds' right-hand neighbor, the German 107 ID; here, however, they achieved nothing.<sup>121</sup> At dawn on the next day the enemy did break into the German trenches northeast of Porskaya Wolka; the episode was successfully ended by noon thanks to quick intervention by the local reserves.<sup>122</sup>

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121 Ulrich, "Res-Inf-Regiment 52 im Weltkrieg" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1925), p. 344

122 Bernhardt, "Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben" (Berlin, 1927), p. 444; also "Eine Weltreise 1911/12 und der Zusammenbruch Deutschlands" (Leipzig, 1920), Vol. III, p. 204. Bartenwerffer and Herrmann, "Das Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 232 in Ost und West" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1927), Vol. II, pp. 47 ff. Klembovsky, p. 82.

41 Hon ID tried to carry out instructions which FML Kaiser issued early on the 29<sup>th</sup>; he told them to use effective fire to suppress any enemy attempt to attack, and not to tolerate any assembly of Russian units in front of the area they'd penetrated the day before. However, the Division was unsuccessful. Drumfire from the Russian batteries pounded the positions along the bend of the Stokhod west of Arsenowiczzy and Ugly; soon after noon the Division's front, again in the sector of Hon IR 20, was pushed back further by XXX Russian Corps. While the remnants of the defenders hung onto the second line, the main body of the attackers wheeled to the north and northwest. From the flank and rear they struck Hon IR "Veszprem" # 31 which held the Division's left wing (with two battalions still in the front line and one battalion as the Brigade's reserve in the second line). The Regiment was simultaneously pinned down by a frontal assault; since the 31<sup>st</sup> was fully encircled, its fate was soon sealed. Despite valiant resistance, only a few men escaped their unit's destruction. The calamity was so sudden that two battalions sent forward from the Division's reserves were unable to save the situation. FML Kaiser also made available Battalion IV/8 from Podlesie and a German battalion which was arriving from Wielick; he had 4 ID switch its Battalion I/8 to its southern wing, which was endangered by the destruction of Hon IR 31.

At first GM Pfeffer wanted to bend back the flank that bordered his neighbor's sector. But Battalion I/49 was already being pushed back by the enemy. Then the Russians advanced through the abandoned trenches toward Sielco, which forced the next battalion in line to give up the town and establish a hook-shaped position farther west.<sup>123</sup> To shore up the exposed flank of the otherwise steady front, and to restore communications with the Honved, GM Pfeffer sent LW IR 30 (which had just five companies) to counterattack. GdK Bernhardi had to recognize that there was a danger that the misfortunes of II Corps could spread more widely. Therefore he sent the last available battalions of the 107 German ID to march through Wielick toward Podlesie; the 2 Polish Brigade moved from Mielnica in the same direction. Around 4:00 PM Bernhardi entrusted GM Hahndorff with the counter-thrust against the Russians who had penetrated the inner flanks of the two Aus-Hung. divisions. While the reinforcements came up, both divisional commanders were able to partly stem the Russian tide by committing their reserves. GM Pfeffer already hoped that he'd be able to recover Sielco. But in the evening the 41 Hon ID suffered another setback. North of

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123 "Ehrenbuch der Hesser", Vol. II, p. 134

Korsyni the Russians broke through the trenches that Hon IR 20 had established as their new position, and moved west as far as the original third line. Just as the Division's left had been endangered in the afternoon, now the right wing was in peril of being rolled up or cut off. The enemy had already made it impossible to occupy all of the inadequately-prepared third line (Korsyni-Sielco). The first German battalion to arrive east of Podlesie had to be used to seal the gap that had developed. GdK Bernhardi had hoped that a general attack by Hahndorff's group could restore the situation, but this hope now disappeared. He decided to pull the shaken II Corps back from the enemy to take up a new, shorter position running straight between Sitowicze and Ml. Porsk, at the base of the triangle formed where the Stokhod bends to the east.

The retreat was completed by midnight and the new defensive front was occupied in the morning of 30 July. The Polish Legion of Corps Fath bent back their right wing behind the Stawokbach; their junction with II Corps (4 ID) was half way between Sitowicze and Rudka Mirynska. The southern wing of 41 Hon ID stretched to a point west of Wielick where they met the lines of 107 German ID, which had also pulled back, pivoting on Ml. Porsk. Little was seen of the enemy during this day.

Lines of Russian infantry moved up to the new position of Bernhardi's front on the 31<sup>st</sup>, while enemy batteries also chimed in. Scouting detachments repeatedly clashed in no-man's land. When Fath's neighboring corps urgently requested reinforcements for the Zarecze area, GdK Bernhardi had to return the 2 Polish Brigade to Group Kneussl.

1-3 August

Early in the morning of 1 August parts of 24 Russian ID (I Corps) were able to establish themselves in the foremost trenches of Hahndorff's Division at Bol. Porsk; in a few hours, however, the sector had again been cleared of enemy troops.<sup>124</sup> The Russians were preparing a powerful blow against II Corps on a wide front. 41 Hon ID had just two combat-ready regiments at the front; behind them the remnants of Honved Infantry Regiments 20 and 31 were combined in one weak battalion.<sup>125</sup> The Division's positions suffered severely under artillery bombardment. FML Kaiser deployed his reserves at the inner wings of Pfeffer's and Schamschula's divisions; through GdK Bernhardt he secured the assistance of German IR 377, which belonged to GM von Stocken's 10 LW ID but was stationed as an Army Group reserve at Mielnica. Because of the heavy damage which the Army Group had suffered from Brussilov's offensive, GO Linsingen thus had to abandon his original plan of taking just one regiment from 10 LW ID as it arrived (for the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army) and sending the Division's main body ahead to join GO Böhm-Ermolli's Army. As the troop trains gradually arrived, they were sent from Kovel to unload at the Lubitow and Poginski stations; thus fresh troops would be available to either Bernhardt or to G.Lt Lüttwitz's Corps as needed. Toward evening a deeply-deployed shock group from XXX Russian Corps made three attempts to break through Honved Infantry Regiments 12 and 32 northwest of Wielick; however, the attackers were always thrown back in front of the barriers by the combined effect of all the defenders' fire. On the next day enemy activity was restricted just to sudden artillery bombardments.

The Russians once more felt strong enough to strike on 3 August; this time they hit the inner wings of Kaiser's and Fath's Corps. In the morning the enemy brought the positions of the Polish Legion and 4 ID on the Stawokbach under strong artillery fire as far as Rudka Mirynska and the area farther south; their principal target was the town of Rudka Mirynska itself, but they also struck 41 Hon ID. The first infantry thrust against Rudka Mirynska was halted by the Moravian IR 99. In the afternoon the Russians repeated their attack against 4 ID with stronger forces

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124 Bartenwerffer and Herrmann, pp. 54 ff. Ulrich, p. 347. Bernhardt, "Denkwürdig-keiten", p. 444. Zayonchkovsky, "Strategic Studies of the World War 1914-1918" (in Russian; Moscow, 1923), p. 50.

125 The rifle strength of the 41<sup>st</sup> Division had shrunk to one third of its level on 28 July (when it had 9700 men).

(1 Turkestan Rif Div and parts of 80 ID); from Sitowicze they also assaulted the Poles. G.Lt Kneussl shifted a Bavarian battalion to the endangered southern wing of his sector; GdI Fath requested that a German Landwehr battalion of the Army Group's reserve should also be brought up from its station west of Powursk.

While the Poles were able to repulse the Russians at Sitowicze with just the help of a few Bavarian companies, at 1:00 PM the enemy broke through 4 ID at Rudka Mirynska and pushed ahead to the forest which lies north of the town. To protect his flank, G.Lt Kneussl immediately threw the III Battalion of Bavarian IR 3 and the 2 Polish Brigade, which had been in reserve, against the enemy.<sup>126</sup>

Since noon the commander of 4 ID, GM Pfeffer, was holding his reserves in readiness to intervene. The commander of the Armee-gruppe, GdK Bernhardt, first sent II Corps a battalion of IR 377 and then, after a new request by FML Kaiser, also batteries from the German 10 LW ID. Meanwhile GM Pfeffer started his counter-attack. The commander of 8 Inf Bde, Col Edler von Köckh, moved against the enemy from the southwest with IR 8 and the battalion from IR 377; the commander of 7 Inf Bde, Col Ritter von Steinitz, advanced from the northwest with IR 99. Köckh's striking group had to fight a heavy action around Rudka Mirynska. North of this focal point, Col Steinitz first mopped up the forested zone; he was aided by the Bavarians and by Polish Uhlans. Afterwards he also drove toward the Stawok. The hotly-contested village was finally wrested from the Russians in hand-to-hand action. The right wing of the Polish Legion, which had been forced to bend back by the enemy penetration, was supported by the 2 Polish Brigade, making it possible to maintain the connection with 4 ID and to also throw back the enemy here. Through the united efforts of the allied troops the original positions were recovered in the evening.<sup>127</sup> In late afternoon the Russians tried to fall upon the southern sector of 4 ID, but the attempt was shattered by the determined defenders of the Lower Austrian IR 49.<sup>128</sup>

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126 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original actually reads that Kneussl threw his troops "against the cavalry." However, there is no indication in the rest of the text, in the order of battle, or in the maps that the Russians used any mounted troops in this operation.

127 Bernhardt, "Denkwürdigkeiten", p. 445; "Eine Weltreise", Vol. III, p. 203; Stengel, pp. 74 ff.

128 "Ehrenbuch der Hesser", Vol. II, p. 136

**b. Defense of the upper course of the Stokhod**

On both sides of the Rovno-Kovel railroad and along the upper course of the Stokhod the lines were held mainly by German units. The way to the communications center at Kovel, coveted by the Russians, was blocked by the right wing of Bernhardt's Armeegruppe (with Division Rusche) and then by Lüttwitz's X Corps (19 and 20 ID, reinforced by the k.u.k. 29 ID plus the recently arrived German 121 ID). The attacking group massed by General Bezobrazov west of the railroad, in a narrow area stretching to a point in front of Lüttwitz's sector, consisted of the elite troops of the Tsarist armed forces - the two Guard infantry corps, with the Guard cavalry corps behind them. To the left, GdK Kaledin's Army threatened the front as far as Zaturcy with two corps (XXXIX and XXIII), which like the Guards were deployed in dense masses. In expectation of a powerful Russian offensive, on 25 July the German 37 Inf Bde (Col von Roeder) was attached to the north-Bohemian 29 ID, which had been commanding just two regiments. The 37<sup>th</sup> Bde was inserted in line at Szczuryn, to the right of the k.u.k. 57 Inf Bde which on its other flank was bordered by Rusche's Division on Bernhardt's wing at Nw. Mosor.<sup>129</sup> Farther south the k.u.k. IR 94, holding the first line at Trysten, was under the command of G.Lt von Schmettau's 19 German ID.<sup>130</sup> The German 20 ID held the positions in the area where the Stokhod has its source (through Kisielin as far as Zaturcy).

The Russian onslaught on 28 July

The enemy artillery fire commenced early on 28 July. Since the fire was directed in varying strength alternately against both the foremost lines and the interior zone, it still wasn't possible by noon to determine which areas the Russian infantry would probably attack. Meanwhile G.Lt Lüttwitz split up the troops of 121 ID, stationed on the left bank of the Stokhod in the Osmigowiczy-Solotwin area, into groups which he held ready behind his other divisions. General Bezobrazov had decided to make his thrust from Niemier toward Ozierzany. He avoided the area in front of Division Rusche, where the terrain was difficult to traverse and not suitable for the massed deployment of troops, but struck FML Schön's 29 ID with full fury. First the Russian batteries intensified their fire around noon to a

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129 The 58 Inf Bde HQ had temporarily been removed from the chain of command.

130 The 94<sup>th</sup> IR had three battalions at Trysten; another battalion was under 57 Inf Bde.

destructive rain of shells which lasted for half an hour. Then wave after wave of infantry launched a furious assault.<sup>131</sup> Around 1:30 PM the enemy took an advanced position at Rajmiesto from the northern wing of Schön's Division; however, 57 Inf Bde was able to occupy a switch position in time and all the rest of the front held on against the stubborn assault by Guard troops from the direction of Niemier.

At the same time, north of Trysten on the left wing of the German 19 ID the enemy overran the weak positions of a battalion of recruits.<sup>132</sup> Pivoting to the north and south, they fell upon the open flanks of G.Lt Schmettau's and FML Schön's sectors. The first attempt to counterattack, by 37 Inf Bde with the attached north-Bohemian Battalion III/92, had no effect; it was pushed aside by the Russian flood. A dramatic and eventful fight developed around Szczuryn; Battalion I/92, stationed farther north, built up a hook-shaped position in the direction of the village and was able to hold onto the first line.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile a German battalion south of Babie prevented the enemy from advancing to the west. Col. Roeder assembled his troops, reinforced by Battalion IV/92 (FML Schön's last reserve), for a fresh counterattack; in the late afternoon the gap between the two divisions was finally closed along a front facing south. The Corps commander helped out with two battalions from 121 ID - one moved forward to Babie and the other guarded the bridge on the Stokhod at Witoniez.

On the northern wing of Schmettau's Division the breakthrough of the Russian Guards at Trysten had unfortunate consequences. As soon as the enemy had overrun the battalion of recruits they were elated with victory, and rolled up all three battalions of the neighboring k.u.k. Turnau IR # 94. Although they had stood up to every frontal assault, they were now overcome, one after the other, as far as the company on the extreme right wing.<sup>134</sup> There weren't enough reserves in place to prevent this catastrophe, and the Regiment bled to death. Only a few remnants escaped destruction; they linked up with German detachments which finally intervened in the fight west of Trysten. A junction was also established with the defensive

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131 Schön, "Die deutsch-böhmische 29. Infanterie-truppen-division am Stokhod", (Reichenberg, 1926), pp. 51 ff.

132 Klembovsky, pp. 81 ff.

133 Ebeling, "Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 78 im Weltkrieg" (Berlin-Oldenburg 1924), pp. 126 ff.

134 "Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 94 im Weltkrieg" (Reichenau, 1929), pp. 524 ff.

group of 29 ID south of Babie. The southern neighbor of the 94<sup>th</sup>, a German regiment of 19 ID, were threatened with envelopment from the flank and rear in the afternoon; they evacuated their position at Woronczyn and pulled back behind the Stokhod.<sup>135</sup> G.Lt von Schöler's 20 ID was furiously assaulted by XXIII Russian Corps, especially at Kisielin. With swords raised the Russian officers urged their men on; the thick ranks of attackers, as many as twenty rows deep, were driven forward with blows from whips. But all the massed attacks, which continued after darkness fell, were bloodily repulsed by the unbending defenders.<sup>136</sup> Reinforcements, which G.Lt Lüttwitz had already sent to the commander of 121 ID in the morning because the Russians had penetrated the northern wing of the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army, weren't used.

The Russian II Guard Corps had pushed back the center of Corps Lüttwitz at Trysten. The power of resistance of two of the divisions had been rather weakened, not only by the significant human casualties but also by the loss of several batteries. Since the right wing of 19 ID had already pulled back behind the Stokhod, it didn't seem advisable to expose the disconnected groups in the Trysten-Babie area, or the still intact line of 29 ID farther north, to further blows on the eastern bank. Therefore the Corps commander left just 20 ID in their old position; during the night he drew the remainder of his front, as far as the junction with Rusche's Division at Nw. Mosor, back behind the river barrier. The new boundary between Schön's and Schmettau's Divisions at Ostrow was supported by some more battalions from 121 ID. GO Linsingen moreover was holding the main body of the newly-arrived 86 ID in readiness as a reserve in Gonczyk Brod.

#### Developments from 29 July to 2 August

The new position was undisturbed until the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>. G.Lt Lüttwitz impressed upon the defenders that "The western and northern bank of the Stokhod will be held regardless of the circumstances." A gap between 19 and 20 ID was filled by parts of 121 ID. Since most components of the 121<sup>st</sup> had been committed to strengthen the inner wings of the German 19 and k.u.k. 29 ID, their commander GM von Ditzfurth was given control over all

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135 Harms, "Geschichte des Oldenburgischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 91" (Berlin-Oldenburg, 1930), pp. 238 ff.

136 Sobbe, "Geschichte des Braunschweigischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 92 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1929), pp. 299 ff.

troops stationed between Kol. Wiktorowka and Witoniez.

The Russians didn't abandon their efforts to make their way to Kovel through the German defensive lines. At noon they resumed their mass attacks at Kisielin and Semerynki, disregarding casualties, and repeated the attempts in the night. In the evening the enemy also pushed against the pulled-back center of the front, striking with particular force at Kol. Wiktorowka and Ostrow. Therefore GO Linsingen moved 86 ID forward to the area around Nw. Dwor. On the next day there was prolonged fighting, especially in GM Ditfurth's sector around the crossing-points on the Stokhod that led to the next Russian objective, Ozierany. However, G.Lt Lüttwitz was able to thwart the enemy's plans with the units he'd been given by the Army Group, to which parts of 10 LW ID were also added on 31 July. The Russians were only able to carve out a small bridgehead on the left bank of the Stokhod, to which they clung stubbornly.

On 1 August the Russians' eagerness to attack flared up again. During the day the three German divisions of Corps Lüttwitz and the right wing of the Aus-Hung. 29 ID were engaged in heated actions, which in some places lasted until the early hours of 2 August. However, the enemy faltered and suffered heavy casualties due to the determined resistance of the allies, who guarded Kovel like a solid wall. The futile fury of the attackers died down into artillery fire. GFM Hindenburg, who'd received authority over Army Group Linsingen at noon on 1 August, sent the German 75 Res ID as a further reserve to the Kovel area.

Earlier (on 30 July), when the battle of Lüttwitz's Group and of Tersztyanszky's adjacent Army was still at its height and the end of the Russian onslaught was not yet in sight, the Aus-Hung. high command had promised to send XV Turkish Corps to GO Linsingen. This Corps assembled at Belgrade, from which the first elements planned to leave by train on 3 August. Since the Turkish troops weren't familiar with battle conditions in the Volhynian theater of operations, they were to be used in relatively quiet sectors to free up other units. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Linsingen reported to Teschen that he intended to deploy the Ottoman corps southeast of Kovel on both sides of the railroad to Rovno.

### **c. A setback for Tersztyanszky's Army**

The k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army, whose combat strength had been greatly

diminished since the catastrophic breakthrough battle at Olyka-Luck, held a short stretch of the front (20 kilometers) from Zaturcy to a point north of Pustomyty with five infantry and one cavalry divisions. To deal with the expected Russian attack GO Tersztyanszky had held back relatively strong reserves: Army HQ had 25 LW Bde (two regiments and two batteries) plus IR 89, X Corps had IR 82, and FML Szurmay's Corps had IR 90 and Hon IR 313 plus two regiments (HR 9 and 13) from 10 Cavalry Division. On the eve of the battle, GO Linsingen also assigned to the Army commander IR 378 from 10 German LW ID; this Regiment arrived at Jakowiczy and was instructed to be ready to fight under X Corps the next day. The opponents of 4<sup>th</sup> Army were from Kaledin's forces - XL Corps, the 14 ID of VIII Corps, and V Cavalry Corps. The left wing unit of VIII Corps (and of 8<sup>th</sup> Army), the 15 ID, extended south opposite the sector of FML Freih. von Leonhardi, which belonged to GdK von der Marwitz's Armeegruppe. Kaledin's assignment was to take Vladimir-Volynsky.

#### The fighting on 28 July

Around 4:00 AM on 28 July the Russians first belabored Corps Szurmay. Their batteries laid down heavy fire, including some stupefying gas shells, on the defensive installations of GM Goldbach's 70 Hon ID and the adjacent northern wing of GM Edler von Obauer's 11 ID. Only a moderate bombardment was directed against FML von Csanady's neighboring X Corps. The troops held for a possible counterattack, including the Army reserves, had just been alerted when bad news was already arriving from the foremost line. At 5:00 AM the 70 Hon ID informed FML Szurmay that the enemy had broken in between Liniew and Koszewo; a battery had been lost and 208 Hon Inf Bde "destroyed." After Hon IR 313 from the Corps' reserve had been placed under GM Goldbach, he tried in vain to halt the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Division in the forested area west of Koszewo.<sup>137</sup> The Landsturm soldiers of the Honved Division, who were now assaulted along their entire front, weren't equal to the occasion; they were relentlessly pushed back. Around 6:00 AM FML Szurmay moved his next reserve - IR 90 of 11 ID - up to Wojnin; he ordered both his infantry divisions to hold onto the intermediate position which ran east of Szelwow as far as Watyn until reinforcements could intervene. From 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ he also received authority over IR 89, which had come forward from Swiniuchy into the forest west of Bubnow.

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137 The actions of the Russian 14 ID are fully described by Vinogradsky in "La guerre sur le front oriental en Russie - en Roumanie" (Paris, 1926), pp. 189 ff.

But the Russians were quicker. They had immediately sent their available horsemen (11 CD and the Orenburg Coss Div) through the gap in Szurmay's line and thus heightened the confusion of their opponents. The cavalry appeared suddenly; they fell upon batteries and attacked the regimental staffs of 22 Infantry Brigade on the exposed northern flank of 11 ID. When enemy infantry also advanced from Liniew toward the south, GM Obauer first attempted to bend back his left wing behind Bubnow (around 7:00 AM). But soon the whole front began to waver, which also caused GM von Bauer's 10 CD to fall back. FML Szurmay wanted to use his last reserves (Hussar Regiments 9 and 13) to block the routes west of Bubnow, but GM Bauer reported that these troops were already deployed to plug the gap between his own cavalry and 11 ID, and that he could hardly make them available.

Meanwhile GM Goldbach's Honved regiments, after very costly fighting, were thrown back to the heights east of Szelwow. The artillery, which kept firing to the last second, had already lost four batteries to the enemy. IR 90 was preparing to counterattack from Wojnin to the east. Now (around 8:00 AM) GO Tersztyanszky ordered 4 Inf Bde (IR 89 and 90) to mount a combined thrust toward Koszewo, which 11 ID and 70 Hon ID would join. Moreover, Szurmay was to hold the two regiments of 10 CD (which however had already been committed to the battle) as a mobile reserve at Korytnica.

The k.u.k. X Corps, which had to fight the 2 and 4 Rifle Divs of XL Russian Corps, had as difficult a time as their neighbors on the right. The quick defeat and virtual destruction of the 208 Hon Inf Bde had burst open the right flank of 13 LW ID (26 LW Bde). FML Csanady rapidly sent the Szekel IR 82 to help his threatened southern wing. While FML Edler von Kalser, commanding 13 LW ID, sought to guard against envelopment from the south and repulsed a Russian thrust against his front, after 6:00 AM the adjacent unit to the north - GM Ritter von Jemrich's 2 ID - was overrun. Endangered from both sides, 13 LW ID now had to pull back. IR 82 only managed to steady the weakened 26 LW Bde.<sup>138</sup> For a time GM Jemrich was able to bring the northern wing of his 2 ID forward again, but the Russians responded with a new attack; they also fell upon the neighboring 37 Hon ID. To support 2 ID, the Corps commander (with the approval of the Army commander) ordered 25 LW Bde to come forward from Kol. Dubrowa. Around 8:00 AM the HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army was informed by GO Linsingen that the attacking Russians by no means had numerical

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138 "The History of the k.u.k. Szekel Infantry Regiment Nr. 82, 1883-1919" (in Magyar; Budapest, 1931), pp. 158 ff.

superiority, but were employing units which had already been in place for a long time. Apparently this was only a diversionary attack, with which the enemy hoped to draw German reserves to the area so that their forces in front of Kovel would have an easier time. "Everything possible must be done to bring the enemy to a halt with a counterattack."

While this exhortation was passed ahead to the Corps commanders, the situation at the front had further worsened. 2 ID fell back. GM Haber, who'd repulsed the first assaults with his 37 Hon ID, now asked for assistance from the Army's reserves. Around 8:30 AM GO Tersztyanszky assigned LW IR 1 to FML Csanady; with the remaining regiment (LW IR 24) and batteries the commander of 25 LW Bde was to move south toward Szelwów to help Corps Szurmay, whose situation was uncertain. However, events upon the battlefield of X Corps upset this plan. The Russians broke through the southern wing of 37 Hon ID in a massed attack by troops deployed in depth. FML Csanady tried to bring his entire Corps back to the next position, which began northeast of Szelwów and ended west of Zaturcy. 13 LW ID and 2 ID (the latter supported by LW IR 1) were able to take up stations on this line. 37 Hon ID, however, with its right wing enveloped by the enemy, was pushed back toward the northwest, suffered heavy losses, and was driven to Cholopieczny. Now GO Tersztyanszky had to countermand the deployment of his last reserves. He instructed FML Csanady to form a counterattack group out of LW IR 24 (of 25 LW Bde) and two battalions which had arrived from German IR 378. Led by Col Wurja, the commander of 25 LW Bde, they would drive back the enemy who were advancing on the road toward Vladimir-Volynsky and farther south.

Under Corps Szurmay the remnants of 70 Hon ID came to a halt just east of Szelwów, where just one Tyrol Kaiser Jaeger company could be deployed to back them up.<sup>139</sup> The morning counterattack by 4 Inf Bde soon bogged down, and their regiments even fell back. The fighting extended as far as Wojnin. The 22 Inf Bde and 10 CD were similarly pushed back toward Korytnica. The movement to the rear was already having an impact on the adjacent wing of Leonhardi's sector, on the flank of GdK von der Marwitz's Armee-gruppe. Army HQ exhorted FML Szurmay to keep his right wing from being pushed to the southwest; if necessary it should fall back due west. During the afternoon a thrust by FML Leonhardi, with the help of German troops, brought 10 CD

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139 Italian-speaking personnel had been incorporated into independent companies which were to be used only in the Russian theater of operations.

forward toward the northeast. The northern wing of this operation was assisted by the Uhlans of 2 Gd Cav Bde, who strengthened the junction with 11 ID. The latter Division also gained some ground in the direction of Bubnow; 4 Inf Bde on their left wing linked up with 70 Hon ID at Wojnin. Here and at Szelwów all further enemy attacks were repulsed through the evening. Under X Corps the 13 LW ID (with the Szekel regiment in the front line) and 2 ID held onto the sectors they'd been assigned since noon. The counterattack by Wurja's group on the northern wing was fully successful; in one bound they recovered the intermediate position which had been lost in the morning, so that 37 Hon ID's stretch of the front was stabilized and firmly connected to Corps Lüttwitz. Late in the evening GO Tersztyanszky again instructed his Corps commanders to cling stubbornly to their present positions so that the neighboring fronts wouldn't be disturbed; they should do everything in their power to avoid a further setback.

### Recriminations

Although in fact the enemy did not have a great numerical preponderance, they had inflicted a sharp defeat upon 4<sup>th</sup> Army. In a few hours the front had been pushed back by 2 to 5 kilometers along its entire length. The Russian blow had a shattering impact on the Aus-Hung. troops. About 15,000 men, half of the infantry strength of the Army, had disappeared; 9 machine guns and 45 guns were given up to the enemy.<sup>140</sup> The heavy losses of the artillery were due mainly to the fact that the batteries continued to fire stubbornly until they were overwhelmed in hand-to-hand combat. Thus the personnel of one battery literally fell victim to the sabers of Russian cavalry. It was also very depressing that the infantry, especially in the Ruthenian regiments, had so little combat value, and that the soldierly spirit of the defenders was no longer able to withstand a severe test. A substantial portion of the casualties were prisoners. In a confidential report to the high command GO Tersztyanszky referred to 11 ID as "4<sup>th</sup> Army's child of sorrow." With the exception of one counterattack, in which

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140 The strength reports forwarded to Army HQ in the evening paint a stark picture of the casualties. 22 Inf Bde of 11 ID had just 600 riflemen left, 4 Inf Bde 1850, and 70 Hon ID 940 (three regiments together had just 170 men). The half of 13 LW ID (plus IR 82) had 1300 riflemen, 2 ID (plus LW IR 1) had 2600, 37 Hon ID 600. Also in the first line was LW IR 24 with 1700 men (including a battalion of German IR 378). The 70 Hon ID alone had lost 33 guns.

German units cooperated, the large number of troops that had been held in reserve had never been able to turn the situation around in our favor. A new Army reserve was needed, since all available men had been thrown into the fighting during the day; Army Group HQ sent the German Res IR 217 (with 2700 riflemen), which had come from Army Group Woyrsch to Vladimir-Volynsky. The Regiment took up quarters at Berezowiczy.

For a long time the commander of the Army Group had been dissatisfied with the higher command echelons of Tersztyanszky's Army, as was evident from many orders and remarks. But 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was rather surprised during the afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> to receive an order from Linsingen announcing the arrival of Prussian GdI Litzmann with the HQ of XL Reserve Corps. The General was to be "entrusted with the defense against the Russian attack" to ensure "that there is a united command over the defenders, some of whom are German troops."<sup>141</sup>

#### Developments from 29 July through 3 August

The enemy allowed the defenders something of a break in the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup>. The southern wing of 10 CD helped Leonhardi's cavalry group to drive out the Russians who'd penetrated the forest zone east of Korytnica. In the afternoon Szurmay's Corps was the target of lively gunfire; the weak infantry thrusts which followed didn't do any damage to the front. However, Csanady's X Corps once more was attacked by XL Russian Corps along their entire line. In FML Kalser's sector the attackers broke down completely in front of IR 82; they were halted by interdiction fire in front of 37 Hon ID. On the other hand the 2 ID, which had less power of resistance, was pushed back. Parts of 26 LW Inf Bde sprang forward to help the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. In the center a counterattack by the Corps' reserve, two battalions of IR 378, plugged the gap by the time darkness fell.<sup>142</sup> As a backup, GO Tersztyanszky also received a battalion of Res IR 217, which during the day assembled at Tworeniczy behind the Army's center; the battalion moved forward to Wolka Szelwowskaja, nearer to the focal point of the fighting.

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141 GdI Litzmann was famous for the breakthrough at Brzeziny in 1914 and the conquest of the Kovno fortress in 1915; hitherto he had commanded a sector under 10<sup>th</sup> German Army. Linsingen's original intention was that the General would assume tactical command over the entire k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army. (Litzmann, "Lebens-Erinnerungen" [Berlin, 1928], Vol. II, pp. 92 ff.)

142 The other battalion of IR 378 stayed with 37 Hon ID.

"To avoid friction in command at the junction of the right wing of the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army with the troops of Group Marwitz<sup>143</sup>, and to give greater support to Szurmay's much weakened group", GO Linsingen assigned GdI Litzmann an Armeegruppe within Tersztyanszky's Army. He was given Corps Szurmay and the sector of G.Lt Beckmann (Leonhardi's Cavalry Group plus German 108 ID). Thus 4<sup>th</sup> Army's front was extended to the south. On the 30<sup>th</sup> Litzmann took up his post at Poryck; the area he commanded stretched from Szelwów to Tereszkowice.

General Kaledin continued to pursue his goal of breaking through to Vladimir-Volynsky, and once more struck at the points in 4<sup>th</sup> Army that he knew were the weakest. Early in the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> the X Corps was hit by a heavy bombardment between Kol. Dubrowa and the Turya. After 5:00 AM the enemy left struck the inner wings of 2 ID and 37 Hon ID, where they had opened a breach the evening before. The battalion of Res IR 217 was ordered to counterattack from Wolka Szelwowska; two battalions of IR 378 were to join on the right, and LW IR 1 and 24 on the left.<sup>144</sup> The position was recovered by 8:00 AM. GO Tersztyanszky was still holding back the other battalions of Res IR 217 in case of need, for the action lasted throughout the day. On one hand the Russians pushed against the northern wing of 37 Hon ID along the highway, and on the other they belabored 2 ID with counter-attacks. Bitter fighting raged along the battle lines until evening; at the end another segment of the trench that had been lost (about 1000 paces long in front of Kol. Dubrowa) was recovered from the enemy. Thus Csanady's Corps was able to hold out. The Russians no longer troubled 13 LW ID; they also restricted their activity opposite Armeegruppe Litzmann to a cannonade and some skirmishing aimed at Corps

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143 On 28 July it became necessary for FML Leonhardi, who belonged to Armeegruppe Marwitz, to issue orders concerning the defensive measures of 10 CD. GO Tersztyanszky had objected to Army Group HQ about this interference in his own area of command.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Of course, the principal reason for the creation of Litzmann's Armeegruppe was mentioned earlier: to ensure that the Germans controlled most of 4<sup>th</sup> Army's units. See Norman Stone ("Eastern Front 1914-1918"; New York, 1975, p. 272) - "[The Austro-Hungarian command of 4<sup>th</sup> Army] became a stage-prop, contemptuously shifted around by one German general after another."

144 Sichelstiel, "Geschichte des k.k. Schützen-Regimentes 'Wien' Nr. 24" (Vienna, 1928), p. 114

Szurmay. The 10 CD was assigned to Leonhardi's Cavalry Group as its left wing, while 2 Gd Cav Bde took over the right. Several companies from 108 ID supported the line held by the cavalry. G.Lt Beckmann reported that his sector was completely quiet after noon.

As instructed by the Army Group commander, his Chief of Staff Col. Hell pointed out to the k.u.k. high command the extreme weakness of Corps Szurmay; he suggested that 11 ID be transferred to another theater of operations and replaced by more reliable troops. He stated that because the Division's regiments, made up mostly of Ruthenes, were "completely unreliable", the 11<sup>th</sup> "as a whole is without any value for the Army Group." However, there was a lack of units available; XV Turkish Corps was supposed to come to Volhynia, but was still in Belgrade. Therefore GO Conrad for the moment had just the burnt-out 61 ID, which was rebuilding behind Armeegruppe Marwitz in the Belz area, as a possible replacement for 11 ID. The new commander of 61 ID, GM von Grallert, reported that as yet his unit had little combat value; GO Linsingen therefore declined the assistance of a force that was in such condition. Instead the high command moved 61 ID to Transylvania at the start of August.

Kaledin's breakthrough attempt was shattered when Csanady's Corps repulsed the Russian onslaught of 30 July. The battle died out in the next few days into the usual artillery duels characteristic of trench warfare. There were actions involving hand grenades in areas where the opponent were especially near each other, such as in parts of X Corps' sector that were thickly forested and at Pustomyty in Group Beckmann's sector.<sup>145</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ immediately sought to enhance the defensive capacity of the front by building fortifications and creating reserves. On the 31<sup>st</sup>, GdI Litzmann received the German Battalion III/46 from Linsingen, and stationed them behind 11 ID. By 2 August the Army commander was able to free up the entire Res IR 217 as another reserve. By incorporating replacement troops the X Corps reached a strength of about 8000 and Corps Szurmay 7000 riflemen. Hon IR 312 of 70 Hon ID was dissolved. Despite the substantial setback, the 4<sup>th</sup> Army had in general carried out its defensive mission in the Battle of Kovel.

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145 Wulffen, "1. Ober-Rheinisches Infanterie-Regiment" Nr. 97" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1923), pp. 62 ff.

***D. Brussilov's Attacks toward Lemberg and Stanislau*****1. The end of the Battle of Brody, 28 July-3 August****a. Sakharov's thrusts against Armeegruppe Marwitz**

Apparently to divert the allies, GdK Sakharov had anticipated Brussilov's great blow against Kovel; he had already started his task of attacking through Brody and Lemberg on 25 July. For this purpose the weight of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was concentrated in the center; the corps stationed north and south of the Lipa (V and XLV) were only supposed to hold their positions. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, when the offensive by most of Southwest Front was starting, Sakharov had already taken the city of Brody. His main body continued to follow Böhm-Ermolli's troops. To assist the thrust by Kaledin's neighboring Army toward Vladimir-Volynsky, Sakharov now also sent his northern wing forward against Armeegruppe Marwitz.

Therefore on the 28<sup>th</sup> the 43 Res ID of GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn's Corps had to repulse an enemy thrust at Zwiniacze. The following day passed without incident for Marwitz's troops, except for the developments by Group Beckmann described above. The half of FML von Hordt's 33 ID was pulled from the front of Corps Dieffenbach and sent marching toward 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. To replace them, 46 LW ID (91 LW Bde) extended their northern wing on the Styr as far as a point in front of Smarzow; the adjacent group under Prussian GM von Hülsen<sup>146</sup> (92 LW Bde, reinforced by parts of the k.u.k. 48 ID and German 22 ID) covered the line through Strzemilcze as far as the right wing of 48 ID. G.Lt Dieffenbach had split up most of 22 ID to back up all the parts of his defensive sector; a small part of the Division remained on the northern wing of Corps Falkenhayn.

On the 30<sup>th</sup>, while Kaledin furiously pushed against 4<sup>th</sup> Army, Sakharov assisted the offensive by his neighbor with his own large-scale attack. Around 4:00 AM the enemy in the area south of the Lipa fell upon GM Prince Schwarzenberg's 48 ID of Corps Dieffenbach; however, the interdiction fire of the artillery was

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146 On 31 July Prussian GM Gronau took over this group, since GM Hülsen had been entrusted with the command of 19 ID (in Lüttwitz's Corps).

enough to check this attempt by the 7 Russian ID. At the same time the Russian 10 ID of V Corps north of the river, along with the extreme southern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army (parts of 15 ID), hit the left half of Corps Falkenhayn.<sup>147</sup> Between Zwiniacze and Tereszkowiec the deeply-massed attackers - arrayed in more than ten ranks - thrust through the first defensive line of 43 Res ID and reached the nearest batteries. The neighboring units held firm, and the sector reserves intervened to stop the enemy, and then to throw them back past the foremost line of trenches. For the rest of the action the Germans held onto all their positions.<sup>148</sup> This day of bloody fighting cost the Russians very heavy casualties. On the next day Falkenhayn reported that about 2000 Russian corpses had been counted in front of the lines at Zwiniacze. Activity sharply declined, as both sides engaged only in skirmishing.

### **b. Böhm-Ermolli's Army retreats after the Battle of Brody**

After four days of costly struggle against the enemy's powerful attacks, FML Kosak's Group of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army pulled back in the night of 27-28 July to a switch position west and south of Brody. Next morning GO Böhm-Ermolli suggested to the k.u.k. high command that the entire southern wing and center of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army should be taken back behind the uppermost course of the Sereth and the Graberka-Luh sector to the line Zarkow-Berlin. But the high command would only allow this retreat to be carried out if the Russians continued to attack through Brody with strong forces, and if the threatened front couldn't be consolidated and reinforced in time. For this purpose the German OHL had earmarked their 10 LW ID. After learning of the fall of Brody, GO Conrad had also asked that Archduke Charles' Army Group should quickly send parts of 105 ID or of 1 Res ID by rail through Lemberg to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

On 28 July the Russians didn't move past Brody; however, the buildup of a strong force around this town indicated that the attack along the railroad in the direction of Lemberg would be starting already the next day. Hope disappeared that the

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147 Vinogradsky, p. 200

148 Bergeder, "Das Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 202" (Berlin, 1927), p. 103; Schwedt, "Das Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 204" (Zeulenroda, 1929), pp.186 ff.; Clausius, "Infanterie-Regiment von Wittich (3<sup>rd</sup> Kur-Hessische) Nr. 83" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1926), pp. 98 ff.

promised reinforcements would be ready to cooperate in the defense against the new Russian onslaughts. Just three batteries and one squadron from the German 10 LW ID joined 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 28 July. As noted earlier, Linsingen needed the other troops of this Division in front of Kovel. Moreover, Bothmer announced that he couldn't give up the reinforcements for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which had been demanded from his South Army, because the Russians were already starting to attack on the Koropiec Brook. In the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> GO Böhm-Ermolli once again asked the high command to permit him to withdraw the southern wing and center of his Army to the line described above. Now GO Conrad finally decided to give his permission.

#### The new front of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

Amidst fighting at Gaje Starabrozkie the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army disengaged from the enemy in the night of 28-29 July. Next morning the IV and V Corps prepared to offer new resistance behind the Sereth and the Graberka-Luh sector, between Grobla and Zarkow. FML Kosak's Group, whose units had become greatly intermingled during the heavy fighting to date, held fast in their prepared positions between Zarkow and Berlin. XVIII Corps was still stationed behind the Boldurka. Infantry Regiments 12 and 83 of 33 ID marched from Corps Dieffenbach to the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The greatly-reduced squadrons of 1 Lst Huss Bde, which had been attached to 7 CD since June, also returned from Armeegruppe Marwitz to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. These horsemen reached Krasne on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

The developments at Brody caused great concern at the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group. The left wing of South Army near the Sereth by Hladki, which hitherto had been protected by IV Corps, was now endangered by the retreat of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. GM von Seeckt, Archduke Charles Franz Joseph's Chief of Staff, reported to the German OHL at Pless that the withdrawal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army hadn't been absolutely necessary, and that the enemy hadn't attacked the Army with superior strength. On the 30<sup>th</sup> GdI Falkenhayn passed this report on to Teschen.

Concern that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would completely succumb to Russian pressure through Brody toward the sensitive Lemberg area, and thus also compel South Army to abandon their positions, forced GdI Falkenhayn to send to Galicia two German divisions (195 and 197 ID), which had recently been formed with troops from various other units. If necessary the German 1 ID, which was moving by train from Verdun toward Oderberg, could also be sent. On 30 July GdI Falkenhayn suggested that the German troops which would

assemble at Lemberg should be under the command of Prussian GdI von Fabeck, who would be placed under GO Böhm-Ermolli's k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. GO Conrad approved this suggestion, but the Germans soon countermanded the plan. In accordance with the wishes of GFM Hindenburg, GdI von Eben was entrusted with the German troops assembling to protect Lemberg. Teschen ordered the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army only to stubbornly hold onto their present position until the new reinforcements arrived.

Meanwhile General Sakharov had broken off his attack on 29 July. On the next day he moved the XXXII, V Sib, XVII and VII Corps forward opposite the new positions of Böhm-Ermolli's Army. However, there was just small-scale fighting on both sides of the railroad; the Russian infantry dug in. Finally in the evening the 106 Lst ID had to repulse a stronger enemy thrust by Sydonowka. Here once again, and then at Lahodow, at Jasionow (on the road to Zloczow), at Zarkow and at Pieniaki the Russians sought to attack on the next day; everywhere the k.u.k. troops prevailed against the local thrusts of the enemy. FML Hordt, the commander of 33 ID, was placed under XVIII Corps HQ; early on 31 July he took over the northern part of the former group of FML Kosak. Here were stationed, on both sides of the railroad to Lemberg, 106 Lst ID and the k.k. 1 Lst Inf Bde, with attached troops from 25, 27 and 33 ID. FML Kosak now commanded only his own division (27 ID) and Col Schmidbacher's group (Cav Rif Bns I and II/4, BH IR 3, k.k. Lst Bn II/31) in the sector of the front on both sides of the road to Zloczow. This part of the line was placed under V Corps early on 1 August.

Meanwhile opposite the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army numerous Russian batteries were deployed on the heights east of the Sereth and the Luh Brook; they started to bombard the battle positions of IV and V Corps. On 2 August the artillery fighting raged from the early morning hours until afternoon. At Wertelka, Zalosce and Ratyszczce Russian scouting detachments tried to advance between the ponds of the Sereth and past the river valley. In most places they were repulsed. Only at Ratyszczce were they able to dig in just in front of the border between 14 and 31 ID.

At midnight (2-3 August) the agreements reached at Pless came into effect. At this hour GFM Hindenburg took over command of the entire front from the Baltic seacoast to Zalosce. The General-Field Marshal was already visiting 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ at Lemberg on 3 August; the Chief of Staff of Archduke Charles' Army Group, GM Seeckt, was also in attendance.

While the German generals visited Lemberg, concern was caused by various signs that the Russians would launch a new attack against 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Their soldiers were building plank bridges over the Sereth at Zalosce and Ratyszczce. The artillery duel in this defensive sector continued on 3 August. It was apparent that Sakharov was massing troops opposite IV and V Corps, probably to deliver a powerful blow in the direction of Zloczow. The situation continued to solidify on the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. GO Böhm-Ermolli decided to hold some of his Army reserve at Zarkow (IR 12 and the BH IR 3 which had been relieved by IR 83), with IR 72 stationed behind V Corps. GFM Hindenburg placed at the disposal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the German 34 LW Bde, which had come from Courland to Kovel. The Brigade, commanded by G.Lt Melitor, had three battalions, one squadron and four batteries; it was ordered to Zloczow. The first trains of the German 197 ID were rolling toward Lemberg; they would be followed by 195 ID, which was still being formed at Kielce.

## **2. The battle north and south of the Dniester, 28 July-3 August**

When the Battle of Kovel broke out on 28 July, the Armies of Generals Shcherbachev and Letschitzky in east Galicia also began to attack once more.

### Shcherbachev's operations

General Shcherbachev, whose assignment was to operate in conjunction with Letschitzky, had decided to carry out his thrust with II and XVI Corps (a total of six divisions) on a broad front between the Koropiec Brook and the Strypa.

In the night of 27-28 July the outpost positions of the k.u.k. XIII and VI Corps were the first to come under attack. With this surprise assault the Russians gained the western bank of the Koropiec brook in 36 ID's defensive sector at Dubienko during the night. In the afternoon, after systematic artillery preparation, Shcherbachev sent four divisions against his opponents' main positions between Puzniki and Kurdwanowka. At Puzniki Col Freih. von Than's 75 Hon Inf Bde shattered four Russian thrusts. Further north, at Welesniow and Dubienko, the Russians were also unable to win any success despite repeated assaults. Troops who penetrated the line at the border between German Res IR 223 (which had been inserted into the center of 36 ID) and the k.u.k. IR 78 were thrown back with a counterattack by a battalion of IR 5. All Russian thrusts against the positions of the k.u.k. 12 ID )on both sides of the railroad to

Monasterzyska), and against the 1 and 48 Res ID at Olesza and Kurdwanowka, collapsed under the defenders' fire.

General Shcherbachev renewed the offensive between Welesniow and Olesza early on the 29<sup>th</sup> and again in the afternoon. Repeated assaults by Russian troops deployed in thick lines wilted under the fire of the Aus-Hung. and German batteries, and of the Croatian, Hungarian and German battalions. In the night of 29-30 July the Russian II and XVI Corps once more attacked between Welesniow and Dubienko, then north of the Jezierzany-Monasterzyska railroad and at Olesza. Each time the enemy was thrown back and suffered heavy casualties. In the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> Shcherbachev directed a strong cannonade against the positions of 36 ID, seeking to finally break through between Zalesie and Dubienko. Around noon the regiments of 3 Turkestan Rif Div, which had been inserted into the front of II Russian Corps, threw themselves upon their opponents; northwest of Welesniow they broke into the trenches of the German Res IR 223. The thrust was expanded toward the south. Despite the very gallant resistance of 75 Hon Inf Bde, they were pushed back southwest of Welesniow around 1:00 PM. Here two battalions of IR 66, which had hastened from 15 ID, entered the fighting. After two hours of combat their counterattack broke down with very heavy losses. A counter-thrust northwest of Welesniow was also unsuccessful. However, in this area the penetration was tightly sealed off during the night by the German Res IR 18, which had come to the northern wing of XIII Corps from 1 Res ID.

Fighting continued to rage for the adjacent 75 Hon Inf Bde on the right. Around 4:00 AM on 31 July, Hon IR "Koloszvar" # 21 had to endure another Russian assault. The gallant Honveds brought the enemy to a halt with a quickly-implemented counterattack. GdI Bothmer sent further reserves to the northern wing of XIII Corps: two battalions of 48 Res ID and parts of 39 Hon ID (the latter from Monasterzyska). On 1 and 2 August the Russians thrust against the outposts of 15 ID south of Puzniki, but couldn't push them back to the west bank of the Koropiec. In these days there was bitter fighting between the trenches in the defensive sector of 36 ID at Welesniow and Dubienko; it involved hand grenades and trench mortars. In the first days of August there were also Russian thrusts along the railroad line and road to Monasterzyska, then in the rolling hills by Olesza and at Kotuzow. But the attacks grew weaker and weaker. As the fighting died out, GdI Bothmer relieved the units that had suffered the most serious losses, IR 78 and German Res IR 223, with IR 100 of 12 ID and the German Res IR 18. In the evening of 2 August, after powerful artillery fire,

troops from 36 ID started to counterattack; they recaptured the lost positions south of Welesniow. The Russians pulled back to the eastern bank of the Koropiec Brook.

Thus at the start of August General Shcherbachev had been unsuccessful, despite the stubbornness of his troops and their immense sacrifices, in his attempt to push back the right wing of Bothmer's Army to the Zlota Lipa. Now he waited to see whether a Russian success south of the Dniester might force his steadfast opponents to retreat.

#### Letschitzky's operations

General Letschitzky had attacked along the entire front from Molodylow to Olesza with XII, XLI and XXXIII Corps. Already on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the foremost Russian troops worked their way up to the positions of FML von Hadfy's and G.Lt von Kraewel's Groups at Chlebiczyn Lesny, and from Chocimierz and Zywaczow. At night the enemy attack divisions occupied their jumping-off points. Early on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Russian artillery opened a strong cannonade on both sides of the railroad to Ottynia as well as against the front south and east of Jezierzany. The massed assault of the Russian infantry started around 11:00 AM. Col. Franz's Landsturm group, deployed on the right wing of 21 LW ID, was able to hang onto Molodylow in see-saw combat with the support of reserves who'd hurried to the scene from I Corps (parts of IR 16). At Chlebiczyn Lesny, however, the tightly deployed XII Russian Corps drove a deep wedge into the front of Group Hadfy. Here the Eger-land LW IR 6 defended themselves in hand-to-hand fighting until they were submerged by the oncoming masses. FML Hadfy tried in vain to stop the resultant large gap with his reserves (five battalions of 21 LW ID). With their center torn apart, the 21 LW ID had to pull back to a position south and east of Ottynia after heavy fighting.

6 CD, engaged on the southern wing of Group Kraewel, fared no better. Around noon their lines were broken at Puzniki, and they fell back to Przybylow.<sup>149</sup> 5 Hon CD now found themselves outflanked by the Russians on the right and left and had to evacuate their position at Bohorodyczyn in order to restore the connection with both neighboring divisions which had been pushed back.

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149 Schramm-Schiessl, "Die Geschichte des k.u.k. Mährischen Dragoner-Regimentes Friedrich Franz IV., Gross-Herzog von Mecklenburg-Schwerin Nr. 6, 1906-1918" (Vienna, 1933), pp. 755 ff.

While this happened, the German troops south and east of Jezierzany, 119 and 105 ID, stood fast strongly against the Russian onslaught. But shortly after noon enemy units from Puzniki suddenly thrust at the rear of this battle group. To avoid encirclement their southern wing had to bend back quickly to Jezierzany in the midst of the battle. Four German batteries, which covered the retreat until the last second, fell into the hands of the Russians.

Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ had meanwhile brought up their reserves (the German 209 Inf Bde) from Nizniow to Tlumacz. Four battalions of this Brigade were already available to G.Lt Kraewel for a possible afternoon counterattack at Korolowka. However, he decided not to undertake a hopeless counter-thrust with these relatively weak units, because the Russians were also advancing in deep lines at Olesza. Here GM Leide's Group was unable to prevail against the larger enemy force. Thus the German 119 ID, fighting in a half-circle around Jezierzany, was also threatened from the north. Group Hadfy, which had already been pushed back 3 km west of their original position, couldn't receive support until early on the 29<sup>th</sup> from 5 ID, which had meanwhile been ordered forward from Nadworna.

With the approval of GO Kövess, G.Lt Kraewel took his badly intermingled units back in the night of 28-29 July to a prepared position south and east of Tlumacz. The newly-arrived battalions of German 209 Inf Bde were inserted at the weakest points in the front. The neighboring XIII Corps sent 2 CD to protect the flank of the South Army at the bend in the Dniester southeast of Nizniow. Next to Group Kraewel, Hadfy's Group occupied the fortified line Tarnowica Polna-Holoskow-Molodylow.

Early on 29 July the Russians pushed into Jezierzany, Targowica and Molodylow. General Letschitzky brought XII, XLI and XXXIII Corps up to the new positions of Kövess' Army, and approached Tlumacz and Ottynia. In a report to the high command, the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army asserted that his widely extended, thin front couldn't stand up to the new Russian assaults which were expected. The combat strength of 21 LW ID, 6 CD and Group Leide had greatly declined. After the heavy fighting so far, the artillery were suffering from an ammunition shortage; moreover, there was no prepared position behind the current front of Group Hadfy.

But now General Letschitzky committed the error of not exploiting the success he had won, just as he had done at Okna.

He hesitated, then postponed the continuation of the attack until 30 July, even though he had been instructed to advance simultaneously with the heavily-engaged 7<sup>th</sup> Army; his troops dug in along the lines they had reached in front of Tlumacz and Ottynia. Brussilov objected to Letschitzky's halt and let him know that by not attacking the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was failing to follow orders; the Army commander responded that his opponent had pulled back into strong positions. Now it was necessary to break off the attack toward Stanislau and make new preparations.

The Russian high command also felt that it was urgent to exploit the initial success south of the Dniester. They recognized that the offensive by Shcherbachev's Army hadn't been victorious. The allies were holding fast north of the Dniester. Therefore the prospects of a thrust by Letschitzky's Army into their southern flank at Nizniow were all the brighter. In accordance with this concept, on 2 August the Stavka ordered General Brussilov to reinforce the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army at the expense of the 7<sup>th</sup> and to switch the main weight of the attack to the front south of the Dniester.<sup>150</sup>

While Letschitzky re-grouped his soldiers for a new thrust, Kövess could make new preparations for defense. In the night of 30-31 July he relieved the burn-out group of Col. Kranz and parts of 21 LW ID (in the sector south and east of Ottynia) with regiments of 5 ID, which had hurried forward by marches on foot and by railroad from Nadworna. 6 CD south of Tlumacz was reinforced by IR 13 (also from 5 ID). GM Stehr, commanding the German 209 Inf Bde, took over the left wing of Group Kraewel (formerly GM Leide's sector). VIII Corps hadn't been attacked; they stretched their front to the north so that the neighboring 30 ID of I Corps could leave the line and take the place of 5 ID as the Army's reserve at Hawrylowka.

### **3. Pflanzler-Baltin's Army makes a relief attack in the Carpathians, 28 July-4 August**

At the end of July, the Archduke-Successor Charles Franz Joseph wanted to build a striking group in the strength of five German divisions on the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which had just been pushed back to Tlumacz and Ottynia. His goal was to envelop the Russian southern wing in the flank and rear with an offensive out of southeast Galicia toward Bukovina; a successful operation would convince the Romanians of the superior strength of the

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150 Klembovsky, pp. 83 ff.

Central Powers. It hadn't been possible to build this striking group. The units intended for this purpose were held fast by Brussilov's latest general offensive in Volhynia and east Galicia.

As July came to an end, Russian pressure in the Carpathians intensified, especially along the roads in the passes leading to Maramaros-Sziget; the danger of an invasion of Hungary, with the accompanying effect on Romania, became greater. Therefore FML von Brudermann's weak group (68 Inf Bde, 3 CD) had to counterattack before the German Carpathian Corps arrived by train. At first the difficult operation by Group Brudermann in the barren mountains gained ground, but then it came to a halt on the upper Czarny Czeremosz. And in the last days of July the northern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was being pushed back toward Stanislau.

In this situation the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group decided to immediately resume the counterattack that Brudermann had started, by committing the Carpathian Corps which meanwhile had assembled in the Visso valley at Leordina. On 1 August the commander of this Corps, G.Lt von Conta, took over from FML Brudermann control over 68 Inf Bde of Brudermann's former group, plus Major Russ' Detachment which was stationed north of Borsabanya. The German Carpathian Corps climbed through the forested mountains and over the border crest into the upper Czarny Czeremosz valley. On 3 August, together with 68 Inf Bde, they were to assault the main Russian position, which at a height of 600 meters ran alongside the valley from the Kamieniec along the wide arc of the Baba Ludowa ridge to a point south of Jawornik. The k.u.k. 3 CD had been pulled from the front and taken back to Borsa in the Visso valley; from here, after a brief rest, they were sent to Kirlibaba to join XI Corps. This Corps had already been reinforced on 1 August by 8 CD, whose rifle battalions deployed on the Orata between Lt Col. Papp's Group and the 215 Inf Bde. The latter Brigade stretched their lines to the west, making it possible for 40 Hon ID to bunch more closely together on the Corps' left wing.

Simultaneously with Conta's thrust to Jablonica and Jawornik, GO Freih. von Pflanzer-Baltin intended to have the main body of 40 Hon ID attack from their positions on the heights north of Kirlibaba in the direction of Cameral Schipoth. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a third battle group (202 Hon Inf Bde and 67 Inf Bde) under FML Rudolf Krauss would advance from Kukul and the Tartar Pass into the upper valley of the Pruth. Army Group HQ approved this plan.

On 2 August, the day before the start of this offensive in the Carpathians to relieve 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the high command informed Archduke Charles' HQ that 7<sup>th</sup> Army would receive another German division; this was 1 ID, which had been relieved by the German OHL at Verdun and was being sent to Maramaros-Sziget. Archduke Charles Franz Joseph was instructed by Teschen to place the Division under G.Lt Conta; he could either send it through the Tartar Pass to deploy between 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the Carpathian Corps or move it from Kirlibaba through Izwor to Seletin to support the left of XI Corps. Archduke Charles selected the second option, although GO Pflanzner-Baltin believed that deploying the German reinforcements on the left wing of his Army would have been more effective.

#### Initial successes of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army

At the start, however, 40 Hon ID had to attack without support, since the trains carrying the German 1 ID couldn't reach Maramaros-Sziget until 4 August at the earliest. FML Edler von Habermann's first thrust was directed west of the Cibo valley against the D. Ormului. This forward position was on the flank of the ridges stretching from the Capul northwest to the Magura. The Russians' main position ran along the Magura Heights and the Stara Obczyna. On 3 August a group from 40 Hon ID climbed the eastern slopes of the mighty Cimbroslawa Wk. toward D. Ormului. The wooded terrain, cut up by ravines, made the Hungarians' advance difficult. Nevertheless they took the D. Ormului. The defenders - dismounted Cossacks from III Russian Cavalry Corps - pulled back to their main position. On the 4<sup>th</sup> the main body of 40 Hon ID advanced from the Capul to the Magura, but couldn't break through. Russian infantry from 103 ID counterattacked. The Hungarians dug in along the mountain ridge on both sides of the bend in the Cibo and repulsed all Russian assaults in the forests.<sup>151</sup>

After powerful artillery preparation, around noon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> G.Lt Conta attacked troops of the Russian XI Corps (82 ID and the Ussuri Cossacks) in their positions on the Kamieniec and on the Ridge stretching from the Baba Ludowa to the Czeremosz. The Archduke-Successor FML Archduke Charles Franz Joseph and his Chief of Staff GM Seeckt were observing this attack from the Kopilas. A raw wind was blowing, driving a screen of mist around the mountain and restricting visibility. Nevertheless,

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151 Col. Stephan Sreter de Szanda, commanding Hon IR # 17, gained the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for the fighting on the Capul.

allied shelling destroyed the Russian barbed wire. Around noon the German Jaeger battalions stormed up the mountain and in their first onslaught wrested the Kamieniec Heights and the Baba Ludowa from the enemy. The k.u.k. 68 Inf Bde captured the Russians' blocking position north of Szybeny. The enemy pulled back to Jawornik and into the Probihna valley. Two guns fell into the hands of the gallant attackers. In a quick thrust, the Hungarian and German battalions already reached the town of Hryniawa, the Ludowa Heights and Jawornik in the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. On the next day, amid new fighting they reached the Kaptarka and Stoupany Heights. The Russians had entrenched along a new line on the Dereszkowata and the Plaik. Before they could be attacked, the artillery and supplies of ammunition would first have to be brought up through the wooded forests (which had few roads). G.Lt Conta decided to use 5 August for this purpose.

For some time now GdI Letschitzky had already believed that a new Aus-Hung. army was assembling near the Romanian border opposite this left wing. This belief arose from the fact that the Russians were aware of the code name "12<sup>th</sup> Army HQ", which the HQ of Army Group Archduke Charles continued to use until 9 August. Letschitzky was concerned that his opponents' fresh units could intervene with an offensive toward Bukovina that would cause the Romanians to further delay their intervention in the war on Russia's side. Now that an operation of weak German and Aus-Hung. units in the Carpathians had started, although it had been born only of necessity, it immediately caused Letschitzky to send his Army's reserve (79 ID) from the Dniester to Kuty on the left wing of his forces.

#### **4. Brussilov's measures to continue the offensive, 4 August**

The offensive by the Southwest Front which started on 28 July had awakened great expectations among the Russian leadership, but their hopes were replaced by bitter disappointment after a few days. The breakthrough toward Kovel had failed, the attackers' momentum had quickly stalled in the heavy fighting along the Stokhod line, and the troops' confidence in victory had already evaporated. Only a few trenches had been wrested from the allies at the cost of heavy casualties; despite a significant expenditure of ammunition, the artillery had been unable to break the allies' power of resistance.<sup>152</sup> Alexeiev

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152 Klembovsky, pp. 82 ff.; Zayonchkovsky, pp. 51 ff. Knox gives the strength of Bezobrazov's Army as 134,000 men on 25

objected to the fact that in the pincers attack toward the Pinsk area General Letsch had made the main effort not with his southern battle group, as intended, but with the northern group. Therefore on 31 July Brussilov instructed that IV Siberian Corps should shift from the Oginsky Canal to the lower Stokhod opposite Stobychwa. Meanwhile, however, I Siberian Corps had arrived at Olyka, so Brussilov decided to use these two fresh divisions to reinforce 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the Bol. Obzyr-Zarecze sector, where success seemed to beckon. IV Sib Corps would assemble as a reserve in the Kiwercy-Klewan sector.

Alexeiev was also dissatisfied with the manner in which Southwest Front was carrying out their offensive. So he tried on 2 August to convince Brussilov's Chief of Staff, General Klembovsky, that it was inadvisable to let all the armies assault their opponents' strong fortifications along a broad front. It would be preferable to use their numerical advantage to concentrate with overwhelming strength against certain important targets. Greater numbers also would make it possible to carry out the planned breakthroughs in coordination with each other, and within the areas penetrated to strike against the allies' flank and rear. Thus costly frontal assaults, like those carried out by Letsch and Bezobrazov, could be avoided. The Tsar's Chief of Staff suggested that a corps should be taken from 7<sup>th</sup> Army, where no progress could be expected, and given to 9<sup>th</sup> Army to help the latter HQ exploit their promising success in the direction of Stanislau.

At Luck on the next day Brussilov discussed the continuation of the attack toward Kovel with Bezobrazov and Kaledin. General Knox reported that the aged General Bezobrazov wanted the attack to proceed only cautiously. His artillery was being forced to fire blindly because numerous German planes dominated the sky and made it impossible to observe from balloons.<sup>153</sup> But Brussilov wanted the offensive to resume in strength. The result of the conference was reflected in the orders which Brussilov issued to his front on 4 August; these instructions

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July ("With the Russian Army 1914-1917" [New York, 1921], Vol. II, pp. 4161 ff.). By 2 August the two Guard Corps had lost 30,000 men; I and XXX Corps were each reduced to 10,000 men. Under 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the XXXIX Corps had sunk to 9000 men and XXIII Corps to 8000. The troops opposite the 4<sup>th</sup> k.u.k. Army hadn't lost so heavily. XL Corps still had 17,000 and VIII Corps 20,000 men.

153 Knox, Vol. II, p. 464. Since mid-July Linsingen's Army Group had included a very active air squadron.

were not in line with Alexeiev's wish that battle groups should concentrate against a limited number of objectives and sent forward in coordination.

All the armies were to attack energetically on 7 August. Without interrupting the activity in the Pinsk area, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was to advance with at least five divisions from the line Stobychwa-Smolary over the Stokhod to Skulin and Woloszki. At the first opportunity, three cavalry divisions were to be sent toward Kamien Kaszyrskij in order to damage the allied rear. Bezobrazov's Army was to assemble three corps for an attack on the Rudka Mirynska - Bol. Porsk sector and then advance to the line Woloszki-Gonczy-Brod. The 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies retained their earlier assignments: to advance on Vladimir-Volynsky and Lemberg. 7<sup>th</sup> Army should have its left wing support 9<sup>th</sup> Army, which would thrust toward Nizniow and Tlumacz with six divisions. Thus the plan was to have the attacking group which Letsch and Bezobrazov were driving toward Kovel strike with their inner wings at Woloszki, and then pursue to their goal in a concentric movement. Similar coordination was envisioned for 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies. Brussilov believed he was carrying out Alexeiev's instructions for the next phase of the operations because of the ratio of strength with which he was facing his opponents in the sectors to be attacked. He reckoned that on an 8 km front the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's striking group would have 86 battalions against 16, while at the same time the Special Army would have 96 battalions against 28 allied battalions on a 15 km front. Letschitzky's 96 battalions would be faced by his opponents' 21 on a 12 km front.<sup>154</sup>

In the last few days the allies had exerted strong pressure on the southern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army in the Carpathians. As noted above, General Letschitzky felt that he was being threatened by a new 12<sup>th</sup> Aus-Hung. Army which was starting to attack. He informed General Brussilov that if 9<sup>th</sup> Army wasn't reinforced it wouldn't have enough strength to carry out its two missions - to attack with the northern wing toward Stanislaw while

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154 Klembovsky, p. 85. This calculation was based on the authorized strength of the Russian divisions. However, it is doubtful that all of the battalions, which had been heavily engaged, could have been restored to full size as early as 7 August by incorporating replacement troops. For example, Knox (Vol. II, pp. 469) calculates that at the start of 8 August Bezobrazov's I Corps still had just 10,000 riflemen and XX Corps had 9000. Only I Guard Corps still had 25,000 men, since 1 Gd ID had suffered the lightest casualties.

simultaneously protecting the left flank of Southwest Front. In turn, the Front commander asked the Stavka on 5 August to send cavalry to the Carpathian sector; this would enable Letschitzky to guard Bukovina without diverting units from his main attacking group. Now that Romania's adherence to the Entente was expected shortly, the Stavka at Mogilev already had to take cooperation with their future allies into consideration whenever they were making plans. Thus the military situation on the extreme southern wing of the Tsar's armies had gained greater importance, and couldn't be endangered at the last minute.

Therefore on 5 August Alexeiev quickly ordered Brussilov to reinforce 9<sup>th</sup> Army at the expense of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Now Brussilov decided to transfer some available units over the Dniester to Letschitzky - 3 Cauc Coss Div from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army as well as 37 and 43 ID plus XVII Corps HQ from 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Furthermore the 64 ID, hitherto at Odessa, was sent to Czernowitz. The Army commander was informed on the 6<sup>th</sup> that if necessary he should postpone the thrust on Stanislau for a few days; it was more important to hold onto the Kimpolung-Delatyn front and thus to retain Bukovina, regardless of whether Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary or continued to maintain its neutrality. On the same day the Stavka informed Southwest Front that they were reserving the right to dispose of IV Sib Corps, which Brussilov had assembled east of Luck.

## ***E. The Close of the Battle of Kovel***

### **1. The Russians prepare to attack; Army Group Linsingen's countermeasures, 4-7 August**

#### Plans and preparations

Exhaustion had already forced the attackers to pause in the Battle of Kovel on 1 August. The only sign that the Russians were still eager to attack was an isolated operation at Rudka Mirynska on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Perhaps this was just a last attempt by mid-level commanders to gain a local success and to keep the II k.u.k. Corps, pushed back to a new position, from gaining their breath. The temporary quiet was due to the fact that Brussilov, smarting from Alexeiev's rebukes, was already altering his plan of attack; he no longer cared whether the offensive that had begun followed the guidelines he'd issued on 28 July. Therefore the armies of Letsch, Bezobrazov and Kaledin halted on 3 August, waiting for the arrival of new orders.<sup>155</sup> These instructions, issued the next day, designated 7 August as the date for the next assault; meanwhile some of the units would be re-grouped so that an attacking group could be assembled. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army shifted I Sib Corps to the Stobychwa-Smolary sector. General Bezobrazov moved I Guard Corps from its original sector southwest of the Roziszcz-Kovel railroad; they were replaced by dismounted Guard horsemen (1 and 2 Gd CD), who were given a purely defensive assignment. The 1 and 2 Gd Infantry Divisions were inserted between XXX and I Corps in the Wielicz-Kuchary area. From here the Special Army would try to break through, while launching a secondary operation on the left wing where the Gd Rifle Division of II Guard Corps would attack over the upper course of the Stokhod toward Ozierany.<sup>156</sup> 3 Gd CD would protect the Army's extreme left flank. In 8<sup>th</sup> Army, Kaledin reinforced the mounted squadrons of V Cavalry Corps (behind his left wing south of the Korczeska) with 12 Cavalry Division.

The commander-in-chief of the entire German Eastern front and most of the Aus-Hung. front, GFM Hindenburg, visited his new subordinates (Linsingen, Tersztyanszky and Böhm-Ermolli) and then moved his own HQ from Kovno to Brest-Litovsk.<sup>157</sup> The first

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155 Klembovsky, p. 83

156 *Ibid.*, pp. 85 ff. Also Zayonchkovsky, p. 55; Knox, Vol. II, pp. 467 ff.

157 Ludendorff, p. 182

overall command which he issued to Army Group Linsingen on 3 August was that the lines presently occupied should be turned into permanent positions. Thus the top-level commanders had decided not to pull back one step from the Russians. The allies were well aware that they could soon expect a fresh, powerful assault against Kovel by the Tsar's armies. The first troops of 75 German Res ID, designated as Hindenburg's reserve, were arriving; XV Turkish Corps was also expected shortly.

#### Actions from 4 to 7 August

Before the enemy struck again, Armeegruppe Bernhardi wanted to improve the tactical situation around the storm center at Zarecze. On 4 August G.Lt Clausius, in his divisional sector north of Stobychwa, used Landsturm troops from the k.u.k. 53 ID to free up II Battalion of the German IR 150. The next day he had the position at the sand dune south of Zarecze stormed by about five allied battalions under the Prussian Lieut-Col. Bürkner (commander of IR 150).<sup>158</sup> The intermingled attackers - Prussians and Bavarians as well as weak companies of the k.k. Landwehr Infantry Regiments 12, 18 and 33, were backed by III Battalion of the Bavarian Res IR 13, which had been relieved in front of Smolary by German Landwehr.<sup>159</sup> The enemy responded with counter-attacks, which were repulsed. However, the success of this operation wasn't decisive, since simultaneous artillery fire against the Zarecze bridgehead remained ineffective, and the Russians were still able to maintain themselves on the west bank of the Stokhod. The chain of command on the front of 53 ID had become confused, since by the end of July two Aus-Hung. brigades and several German units had become mixed together. GdI Fath resolved the problem by placing 128 Lst Inf Bde in charge of the right wing as far as the sand dune. Next to this Brigade was Bürkner's group of mainly German troops. The sector on the left, from Zarecze to the valley of the Stobychwa, was placed under 51 LW Bde.

In Kneussl's sector, in the morning of 4 August the enemy struck an advanced outpost on the Hulewicze estate, but were shattered by the watchful Bavarian garrison. In the next few days the

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158 Bernhardi, "Eine Weltreise 1911/12", Vol. III, p. 204.

"Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 150", Vol. I, pp. 279 ff.

159 Per a report from 53 ID HQ to Corps Fath on 3 August, the total rifle strength of the k.k. LW IR 12, 18 and 33, along with the k.u. Lst IR 19, was no more than that of half a full-strength battalion.

Bavarians and the north-Bohemian Landwehr Regiments 9 and 10 of GM Wieden (26 LW ID) engaged the Russians in lively patrol actions along the Stokhod south of the railroad crossing point.<sup>160</sup>

Early on 4 August the Russians once again probed forward against 4 ID; however, this movement was nipped in the bud by the defenders' fire. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, enemy batteries fired upon the positions of II Corps. Allied airmen detected new camps in the forest by Sielco; since the day before, Russian troops in the Trojanowka area had been observed marching toward the Stokhod front of Corps Fath. The enemy had constructed 18 vehicular and foot bridges over the river channels at Smolary. Finally, the new assembly points of I Sib and I Guard Corps were betrayed by radio transmissions. Because of all this evidence, GO Linsingen had to expect a strong attack against the center of Armeegruppe Bernhardi. As a counter-measure in the sector north of the Kovel-Maniewiczze railroad, G.Lt von Hoepfner's 75 Res ID<sup>161</sup> was deployed in a wide area between Grywiatki and Soszyczno behind Corps Fath, while the main body of 10 LW ID (around Mielnica and Byten) served as a reserve to II Corps and the right wing of Armeegruppe Bernhardi. GdK Bernhardi increased II Corps' power of resistance with German trench mortars and a battalion which took up a position with 41 Hon ID.

Also the center and southern wing of Army Group Linsingen armed themselves to defend against new Russian onslaughts. Under Group Lüttwitz the decline in the fighting made it possible to pull the troops of 86 ID away from the front and to assemble them at Gonczyj Brod-Ozierany by evening on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Combat activity stayed within the usual limits for 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Although there was considerable movement behind the Russian lines, the enemy didn't increase their artillery fire against the k.u.k. X Corps until August 7. Meanwhile GdI Litzmann tried to raise the spirit and self-confidence of the Aus-Hung. regiments under his command, who'd been somewhat shaken by the recent fighting. The northern wing of Corps Szurmay (70 Hon ID), where a secure junction with 13 LW ID of the neighboring corps was badly needed, was strengthened with a battalion from Res IR 217. The Hon IR 314 at Wojnin, along with four German battalions and a

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160 Wisshaupt, "Die 52. Landwehr-Infanterie-Brigade", pp. 413 ff.; Mayer, p. 62; Stengel, p. 75

161 The 75 Res ID had 9 bns [Res IR 249, 250 and 251], 1 sqdn [75 Res Cav Sqdn], 12 batties [Res FAR 55, 75] and 1 tech comp, or 7300 foot, 100 horse and 48 guns.

German cavalry regiment, made up the Armeegruppe's reserve.<sup>162</sup> GO Tersztyanszky had the other two battalions of Res IR 217 available behind the boundary of Csanady's and Szurmay's corps. GdK von der Marwitz assembled a group of three battalions, one squadron and three batteries at Lopatyn as a reserve for his sector.

In these days, when the attitude of Romania toward the Central Powers grew always more hostile, the Aus-Hung. high command had to look to the defenses of Transylvania; they were trying to find mainly Hungarian troops to defend this province. On 6 August the HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army was informed that the Szekel IR 82 would be called back to their homeland. To replace the 82<sup>nd</sup>, the 2 ID would receive a battalion apiece from IR 62 (of XII Corps) and from IR 103 (of Corps Hofmann). It was planned to also send 70 Hon ID, which was in need of rebuilding and anyway had been formed for the defense of Transylvania, as soon as enough Turkish troops had arrived at Kovel. In Marwitz's Armeegruppe the 46 LW ID would give up Major Trupkovic's Regiment as soon as possible. Battalions III/76 and II/101 came under 48 ID, which in turn sent Battalions IV/20 and I/21 to the Isonzo front.

At the last moment Brussilov's attack on Kovel was delayed. On 6 August General Bezobrazov reported that I Guard Corps would first need to have two batteries in firing positions, and therefore requested to postpone the offensive for one day. Brussilov agreed, so that the entire northern half of his forces could attack on the 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>163</sup> General Letsch already made his opening move on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Early in the morning the I Sib Corps advanced from the foremost lines on the blood-soaked ridge of sand opposite the k.u.k. 53 ID; the badly-weakened 77 and 78 Russian ID were pulled behind the front. A counterattack by LW IR 18 and German Landwehr once more threw back the attackers. Then the front was reinforced by III Battalion of the Bavarian Res IR 13. In the afternoon the defenders also checked a Russian advance from Zarecze toward the west. It was clear to the allies that the enemy were stubbornly adhering to their plan of breaking through the defensive wall around the bridgehead on the western bank of the Stokhod, since they had brought up Siberian troops, whose striking power was always relied on by the Russian generals. Since a night attack was possible, by evening the 75 Res ID (in the Army Group's reserves) was brought up closer behind Corps Fath. Res IR 215 plus three batteries moved up from Karsin and Stobychowka to Lubarka, where they

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162 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 102 ff.

163 Klembovsky, p. 86

contacted G.Lt Clausius. The rest of the 75th Division came to the area Powursk-Grywiatki.

## **2. The last days of the Battle, 8-12 August**

### **a. Letsch's and Bezobrazov's Armies attack Armeegruppe Bernhardi**

#### Letsch's operations

The enemy was still not very active in front of Cavalry Corps Hauer. The thrust of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army was aimed against the front defended by Corps Fath of Bernhardi's Armeegruppe. Shortly after midnight of 8 August, Siberian riflemen worked their way forward against the center of 53 ID (Group Bürkner), but were pinned down by the defenders' fire. In the morning an artillery duel of increasing intensity developed along the entire front of Corps Fath. After noon it became evident that the enemy only wanted to harass Kneussl's sector, but had chosen Clausius' sector - which was the target of a growing bombardment by the heavy guns - for the breakthrough. The defensive works and the garrisons of 53 ID suffered quite substantially under the rain of shells; the Russian artillery fire also blasted the adjacent positions of the Germans as far as Bol. Obzyr. G.Lt Clausius had already drawn a battalion from his northern wing and held it in readiness behind Stobychwa. G.Lt Kneussl sent a Bavarian battalion to his left wing as a reserve behind his border with Clausius. By sending forward 75 Res ID GO Linsingen was making every effort to enable Bernhardi's Armeegruppe to withstand the Russian storm on the Stokhod line, but there was no reserve available for the northern wing of the Army Group (the northern part of Division Clausius and Hauer's adjacent Cavalry Corps). GFM Hindenburg therefore had parts of 1 German LW ID (of Gronau's neighboring group) shifted to the south; their leading regiment reached Jajno on 8 August.

On the battlefields of 53 ID, blasted by artillery fire, some parts of Group Bürkner already had to repulse Russian infantry in the morning, as did parts of 51 LW Bde in the afternoon.<sup>164</sup> However, the enemy didn't launch their principal assault until evening; it encompassed the area between the sand dune and Stobychwa. The defenders stood up to the Siberians with all

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164 "Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 150", Vol. I, pp. 288 ff.

their strength and inflicted heavy casualties. But new crowds of attackers pushed forward. The wild, raging actions were scarcely interrupted during the night; by the morning of 9 August the allies, with help from the local reserves, had already repulsed six attacks. The enemy dug in on one summit of the sandy ridge, because an attempt to drive them back with a counterattack (by several companies of Landwehr Regiments 18 and 33 plus Bavarians) was defeated by a subsequent Russian thrust. The other positions remained firmly in the hands of the defenders, although their ranks had certainly been thinned, especially in Bürkner's Group. But they were now joined by just a battalion of Res IR 251, since GO Linsingen insisted that his Army Group reserves should be employed very sparingly.<sup>165</sup>

The fighting died down for a few hours. At noon the firestorm from the enemy artillery again began its destructive work between the left wing of Group Kneussl and the area north of Stobychwa. It was soon followed by a Russian thrust at Zarecze. This attack had just been repulsed when a fresh assault opened around 4:00 PM, this time involving a wider area. The oncoming XLVI Russian Corps received a bloody setback in front of Smolary and the lines of 128 Lst Inf Bde, which was supported by the batteries of 45 LW ID; the attackers fled back over the Stokhod.<sup>166</sup> The battalion from Bav Res IR 13 held out on the sand dune. However, it wasn't possible to drive the enemy from the summit they'd occupied, even though the point was enveloped from three sides. Defensive fighting by Group Bürkner and 51 LW Bde lasted until late at night; south of Zarecze, the Russians who'd penetrated the forward trenches were overwhelmed with a counterattack.<sup>167</sup>

The German 1 LW ID, as the Army Group's reserve, already had sent one regiment to Werchy in the morning; another came to Holoby, behind Hauer's Cavalry Corps. Since the Russians maintained a lively bombardment against the defensive sector of Division Clausius during the entire day, it was possible that they also intended to make a serious attack here. Therefore a German Landwehr battalion was sent forward from Werchy toward Bol. Obzyr. In the evening drumfire rained upon Stobychwa and lasted until midnight, so G.Lt Clausius placed the next available battalion of Res IR 251 in readiness behind this

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165 Meienborn and Goebel, "Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 251" (Zeuelenroda), pp. 122 ff.

166 Klembovsky, p. 90

167 Wisshaupt, "Aus den Kämpfen des Korps GdI Fath" (in Öst. Wehrzeitung, Issue 43 for 1926)

village.

In the first morning hours of 10 August the 78 Russian Division attacked the German positions in strength, but collapsed under the coordinated defensive fire. Around the same time, soon after dawn, the fighting also died out in the trenches of the k.u.k. 53 ID. The guns, however, continued to roar over a battlefield covered with the corpses of the attackers.

GdI Fath saw his next task to be the relief of the troops in the first line who'd been the most worn-down by the days of fighting, and their replacement by units that had a stronger capacity for resistance. The Corps commander stressed that the units in the sector around Zarecze had been exposed to a powerful shelling for a full 25 hours since early on 8 August, since batteries from four Russian divisions had pounded the area they were trying to penetrate. The allies had repulsed ten powerful enemy attacks within 36 hours. GdK Bernhardt released the two battalions of Res IR 251 to G.Lt Clausius, but warned that the entire regiment would again have to be available to serve as the Army Group's reserve within a few days. The relief of the garrisons of the trenches should not be allowed to reduce the number of German troops available behind the front for counterattacks.

Therefore in the night of 10-11 August most of the burnt-out Aus-Hung. and German detachments on both sides of Zarecze were relieved by the two battalions of Res IR 251 or by sector reserves already on hand. Throughout the 11<sup>th</sup> there were only artillery duels and skirmishing along the front of Corps Fath. Livelier fighting took place for a short while on the sand dune, where the two sides tried to gain an advantage with sudden assaults. Several allied patrols managed to reach the Stokhod, where they destroyed some of the Russians' plank bridges. On the northern wing of 26 LW ID, which now included a Bavarian battalion, a raiding party thrust over the railroad crossing into the trenches east of the Stokhod; here they stayed to the next day in order to destroy this position. Under Corps Fath the reorganization of the units and the relief of the troops at the front continued; replacement troops were incorporated.

#### Bezobrazov's operations

Around 6:00 AM on 8 August, Bezobrazov's Army opened preparatory artillery fire on the Rudka Mirynska-Bol. Porsk sector. XXX Russian Corps was sent against FML Kaiser's II Aus-Hung. Corps. The elite troops of the Tsarist Empire - its most distinguished

regiments that made up the I Guard Corps - were massed in front of the German 107 ID; with the support of I (line) Corps on their left they were supposed to overrun the nine battalions of Prussian GM Hahndorff and the adjacent wing of 41 Hon ID.<sup>168</sup> The hurricane of fire reached its greatest intensity at noon; the barbed wire and trenches of the allies were badly damaged. Overnight the attackers had filled up the trenches to be used as jumping-off points, which ran one behind the other in several lines. A first, weak thrust was repulsed at Wielick. In the afternoon the Russians reduced the fire of their batteries opposite II Corps. Around 5:00 PM a powerful infantry attack was unleashed against the inner wings of FML Pfeffer's 4 ID and GM Schamschula's 41 Hon ID. However, the Lower Austrian IR 49 and Transylvanian Hon IR 32, along with a battalion from German IR 377, checked all the efforts of 80 Russian Division in front of the obstacles.<sup>169</sup> The enemy tried again after 7:00 PM, but in the darkness suffered the same bloody fate as before. In the afternoon GdK Bernhardi had brought up Res IR 250 of the German 75 Res ID to Mielnica and Krywin, but it wasn't necessary to reinforce Corps Fath. The troops fighting in the front line were sufficient to force the enemy to halt, except that GM Schamschula had to use one company of his divisional reserve to support the garrison in the trenches.

In the afternoon the German 107 ID was once again smothered by drumfire. Around 5:00 PM the Tsar's Guards, plus 22 ID of I Corps, stormed forward. The Germans' left wing was pushed back, but the front to the right held on without flinching. The enemy directed only harassment fire against Rusche's Division. Very bitter fighting raged at the point of penetration, in the woods west of Kuchary. To dam the onrushing Russian flood, GdK Bernhardi threw German IR 46 into the fray.<sup>170</sup> The situation was still uncertain that night. But by daybreak the German counterattack had driven the enemy completely back to their starting-point.<sup>171</sup>

The Russians were very disappointed by this major failure, and for the immediate future refrained from further attempts to

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168 Knox, Vol. II, pp. 469 ff.

169 "Ehrenbuch der Hesser", Vol. II, pp. 137 ff.

170 The 46<sup>th</sup> IR (with two battalions) had been placed at GdK Bernhardi's disposal by GO Linsingen, along with the main body of German 10 LW ID.

171 Bernhardi, "Eine Weltreise 1911/12", Vol. III, pp. 204 ff. Bartenwerffer and Herrmann, Vol. II, pp. 57 ff. Ulrich, p. 349. Klembovsky, p. 90

attack.<sup>172</sup> The planned breakthrough of Bezobrazov's Army to Kovel had again foundered on the unshakeable defenses of their opponents. Both sides fell back into trench warfare. Minor operations carried out by II Aus-Hung. Corps in the next few days proved that the enemy had conceded the upper hand to the allies in the area between the lines.

b. Russian thrusts against the center and southern wing of Linsingen's Army Group

The subsidiary attack, which the left wing of Bezobrazov's Army was supposed to deliver toward Ozierany, involved part of the front held by Group Lüttwitz (FML Schön's k.u.k. 29 ID and the German 121 ID). The II Russian Guard Corps could utilize their bridgehead at Witoniez; they intended to first expand the area they controlled on the western bank of the Stokhod by capturing Witoniez village. There was lively fire from the Russian batteries during 8 August; it was directed especially against the inner wings of the Divisions of Schön (German 37 Inf Bde) and Ditfurth. The allies expected an attack on Witoniez that evening. However, the enemy continued their bombardment into the next day, for a total of twelve hours, before they attacked late in the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>. The densely deployed skirmishing lines of the Guard Rifle Division, which were followed by detachments in close order, were crushed by the fire of the defenders.<sup>173</sup> Against the adjacent 19 German ID on the right, and especially against 20 ID, the XXIII Russian Corps of Kaledin's Army repeatedly unleashed massive assaults at Kisielin. The enemy advanced both in ranks, driven forward with blows, and in groups deployed in close order; they collapsed in front of the German lines under ruinous fire.<sup>174</sup> The result was

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172 Knox (Vol. II, pp. 472 ff.) lists the following casualty statistics: 300 men from 71 ID, 1500 from 1 Gd ID, 4000 from 2 Gd ID, 1000 from 22 ID; the total was 6800 men. As this author noted, 71 ID hadn't been heavily engaged. Only regiments of 80 Russian ID were identified by the k.u.k. II Corps during the fighting. These units must have been substantially bled, since on 9 August the k.u.k. 4 ID counted 800 Russian corpses in front of their obstacles. Corps Kaiser, including the German IR 377, lost only about 300 men; however, Res IR 52 and 232 of Hahndorff's Division had suffered heavily.

173 Schön, "Die 29. ID. am Stochod", p. 68. "IR 94 im Weltkrieg", pp. 562 ff. Ebeling, pp. 131 ff. Klembovsky, p. 90. Knox, Vol. II, p. 473.

174 Cron, p. 160. Sobbe, p. 304.

that on 10 August the enemy stayed on the defensive in front of Group Lüttwitz.

On 8 August the center of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army advanced against the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Enemy batteries opened the battle early in the day. The first infantry assault was directed against the right wing of the k.u.k. X Corps and the northern third of Armeegruppe Litzmann.<sup>175</sup> Around 6:00 AM the 4 Rifle Div of XL Corps (reinforced by parts of 53 ID) was already driving back the southern half of the Aus-Hung. 13 LW ID north of Szelwow. FML Kaiser, the divisional commander, sent his sector reserve to counterattack. His Corps commander, FML Csanady, asked to be given the Army's reserves, which were stationed nearby at Wolka Szelwowskaja; Csanady wanted to hold back his own reserves, 3 Inf Bde, which were stationed farther away and might be needed to support the Corps' center and northern wing. Army HQ made a battalion of German Res IR 217 available, and ordered that the enemy should be thrown out of the area they'd penetrated. Under Szurmay's neighboring Corps, another battalion of the 217<sup>th</sup> had already been inserted in the left wing of 70 Hon ID; they gallantly stood their ground and thus protected the Honveds' flank in the direction of the ground that had been lost. 70 Hon ID and 11 ID were able to check the advance of 14 Russian Division.<sup>176</sup>

The allied commanders were still bearing in mind the events of 28 July, when an enemy penetration in the same area around Szelwow had caused a sharp defeat. They wanted to immediately plug the gap at a sensitive point, the border line between two corps, with an energetic operation. GO Linsingen ordered that GdI Litzmann should be in sole command of the counterattack in the area where his group bordered X Corps. Since it was known that the enemy was holding their V Cavalry Corps in readiness to strike, Litzmann also had available several mounted regiments that could opposed any advancing Russian squadrons with cold steel.

In the morning 13 LW ID, pivoting on their left where LW IR 24 had firmly held onto its sector, recovered some of the lost position toward the south; however, the counterattack north of Szelwow moved forward only slowly.<sup>177</sup> There was still a gap 1500 paces wide in the front. Around 11:00 AM GO Tersztyanszky visited HQ of X Corps, and then appeared on the battlefield of

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175 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 106 ff.

176 Winogradsky, pp. 201 ff.

177 Sichelstiel, "Sch.R. 24", p. 117

13 LW ID. From his reserve the Army commander committed the last battalion of Res IR 217. Under the leader of this Regiment, Col. Johow, the allied counterattack was fully successful. After noon the lost parts of the trenches were recaptured.<sup>178</sup> All Russian attempts through evening to attack 2 ID and 37 Hon ID were defeated by barrage fire. Similarly Szurmay's Corps of Armeegruppe Litzmann thwarted all the thrusts of 14 Russian ID. The enemy merely directed artillery fire against Beckmann's Group.

On 9 August there was still lively skirmishing around the foremost outposts. In particular, the enemy paid back 13 LW ID for their defeat with a powerful bombardment. However, they didn't attempt any further infantry attack against 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The two battalions sent to replace IR 82 had detrained at Vladimir-Volynsky, and headed for the front.

In the sector of Armeegruppe Marwitz, on 8 August there was intense but temporary activity caused by Russian artillery fire and by the approach of some infantry near the positions in front of Zwiniacze. In the afternoon a large column was observed in motion at Holatyn, crossing the Lipa toward the south; therefore some Army Group reserve troops (parts of 22 German ID), acting upon a suggestion from GdK von der Marwitz, were shifted from Lopatyn to Zawidcze.<sup>179</sup> However, the Russians didn't attack the allied front. And so trench warfare went on, as both sides made their usual feints. 7 ID sent Battalion III/79 away by train to the 5<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### Another pause in the fighting

Linsingen's Army Group had won the second phase of the defensive Battle of Kovel, just like the first. When the enemy suddenly broke off most of their attacks on 9 August - only at Zarecze did they continue to fight for a while longer - the Central Powers' commanders could not yet tell for sure that the very bitter contest around Kovel had been decided for now in their favor. Traffic was heavy on the two rail lines that led up to the Russians' front lines (from Sarny and Rovno). Linsingen's bomber squadron attacked the detraining points at Trojanowka, Maniewiczze and Kiwercy. The radio station of IV Sib Corps was identified at Klewan. The allies therefore had to anticipate new attacks, and could hardly rest on the laurels they had won. The overall situation in the Eastern theater of operations

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178 On this day 13 LW ID lost 1200 men.

179 Clausius, p. 100

remained as serious as ever.

Already in the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> GM Seeckt, the Chief of Staff of Army Group Archduke Charles, had urgently questioned the German OHL and Hindenburg as to whether they were in a position to release forces to support the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The Aus-Hung. high command was simultaneously informed of these requests; based on a suggestion relayed from the HQ at Brest-Litovsk through their liaison officer, the AOK diverted the Ottoman XV Corps, which was moving by train, from Linsingen to Army Group Archduke Charles. The diversion of this Corps on the 9<sup>th</sup> was necessary because of the situation, so GdI Falkenhayn had to approve it "despite the most serious reservations." But in his comments he didn't fail to note reproachfully that Conrad had acted on his own without first obtaining the agreement of the German OHL. Two troop trains carrying Turks which had already arrived at Kovel turned around. For the moment Linsingen's Army Group could do without these intended reinforcements, since despite their numerical inferiority the defenders here had available three German divisions (86 ID, 10 LW ID and 75 Res ID) around the communications center at Kovel.

The fronts held by Bernhardt and Group Lüttwitz had proven to be sufficiently strong; only 4<sup>th</sup> Army needed to be propped up. The German IR 372 with a brigade HQ had already come up through Vladimir-Volynsky on the 9<sup>th</sup> and were stationed behind the Army, temporarily in the Army Group's reserve. Their parent HQ, GM Stocken's 10 LW ID, was following them with more troops. On the 12<sup>th</sup> Linsingen ordered that the regiments of 13 LW ID - with the exception of LW IR 24 - should be relieved at the front by IR 372. GM Stocken took command of this divisional sector. GO Tersztyanszky replaced IR 82 with the newly-arrived Battalions V/62 and V/103, since the HQ at Brest-Litovsk was asking when the Szekler Regiment would be available. 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ indicated that they were loath to part with the 82<sup>nd</sup>, but were informed that it was necessary to weaken the forces on the existing Eastern front to reinforce the future theater of operations against Romania.

On 12 August, when the Görz bridgehead had fallen to the Italians and the situation remained tense on the Isonzo front, GO Conrad was obliged to ask the German OHL to send an Aus-Hung. division from the northeastern front to strengthen 5<sup>th</sup> Army. His note stated that the k.u.k. high command wished to exercise the right, which they had reserved by treaty, to switch units from GFM Hindenburg's command to the Southwestern front. But they didn't want to do so without the consent of the German Chief of

the General Staff, "because we both have the same interest in maintaining our common front against the Russians." Falkenhayn therefore offered a division from the k.u.k. XII Corps, which was serving the Woyrsch's German Army. Conrad selected the k.u.k. 16 ID.

## ***F. Continuation of Russian Attacks toward Lemberg and Stanislau***

### **1. The Battle of Zalosce, 4-8 August**

#### 4 August

On 4 August the Russians attacked the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in its new position on the Sereth and the Graberka. General Sakharov had deployed V Sib Corps on both sides of the Brody-Lemberg railroad and taken XXXII Corps, which had been heavily damaged at Klekotow, back behind the front in reserve. With XVII and VII Corps he fell upon the right wing (IV and V Corps) of Böhm-Ermolli's Army and sought to capture the Tarnopol-Zloczow-Lemberg road by penetrating the line between Zalosce and Zwyzyn. Sakharov directed the principal blow against the inner wings of 14 and 31 ID at Ratyszczce.

Around 5:00 AM the Russian 13 ID thrust over the Sereth and took control of the positions of the Esztergom IR 26 at Czystopady. At the same time units of 3 Russian ID drove into the defensive sector of the Budapest IR 32 by Markopol, but here it was possible to drive the enemy back out of the trenches. Meanwhile a wild fight raged between Czystopady and Ratyszczce. Only with difficulty was IR 26 able to prevent the Russians from climbing out of the Sereth valley to the heights of Troscianiec. GM Horvath, commanding 14 ID, threw his reserves into the fire. Czystopady was lost; although the village was recovered, the Russians finally gained the upper hand and stormed the edge of the heights between Zalosce and Ratyszczce.

GdI Schmidt von Georgenegg, the commander of IV Corps, ordered that the reserves sent ahead in the morning toward Markopol (two battalions of IR 71) should thrust along the Sereth to Ratyszczce to fall upon the flank of the enemy who'd advanced over the river. But these reserves were hindered by the ponds along the Sereth and had to shift to the south; they couldn't deploy in the woods east of Hnidawa for their counterattack until around noon. Meanwhile IR 26, after a wild action, succumbed to the

Russian onslaught. Supported by the reserves of 14 ID and of IV Corps (a total of eight battalions), in the afternoon the troops who'd been driven out of their positions on the Sereth stood fast in the woods south of Ratyszczce and on the northern edge of the plain with its rolling hills. Toward evening the Russian attack came to a halt.

GO Böhm-Ermolli had meanwhile ordered the reserves of V Corps (IR 72 and parts of IR 44 under the brigadier Colonel Bacsila) to Troscianiec, while the Army's reserves stationed next to the Brody-Lemberg railroad (IR 12 and three battalions of BH IR 3) moved behind 31 ID. Moreover GdI Bothmer sent Battalions IV/35 and III/75 to Troscianiec. The defenders who'd been pushed back from Czystopady and Ratyszczce were now instructed to hold onto their current position until the fresh units brought to IV Corps could open a counterattack under the command of GM Horvath.

#### 5 August

The long distances to be covered delayed the arrival of the reserves. Therefore IR 72 and both battalions from South Army didn't appear until the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, much exhausted, behind the left wing of IV Corps. The planned counterattack thus had to be further postponed.

Meanwhile between Ratyszczce and Zalosce the Russian 13 ID and parts of 34 ID were massing together for a powerful attack. Around 5:30 AM the 3 Russian ID struck at Markopol. Here they drove back the k.u.k. IR 32, which then stood fast between Hnidawa and Zwyzyn. After 10:00 AM two regiments from 13 Russian ID penetrated the forest south of Ratyszczce. Reserves from 14 ID (parts of Infantry Regiments 44 and 72) threw themselves against the advancing Russians. Once more the tide of battle surged back toward Ratyszczce. Toward 1:00 PM, however, the Russians again stormed forward on the entire front from Hnidawa to Zalosce. The defenders couldn't withstand this assault. At the boundary between V and IV Corps, Hnidawa was lost. After a heavy action, the group fighting in the woods south of Ratyszczce (led by GM Brauner, the commander of 66 Inf Bde) had to pull back around 4:00 PM to Manajow and Troscianiec. Three battalions of IR 12, which meanwhile had hastily arrived, supported the brittle front at Zwyzyn, Batkow and Manajow.

While this was going on, the struggle in the center of IV Corps was also decided in favor of the Russian 34 ID; they stormed the heights west of Zalosce Str. and pushed from the west into the

village.<sup>180</sup> The k.u.k. troops who'd dug in here (parts of Infantry Regiments 26 and 48) suffered very heavy losses; supported by a battalion from IR 71, their neighbors on the right, they had to pull back to Reniow.

GM Horvath, commanding 14 ID, sought to prevent the threatened breakthrough by throwing his available reserves (Infantry Battalions V/72, IV/35, III/75) into the tumult on the heights northeast of Troscianiec. At 5:00 PM, however, the k.u.k. troops in this sector gave way to the Russian onslaught; after a seesaw action they pulled back toward Bialokiernica. Their connection with the group still holding onto the heights west of Reniow was severed.

In this critical hour the first German reinforcements under G.Lt Melior arrived at Olejow. These were three battalions, four batteries and one squadron of his 34 LW Bde, which during the morning had come up by train from Lemberg to Zborow. The German troops were immediately placed under IV Corps as they arrived; during the evening, and in the night of 5-6 August, they reinforced the Corps' pushed-back center.

GO Böhm-Ermolli gave G.Lt Melior command over the parts of 14, 31 and 33 Divisions on the left wing of IV Corps, which were completely intermingled. The Corps' right wing, consisting of two regiments from 14 ID plus two battalions apiece from 19 ID and from German 34 LW Bde, was now placed under GM Ritter von Schilhawsky (commander of 27 Inf Bde).

#### 6 August

Early on the 6<sup>th</sup> the battle group of Col. Alfred von Zeidler counterattacked from the heights southeast of Troscianiec. He had a total of four Aus-Hung. battalions plus a battalion from the German 34 LW Bde; his mission was to restore the connection with the corps' right wing which was still fighting on the Sereth and on the heights west of Reniow. This short thrust closed the gap in the Corps' center. On the right wing of V Corps, Col. Bacsila's brigade (IR 32 and 12) didn't carry out the thrust toward Hnidawa and Ratyszczce which had been ordered the day before. Now they were supposed to wait for the

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180 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The community of Zalosce, after which the battle was named, actually consisted of two villages. Nw.-Zalosce ("New" Zalosce) was in Russian hands prior to the fighting; Zalosce-Str. ("Old" Zalosce) was situated to the southwest, and was just behind the Austro-Hungarian lines.

intervention of the German 197 ID, which was coming up by train from Lemberg to Zloczow and Zborow.

Around noon on 6 August, before the arrival of these reinforcements, the regiments of the Russian 3, 13 and 34 ID, emboldened by the success of their attack on the day before, again fell upon the right wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army.

First the Russians attacked the bent-back right wing of the k.u.k. V Corps and pushed into Zwyzyn. Col. Bacsila's Brigade defended themselves courageously; they clung firmly to the western edge of Zwyzyn and held onto the heights directly east of Batkow. Around 2:00 PM the waves of Russian attackers flowed toward Troscianiec. GM Brauner's Brigade lost Heights # 375. The fighting was desperate. Hungarian battalions from 14 and 33 ID and German battalions from Melior's Brigade became confusingly intermingled as they fought. Refugees hurried down the road toward Olejow. Thanks to quick counter-strokes by the troops in the trenches and the employment of the last of the scanty reserves behind the left wing of IV Corps, Heights # 375 were finally recovered and the enemy were driven out of Troscianiec.

Meanwhile, however, the battalions of 14 and 19 ID fighting on the heights between Troscianiec and Reniow succumbed to the powerful assault by the Russian 3 and 34 ID. The center of IV Corps fell back to Bialyglowy. The attackers thrust out of Zalosce toward the south and struck the flank of the Trencsen IR 71, which was still holding out next to the Sereth with their front facing east. This Regiment was able to pull back from the Sereth, but only after suffering heavy casualties.

The prolonged combat, which featured massive Russian attacks and counterattacks by the k.u.k. troops, died out in late afternoon. However, enemy troop concentrations next to Troscianiec indicated that there would already be more attacks in the coming night. The units of 14 ID and the troops from 33 and 31 ID and the German 34 LW Bde who'd been inserted in the front were all mixed together; the order of battle couldn't be restored. GM Horvath moreover complained that his regiments had lost half of their combat strength. The situation became more serious in the evening when the Russians crossed the Sereth near Horodyszcze; IR 48, although supported by two battalions of IX Corps that hurried to the scene, was pushed southward. The South Army, whose extreme left wing was still stationed on the Sereth, was now in danger of being rolled up from the flank. A new front could be constructed only by pulling IV Corps back behind the

line of ponds from Bialyglowy to Horodyszczce during the night.

On this day of crisis for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (6 August), GO Conrad visited the HQ of Archduke Charles at Chodorow and the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army at Lemberg. GFM Hindenburg communicated with the Chief of the General Staff of the k.u.k. Army by telegraph and authorized the expedited movement of the German 195 ID to Zborow. GO Böhm-Ermolli also did everything possible to prevent a Russian breakthrough to Zborow, which would have had very serious consequences for South Army. With great speed he moved 197 German ID, which had already detrained at Zborow, on to Olejow, and sent BH IR 3 to guard the flank of V Corps in the area south of Hucisko Pieniacke.

#### 7-8 August

GdI Eben, the leader of the German reinforcements sent to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, was placed in charge of the Aus-Hung. and German troops stationed in the sector from Nosowce to Zwyzyn. On 7 August FML Hordt took over the k.u.k. IV Corps, while GM Kratky (commander of 106 Lst ID) took over the southern wing of XVIII Corps. Thus FML Hordt was responsible for the most important battlefield on both sides of Troscianiec; he was placed under GdI Eben. IV Corps and the left wing of IX Corps were instructed to hold firm in their current positions until GdI Eben could counterattack with the assembled units of 197 and 195 ID toward Zalosce and Ratyszczce.

Generals Alexeiev and Brussilov had considered on 6 August how to exploit the initial Russian success at Zalosce. The Russian XXXII Corps, which Sakharov had pulled from the front, still urgently needed rest and couldn't be used for a thrust toward Zborow. GdI Shcherbachev was supposed to reinforce VII Corps as soon as possible with a brigade from VI Corps. However, the commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army reported that on his widely-extended northern wing he had just one regiment available in reserve, and couldn't send any troops to his neighbor. Because of the allies' strong resistance at Zalosce, Sakharov believed he would need at least two fresh divisions to carry out a successful offensive to Zborow.<sup>181</sup>

The events of 7 and 8 August confirmed Sakharov's opinion. On both days the Russian 34 ID tried in vain to rip apart the right flank of the k.u.k. V Corps at Zwyzyn. The Russians weren't able to drive their opponents from the western edge of this

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181 Klembovsky, p. 86

town. The Budapest 31 ID, reinforced by parts of IR 12 and of BH IR 3, maintained stubborn resistance at this vital part of their front, and held onto their positions. The 13 Russian ID remained lying exhausted in front of Troscianiec, and also was unable to advance further through Bialyglowy. Troops of the Russian 34 ID tried on the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> to thrust ahead from the western bank of the Sereth at Horodyszczce, but couldn't fight their way out of Pleszkowce. After four days of combat the left wing of Sakharov's Army were at the end of their strength. On the 8<sup>th</sup> the badly-damaged regiments of 3, 13 and 34 ID dug in along the line they had reached. Behind the front of the k.u.k. IV Corps, GdI Eben meanwhile deployed GM Wilhelmi's 197 ID at Olejow and GM von Hofmann's 195 ID at Perepelniki; he planned to break through to Zalosce and throw the Russians back again over the Sereth.

## **2. Actions of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army in the Carpathians, 5-8 August**

On the front of South Army there were only some unimportant actions on the lower Koropiec Brook during the first week of August. For the present Shcherbachev couldn't resume his attacks, because he had been compelled to give up substantial forces (37 and 43 ID) to 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. 43 ID was sent to the Carpathians; 37 ID was shifted against the Aus-Hung. front south of the Dniester, where GdI Letschitzky was preparing for an offensive toward Tlumacz, scheduled for 7 August. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, troops from the k.u.k. 59 ID thrust against the Russian positions at Dora to divert the enemy's attention from the Tartar Pass. This local thrust by 59 ID was successful; it led on 6 and 7 August to Russian counterattacks, which were repulsed.

On the Carpathian front north of Kirlibaba, Russian thrusts on the 5<sup>th</sup> and in the following days led to heavy fighting. 40 Hon ID's offensive toward the Magura couldn't prevail against the enemy's stiff resistance. Therefore the right wing of this Division had to remain for the time being on the defensive between the road through the path to Schipot a.S. and the Cibo valley. On the left wing, where FML Habermann let the attack continue on the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Russians were driven from the northern edge of the Cimbroslawa Wk. by parts of 40 Hon ID and from the area south of Sarata by Lt Col. Coloman Schmidt's Landsturm group (k.k. Lst Inf Bn 150 and parts of k.u. Lst IR 33).

On the 5<sup>th</sup> the Carpathian Corps prepared to attack the position

on the heights occupied by the Ussuri Coss Div and parts of 82 Russian ID; it ran from the Dereszkowata through the Plaik and the Kreta between the Czarny and Bilyj branches of the Czeremosz at elevations up to 1077, 1228 and 1208 meters. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Conta's main body (the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Brigade) stormed the Dereszkowata and Plaik Heights. The Russians were thrown back to Jablonica. The Hungarian 68 Inf Bde attacked ahead toward Heights # 1208. However, the k.u.k. and German battalions stood in isolation, cut off by the high mountain wall from their supply bases, and left with insufficient ammunition and rations between the wild rivers. On the 7<sup>th</sup> the 68 Inf Bde was threatened by Russian units which advanced on the Pod Kreta Ridge and from the western bank of the Bilyj Czeremosz toward the south. Therefore G.Lt Conta decided to reinforce 68<sup>th</sup> Bde with forces from the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Brigade; he wouldn't continue the thrust through Jablonica and toward Zabie until the situation was clarified.

On 5 August GO Pflanzler-Baltin came to Lazescsina on his Army's left wing so he could be present for the offensive scheduled to take place that day. It was carried out by FML Rudolf Krauss' 34 ID, reinforced by Landsturm, who attacked toward Worochta and along the road through the pass to Tatarow. The striking groups of 202 Hon Inf and of 34 Inf Bdes advanced sharply over the wooded slopes; in their first onset, admirably supported by the artillery, they took the defenders (troops from XI Russian Corps) by surprise and captured the Kiczera, Poharek and Siemczuk Heights. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 67 Inf Bde gained more ground on the ridge of heights east of the road through the pass; on the next day they reached the Seredina Heights. 202 Hon Inf Bde already stood just south of Ardzeluza and Worochta, but couldn't descend any further into the valley where the Pruth has its source. The Russians were now offering stubborn resistance to 202 Hon Bde. On the 8<sup>th</sup> the assault of 67 Inf Bde also came to an end in front of the main Russian position on the mighty Mount Magura, which rises to a height of 1270 meters between the Pruth and the road through the pass. Three Russian divisions - 11, 32 and 79 ID - had been identified in the area east of the upper Pruth. The offensive by FML Rudolf Krauss' Group was now halted until the Carpathian Corps would also be able to thrust forward again.

GO Pflanzler-Baltin was of the opinion that nothing decisive could be achieved by advancing in the Carpathians with three relatively weak groups in widely-separated sectors. To him it still seemed that the most promising plan would have been to deploy 1 German ID, whose trains had been rolling through

Maramaros-Sziget since 4 August, on his left wing so they could thrust through the Tartar Pass in a direction where they could give the most effective relief to the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. However, following the orders of Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ, as these German reinforcements came up they were moved instead to F. Visso and Borsa for an attack into Bukovina. On 8 August GM Paschen's newly-arrived 1 German ID (with a total of 9 battalions, 1 squadron and 15 batteries) was placed under G.Lt Conta, who also already commanded Major Russ' Group, the reinforced German 2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Brigade (now designated 200 ID) and the k.u.k. 68 Inf Bde. Conta moreover was given authority over 40 Hon ID and Lt Col. Schmidt's Group (the latter stationed at Sarata).

When German 1 ID arrived, the HQ of 7<sup>th</sup> Army moved 3 CD, which had been pulled behind the front, from Borsa to Jacobeny and Dorna Watra. G.Lt Conta assembled the main body of German 1 ID at the town of Kirlibaba. He sent one regiment from the Prislop Pass into the area south of Sarata which had been held by Lt Col. Schmidt's Group; Schmidt now left the front and was to be sent to Körösmezö on the Army's left wing. Together with 40 Hon ID, 1 German ID was preparing to attack the Russian positions on the Magura<sup>182</sup> and Stara Obczyna on 11 August; then they would thrust along the Kirlibaba Brook to Cameral-Schipoth. The adjacent wing of XI Corps was also supposed to be ready to attack on the 11<sup>th</sup>; by advancing through the upper Moldawa valley they would cover the right flank of Conta's group.

### **3. The Battle of Stanislau, 7-10 August**

#### **a. The Russians break through at Tlumacz and on the Dniester**

##### 7 August

On 7 August General Letschitzky was ready to thrust, as ordered by Brussilov on the 4<sup>th</sup>, to Tlumacz and Nizniow. Early that morning the artillery opened a heavy cannonade along the entire front between the Pruth and the Dniester. Around noon the XII, XLI and XXXIII Corps (along with parts of XI Corps on the left)

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182 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Mt Magura in front of G.Lt Conta (elevation 1556 m) is not to be confused with the Mt Magura (1270 m) which blocked the advance of 67 Inf Bde on the Army's other wing.

began their attack. On the southern wing of the k.u.k. VIII Corps, the 59 ID repulsed some sharp thrusts. Southeast of Majdan Srd. a strong enemy assault collapsed with bloody losses under the fire of 42 Hon ID. Letschitzky delivered his main blow on the front running north of Molodylow to the Dniester. Here, after a very heavy artillery bombardment, six Russian divisions (12, 19 and 74 ID; 1, 2 and 3 Trans-Amur Divs) advanced against the northern wing of Kövess' Army in thick, unbroken ranks. In the sector southeast and east of Ottynia, the 5 ID and 21 LW ID defended themselves stubbornly and held off the enemy in prolonged fighting. At Hostow, however, in the afternoon the Russians broke into the positions of 5 Hon CD; at Korolowka, despite very gallant resistance, they also pushed back IR 13 which had been deployed on the right wing of 6 CD. Now deep swarms of Russian infantry, as well as a strong force of cavalry, pushed through the broken front toward the Worona Brook. FML Hadfy was able to drive the Russians from Krywotuly Nw. with 30 ID, which he had been given from the Army's reserves. Farther north, however, the divisional cavalry (two squadrons of LW UR # 1) couldn't close the gap between Groups Hadfy and Kraewel.

By noon Kraewel's left wing had already been placed in a precarious situation by powerful Russian assaults. The lines of German 105 ID were broken by an attack of much larger Russian forces at Wesola. The last reserves of Group Kraewel, two weak German battalions, were deployed at Okniany, but the Russian pressure was too strong. The hard-pressed German 105 ID conducted a fighting retreat from the Dniester toward the northwest. The German 119 ID, which was sharply attacked east of Tlumacz, was equally unable to hang on. After murderous drumfire the Russian broke into their positions. Now the troops who were still holding fast at Korolowka (parts of the 4<sup>th</sup> Württemberg Fusilier Regt # 122 plus the foot detachments of the k.u.k. 6 CD) were outflanked from the north and south; they also pulled out of their positions and back toward the Worona Brook.<sup>183</sup> Kraewel's sorely-tried group took up a new position west of Tlumacz, and including Palahicze. Units of the II Russian Cavalry Corps crossed the Dniester at Kutyska and threatened the rear of the k.u.k. XIII Corps. Six squadrons of 2 CD at Nizniow opposed the Russians who were advancing on the southern bank of the Dniester.

The k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had suffered substantial casualties on 7 August. All available reserves had been deployed. There was no

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183 Schramm-Schiessl, pp. 755 ff.

longer any chance that the situation could be restored in the area around Tlumacz, where the Russians in some places had already advanced past the second position and toward the Worona Brook. Therefore GO Kövess was compelled to retreat. After darkness fell the northern wing of I Corps was pulled back from Molodylow to Strupkow. The Groups of Hadfy and Kraewel withdrew into a reserve position which ran from Strupkow through Worona along the Rikitno Brook, then north along a line east of Tysmienica to the town of Bukowno on the Dniester.

### 8 August

Exhausted and worn down from fighting, the badly damaged divisions of Groups Hadfy and Kraewel took up their hastily-prepared positions early on 8 August. The units were greatly intermingled after the recent fighting and the night-time retreat. It wasn't possible to find any reserves along the Army's broad front. GO Kövess, who moved his own HQ from Bohorodczany to Kalusz in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, reported to Army Group HQ that his 3<sup>rd</sup> Army wouldn't be able to hold their present position if the Russians attacked this day.

In the event, General Letschitzky did continue the offensive with his main body early in the morning of 8 August. The pursuit continued to the west over the rolling terrain by Tlumacz as far as the foothills of the Carpathians. The XII Russian Corps, along with parts of XI Corps, thrust through Ottynia and by noon were already preparing to attack the new positions of Kövess' Army. 42 Hon ID defeated the enemy at Majdan Srd., but at Worona the Russians broke into the defenses of 5 ID around 4:00 PM. After seesaw fighting, this Division's line was broken and the troops had to retreat to Winograd. Meanwhile the divisions of XLI Russian Corps had advanced over the Worona Brook and were nearing the northern wing of Group Hadfy.

On 8 August Letschitzky once again made his major effort in the area immediately south of the Dniester. With XXXIII Corps he thrust past the Tlumacz-Nizniow railroad. In the afternoon a powerful attack through Klubowce drove the German 119 ID out of their trenches and pushed them back northwest to Olszanica. 6 CD was outflanked from the north and received an order from G.Lt Kraewel to withdraw to the heights north of Tysmienica while staying in contact with 119 ID. The Russians pursued their retreating opponents. Supply trains and troops who'd left their units fled back toward Stanislau. With 6 CD and 119 ID, G.Lt Kraewel constructed a makeshift front facing southeast on the

line Podpiecary-Mohilka Heights.

When Group Kraewel pulled back, the flank of 5 Hon CD was exposed; there was a danger that the Russians could strike Group Hadfy from the rear. With great haste FML Hadfy sent LW IR 6, which was already greatly reduced, to Stanislau. There was no possibility that he could withdraw any other troops out of the wide sectors held by 21 LW ID or 5 ID, which themselves were engaged in heavy fighting. Because of the very serious situation, GO Kövess ordered Group Hadfy to retreat, which would in turn compel the neighboring troops on Hadfy's right to withdraw.

In the night of 8-9 August the 44 LW ID (on the northern wing of VIII Corps) and I Corps pulled out of the Dobrotow-Strupkow front and back to Lojowa and a position east and northeast of Nadworna. 5 ID also broke off their battle so that they could dig in behind the Bystrzyca Nadwornianska. 21 LW ID had to be taken back to Stanislau; 5 Hon CD stretched their lines north to Podluzie to link up with Group Kraewel. The troops were ordered to offer stubborn resistance in their new positions and to await the arrival of reinforcements.

The attack of the Russians toward Stanislau was a major threat to the flank and rear of Bothmer's Army; GM Seeckt's call for help had meanwhile compelled Hindenburg to send troops from several German divisions to the Dniester. These reinforcements were all the more needed because Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ had no reserves of their own. Because of GM Seeckt's request, on 8 August the 6<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Regiment from German 195 ID was already moving by train toward Stanislau. They were followed by Lt Col. Mohs' Detachment from Hindenburg's reserves (IR 346 plus five batteries). Also units from Woyrsch's Army (German LW IR 37 and Landsturm Infantry Regiments 34, 35 and 36) were ordered to join Archduke Charles' Army Group. Moreover, as noted previously GO Conrad had diverted the Turkish XV Corps, which was intended for Linsingen's Army Group, to the South Army. When the first of these troops arrived (the Turkish 19 ID), GdI Bothmer was supposed to shift some German troops from his Army to the Dniester.

#### 9-10 August

On 9 August troops from XI Russian Corps stationed on the upper Pruth attacked 59 ID and in the afternoon captured the strategic Pirs Dora Heights after a stiff battle. 59<sup>th</sup> Division now had to pull their left wing back into an already-prepared second

position. 44 LW ID, the next Division to the north, therefore bent their right wing back from Delatyn to the west.

In front of the center of Kövess' Army, the first troops of the widely deployed XII Russian Corps advanced during the day to the area east of Nadworna and onto the eastern bank of the Bystrzyca Nadwornianska. The XLI and XXXIII Corps didn't begin to advance on 9 August until 21 LW ID and 5 Hon CD had already taken up a position east of Stanislau. To avoid being pushed back in an envelopment attack, in the night G.Lt Kraewel had pulled the part of his front that bulged forward at Olszanica back to Polusze and the Seredny Korb Heights. The German Jaeger Regt 6 and IR 346 had meanwhile arrived at Stanislau. The Jaeger were sent to beef up the front in the sectors of 6 CD and 119 ID. Fusilier Regiment 122 and IR 346 were in reserve behind Group Kraewel.

On Kövess' southern wing, in the morning of 10 August the widely separated battle groups of 59 ID in the Carpathians and the right wing of 44 LW ID gave way to Russian pressure; they withdrew west to a position on the Chomiak Heights, the Pod Bukowica mountain ridge, and the Swiniarka and Strahora Heights. The northern wing of XI Russian Corps seemed to be following the k.u.k. VIII Corps over the Pruth into the wooded mountains, while the southern wing turned against the Tartar Pass. In the area between Delatyn and Winograd the XVIII Russian Corps, newly-deployed with 37 and 117 ID, moved ahead toward the northern wing of 44 LW ID, stationed east of Nadworna. The Groups of Hadfy and Kraewel also anticipated strong Russian attacks. Although the XII and XLI Russian Corps made only slow progress because the Bystrzyca Nadwornianska was a considerable obstacle, the Russian XXXIII Corps was able to attack over the rolling hills south of the Dniester around noon. They came right up to the positions of Group Kraewel.

In the afternoon the tightly-massed regiments of XXXIII Corps stormed forward. Once again Kraewel's 119 and 105 ID, though already badly damaged, bore the main burden of the fighting. They were pushed back to Uzin. As his last reserves G.Lt Kraewel deployed some German recruit companies and IR 346, and the Russian attack was checked for a time. New fighting developed in the evening, and the right wing of 119 German ID was pushed back. The Russians now thrust to Uzin and enveloped the German Jaeger who'd deployed on the left wing of 6 CD; the Jaeger were able to free themselves from encirclement only with a desperate counter-attack.

To avoid being completely overwhelmed by the larger enemy force, G.Lt Kraewel ordered his Group to retreat behind the Bystrzyca. Now FML Hadfy had to evacuate Stanislau; he also pulled his left wing, which was in the greatest danger, back to the western bank of the Bystrzyca. Even before this happened, GM Seeckt had already urged Archduke Karl Franz Joseph to retreat, based on a report from G.Lt Kraewel which depicted the situation as fairly hopeless. GO Kövess also recommended withdrawal. Therefore Army Group HQ ordered that "3<sup>rd</sup> Army should pull back tonight to the line Zielona-Pasieczna-Potoki Heights-Zuraki-Bystrzyca Solotwinska-Jezupol." Here they were to offer stubborn resistance."

**b. A subsidiary thrust by Shcherbachev's Army**

General Shcherbachev, who'd been instructed to support the thrust by Letschitzky's Army to Halicz, initiated lively actions along the upper Koropiec Brook on 7 August. However, on this day he didn't seriously assault the southern wing of Bothmer's Army, apparently because he was shifting some reinforcements (the Finnish XXII Corps). Since the Russians advancing south of the Dniester toward Nizniow were already threatening the flank and rear of XIII Corps, FML Csicseric was nevertheless compelled to pull back the Corps' right wing (15 ID) to the Nizniow-Monasterzyska railroad line after darkness fell.

On 8 August the II Russian Cavalry Corps thrust over the lower Koropiecbach and sought to advance along the northern bank of the Dniester into their opponents' flank. In the evening the 15 ID had to pull back fighting to Uscie Zielone. On 9 August the Russians came up slowly to the new front of XIII Corps; in the evening they attacked unsuccessfully at Komarowka (by the border between 15 and 36 ID). Nevertheless, during the night the right wing of XIII Corps had to be further extended and drawn back because in the area south of the Dniester Group Kraewel had pulled back to Uzin.

On 10 August the XIII Corps was stationed between Mariampol and Dubienko on both sides of the Zlota Lipa, facing to the southeast. General Shcherbachev had meanwhile reinforced his southern wing with the units of XXII Finnish Corps. In the afternoon, after murderous artillery fire, he stormed the northern wing of the k.u.k. XIII Corps. Finnish rifle battalions broke into the positions of 36 ID at Lazarowka. The German Res IR 18 and parts of the Upper Hungarian IR 5 prevented the line from collapsing here with a counterattack from the north. At Slobodka Dl., where the front bent to the north, the Russians broke through Hon IR 11 of 39 Hon ID, stationed on the southern wing of VI Corps. Infantry Regiments 100 and 56 of 12 ID, which had still been holding their ground farther north, now had to be taken back to the eastern edge of Monasterzyska. Southwest of this city the intervention of German Res IR 223 sealed off the Russian penetration.

On the right wing of XIII Corps the troops of 15 ID and 2 CD fought on 10 August in the area west of the Zlota Lipa; in general they were able to hold off the advance of the II Russian Cavalry Corps. However, due to the withdrawal of Group Kraewel, in the evening a wide gap once more developed between this Group

and XIII Corps; it was only insufficiently covered by cavalry (2 CD).

Meanwhile the German LW IR 37 arrived at Chodorow. This Regiment was assigned to Kraewel's hard-pressed Group, and ordered ahead to Jezupol. Moreover German Landsturm troops were now coming up by train to Bukaczowce and Bursztyn. For the time being no units were available to back up Bothmer's Army other than these relatively weak forces. The Turkish XV Corps was supposed to be shifted to the quiet sector of Corps Hofmann, thus freeing the German 48 Res ID to be sent to the Dniester, but the Turks were still riding the rails. After the events of the last few days there was scant hope that Kövess' Army would be able to offer prolonged resistance behind the Bystrzyca. If the attacking Russian masses advanced along the Dniester into the rear of Bothmer's Army, the overall situation could turn critical. Bothmer's center was still on the Strypa. Now his Army's left wing was beginning to feel the slowly-developing pressure from the enemy advancing over the uppermost Sereth, threatening envelopment from the north. All these factors made it advisable to pull Bothmer's Army out of their position jutting forward to the east, and back behind the Zlota Lipa.<sup>184</sup> Thus in the night of 10-11 August Army Group Archduke Charles ordered GdI Bothmer to move his corps back to the line Wodniki-Horozanka-Zawalow-Potutory-Koniuchy-Zborow. This retreat would start in the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> and be finished by 14 August. GFM Hindenburg was asked if he could link up the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (north of Zborow) with the left wing of IX Corps.

#### **4. New Russian attacks over the upper Sereth, 9-13 August**

Along the right wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army the Russian attacks over the Sereth came to a momentary halt on 8 August. The artillery fighting continued. While the Russian offensive was flagging, the troops of German 197 ID who'd detrained at Zborow came forward to Olejow, where they assembled on 9 August with all their units. For the time being just four battalions, one squadron and two batteries of 195 ID had arrived at Perepelniki; three battalions (the 6<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Regiment) had to be diverted to the Dniester and the rest were still coming to Zloczow by train. Meanwhile General Sakharov inserted XXXII Corps in the front between XLV and V Sib Corps and strengthened his Army's left

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184 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original refers to the "position jutting forward to the west", but it is clear from a map that the direction is in error. The troops had to withdraw west.

wing by bringing XVII and VII Corps more closely together. Thus he would be able to resume attacking on 10 August.

Sakharov delivered his principal thrust with the Russian 34 ID between Nosowce and Bialoglowy against GM Horvath's defensive sector, which was held by about four battalions of the k.u.k. 14 ID and two battalions of 19 ID.

The line of Horvath's battalions was already broken very early on 10 August. They withdrew to the hill east of Bzowica. This compelled their neighbors on the right - 32 ID of IX Corps - to bend their own left wing back from Nosowce toward the south. During the morning the Russians advanced to the heights south of Neterpince, where they were stopped by the resolute troops of the west Hungarian 14 ID and dug in. Also in the morning the German 197 ID, which GdI Eben had meanwhile sent to Bzowica, began to counterattack. The rallied remnants of GM Horvath's Group joined this advance, as did the left wing of 32 ID. The counterattack gained ground slowly. In the afternoon the Germans recovered the lost positions of 14 ID at Bialoglowy.<sup>185</sup> But it wasn't possible to drive the enemy from Neterpince and Nosowce. To reinforce his right wing, GdI Eben brought up parts of the German 195 ID, while the troops of this Division already on hand were deployed on FML Kosak's front at Troscianiec. GdI Eben wanted to continue his thrust to the Sereth, but had to go over to the defensive. In the evening the Russians regained the initiative and attacked. In stubborn actions which lasted until late at night the Aus-Hung. and German troops under GdI Eben were able to repulse the Russians.

Simultaneous with the thrusts by XVII and VII Corps against the right wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army, on 10 August the Russians also began to attack the left wing of Bothmer's Army north of the Tarnopol-Jezierna railroad. Russian pressure from the east and north forced 32 ID to pull back in the night of 10-11 August from the part of their front that jutted forward to the Sereth at Pleszkowce; the troops withdrew to Nesterowce.

On 11 August Sakharov once more struck the right wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army with the full wight of VII and XVII Corps. A heavy bombardment thundered from Zwyzyn on the Graberka to a point south of Pleszkowce. In the afternoon the Russian infantry began massive assaults on Troscianiec and through Neterpince. Once again the Russian assault collapsed under the

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185 Wächter, "Das Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 32 im Weltkrieg 1914-1919" (Oldenburg, 1924), pp. 38 ff.

fire of the Aus-Hung. and German battalions. But during the afternoon the Russians pushed back the left wing of 32 ID, so that GdI Eben had to bend back his extreme right wing toward the south at a right angle. Since Russian pressure against 32 ID also increased on this day through Isypowce, the rear of Corps Eben was in serious danger. When darkness fell FML Kralicek pulled back the northern wing of IX Corps on the front east and north of Jezierna; at this time the orders for the retreat of Bothmer's Army behind the Zlota Lipa had already been issued. Therefore GdI Eben also withdrew his right wing to Bzowica; his left wing still remained at Troscianiec.

## **5. Consequences of the Battle of Stanislau (9-13 August)**

### **a. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army retreats behind the Bystrzyca Solotwinska**

In the evening of 10 August, after four days of battle, Kövess' Army had to pull back behind the Bystrzyca Solotwinska. Their most urgent mission was to bring the Russian attacking group on the Dniester to a standstill, because otherwise Bothmer's Army could be rolled up from the south. Moreover, the valuable oil fields near Boryslaw were threatened by the continuing Russian offensive to the west. And it was increasingly improbable that the troops needed to defend against Romania could be made available if the Russian onslaught in Galicia wasn't blunted soon. Already there were reports that Russia and Romania were about to conclude their prolonged negotiations about how the Russians would provide armed assistance in the Dobruja while Romanian troops helped out against the right wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army. The day when Romania entered the war wasn't far in the future. On top of everything else, Görz fell on 9 August. The extremely critical situation on the Isonzo made it necessary to send reinforcements, which could only be taken from the Eastern front where Army Group Archduke Charles lacked reserves behind the most endangered part of their lines. Beginning in the evening of 9 August more German troops were coming by train to Galicia: the reinforced 103 Res Inf Bde and 10 Bav ID. The German 2<sup>nd</sup> Bicycle Brigade at Breslau would soon follow them. The threatening advance of the Russians south of the Dniester forced GdI Falkenhayn to place these units at the disposal of Archduke Charles' Army Group for the time being.

Because of the heavy casualties which the attacking Russians had suffered on the Dniester, and the exhaustion of their troops after the heavy fighting, Kövess' Army was able to break off

contact in the night of 10-11 August with relatively little interference from the enemy. However, the nighttime retreat was very difficult on roads that were packed with supply trains and refugees. Early on 11 August Letschitzky was already following his retreating opponents with the majority of his troops. In the mountains west of the upper Pruth the Russian XI Corps caught up again with the k.u.k. VIII Corps. The advance guards of Russian XVIII Corps reached Nadworna. The pursuers also entered Stanislau. But all the bridges over the Bystrzyca Nadwornianska had been destroyed, so that the marching columns of XII and XLI Corps had to stop; they weren't able to thrust over the river on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The Russian XXXIII Corps even stayed put in the area around Uzin.

Meanwhile the troops of Kövess' Army prepared to defend the heights west of Nadworna and the left bank of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska. On 12 August the XII, XLI and XXXIII Russian Corps resumed their advance. Reconnoitering squadrons, armored cars and horse artillery batteries thrust toward the crossing points on the Bystrzyca Solotwinska. On the northern wing of Group Hadfy the k.u.k. 5 ID and 5 Hon CD were engaged in the morning against a strong force of Russian infantry which had set foot on the eastern bank of the Bystrzyca at Stanislau. Enemy units also appeared north of the city, in front of Group Kraewel; however, Letschitzky's men no longer had the strength to throw themselves upon the allies, even though the latter were also exhausted from days of marching and fighting. The Russians stayed in place in front of the new positions of Groups Hadfy and Kraewel.

The enemy was more active against the right wing of Kövess' Army on the 12<sup>th</sup>. In the morning the units of the Russian XI and XVIII Corps which had advanced in the area southwest and north of Nadworna opened an envelopment assault against the front of the k.u.k. VIII Corps, which here jutted forward toward the east. The fighting spread north as far as the left wing of 42 Hon ID, stationed at Zuraki. The left wing of 44 LW ID, heavily engaged on the Werpil Heights, had to receive help in the evening from units of 59 ID; in the evening the Russians broke into the positions of 44 LW ID.

GO Kövess meanwhile had ordered the right wing of his Army to withdraw behind the Bystrzyca Solotwinska. VIII and I Corps would entrench along a line which ran through the Turowa and Klewa Heights and behind the Sadzwka and Matyjowka Brooks. This would significantly shorten the front. However, by this retreat the right wing of Kövess' Army would distance themselves from

the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army. A new crossing point to Hungary, the Pantyr Pass, would be left open to the Russians. So that this Pass wouldn't be completely unguarded, a detachment under Col. von Frater (consisting of two battalions, one squadron and a mountain battery from 59 ID) on the Siwula Heights blocked the crossing to Hungary through the valley where the Bystrzyca has its source.

The right wing of Kövess' Army carried out their retreat on 13 August. The Russians didn't advance after them. They also remained inactive in front of the Army's center and left wing, and entrenched along the right bank of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska.

### **b. The Armies of Bothmer and Böhm-Ermolli retreat**

On 11 August the South Army was still holding on in the area between Mariampol and Burkanow, and along the upper Strypa, although their flank was exposed. The Russian attacks at Monasterzyska slackened off on this day; their II Cavalry Corps advanced only hesitantly toward Uscie Zielone. After darkness fell Bothmer took the left wing of XIII Corps back behind the Zlota Lipa, and VI Corps back to Jarhorow. The 1 and 48 Res ID, as well as Hofmann's Corps, evacuated the parts of the front that bent forward east to the Strypa, and retreated as ordered behind the upper Koropiec Brook. IX Corps withdrew to an intermediate position running from Kazowa through Jezierna. In the adjacent sector to the north, GdI Eben pulled back the right wing of his corps to Bzowica.

The Russians followed behind their withdrawing opponents early on 12 August. The units advancing on the left wing of their 7<sup>th</sup> Army (II Cavalry Corps, XXIII Corps, 3 Turkestan Rif Div, II Corps) came as far as the line Uscie Zielone-Monasterzyska. The Russian XVI Corps advanced from the Strypa toward the Koropiec Brook; in the evening their leading troops approached Podhajce and Kozowa. The Russian VI Corps moved slowly toward Jezierna, while the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army continued their offensive from the uppermost Sereth toward Zborow. Thus FML Kosak's group, which still tarried at Troscianiec, was exposed to an envelopment attack. However, the front of the k.u.k. IV Corps, reinforced by parts of German 195 ID and of G.Lt Melior's Brigade, withstood the Russian pressure. The left wing of IX Corps was also still stationed in the evening in the area north of Jezierna. The regiments of Russian VI Corps, advancing from the east, were already very near to the new positions of 19 and 32 ID.

In the night of 12-13 August Bothmer's Army continued their retreat practically undisturbed. The pursuit by 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army on the next day reached Jarhorow, the heights on the western bank of the upper Koropiec Brook, and the area around Jezierna; however, they couldn't hinder their opponents' departure. As ordered, the XIII and VI Corps moved back to the line Wodniki-Horozanka-Zawalow, where they dug in facing southeast. The German 1 Res ID, Corps Hofmann and IX Corps occupied a defensive position that ran along the western bank of the Zlota Lipa and from Potutory through Koniuchy to a point north of Zborow. To the left of IX Corps, GdI Eben with the right wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army took up a position on the Zlota Ga. Heights and on the fortified line Jaroslawice-Perepelniki-Manajow. GdI Eben was able to pull his troops back from the Troscianiec area into the designated front facing east without any substantial fighting. The Russian XVII and VII Corps had suffered severely in the uninterrupted combat since 4 August and were no longer capable of pressing their opponents. Therefore on 13 August General Sakharov broke off his attack. On this day, from the reserves of GFM Hindenburg, the first troops from German 2 CD detrained at Ozydow behind the left wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army. Under Bothmer's Army, the newly-arrived Turkish 19 ID came to the Zlota Lipa, so that they could be inserted in the defensive sector of Corps Hofmann between 54 and 55 ID. 48 Res ID was taken out of the front and assembled by GdI Bothmer behind XIII Corps in the area north of Halicz.

## **6. A new relief offensive by Pflanzler-Baltin's Army (8-13 August)**

The overwhelming Russian pressure on the Dniester in the second week of August made it urgently necessary to continue the offensive which Pflanzler-Baltin's Army had initiated in the Carpathians. To carry out the assignment of interfering with the Russian advance in the area south of the Dniester, GO Pflanzler-Baltin had initially intended that his Army's left wing - reinforced by 1 German ID - should attack from the Tartar Pass, if possible shoulder-to-shoulder with the right wing of Kövess' Army. However, at the request of GM Seeckt it was decided to deploy the German 1 ID at Kirlibaba, from where they could mount an effective thrust through Schipot a.S. against the flank and rear of the Russian left wing. It was also hoped that a successful attack by German troops in Bukovina would have an impression on Romania.

Thus the German 1 ID was sent to reinforce G.Lt Conta's Carpathian Corps; on 9 August their vanguard reached the Prislop Pass. However, the Division's components were still very widely separated, so that the breakthrough attempt on the Kirlibaba Brook had to be postponed until 11 August, when it opened after a sharp artillery bombardment. The main body of 1 German ID attacked east of the Brook toward the Luczina stud-farm, through terrain covered by woods and traversed by ravines; the offensive gained only a little ground and after two days of fighting came to a complete halt. Hon IR # 19 of 40 Hon ID thrust from the Capul; on 11 August, supported by some troops from 1 German ID they conquered the foremost Russian positions on the Magura but couldn't thrust forward any further. On 13 August the components of 1 German ID deployed on the extreme left wing of 40 Hon ID reached the Sarata area, deep on the flank of the Magura. This group was instructed to continue their envelopment operation by attacking toward the Stara Wipczyna Heights, while guarding against the enemy stationed on the Tomnatik Ridge.

In the center of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army, GM Boëss' 200 German ID remained pinned down on the Dereszkowata and on the Plaik southwest of Jablonica by reinforced enemy units. Major Russ' weak detachment was guarding their right flank in the direction of Jalowiczora in the area where the Czeremosz has its source. To the left of 200 ID the Russians started in the evening of 9 August to attack the outposts of the k.u.k. 68 Inf Bde on the Kreta Ridge. G.Lt Conta reinforced this Brigade with troops from 200 ID and on 12 August let the offensive against Zabie continue. In stubborn fighting in the forest, parts of the k.u.k. 68 Inf Bde and German Jaeger captured a Russian position southeast of Bystrzec in the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>. After this local success, however, Conta's left wing had to go over to the defensive against the reinforced Russians.

Initially FML Rudolf Krauss' Group (67 Inf and 202 Hon Inf Bdes) was also supposed to attack on 11 August simultaneously with the Carpathian Corps, but they were unable to continue their thrust toward Kosmacz and Tatarow. 67 Inf Bde, which was to attack the Magura Heights, had already been under mounting pressure from Russian counterattacks since 9 August. 202 Hon Inf Bde, which meanwhile had been reinforced by the burnt-out k.k. Landsturm Battalion 150, had reached the heights east of Worochta, but were compelled to repulse a sharp Russian counter-thrust on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Under these conditions GO Pflanzer-Baltin had already ordered FML Krauss on 10 August to stay on the defensive.

Because of the retreat of the right wing of Kövess' Army, they

were distancing themselves from the left of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. GO Pflanze-Baltin therefore reckoned that the Russians would shift the weight of their offensive in the Carpathians against his Army's left wing. However, he had no reserves behind FML Krauss' weak group. And so on 13 August he had 3 CD, which had come to Borgo Prund, sent by railroad to Körösmezö.

Pflanze-Baltin was also greatly concerned that the Romanians could fall upon the rear of the k.u.k. XI Corps. He urged G.Lt Conta to complete the offensive toward Schipot, which was making only slow progress, as quickly as possible. On 13 August he suggested to the HQ of Army Group Archduke Charles that the attack should end after the Russian positions on the Magura and Stara Obczyna were taken. 40 Hon ID, which had already suffered heavy casualties, should be taken out of the front as soon as possible and held in readiness to guard the rear of XI Corps at Dorna Watra. However, despite the threatening news from Bucharest, at this time the Aus-Hung. high command didn't believe that Romania would strike in the next few days. Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ also didn't agree that Pflanze-Baltin's Army should now restrict themselves to defensive measures in Bukovina. The fighting in the wild mountains north of Kirlibaba

was certainly dragging on slowly for the Carpathian Corps. However, if the Russians were left in peace, without any threat to their lines of communications, they could bring up reinforcements and even attack over the Carpathians themselves; this had to be avoided because of Romania. For these reasons it was decided that the Carpathian Corps would continue to attack.

The continuing pressure from Conta's attacking group had meanwhile increased Letschitzky's concern that the k.u.k. 12<sup>th</sup> Army (which he believed to be in the vicinity of Bukovina) was beginning an offensive and would thrust toward Czernowitz. On the left wing of his Army he had just 103 ID and III Cavalry Corps. When the German 1 ID began to attack in the mountains north of Kirlibaba, Letschitzky strengthened the front south of Schipot a.S. with 43 ID, which meanwhile had been assigned to him. Moreover he deployed the newly-arrived 64 ID as a reserve at Kutu, and he gradually shifted all units of the Russian XI Corps against the left wing of Pflanze-Baltin's Army. His plan was to open a general offensive in the Carpathians with General Rerberg's new group (43 and 103 ID, 3 Don and 1 Terek Coss Divs, 10 CD) and the reinforced XI Corps (11, 32, 79 and 82 ID, Ussuri Coss Div) as soon as all their forces were assembled. The immediate goal was to secure the crossing-points through the mountains toward Borgo Prund, Borsa and Maramaros-Sziget.

## ***G. The Tsar's Armies prepare for a new offensive in the area south of the Pripyat***

### **1. The Stavka assigns goals for the offensive**

On 9 August it was already clear to the commander of the Russian Southwest Front that his plan - to break through the defensive wall of his opponents toward Kovel with two coordinated attacking groups - was doomed to failure. On this day, therefore, Brussilov decided to halt the operation before the setback could assume more serious proportions and cause greater casualties; he stopped the offensive and ordered the three Armies of his right wing to go over to an "active defense."<sup>186</sup> Alexeiev had hoped that the commitment of the pride of the Russian armed forces, the Guards, after their long period of inactivity would be the decisive factor in the battle for the strategic goal of Kovel. This hope had completely evaporated. General Bezobrazov blamed the defeat on the strength of his well-entrenched opponents, especially to their superior heavy artillery and air units. This unfavorable situation existed from the start, and it was exacerbated in the second phase of the battle, since the 40,000 men whom the Special Army lost between 28 July and 8 August hadn't been replaced.<sup>187</sup> In his memoirs, Brussilov later referred to the superiority of the Germans, but also pointed out some other, deeper-lying reasons for the defeat. The Guard troops, officers as well as men, were magnificent soldiers, full of self-confidence and the best military spirit. However, their commanders lacked leadership ability, knowledge, and even sufficient military education. The Guards had been away from the front for too long. Thus they lacked the necessary understanding of the latest special conditions of trench warfare, in which artillery and the technical services played a large role.<sup>188</sup>

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186 Klembovsky, p. 90

187 Zayonchkovsky, p. 56

188 "Memoires du General Broussilov, Guerre 1914-1918" (Paris, 1929), pp. 221 ff.

Knox (Vol. II, pp. 466 and 472) adds that while behind the lines for ten months the Guards had spent their time learning close-order drill, but field tactics had been neglected. This dispassionate English observer had compared the superior physical condition of the Russians with that of their prisoners (troops from German Reserve regiments), and was

Brussilov was preparing his next offensive stroke when on 11 August the Stavka intervened with a major change of plans. Alexeiev observed that while two armies tried in vain to defeat the allies in front of Kovel, the successful attack by the Southwest Front's 9<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Armies indicated where the next effort should be made.<sup>189</sup> Brussilov was instructed to build on the success already won and to separate the Central Powers' units stationed on the Brody-Kimpolung front from the main body who were concentrated around Kovel and Vladimir-Volynsky. So that Brussilov could give his full attention to this new assignment, which involved the southern half of his Front, the Armies of Bezobrazov and Letsch were re-assigned on 12 August to the Western Front. The Stavka handed authority over IV Sib Corps to Brussilov.

GdI Evert, the commander of the West Front, was to prepare the next attack in the Kovel area. He was told to strengthen the two armies already engaged there with extra forces available north of the Pripyat, and to have them mount a powerful offensive. The main blow should be directed "if possible in the direction of Kamien Kaszyrskij." North of the Pripyat, Evert was supposed to leave only enough troops to hold the front and to engage his opponents with diversionary operations.

Around this time the North Front was still making preparations for a landing at Rojen, which was scheduled to begin on 27 August in an effort to envelop the German's northern wing. This amphibious operation was to be accompanied by an offensive by 12<sup>th</sup> Army at Riga and by 5<sup>th</sup> Army at Dvinsk.

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trying to understand why the magnificent Guard soldiers, in the prime of their lives, could accomplish nothing against the German 107 ID.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Stone (pp. 262-63) agrees with Brussilov that the defeat of the Guard Corps was largely due to its generals. Moreover, he discounts the idea that the German artillery or planes were superior, at least in numbers. "The Russians' weight was now far beyond anything seen in the Eastern front...The Guard used a hundred guns of the heaviest caliber, whereas no German operation in the East had ever used more than forty of these great guns. Aircraft began to come into their own, although those on the Russian side seem to have been dominated by numerically inferior German fliers...Overall, there were six Russian shells to one German."

189 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 59 ff.

Thus the Stavka was again planning a general offensive against the two Central Powers, which would take place at the end of August. The HQ at Mogilev was sticking to their decision in July to break apart the long allied front by separating the German Eastern armies from the main body of the Austro-Hungarians; now, however, they altered the means for carrying out the plan. The assignment, hitherto Brussilov's alone, would be shared; his great energy would be concentrated on just one goal, a break-through in Galicia, while Evert took over the thrust against Kovel. Another factor, as noted by the Russian General Zayonchkovsky in his "Strategic Studies", may have been an intention of shaking the commander of the West Front out of his inactivity by giving him responsibility for an important operation. During the summer offensive Brussilov had often complained that his Armies were bearing the main burden of the fighting, but still didn't get any support from the neighboring Front.

The main effort of the Tsar's forces would still be made in the area south of the Pripyat, and would involve a powerful operation carried out by two Fronts.

On the 12<sup>th</sup>, Brussilov passed on these orders to his Army commanders and added his own instruction "to complete the defeat of the Aus-Hung. troops." 9<sup>th</sup> Army would attack Halicz-Stryj with their right wing, and 7<sup>th</sup> Army would continue their advance. 11<sup>th</sup> Army would thrust toward Lemberg, and in the future would also bring their right wing into the offensive. 8<sup>th</sup> Army would stay on the defensive for now, but prepare to operate in conjunction with their neighbors on the left.<sup>190</sup>

## **2. The Russian advance in east Galicia, and changeable fighting in the Carpathians, 13-17 August**

### Actions in east Galicia

Brussilov's orders expressed the hope that with a ruthless pursuit and a new offensive the Russian armies in Galicia would completely destroy their retreating opponents. But already on 13 August it was clear that the allies had systematically evacuated the bulge in their front which had extended east to the Strypa, and that in the area south of the Dniester they had taken up a new position behind the Bystrzyca. Also in the area around the source of the Sereth the Russian successes hadn't

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190 Klembovsky, p. 91 and Supplement # 13.

been as decisive as Brussilov apparently believed. Sakharov had tried in vain to cut off the exposed protuberance in the front at Pleszkowce by simultaneous pressure from the north and east. Although his opponents were hard pressed, they had been able to pull back the troops stationed here and thus avoided the danger of encirclement.

On 13 August the Russian XVII and VII Corps were unable to advance through the Olejow area, despite heavy fighting. Early on the 14<sup>th</sup>, when General Sakharov finally had the left wing of his Army resume their advance, GdI Eben's Group had already prepared their front, running in an almost straight line between Zborow and Zwyzyn, for a new defensive battle.<sup>191</sup> During 14 August General Sakharov brought his Army's left wing up to his opponents' new position and decided to attack. This offensive, not undertaken by the Russian XVII Corps until the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup>, was a failure; the k.u.k. IR 72 of 14 ID repulsed all thrusts at Manajow. Farther north the enemy broke into the trenches, but were thrown out by IR 12 of 33 ID. V Sib Corps restricted themselves to firing artillery against the positions of the k.u.k. 31 ID. The Russian VII Corps, which extended their left wing south almost to Zborow, didn't venture to attack the front held by German troops at Jaroslawice.

On the northern wing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, their VI Corps had meanwhile advanced out of the Tarnopol bridgehead and over the upper Strypa. On 14 August they started to attack the k.u.k. IX Corps on the front between Zborow and Koniuchy. The Russian 23 ID thrust out of Brzezany along the road from Kozowa and at Szybalin drove back the outpost line of the k.u.k. 55 ID. This Division, as well as IX Corps, managed to halt the enemy advance with defensive fire. Opposite the k.u.k. 54 ID and German 1 Res ID, on 14 August the Russian XVI Corps reached the Zlota Lipa between Potutory and Zawalow on 14 August. South of Zawalow the Finnish XXII Corps pushed over the river and came near to the k.u.k. VI Corps at Toustobaby. The k.u.k. XIII Corps were engaged in action on the heights north of Mariampol and on the Dniester against the advancing II Russian Cavalry Corps on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

On 15 August Shcherbachev tried with his Army's left wing to attack the XIII and VI Corps at several points. These weak

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191 Eben's Group consisted of the German 197 ID, parts of German 115 ID, main body of German 195 ID, and the k.u.k. IV Corps (the latter made up of 14 ID plus parts of 33 and 31 ID).

Russian thrusts were easily repulsed. Only at Toustobaby was the enemy able to break into part of VI Corps' position, but here also they were finally driven away. Bothmer's and Böhm-Ermolli's Armies weren't engaged in any substantial fighting on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Sakharov and Shcherbachev broke off their operations, since the strong positions occupied by their opponents made any pursuit impossible. General Letschitzky had meanwhile also stopped his offensive. He sent the center of his Army to follow the k.u.k. VIII Corps on 14 and 15 August as far as the Bystrzyca Solotwinska, but he didn't carry out the planned thrust to Halicz because he felt threatened by the strong pressure exerted by the allies in Bukovina against his flank and rear.

Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ expected that the battered k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would be the target of new Russian assaults after the breakthrough at Stanislau. The reserves which were coming through Lemberg by railroad (103 Res Inf Bde, 2 Bicycle Bde, 10 Bav ID) were shifted to the area south of the Dniester, where they began to arrive on 14 August. At the same time that these reinforcements were arriving, GO Kövess had to give up two divisions, 51 Hon ID and 44 LW ID, at the order of the k.u.k. high command. 51 Hon ID, which had been hastily rebuilt behind the front of I Corps during the Battle of Stanislau, was ordered on 14 August to move to Transylvania, where they could complete their rehabilitation and then join the 1<sup>st</sup> Army which was in the process of forming. On 7 August GdI Arz was named to lead this Army; in his place FML von Fabini was entrusted with command of the VI Corps. The 44 LW ID left by train on 16 August to reinforce the Isonzo front. Simultaneous with these troop movements, the HQ of Army Group Archduke Charles assembled G.Lt von Puttkamer's 199 ID (formed from the 103 Res Inf and 2 Bicycle Bde) and GM Burkhardt's 10 Bav ID in the area around Kalusz. GdI Falkenhayn, who was very concerned about the front south of the Dniester, also sent the HQ of XXIV Reserve Corps under the Württemberg GdI von Gerok. This General arrived on 17 August and took over the command of the former Group Kraewel.

There was also a personnel change at 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ after the severe setback at Stanislau. GM Konopicky, the Army's Chief of Staff, went on sick leave, and Col Alfred Freih. von Waldstätten took his place. This change was necessary only because of Konopicky's illness and had no connection with any events that had taken place at the front.<sup>192</sup>

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192 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The last sentence of this paragraph didn't appear in the first edition of Volume V, but was added

Actions in the Carpathians

At the same time fighting also continued in the Carpathians. On 13 August the detachment of 40 Hon ID which (together with German IR 43) had been sent to envelop the Magura position reached the area south of Sarata. Two days later this group stormed the western slope of the Stara Wipczyna. Simultaneously parts of 40 Hon ID attacked the Stara Obczyna, but couldn't break the stubborn resistance of the Russian 43 ID in bitter bayonet fighting. Meanwhile G.Lt Conta pulled parts of 1 German ID from his extreme right wing, where all thrusts against the area around the Luczina stud-farm had been fruitless, and shifted them into the Cibo valley for a new assault on the line of ridges from Stara Wipczyna to Magura. Conta's striking group was ready on 17 August. East Prussians and Honveds (parts of Hon IR 19) first stormed the Stara Obczyna Heights. Around noon on 18 August, after a heavy artillery bombardment, the German 1 ID also wrested the Magura from the Russians. The badly-damaged 43 ID still clung desperately to the eastern slopes of the Stara Wipczyna. General Letschitzky brought up as a reinforcement his 64 ID, which had been held in readiness at Kutu. Fear of an envelopment in Bukovina forced the Russian Army commander to send 37 ID along with the HQ of XVIII Corps from the Stanislaw sector of the front to the area around Seletin.<sup>193</sup>

Meanwhile the Russian XI Corps had attacked on the upper course of the Pruth and placed the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army in a serious situation. On 14 August the lines of 202 Hon Inf Bde were broken at Arzeluza and at Worochta, and 67 Inf Bde was riven from the Jablonica area. 202 Hon Inf Bde had to give up the valley where the Pruth has its source to the oncoming enemy, and withdrew to the Kukul. Now FML Rudolf Krauss took 67 Inf Bde back to the Tartar Pass. Col. Frater's Detachment found that the enemy was moving around their right at Zielona, and retreated in the Bystrzyca valley through Rafailowa toward the Pantyr Pass. On 15 August the troops of Group Krauss, thoroughly worn-out, occupied the fortified crest on the Hungarian border between the Kukul and Sumaren [Sumarem].

It was now urgently necessary to strengthen the left wing of the

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as a "correction" when Volume VI was published. The preceding sentences certainly implied that Konopicky's "illness" was a cover story for his replacement, and apparently someone objected to this implication.

193 Zayonchkovsky, p. 78

k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army. GO Pflanzer-Baltin sent a brigade from 3 CD, which had already arrived at Körösmezö, to Rafailowa. Moreover, he pulled 68 Inf Bde from the left wing of the Carpathian Corps, where they'd been deployed facing Zabie, and sent them through Ruszpolyana to the Tartar Pass. G.Lt Conta pulled the German 200 ID from their forward positions at Jablonica back to the Kaptarka and the Skupowa so that he could shift troops from this Division toward Zabie to take the place of the k.u.k. 68 Inf Bde. The Russians spread out in the area around the source of the Pruth, and sought to take the border crest between the Kukul and the Tartar Pass. Now the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group decided on 17 August to move the German 2 Bicycle Brigade from their reserves and deploy it behind the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army.

### 3. Stalemate in Volhynia

Naturally the offensive which the Stavka planned against Kovel couldn't take place quickly; the preparations would take some time. While Brussilov's center and southern wing were still pushing against Archduke Charles' Army Group, the northern sector of his now truncated Southwest Front (most of 11<sup>th</sup> and all of 8<sup>th</sup> Armies) remained on the defensive along their lines. Also the West Front, now in charge of two more armies toward the south, had to initially stay inactive before launching their intended attack on the Kovel area; the Armies of Bezobrazov and Letsch had to be brought back into order while large bodies of troops were shifted from earlier target areas (in front of Baranowicze and Vilna) to the Stokhod.

GO Linsingen utilized the ensuing pause in operations in his Army Group's area, which was broken only by some patrol actions and artillery fire, to increase the defensive strength of the front. The k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army was reinforced by German heavy batteries. By 14 August the troop movements involving the k.u.k. X Corps were completed. IR 82 was sent to Transylvania; the three regiments of 13 LW ID which had been pulled from the front line were replenished and strengthened with replacement troops. The one regiment still at the front, LW IR 24, came under the orders of the German 10 LW ID. The last regiment of 10<sup>th</sup> LW ID to arrive, IR 377, had to be relieved from the k.u.k. II Corps, where GdK Bernhardt replaced it with Res IR 249 from 75 Res ID; then IR 377 stayed in 4<sup>th</sup> Army's reserves.

Army Group HQ gave GdI Litzmann command over the k.u.k. X Corps; his Armeegruppe thus now included all of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. So that GO

Tersztyanszky, this Army's commander, would have something to do he was also placed over Group Lüttwitz.

To enhance the defense of Transylvania the high command needed HQ whose officers were familiar with that province. GO Tersztyanszky therefore was ordered on 16 August to send GM Goldbach with the staff of his 70 Hon ID, as well as the staffs of 3 Inf and 208 Hon Inf Bdes. FML von Sorsich, with the staff of 63 ID HQ, took over 70 Hon ID.<sup>194</sup>

Under Armeegruppe Bernhardi there was an attempt on 13 August to clear up the situation on the sand dune in 53 ID's sector. In the evening four German companies from Bürkner's Group took the summit in a successful surprise assault. The Germans maintained themselves here throughout the night despite all counterattacks by the Siberians, but in the next day had to again evacuate the position due to pressure from further heavy assaults. The allies were content in the following days to wear down the Russian strong point with powerful artillery fire.<sup>195</sup>

Although combat activity on the front of Army Group Linsingen had considerably slackened off, the apprehension of the commanders had not. By observing the behavior of the enemy they were able to draw some conclusions about their next plans. The Russians began to concentrate the VIII, XL and XXIII Corps (opposite Litzmann's Armeegruppe) toward the left, while simultaneously extending the line of XXXIX Corps (opposite the southern half of Lüttwitz's force) to the south. 12 CD came near to the northern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army. It seemed that troops were being relieved and shifted among the adjacent Guard troops (II Guard Corps and the cavalry divisions). It was possible to trace the movement of IV Sib Corps through Luck to the area south of the Polanka. It wasn't difficult to conclude that the enemy intended on the one hand to fall upon either Litzmann or Marwitz, and on the other to strike Bernhardi somewhere around Mielnica.

#### **4. Measures of the opposing commanders**

##### The allies

It was not in character for the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff, and

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194 Until FML Sorsich arrived from Albania, the commander of 8 Cav Bde, GM von Mouillard, was in charge of 70 Hon ID.

195 Meienborn and Goebel, pp. 124 ff.

very depressing to him, that since June he had to leave the initiative on the Eastern front to the enemy; the considerable reinforcements which arrived during the summer had been used only to fend off attacks and to fill gaps in the line. Thus the allies never emerged from the unthankful role of defenders. Therefore around mid-August, when Army Group Archduke Charles had surmounted another serious crisis, GO Conrad raised the issue of whether it would be possible in the final hour to anticipate the next Russian onslaught with an offensive of our own. A successful battle could regain a measure of operational freedom. Conrad was indeed convinced that Romania would soon enter the war. The majority of the Romanian Army was already stationed on the eastern and southern borders of Transylvania. However, it wasn't certain that this new enemy had fixed a day on which they would strike. GdI Falkenhayn even believed that Romania wouldn't draw the sword against the Habsburg state until October, after the harvest was complete.<sup>196</sup> However, it was more probable that the Romanians were only waiting until the Russian armies resumed their attacks and appeared in the Carpathian passes.

On 17 August Conrad and Falkenhayn met at Teschen to discuss various plans of attack. GO Conrad, concerned about Lemberg, though that it would be most advisable to have Armeegruppe Marwitz strike. Also an offensive from the Zloczow area toward Dubno was considered. The Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff expected that an operation in this direction would even roll up the Russians in Volhynia from the south. However, there could be no serious planning to implement such a wide-ranging campaign because it was impossible to bring up the necessary forces (about 20 divisions). Therefore it seemed that only a quick and smaller thrust was feasible, either from the center of Bothmer's Army or from the area south of the Dniester.

Army Group Archduke Charles had available two fresh divisions in the area around Kalusz (199 German and 10 Bav ID). The 48 Res ID stood ready at Halicz behind XXIV Reserve Corps. The Ottoman Corps had arrived in Bothmer's Army.<sup>197</sup> The Turkish 19 ID had

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196 Cramon, "Bundesgenosse", p. 76

197 The following was the organization of XV Turkish Corps.

The commander was Col. Shevki Bey, and the Chief of Staff was Lt Col. Hari Bey. 19<sup>th</sup> ID (Lt Col. Shefik Bey) had IR 57, 72 and 77; Arty Regt 19. 20<sup>th</sup> ID (Lt Col. Jasyn Hilmi Bey) had IR 61, 62 and 144; Arty Regt 20. Total strength was 24 battalions, 2 squadrons, 8 batteries and 2 technical comps. The firepower of the Corps was enhanced by the attachment of

already taken over the defensive sector on both sides of the Kozowa-Rohatyn railroad, while the 20 ID was still in reserve behind Corps Hofmann. The German 117 ID was moving by rail from the Western theater of operations to Galicia. GFM Hindenburg wanted this Division diverted to Woyrsch's Army, in order to make free the k.u.k. 16 ID which Teschen needed for the Isonzo front. However, GdI Falkenhayn decided with Conrad's agreement that 117 ID for the time being would be sent to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Archduke Karl Franz Joseph (who had been promoted to GdK on 1 August) was instructed that after this Division arrived he should thrust toward Kolomea. Moreover the Aus-Hung. high command felt it was very important that Pflanzer-Baltin's Army should continue with their slow but persistent offensive in Bukovina.

### The Russians

In these days the commanders of the Russian West and Southwest Fronts also gave their army commanders the guidelines for the coming offensive.<sup>198</sup> On 16 August Evert ordered Generals Letsch and Bezobrazov to throw their opponents back behind the Turya with a powerful attack. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which had been assigned three corps (XXV, XXVI and XXXIV) from the forces piled up north of the Pripyat, would carry out the main offensive toward Kamien Kaszyrskij and Zaprudie, while falling upon the German rear with an accompanying thrust at Pinsk. The Special Army, which now included I Turkestan Corps, would break through toward Kovel with a strong center (where both the Guard Infantry corps were concentrated). GdI Smirnov's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had been newly formed between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies since the start of August, would intervene in support if his neighbor Letsch was successful. On the front running farther to the north the Germans were to be pinned down.

Brussilov assigned his armies their objectives on the 17<sup>th</sup>. He took into account a suggestion made by Kaledin on the 9<sup>th</sup>, that the next thrust shouldn't take place at Kisielin, but farther south through Swiniuchy toward Poryck.<sup>199</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Army would therefore attack with a strong southern wing - its striking power enhanced by IV Sib Corps - to Poryck and Milatyn. Sakharov should attack with either the left wing or center of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, while his right wing kept pace with 8<sup>th</sup> Army. Brussilov still wished to build upon the victorious Battle of

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Aus-Hung. machine gun detachments and batteries.

198 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 61 ff.

199 *Ibid.*, pp. 91 ff. and Appendix 14.

Stanislau. Therefore he again ordered Letschitzky to advance with his right wing to Halicz while the left sought to reach Maramaros-Sziget and Kirlibaba. Shcherbachev would support the attack of 9<sup>th</sup> Army by pushing forward his left wing. Both Brussilov and Evert still left open the date when the offensive should open.

On 19 August, after the arrival of the disturbing news that the Magura position had been lost, Brussilov felt compelled to alter his instructions insofar as they pertained to the southern wing of his Front. The commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Army, General Letschitzky, felt that his double assignment (to simultaneously attack toward Halicz and in the Carpathians) was not feasible with the forces available. Therefore Brussilov restricted the objective of this Army to breaking into Hungary, and assigned the attack toward Halicz to Shcherbachev's Army. Letschitzky would cover the operations of the neighboring Army with his right wing, and give them the XLI and XXXIII Corps as well as the Caucasian Native Cav Div. 7<sup>th</sup> Army transferred VI Corps (4 and 16 ID) to 11<sup>th</sup> Army, which in turn gave V Corps to 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

## **5. The Eastern front up to Romania's declaration of war (18-27 August)**

### **a. Events by Army Group Linsingen**

Since the Russians might want to launch a surprise attack on the birthday of the aged ruler of the Danube Monarchy, for 18 August GO Linsingen ordered his men to be very alert. Also it was not improbable that a serious offensive would soon open against the southern wing of Armeegruppe Litzmann, where the enemy had concentrated strong forces. Therefore Army Group HQ instructed that from the German 1 LW ID (which was stationed as a reserve behind the inner wings of Corps Hauer and Fath in the Werchy-Holoby area) the LW IR 84 should march to Grywiatki, and then take the railroad through Kovel to Iwaniczky.

#### The attack on Corps Hauer (18-19 August)

But while GO Linsingen considered the southern part of his Army Group to be the most endangered at the moment, on the 18<sup>th</sup> the enemy suddenly fell upon the northern wing, Hauer's Cavalry Corps. After Russian batteries prepared the way with an escalating bombardment, in the afternoon the 4 Finn Rif Div and parts of 27 ID attacked GM Ritt. von le Gay's 9 k.u.k. CD and

the sector to the north held by G.Lt von Hellingrath's Bav CD. The k.u.k. 1 CD was hit only by moderate artillery fire. Each of Hauer's Aus-Hung. cavalry regiments was divided into a mounted portion and a rifle detachment (in battalion strength), with troops equipped as infantry. The rifle detachments held the defensive installations while the mounted squadrons served as reserves. Although the latter were numerous, they had little combat value once they dismounted for a firefight. As soon as the Russian cannonade indicated what part of the front had been selected for the attack, GdK Hauer had shifted his available reserves toward the threatened divisions. The nearest infantry, the German LW IR 31 of 1 LW ID, had departed in the morning from Holoby to Werchy at the orders of the Army Group to replace LW IR 84; at noon, however, they were halted south of Jajno and sent to retrace their steps.

The Russian onslaught pressed 9 CD back between Rudka Czerwiszcze and Tobol; both villages had to be given up, as well as several strong points northeast of Tobol which were held by the Bav CD.<sup>200</sup> After these costly actions the allies held fast to the nearest switch positions and sealed off the penetration. G.Lt Hellingrath also brought up a German Landsturm Etappen Battalion. In the evening GdK Hauer ordered both divisional commanders to counterattack toward Tobol along with the Corps reserves which had been committed. GO Linsingen, who'd already sent the bombers of the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Kampfgeschwader into the fray in the afternoon, made LW IR 31 and some German batteries available. From Armee-gruppe Bernhardi a half battalion of the Saxon LW IR 350 was sent from Bol. Obzyr to 1 CD and a battalion of Res IR 251 to Werchy. The reinforcements from Bernhardi, however, wouldn't be available until the next day. The 31<sup>st</sup> Landwehr, after a difficult march on sandy roads in the heat of high summer, arrived behind the northern wing of 1 CD after darkness fell; they weren't in any shape to fight. Therefore the 9 CD and Bav CD (the latter reinforced by the k.u.k. DR "Kaiser" # 1) started to attack around 10:00 PM with just the available cavalry and the German Landsturm.

In the first hours of the morning of 19 August most of the original line of positions, along with the two lost villages,

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200 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Bavarians claimed that they had successfully repulsed all Russian assaults until after 5:00 PM when they had to bend back their line due to the defeat of the Austrians on their right. See Bavarian Military Archive, "Die Bayern im Grossen Kriege 1914-1918" (Munich, 1923), pp. 302-303.

were re-conquered; but then the enemy nullified this briefly-achieved success. Around 5:00 AM strong forces again attacked at Rudka Czerwiszcze; first they threw back 1 Cav Bde on the southern wing of 9 CD, so that GM Ruiz's 1 CD had to bend back their adjoining wing north of Helenin. The half battalion of the Saxon LW IR 350 was deployed to support 1 CD. LW IR 31, which had come up after midnight to 9 CD, stiffened the Division's wavering front.<sup>201</sup> An allied counterattack was unsuccessful, because the enemy was continually reinforced as they stubbornly sought to widen the area they'd penetrated. Their mounted cavalry intervened several times, but were repulsed. The allies therefore had to restrict themselves to preventing the Russians from further advances. At noon GdK Hauer urgently requested fresh units from Army Group HQ. GO Linsingen in turn asked that a battalion of IR 343 from Gronau's neighboring group in the north be sent to the Bav CD, and ordered all of Res IR 251 and further batteries to come from Bernhardi's sector. G.Lt Clausius was given command over all the German troops fighting on the battlefields of the two Aus-Hung. cavalry divisions, and was told to drive the enemy back with a counterattack.

Toward evening the Russians again struck at Helenin and Tobol. The inner wings of 1 and 9 CD, supported by the leading battalion of Res IR 251, held fast.<sup>202</sup> On the other hand, the hotly-contested village of Tobol was lost, and with it the junction between 9 CD and the Bavarians which had been maintained with such difficulty. With help from the battalion of IR 343, G.Lt Hellingrath was able to somewhat improve the situation overnight. From prisoners' statements it was inferred that now parts of 1 Sib Rif Div and of 73 ID were involved (they were from III Russian Corps which was fighting Group Gronau). To check the Russians who had been violently assaulting Hauer's front for two days<sup>203</sup>, GO Linsingen had meanwhile quickly ordered LW IR 84 to Grywiatki, and also asked Hindenburg for reserves. The Landwehr Regiment hurried to the scene in a night march; the German 25 Cav Bde, which arrived in Kovel on the 20<sup>th</sup>, was immediately moved forward to the Karasin area.

#### Fighting continues for Corps Hauer (21-27 August)

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201 Suhrmann, "Geschichte des Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 31 im Weltkriege" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1928), pp. 429 ff.

202 Meienborn and Goebel, pp. 125 ff.

203 The k.u.k. 9 CD had already lost 2000 men, and 1 CD 600 men.

For the impending major offensive GdI Letsch, commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army, wanted to create a second sally port in addition to the bridgehead at Zarecze, and he didn't let up the pressure on Hauer's wounded front.<sup>204</sup> The enemy renewed their strenuous efforts to destroy the allied defenses on 20 and 21 August, concentrating mainly against the part of Hellingrath's sector between Tobol and Stare Czerwiszcze. But the Bavarian cavalry, who many times defended their strong points in hand-to-hand combat, and the Aus-Hung. "Kaiser" Dragoons were unbeatable opponents; they shattered the thick lines of the attackers.<sup>205</sup> At the same time the divisions of Le Gay and Ruiz, strengthened with German infantry and artillery, repulsed all assaults. Radio messages revealed that behind the attackers, on the eastern bank of the Stokhod, four cavalry divisions were assembled around Griwa (IV Cavalry Corps and Corps Wolodtschenko). This mass of horsemen was apparently supposed to exploit any success won by the infantry. Therefore GO Linsingen called up all available reinforcements to his threatened northern wing. The Prussian Leib Hussar Brigade was reassigned here from 2 German CD (which Hindenburg had brought to the area of the 2<sup>nd</sup> k.u.k. Army); on 22 August they reached Holoby, while 25 Cav Bde reached Jajno. From Corps Fath, GdK Bernhardt sent Hauer the German LW IR 33 and some heavy batteries, as well as the k.k. LW IR 18 (but the latter was just two companies strong).

Meanwhile however the activity of the enemy - who'd suffered very heavy casualties - was noticeably sinking. G.Lt Clausius postponed the counterattack planned for 22 August, which was to be carried out on the battlefield of 9 CD toward Tobol in conjunction with the Bav CD, until the next day.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> a striking group formed of German battalions was deployed on the adjacent wings of both divisions and sent to attack. But the success was slight.<sup>206</sup> Tobol couldn't be wrested from the enemy, although the bulge in the front that surrounded the settlement was somewhat reduced. G.Lt Clausius decided not to repeat the attack until he had more heavy guns.

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204 Zayonchkovsky, p. 64

205 Frauenholz, "Das K.B. 2. Kürassier- und Schwere Reiter-Regiment" (Munich, 1921), pp. 260 ff. Hutschenreuther, "Das K.B. 1. Chevauxlegers-Regiment im Weltkrieg 1914-19" (Munich, 1922), pp. 76 ff. Gebattel, "Das K.B. 1. Ulanen-Regiment Kaiser Wilhelm II König von Preussen" (Augsburg, 1924), pp. 166 ff.

206 Bernhardt, "Eine Weltreise 1911/12", Vol. III, p. 209

GdK Hauer received from Army Group HQ, in addition to the Leib Hussar Brigade which was already assigned, the recently arrived German LW IR 37. Group Gronau assisted the Bav CD with two cavalry regiments, which were followed on the next day by a cavalry brigade. GO Linsingen held back the 25 Cav Bde as an Army Group reserve, but moved IR 344 and an artillery battalion from 86 ID to Werchy.

Preparations for the attack were further prolonged until 27 August. The enemy didn't interfere. G.Lt Clausius gave command over the stretch of front from Helenin to the Tobol-Pniowno road, the junction point with the Bavarian CD, to two German brigadiers. The Aus-Hung. cavalrymen still stationed in the former sector of 9 CD, who were sadly diminished in numbers, were mostly relieved and assembled as reserves. German infantry deployed in the first line. On the 28<sup>th</sup> the commander of the northern brigade sector, Col. Feldtkeller, would resume the attack on Tobol with three German regiments. G.Lt Clausius moreover had available some parts of 86 ID. The German 25 Cav Bde, which still hadn't entered the fighting, was ordered by Linsingen to the railroad at Grywiatki, from where it would be sent to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Meanwhile the enemy had dispersed the large group of cavalry which had been massed behind the area they'd penetrated; thus they seemed to have already given up hope that the horsemen could force their way forward through a gap in the front. On the other hand the allies learned from a prisoner taken from 65 Russian ID on 27 August that fresh attackers from XXVI Corps were gathering in front of Tobol.

#### Other activities along Linsingen's front

Under Armeegruppe Bernhardi, Fath's Corps kept up lively activity in no-man's land to pin down the enemy. Small detachments probed forward to the nearest arm of the Stokhod, and did damage to the Russians by capturing their sentries, raiding parts of the trenches, and destroying plank bridges. In the sector of 53 ID, during the night of 20-21 August Bürkner's Group mopped up the last Russian strong points on the sand dune in a *coup de main* involving parts of Prussian IR 150 and Bavarian IR 3. This rising ground, so fiercely contested for a week, could only be held by a line of outposts rather than a large garrison holding a continuous front. Mounds of corpses, exposed to the hot sun, polluted the air; while building new trenches the troops everywhere uncovered more bodies that had been hastily interred.<sup>207</sup>

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207 "Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 150", Vol. I, pp.

The extensive movement of troops to 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army (XXV, XXVI and XXXIV Corps) was already known to the allied commanders; all that remained unclear was how the enemy planned to group these units. In front of the k.u.k. II Corps and German 107 ID, where all four infantry divisions of the Tsar's Guard had been identified, the Russians were working on their favorite preparation for an offensive, a maze of approach trenches. The allies responded with nighttime sorties and surprise cannonades. Since the right wing of Armeegruppe Bernhardt didn't have sufficient reserves after the departure of the German 10 LW ID, GO Linsingen shifted some troops from Group Lüttwitz's area, where the enemy had also removed substantial forces; these were the parts of 86 ID still available, which by 25 August arrived in the Holoby area.

Along the fronts of 4<sup>th</sup> Army and of Armeegruppe Marwitz the static trench warfare through 27 August was interrupted only by minor operations, either to gain some local advantage or to reconnoiter. In the evening of 18 August the Russians succeeded in penetrating the trenches of the k.k. LW IR 24 on the left wing of the German 10 LW ID (in the woods north of Szelwow); however, this misfortune was soon rectified. In the next few days the allies undertook many raids in 4<sup>th</sup> Army's sector to bring back prisoners and some military equipment; they clarified the picture of the enemy's deployment. The Russians were weakening the northern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army in front of Group Lüttwitz and assembling their divisions opposite Armeegruppe Litzmann. Since 20 August the allies knew that a division of IV Sib Corps had reinforced the front between Bubnow and Pustomyty. In the period which followed, Russian batteries directed their fire against Corps Szurmay and Group Beckmann. The building of approach trenches in the direction of this part of Litzmann's front also clearly indicated that an attack was imminent; prisoners affirmed that it would start on 28 August.

Reserves were needed for the defense. From the Army Group, 4<sup>th</sup> Army received the German IR 42, which reached Lokaczy on the 27<sup>th</sup>; in turn the Army gave IR 377 to GdI Litzmann. GFM Hindenburg brought back the reserves he'd temporarily lent to Army Group Archduke Charles (on 8 August), although he kept them under his control for the time being. These were the German Jaeger Regiment 6, which came up through Poryck to Koniuchy, and Mohs' Detachment (IR 346 and five batteries) which assembled around the Kovel railroad junction. IR 373 was also held near

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296 ff. Also Stengel, p. 75.

Kovel.

The commander of X German Corps, G.Lt Walter Lüttwitz, was recalled on 21 August; he exchanged assignments with G.Lt Schmidt von Knobelsdorf, hitherto Chief of Staff to Crown Prince William. On 19 August the Aus-Hung. high command ordered 29 ID to release the staff of 57 Inf Bde for Transylvania; command of the sector of this Brigade was assumed by the HQ of 58 Inf Bde, which up until now had been unemployed. From 13 LW ID, which had been relieved from the front with three regiments, the 26 LW Bde was sent by train on 26 August to Woysch's Army, where it would replace some German units.

### **b. Actions in east Galicia and the Carpathians**

translation missing

### **6. Analysis of the August fighting in the East**

translation missing

## **IV. The Campaign in Transylvania**

translation missing

### ***A. Romania enters the World War***

translation missing

#### **1. Romania's policies through the end of August 1916**

translation missing

#### **2. Alliance treaty and military convention between Romania and the Entente**

translation missing

#### **3. The Romanian Army**

translation missing

#### **4. The Romanian operational plan**

translation missing

**5. Counter-measures of the allied Central Powers**

translation missing

**a. The operational plan and its modifications**

translation missing

**b. Austria-Hungary's military preparations against Romania**

translation missing

**c. Provision of Aus-Hung. units and military equipment for Bulgaria**

translation missing

***B. The Romanian invasion of Transylvania***

translation missing

**1. The Romanian advance on the eastern front (27 August-4 September)**

translation missing

**2. Initial actions on the southern border of Transylvania, 27 August-4 September**

translation missing

**a. The invasion by Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army**

translation missing

**b. The fighting south of Hermannstadt**

translation missing

**c. Actions at Petroseny and Orsova**

translation missing

**3. Counter-measures of the Central Powers**

translation missing

**a. Decisions and orders of the commanders through 5 September**

translation missing

**b. Falkenhayn's dismissal and the establishment of an inter-allied command**

translation missing

**4. First actions in Dobruja, 1-9 September**

translation missing

**a. Bulgaria declares war**

translation missing

**b. The conquest of Turtukai and its consequences, 1-6 September**

The mission of 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army

On 28 August, the last day when Falkenhayn led the German OHL, GFM Mackensen received an order from that HQ to attack as soon as possible; the direction and goal were left to his discretion. But on the next day the new men at OHL provided more clarity. They were of the opinion that an immediate thrust toward Bucharest would only lead to defeat for Mackensen's weak forces. Since the assembly of the German and Aus-Hung. divisions chosen for the counterattack in Transylvania would last until the second half of September, Mackensen received on 29 August this precise order: "For the time being refrain from crossing the Danube. Instead the Army Group's task is, while securing the Danube line, to invade Dobruja, drawing enemy units in its direction and thrashing them."<sup>208</sup>

The General-Field Marshal, who came to his HQ at Tirnovo on the 31<sup>st</sup>, had available G.Lt. Toshev's 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army (deploying on the border of Dobruja), Col. Kaufmann's German Detachment (stationed on the Danube between Ruscuk and Sistov)<sup>209</sup>, the k.u.k. Danube Flotilla along with its Land Group, and the 12 Bulgarian Division made up of militia (watching the southern

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208 Werzell, p. 20. Hindenburg, pp. 182 ff.

209 Hiller, "Geschichte des Thüringischen Ulanen-Regiments Nr. 6" (Berlin, 1930), p. 214

bank of the Danube between Sistov and Tekija). Based on a suggestion from G.Lt Toshev, Mackensen planned first to take the fortress of Turtukai, which otherwise could threaten the northern flank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army as it strove to reach the shortest possible line between the Danube and the sea.

#### Capture of the fortress

The fifteen forts built in a circle around Turtukai covered a circumference of 25 km, and were defended by the Romanian 17 ID. The fortified place constituted a bridgehead, although it lacked a bridge to the northern bank of the Danube.

For the Bulgarian attack to succeed, it would have to be carried out quickly before Romanian troops could arrive in relief from Silistria or before the Russian auxiliary corps, correctly believed to have reached Cernavoda and Medzidie, could hasten to the scene. For the attack, G.Lt Toshev selected the Bulgarian 4 ID, a brigade from 1 ID, and the main body of Col. Kaufmann's weak German Detachment.<sup>210</sup> The other two brigades of 1 ID were to cover the operation in the direction of Silistria and to advance first to Akkadylnar. 1 CD was to occupy Kurtunar and maintain a link with the Army's right wing (2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of 6 ID and the mobile reserve from Varna), which had been instructed to occupy Dobric.

The Bulgarians crossed the border on 1 September. During the three following days the units assigned to attack Turtukai enveloped the fortress in a half circle and pushed back the Romanian advanced troops. The fortress commander now lost his nerve and appealed for quick reinforcements. The Russians under General Zayonchkovsky, who reached the line Azaplar-Karalij on the 5<sup>th</sup>, didn't heed the call for help from the Romanian high command, because their mission was to advance toward Dobric, which they planned to use as a base for an operation through Burgas toward Constantinople.<sup>211</sup> On the other hand, the Romanians' strategic reserve, initially intended for Transylvania, was shifted on 4 September to Giurgevo (10 ID) and Oltenita (15 ID). The latter Division was to provide direct support to Turtukai, and in the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> its first detachments were already arriving on the south bank of the Danube.

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210 Hammerstein, "Kriegs-Geschichte des Königl. Preuss. Infanterie-Regimentes von Borcke Nr. 21" (Zeulenroda, 1930), pp. 387 ff.

211 Dabija, Vol. I, p. 284

On 5 September the Bulgarian and German troops (the latter now led by Major Freih. von Hammerstein) opened the decisive attack. Although the defenders, after the arrival of 15 ID, were numerically stronger than the attackers, the allies managed to conquer the fortified town in two days.<sup>212</sup> The fortress commander failed completely to do his duty and - with a few exceptions - his troops offered very inadequate resistance. At the end they all broke in uncontrollable flight toward the northern bank of the river. Only a small number of men from the fully disorganized units of both 15 and 17 ID succeeded in escaping. Hundreds drowned in the waters. Of the 39,000 defenders, 28,500 men were taken prisoner; 3570 were killed or wounded. Over 100 guns and 62 machine guns fell into the hands of the conquerors, whose victory had cost them 7950 men killed or wounded.<sup>213</sup>

The 9 ID launched a belated and half-hearted relief attempt from Silistria, but was checked by the main body of 1 Bulgarian ID at Arabadzilari and Goljabina on 6 September in another triumph of Bulgarian arms. In full flight, the Romanian troops returned to Silistria in the evening. The right wing of Toshev's Army, which had already taken Dobric on the 4<sup>th</sup> without fighting, held it on the 6<sup>th</sup> against attacks by the Russian XLVII Corps, which had linked up with 19 Romanian ID.

#### Impact on the Romanians

The surprisingly quick fall of the Turtukai fortress caused great dismay in Romania. It had been considered impossible that this carefully-constructed bridgehead could have been taken by the attackers in such a short time. Now the right pillar of the Dobruja front had fallen, while two divisions had been almost completely eliminated from the Romanian Army's order of battle. Consternation became even greater when it was realized that the Romanian troops had proved inferior to their opponents in tactical skill, had easily been swept by mass panic, and in particular were unable to stand fast under heavy artillery fire. On the other side, the brilliant feat of arms considerably enhanced the Bulgarians' self-confidence. The bonds of the

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212 The Romanians had 34 battalions with 187 guns (including the guns of their flotilla); the allies had 28 battalions and 128 guns. See Ortlep, "Die Eroberung der rumänischen Donau-Festung Tutrakan" in "Wissen und Wehr", Berlin; Issue 5 for 1932 (pp. 225 ff.) and Issue 6 for 1932 (pp. 297 ff.).

213 Dabija, Vol. I, pp. 245 ff.

alliance were strengthened, and the Central Powers had grounds for hope that the Bulgarians would also stand up to the Russians.

The Romanian high command were concerned that their opponents could cross the Danube in the direction of Bucharest or advance against Silistria, the second pillar of the northern wing of the Dobruja front. Therefore on 6 September they placed all the Russian and Romanian units south of the Danube under General Zayonchkovsky and instructed him to recapture Turtukai. As a further reinforcement for the southern front, which was now of greater importance and had already absorbed the strategic reserves, 12 ID was sent from 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had just been reorganized from four divisions of three brigades into six divisions of two brigades by creating 21 and 22 ID, lost 5 ID to the southern front.<sup>214</sup> The high command also carried out important changes in personnel. General Aslan, the commander of Romanian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, lost his position. He was succeeded by General Averescu, hitherto the leader of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, who in turn handed his command over to General Crainicianu.

General Zayonchkovsky didn't carry out his assignment of trying to recapture Turtukai. Instead he continued to push toward Dobric on the 7<sup>th</sup>. The Serbian Division, which consisted of former Aus-Hung. prisoners of war of Southern Slav nationality and had little combat value, was able to win some success against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of 6 Bulgarian Divisions just south of Kara Senan. Then, however, the ground they gained was retaken when parts of the mobile garrison of Varna and of 1 Bulgarian Cav Div intervened.<sup>215</sup>

Now the Romanian high command was concerned that their 9 ID, left isolated in Silistria, could suffer the same fate that had overtaken 17 ID in Turtukai. Therefore at night on the 7<sup>th</sup> they ordered the evacuation of the fortress. In the afternoon of 8 September the 9 ID pulled back to Lipnita. Next day German Uhlans of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, racing ahead of 1 Bulgarian ID, rode into the abandoned fortress on the Danube.<sup>216</sup> On 9 September

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214 Dabija, Vol. I, p. 193

215 Dabija, Vol. I, p. 310. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Considering that the Entente had put great store in the traditional affection of the Bulgarian people for Russia, it was a serious error of judgment to send a division of Serbs, Bulgaria's mortal enemy, into Dobruja. (Cruttwell, "A History of the Great War" [London, 1934], p. 295).

216 Hiller, p. 233

Zayonchkovsky's group was deployed from west to east with 9 Romanian ID, 3 Russian CD, the Serbian Division, 61 Russian ID, 19 Romanian ID and 5 Calarsi Bde, approximately on a line from Lake Oltina through Jokari Mahala, Musu bej and Kara Omer to Mangalia. Thus after nine days of campaigning they had already been pushed back 50 to 90 km from the border with Bulgaria.

#### Dissension in the Russo-Romanian coalition

After this first, catastrophic defeat the Romanians also experienced the disadvantages of coalition warfare. On 8 September the Russian Chief of Staff General Alexeiev sent a message through Col. Tatarinov, his plenipotentiary attached to the Romanian high command; he demanded increased security measures against the Bulgarians. He wanted four or five division to reinforce the Silistria area on the right wing of the Russian auxiliary corps so that a new front could be established between Silistria and Dobric. The original plan of operations in Transylvania should be altered so that the only advance would be from the Kronstadt-Dorna Watra front toward the west, and it would proceed only as far as the line Hermannstadt-Maramaros Sziget while remaining firmly linked with the left wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. Alexeiev recommended defensive operations in the area west of the Alt, with special attention paid to the stretch of the Danube between Orsova and Calafatu. He went on to state that Romania couldn't count on support from Sarrail's Army for the moment. The main objective should be to assemble units for a decisive blow; but Alexeiev left his allies unclear about where he thought this blow should be delivered.

On 8 September the Romanian King sent a call for help to the Tsar, reminding Nicholas II of his duty as an ally and requesting support for the Danube front. But this had little effect. The Tsar did decide to send 115 ID from the North Front to Dobruja, but otherwise at the suggestion of his own Chief of Staff advised that only the minimal number of divisions necessary should be assembled in Dobruja. The campaign would be decided in Galicia, where the Russians - and also their opponents - had deployed strong forces. A victory for Russian arms here would also make it easier for the Romanian army to fulfill their assignment in Transylvania.<sup>217</sup>

The Romanians carried out the Russians' requests to the greatest possible extent. With an order on 9 September they created in Dobruja an independent army under Zayonchkovsky, which they

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217 Dabija, Vol. I, pp. 313 ff. Vassiliev, p. 84

intended initially to reinforce to a strength of five battle-ready divisions. For this purpose they also drew 2 ID from 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The divisions newly assigned to the Dobruja army (5, 12 and 2 ID), along with the remnants of 15 ID, were to detrain at Cernavoda and Medzidie between 10 and 17 September. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, now commanded by Averescu, was responsible only for guarding Wallachia on the northern bank of the Danube (east of the mouth of the Alt). 20 ID, stationed to the west of the Alt, was assigned to 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The general offensive in Transylvania was temporarily suspended. Therefore the 1<sup>st</sup> and North Armies fell onto the defensive. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was deploying so that it could either stay on the defensive if necessary or resume the advance into the sector along the Alt and Homorod Brook between Fogaras and Homorod Almas.

The result of the first two weeks at war had been very depressing for the Romanians. Their army had been forced onto the strategic defensive in Transylvania as well as in Dobruja.

## **5. Events in Transylvania from 5 to 13 September**

### **a. Advance of 11 Romanian ID toward the Hatszeg basin, 5-11 September**

Before the troops of G.Lt Staabs had assembled in sufficient strength to carry out their mission ("To defeat the enemy who'd invaded through Hermannstadt and farther east"), the Romanians belabored both wings of 1<sup>st</sup> Army so strongly that the feasibility of the task assigned to the southwestern group seemed to be seriously in question.

On 5 September the Romanian 11 ID, instructed to advance into the Hatszeg basin, attacked 144 Inf Bde on the heights north of the Romanian Schyl; on the next day they also attacked at Krivadia. Col. Berger's troops were able to repulse the enemy, but they had to be reinforced by two Landsturm infantry battalions hitherto stationed in the Iron Gate pass, plus a mountain battery.

The Romanians struck once more on the 7<sup>th</sup>, with one group over the heights and another along the railroad. The latter managed in the evening to break through along a four kilometer front by Krivadia. On the next day a counterattack was mounted by 2½ Aus-Hung. battalions and 1½ battalions from 187 German ID; they managed to retake the heights north of Baru mr., but the enemy

were able to envelop the western wing of 144 Brigade on the hotly contested ridge north of Romanian Schyl. Col. Berger therefore pulled all this troops back to a line running along the ridge between Retiezat and Hobica, and then from Hobica to Ohaba-Ponor. The Romanian pursuit was hampered by the destruction of bridges in the Strell valley.

G.Lt Staabs assumed command of his group at Karlsburg in the morning of 8 September. From 187 ID he quickly sent IR 187 and four batteries to 144 Inf Bde, and placed the divisional commander, G.Lt Sunkel, in charge of all troops engaged in the Hatszeg sector. Sunkel's assignment was to throw the enemy out of the Strell valley or at least to prevent the Romanians from advancing out of the Hatszeg basin toward the Iron Gate Pass or, especially, north toward the Maros valley. Other parts of the 187<sup>th</sup> Division - an infantry regiment and seven batteries - meanwhile assembled at Mühlbach; from Hon IR 302 (which rejoined 51 Hon ID on 9 September) they took over the task of guarding the town toward the southeast and south.<sup>218</sup>

However, the enemy didn't penetrate further into the Hatszeg basin. They were content to occupy the Petroseny coal mines. Since the Romanian high command ordered in the evening of 6 September that the offensive should be suspended, and since I Corps had been weakened by the departure of 2 ID, General Culcer instructed 11 ID to stay on the defensive. As directed by I Corps HQ on 11 September, 11 ID built up a position on the line Baru mr. - Oboroca - Tulisa.

### **b. Developments at Hermannstadt and northwest of Kronstadt, 5-13 September**

Unlike the Romanian 11 ID, the enemy troops in front of Hermannstadt - who on the 8<sup>th</sup> were placed under the commander of 13 ID as the "Alt Corps" - were quite inactive. This allowed the defenders to relieve 143 Inf Bde on the 4<sup>th</sup> without any difficulty, even though Hon IR 302, their replacement, didn't

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218 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original is a little unclear about the disposition of 187 ID, since it states that "the rest" of the German division was at Mühlbach. Actually two regiments (# 187 and 189) were in the Hatszeg sector with four batteries. IR # 188 with seven batteries (the main body of FAR 39) and one of the divisional cavalry squadrons (6/DR 16) was detached at Mühlbach. See the Prussian General Staff work, "Die Schlachten und Gefechte des Grossen Krieges 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1919), p. 219.

arrive from Mühlbach until five days later. Meanwhile some energetically-led scouting detachments annoyed the Romanians and deceived them into believing they were opposed by strong forces. In retaliation, four Romanian battalions and one battery undertook a thrust from Freck through Cornatielu toward Schellenberg on the 7<sup>th</sup>. The enemy took 1000 men prisoner by surprise, but then came under artillery fire and were disrupted; 900 of the prisoners escaped.<sup>219</sup> The 1 Calarasi Bde, reinforced by some infantry, repeated the attempt in this same area on the 10<sup>th</sup>, but suffered a similar setback.

On the next day Schmettow's Cavalry Corps deployed on the front next to 51 Hon ID. The German cavalry occupied the heights north of the Hermannstadt-Cornatielu road. Farther east the 7 Cav Bde of k.u.k. 1 CD dug firmly into position and sent outposts forward to the edge of heights on the north bank of the Alt. 6 Cav Bde came to the Agnetheln-Schönberg area and established their outposts between Rucoru and Calboru.

The appearance of German troops east of Hermannstadt and on the Mühlbach-Hermannstadt railroad caused the commander of the Romanian Alt Corps great concern. To better protect his western flank, he attacked and took a hill overlooking a bend in the rail line east of Szecsel; two days later, however, this position was recovered by two battalions of 187 ID.

Farther east the k.u.k. 71 ID had stationed 141 Inf Bde on their right along the northern bank of the Alt between Halmagy and a point east of Repts; 142 Inf Bde was farther north, along the small Homorod Brook as far as Homorod Okland. The Division's outposts in the Geister Woods were being pushed back by the slowly-advancing 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army. General Crainicianu, who assumed command of that Army on the 7<sup>th</sup>, had II Corps move their 3 ID to Mundra and Sarkany on the 8<sup>th</sup>, while 4 ID reached Krebsbach and Rothbach. The 21 ID stayed at Zeiden. The III Corps was held back, with 22 ID taking the place of the departed 5 ID at Marienburg and 6 ID still at Sepsí Szt. György; a detachment was on the Corps' right to maintain a link with North Army at Mikoujfalú.

### **c. The Romanian North Army continues its offensive, 5-11 September**

#### 5-6 September

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219 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 48 ff.

On 5 September the Romanian North Army completed their second deployment. The objective of the commander, General Presan, was now to occupy the heights west of the Gyergyo and the Csik, entailing an advance to the line of ridges through the G6rgen, Hargitta and Barot Mountains.<sup>220</sup> To reinforce the right wing, the main body of 8 ID was pulled from the Haromszek and sent by rail to Piatra, whence it marched through the Bekas Pass and Gyergyo Ditro; the men were deployed between 14 and 7 ID. For now the 15 Inf Bde of 8 ID stayed on the southern wing of North Army.

Toward noon on 6 September the Romanian 14 ID began a double envelopment assault against 16 Lst Mtn Bde, which held a fortified line just west of Marosheviz. Since the scanty reserves weren't sufficient to prevent the Brigade from being outflanked, GM Grallert planned to move them back in the evening to a prepared position at Zenkany. The enemy, however, guided by local Romanian-speaking citizens, had already moved around the northern wing and were behind this position. Even if all the reserves were committed, there was little hope of holding the new line, because the k.u. Landsturm Infantry Battalion III/7, fighting west of Gyergyo Remete, had been pushed back to the ridge east of Laposnya. GM Grallert therefore intended to pull back in the Maros valley to Palota on the 7<sup>th</sup>. The Gendarmerie Battalion was to withdraw to Bistricioara where they could restore the link with 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

HQ of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, however, objected to such a long retreat by 16 Lst Mtn Bde; this caused GdI Arz to order that resistance should be resumed at least at Mesterhaza. To reinforce the endangered northern wing the already-planned transfer of 72 ID was now initiated. The railroad was still being used by 10 Bav ID (moving to 7<sup>th</sup> Army), so 72 ID could move only as far as Szamos Ujvar by train; from here they marched on foot to Lechnitz (17 km southwest of Bistritz).

The k.u.k. high command now also intervened forcefully. They declared that the pre-condition for successful operations against the Romanians was the firm commitment of all the troops to surrender no territory unless absolutely necessary, and not without first causing some damage to the enemy.

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220 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 268

7-11 September

On 7 September the 16 Lst Mtn Bde, as ordered, took up a position on both sides of Mesterhaza. The Romanian 14 ID followed at a respectful distance. There were two groups connecting the two brigades of 61 ID - k.u. Landsturm Battalion III/17 at Laposnya and k.u. Landsturm Battalion II/12 which was still an hour's march west of Gyergyo Alfalu. G.Lt Morgen, who officially took command of the area on the 8<sup>th</sup> at Maros Vasarhely, had already on the 7<sup>th</sup> sent 1 Lst Huss Bde toward Parajd to block the upper valley of the Little Kokel and to reinforce Battalion II/12. 19 Lst Mtn Bde, stationed just west of Csik Szereda, was attacked by parts of Romanian 7 ID along a broad front in the late afternoon of the September 7. Because they were threatened on both wings, the Brigade pulled back to the heights by Tolvajos Pass. To defend the road from Gyergyo Vaslab to Szekely-Udvarhely, Col. Szabo had detached half a battalion.

On 8 and 9 September the fighting for 61 ID was restricted to defending against isolated Romanian thrusts by groups spread along a front of 120 km, much of it in forests. In one of these actions the Landsturm Infantry Battalion II/12 pulled back on the 9<sup>th</sup> to the heights by the pass southeast of the Mezöhavas # 1777, but in the night better counsel prevailed and they returned to the edge of the basin. 19 Lst Mtn Bde was also strongly threatened; therefore G.Lt Morgen took three Bosnian battalions, which had detrained at Schässsburg and were supposed to join 71 ID, and sent them instead to Szelekey-Udvarhely. They arrived there on the 10<sup>th</sup> and were united as a regiment under Lt Col. Kopfstein.

The units of Presan's Army prepared on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> for a new attack. For this purpose 14 ID came up to Mesterhaza, 8 ID ended its concentration at Gyergyo Ditro (for an advance through Laposnya), and 4 Mixed Bde moved from Gyergyo Szt. Miklos through Gyergyo Alfalu toward Parajd. 15 Inf Bde joined 7 ID at Csik Szereda. 2 CD, stationed between Kukuk Heights # 1560 and Mikoujfalú, prepared to reconnoiter into the upper Vargyas valley and toward Barot.

The Romanian offensive resumed on 10 September. 19 Lst Mtn Bde was forced by 7 Romanian ID to retreat to a position blocking the road 10 km east of Szt. Egyhaza-Olahfalú. Also their detachment on the left had to pull back to a point two hours' march north of Zetelaka. Col. Csecsi-Nagy's Group (Landsturm Battalion II/12 and the main body of 1 Lst Huss Bde) was first

pushed back by 4 Romanian Mixed Bde to the heights east of Mezöhavas and then by a new attack to a position 10 km east of Parajd. Landsturm Battalion III/17, confronted by much larger forces from 8 Romanian ID, suffered substantial casualties and had to withdraw to Al. Fancsal. Then they were reinforced by a half battalion, a foot squadron and two guns, and placed under the command of Lt Col. Hettinger. Finally the 14 ID, attacking on both wings, pushed back Bernatsky's Brigade at Mesterhaza. The defenders' southern wing was broken and their artillery in the valley came under attack. Only with difficulty were the scanty reserves and Armored Train XI able to preserve the guns from capture. By evening the badly battered Brigade was just east of Palota. The Romanian 14 ID shifted a detachment of all arms north to clear Aus-Hung. detachments from the uppermost Negra valley.

On 11 September the situation for the k.u.k. 61 ID was rather quiet. The Romanian North Army moved forward in the Görgeny Mountains up to the line Palota-Mezöhavas, and in the Hargitta and Barot Mountains as far as the watershed.

#### **d. Decisions of the commanders in Transylvania, 10-13 September**

Early on 10 September the commander of the northern group, G.Lt Morgen, learned of the new attack of the Romanian North Army, whose strength he estimated as four divisions; he was concerned that this Army could break through toward Szekely-Udvarhely and Parajd. Therefore he reverted to his plan to fall upon the enemy when they emerged from the Görgeny and Hargitta Mountains. To prepare for this operation, in the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> he ordered that the brigades of Col. Csecsi-Nagy and Col. Szabo should pull back in front of the larger enemy force toward a line running from Bögöz (7 km southwest of Szekely-Udvarhely) through Szekely-Kersztur to Erdö Szt. György. Meanwhile the northern groups of 61 ID should give up ground only slowly. He wanted to carry out the counterattack toward the southeast with 39 Hon ID and 72 ID. The setback suffered by Csecsi-Nagy's Brigade on the 10<sup>th</sup> caused G.Lt Morgen concern that this unit would have to retreat faster than was desirable; therefore he sent Lt Col. Kopfstein's Bosnian Regiment in a forced march from Szekely-Udvarhely to Parajd.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Army's analysis of the situation

Meanwhile on 8 September the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army had learned from

Teschen that the German Alpenkorps and 89 ID were coming by train; the latter was being sent in lieu of 3 Gd or 208 ID. GdI Arz intended to send the Alpenkorps through Alvinc and Mühlbach so that it could take part in the attack of Staabs' Group against the enemy by Hermannstadt. For technical reasons involving the railroads, 89 ID had to come up through Klausenburg and to detrain at Kocsard. The Division was earmarked to join the southwest group, but if necessary it could be sent instead to Morgen's group.

Influenced by events on Transylvania's eastern front, GdI Arz altered his planning on the 10<sup>th</sup>. In a situation report submitted to Teschen he declared that the enemy advance out of the Csik and the Gyergyó was the most dangerous; supported by G.Lt Morgen's suggestion, he stated that he could strike a blow against the Romanian North Army with 72 ID, 39 Hon ID, and the German 89 ID (the latter however wouldn't be ready for action at Maros Ludas until the 14<sup>th</sup>). This was all the more necessary since the North Army, if they continued their advance, could reach the Görönybach valley, Parajd and Székely-Udvarhely, thus threatening the north flank of 71 ID. Formation of the 71<sup>st</sup> was almost finished, and Arz hoped that under their energetic commander they would offer prolonged resistance against the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which was feeling its way forcefully only through Sarkány toward Fogaras but otherwise was staying inactive. The HQ at Klausenburg believed that 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army was either shifting parts of its four divisions in the Burzenland toward the north or giving them up for the Dobruja front. On the 11<sup>th</sup> G.Lt Morgen ordered 71 ID to assemble their main body at Deutsch Kreutz, so that they could strike a blow toward Székely Udvarhely from the south against the advancing Romanian North Army; only weak outposts would be left on the Alt between Fogaras and Heviz. However, 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ objected to thus weakening the defenses against 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army. Therefore it was planned to bring the trains carrying the Alpenkorps ahead to Elisabethstadt, where the unit could either be deployed toward the south or sent east to strengthen Morgen's group if necessary.

The enemy's inactivity in front of Hermannstadt made any attack against them unnecessary for the moment. Even if they succeeded in pushing 51 Hon ID to the north, thrusts on the flank from Cavalry Corps Schmettow on the east and by the German troops assembled at Mühlbach on the west would delay any Romanian advance. It seemed more important to 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ to completely recover the area around Petroseny by throwing the enemy back over the border. This attack should begin after the arrival of

the k.k. Lst IR 9, coming by train from Albania.

1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ had no concern over the Orsova sector. Here on 6 September the 145 Inf Bde attacked toward the heights on the border southeast of Herkulesbad. They weren't as fully successful as had been hoped, but FJB 19 came near to Vrf. Cocosiuului. Fighting continued to the night of 9-10 September, and GdI Arz believed that the attack had put an end to the Romanians' desire to advance further in the Danube valley. More disturbing were reports that Russian troops had appeared in front of Orsova and also in the Schyl valley, but these reports were soon proven to be completely without foundation. On the 8<sup>th</sup> a German battalion was sent to Mehadia; although they didn't engage in any fighting, they stayed for ten days to make the Romanians believe that stronger German units were concentrating here.

The k.u.k. high command agreed with GdI Arz's plans. They specified only that the 51 Hon ID should be placed under G.Lt Schmettow so that there would be unified leadership at Hermannstadt; this order was passed on through Klausenburg. The AOK was sending more units to Transylvania: FML von Fabini's k.u.k. VI Corps HQ (to lead 72 and 61 ID plus 1 Lst Huss Bde), 37 Hon ID (initially without their artillery) and finally HR 2, whose Szekel personnel had asked to be employed in their homeland.<sup>221</sup>

#### The groups of Morgen and Staabs receive their orders

Per the inter-allied agreement, the decisions taken at Klausenburg and Teschen involving the Transylvania campaign were communicated to Pless. The German OHL agreed with the intended use of Group Staabs (to first throw the enemy back through the Szurduk Pass), as well as with the assembly of 89 ID at Maros Ludas and its eventual advance to Maros Vasarhely. On the other hand they didn't believe an attack by the northeastern group was justified. G.Lt Morgen himself had reported directly to the OHL that the Aus-Hung. troops under his command had little capability for an offensive. Also, part of the German 89 ID consisted of older troops who weren't sufficiently in shape for marching after long service in the trenches. The HQ at Pless didn't believe that the counterattack planned by G.Lt Morgen had much chance of success; they preferred that the northeastern group should stay essentially on the defensive as hitherto. On the other hand, GdI Ludendorff again urged that the decision

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221 Hitherto HR 2 had been employed as divisional cavalry with 16 and 35 ID of the k.u.k. XII Corps near Baranowicze.

should be sought by Staabs' group as soon as sufficient forces were in place. Therefore he ordered that the Alpenkorps should detrain, as originally planned, at Mühlbach. The k.u.k. AOK concurred with his decision.

Based on this exchange of views with the German OHL, GO Conrad now (on the 12<sup>th</sup>) issued an order to 1<sup>st</sup> Army regarding the mission of Group Morgen. It was based on the supposition that the Romanians' North Army could hardly thrust past Szekely-Udvarhely and farther north unless their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army simultaneously advanced from the Kronstadt area over the stretch of the Alt between Fogaras and Heviz, now just weakly guarded by 71 ID. Such an advance by 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army north through Fogaras and Reps would prevent any attack by G.Lt Morgen's striking group toward the east. Since GO Conrad was also greatly concerned about the security of the southern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, he ordered that any Romanian advance in the area around and north of the road leading through Parajd should only be delayed by 72 ID, the northern group of 61 ID and the reinforced 1 Lst Huss Bde. Conrad went along with G.Lt Morgen only insofar as he agreed that local successes should be sought against the enemy as the latter emerged from the wooded mountains, which would separate them into isolated, widely separated groups. The divisions assembled on the southern wing (39 Hon ID and 89 ID) should under no circumstances advance over the Little Kokel toward the south because of possible menace from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army.

At first G.Lt Morgen didn't want to give up his plans for an offensive. However, when he learned that the OHL at Pless also wanted him to remain on the defensive, he decided on the 13<sup>th</sup> to carry out his operation accordingly. 71 ID (to which the 19 Lst Mtn Bde was attached from the 13<sup>th</sup>) was to delay the enemy advance; the reserves which GM Goldbach had assembled at Deutsch Kreutz should do as much damage to the Romanians as possible. The northern wing of Group Morgen - the reinforced 1 Lst Huss Bde stationed east of Parajd (placed directly under the German corps commander) and the half of 61 ID fighting in the Görgeny and Maros valleys - would hinder the enemy as covering troops. When pushed back, the entire force would continue to oppose any enemy advance over the Kelemen Mountains and past the prepared Maros-Kokel position. For this purpose the 39 Hon ID would deploy on the 13<sup>th</sup> at Ol. Telek-Mikhaza (southeast of Szasz Regen) and 72 ID at Monor and N. Sajo (north of Szasz Regen). 72 ID had sent Battalion VII/73 under Lt Col. Sander, along with two mountain batteries, to support Ziegler's Gendarmerie Battalion in the direction of the Bistricioara # 1994. German 89 ID moved ahead to Maros Vasarhely.

Meanwhile the southwestern group of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, left alone almost completely by the enemy, were preparing for the upcoming operations. G.Lt Staabs planned to begin his counterattack on the 14<sup>th</sup> in the Hatszeg sector. After liberating the Petroseny basin, he intended to advance with all available parts of 187 ID through Mühlbach for an attack at Hermannstadt. Until then the 51 Hon ID, supported by parts of the Cavalry Corps, would continue to defend the heights north of the city. The group at Orsova should also hinder the enemy's advance. To relieve G.Lt Staabs of responsibility for this sector, on the 12<sup>th</sup> the k.u.k. high command placed 145 Inf Bde and the Danube Group under a unified command, led by Col. Ritter von Szivo with the HQ of 10 Cav Bde.

### The Romanian plans

On 9 September the Romanian high command had ordered the temporary suspension of the offensive in Transylvania. General Presan, commanding the Romanian Northern Army, delayed implementation of this order until the 11<sup>th</sup>, when his troops reached the line of ridges through the Görgeny, Hargitta and Barot Mountains. He intended to fortify this line, as well as positions on the eastern edge of the Gyergyo and of the Csik; farther east he would build a back-up position on a line running through the entrances to the passes. 15 Inf Bde, in the Army's reserve, shifted north to the area Gyergyo Szt. Miklos-Gyergyo Vaslab. 2 CD by itself would cover the large gap on the left as far as the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.<sup>222</sup>

The continuing deterioration of the situation in Dobruja compelled the Romanian high command on the 12<sup>th</sup> to once more order the troops in Transylvania to stay on the defensive. Furthermore, in order to free up more units 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would shorten their front by occupying the line Fogaras-Homorod Almas. North Army would move 2 CD forward on their southern wing to Lövéte and Szekely-Udvarhely. To maintain a link with 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Crainicianu's Army would send a mixed detachment to Ucia d.j. (24 km west of Fogaras).

## **6. The Romanian theater of operations from 14 to 19 September**

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222 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 276

### a. 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army crosses the Alt

The 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of September passed without any notable events on the eastern front of Transylvania. This enabled GM Goldbach to leave just one infantry and one Landsturm battalion, plus three Gendarmerie battalions and a battery, along the line of the Alt and the G. Homorod Brook between Fogaras, Katzendorf and Homorod Szt. Pal (3500 riflemen and 6 guns on a 48 km front). Goldbach assembled the main body of his Division at Kanyad, intending to deliver a powerful blow against the enemy on 15 September if given the opportunity.<sup>223</sup> In fact this opportunity was offered, since General Crainicianu intended to cross the Alt on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Already before daybreak on the 15<sup>th</sup> the river was crossed by 3 ID of II Romanian Corps between Fogaras and Comana d.j. and by 22 ID of III Corps on both sides of Heviz. The enemy came over mostly without bridging equipment, and pushed the weak outposts of the k.u.k. 71 ID back from the bank and past the line Fogaras - D. Tekes - Reps. The 2 Calarasi Bde, on the other hand, suffered a sharp setback at Voila from Col. von Pongracz's k.u.k. 6 Cav Bde.

The enemy advance, which had been expected by GM Goldbach, strengthened his conviction that he should employ his main body for a counterattack. Around noon he received a report that a Romanian troop column had moved through Katzendorf toward Homorod, so Goldbach sent his available units - IR 82 and Infantry Battalion V/43 - to thrust south. This group struck the southern column of the 6 Romanian ID, advancing between Al. Rakos and Homorod Okland, in the flank and rear. In a lively action which developed on the forested mountains west of Katzendorf, the Romanian detachments were thrown back to Reps. Enemy reserves then in turn pushed back the Szekels, who however were finally able to hold onto the heights south of Königsdorf.<sup>224</sup>

Meanwhile GM Goldbach hurled HR 2, which had arrived by railroad

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223 Bajnoczy, "The 50 days of mobile operations by the k.u.k. 71<sup>st</sup> Division" (in Magyar; Budapest, 1931), pp. 57 ff.

224 Kiszling, "Das Gefecht bei Königsdorf" (Mil. wiss. Mitt., Vienna; 1930 edition, pp. 385 ff.). GM Anton Goldbach was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for his excellent leadership of 71 ID in the Königsdorf action as well as for his brilliant activity in the fighting in the Ojtoz Pass in October 1916.

east of Schässsburg, toward the south to maintain the link with Schmettow's Cavalry Corps. However, after receiving a report in the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> that 19 Lst Mtn Bde had retreated in front of Romanian 7 ID to Fenyed (5 km northeast of Szekely-Udvarhely), on the 16<sup>th</sup> he pulled back the main body of his Division. As planned, they took up a position on a line between Erkedt and the heights south of Denndorf, where they could block the roads leading from Reps and Fogaras to Schässsburg.

The enemy didn't interfere with this movement, because their three attacking divisions had reached their goal, the line Fogaras-Reps-G. Homorodbach. Also the bold stroke by the 82<sup>nd</sup> at Königsdorf may have had an impact on the Romanians. Their 2 CD hadn't taken part in the advance; in place of this Division the 3 Calarasi Bde kept up the link with the North Army at Homorod Szt. Marton. 4 ID of II Corps stayed in the plains along the Alt southeast of Fogaras; 21 ID was in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's reserve at Helsdorf and Krebsbach.

On 17 September the Romanians attacked from Fogaras against 6 Cav Bde and were able to push back Col. Pongracz's hussars. Since there was no chance of a successful counterattack, the latter took up a new position on the western bank of the line of ponds stretching north from the Kl. Schenk.

Meanwhile the center of the Romanian North Army also moved forward somewhat. On the 18<sup>th</sup> they pushed Col. Csecsi-Nagy's Group back behind the line Korond-Parajd; on the next day they forced Lt Col. Hettinger's Group to withdraw from Al. Fancsal to a point half way to Libanfalfa.

On the extreme northern wing of Presan's Army, the detachment which Romanian 14 ID had sent north made contact with the Russians, and on 16 September forced the Gendarmerie Battalion back from Ptr. Pisciu # 2022 to Heights # 2102. In response to an appeal from 7<sup>th</sup> Army, concerned about keeping up their link with 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Lt Col. Sander's detachment was now sent to support the Gendarmes. Moreover the k.u.k. high command wanted to dispel this threat to the supply line running through the Borgo Pass to XI Corps, and instructed 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ to shift a regiment from 37 Hon ID (arriving at Lechnitz) through Borgo Prund. Hon IR 18 was selected for this mission; they were sent to Tihuca and placed under XI Corps HQ. On his own initiative, GdI Arz sent a second regiment from the division (Hon IR 13), along with a mountain battery, to Borgo Prund under the HQ of 73 Hon Inf Bde. Meanwhile Ziegler's Gendarmerie Battalion had to pull back further, toward the Bistricioara Heights # 1994. Lt

Col. Sander counterattacked on the 17<sup>th</sup>, but couldn't break the enemy resistance. Even the arrival of two battalions of reinforcements (1½ from 72 ID, ½ from XI Corps) couldn't improve the situation.

### **b. Recovery of the Petroseny coal mines, 14-19 September**

On 12 and 13 September G.Lt Sunkel prepared to carry out his assignment to recover the Petroseny coal mines. The attacking group had 14 battalions and 12 batteries (of which 5 battalions and 7 batteries were from 187 ID) and deployed on the line Heights # 2456 (east of Retiezat) - Baru-mr. The main body under Col. Berger (commanding k.u.k. 144 Inf Bde) was in the Strell valley; three battalions held firmly to the ridges extending to the southwest.

The attack began on the 14<sup>th</sup>. On both sides of the valley the troops advanced only as far as Krivadia. The enemy, estimated as 18 battalions strong, defended themselves gallantly.<sup>225</sup> On the 15<sup>th</sup> the Romanians launched strong counter-strokes and inflicted substantial casualties on the allies, so G.Lt Sunkel asked for reinforcements. During the 15<sup>th</sup> he was already given three battalions of the Alpenkorps as they arrived by train.

Around 5:00 PM on the 16<sup>th</sup>, Sunkel's reinforced group renewed their assault, which continued in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>; they threw the enemy back through Merisor, capturing four guns and five machine guns. The Romanian 11 ID now fell back to the ridge at Baniti. Here they were attacked once more on the 18<sup>th</sup>; their own reinforcements - four battalions and three batteries - came up by railroad but arrived too late. The defenders' resistance rapidly waned and they were again driven back. Meanwhile the allies, advancing from the north, were already threatening Zsilyvajdevulkan. Therefore the commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army (General Culcer), who was on the battlefield, ordered his 11 ID to retreat to the two passes on the border.<sup>226</sup> In the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunkel's battalions stood on the Tulisa, the Oborooca and the northern edge of Petroseny. On the next day all of the coal mines, vital for supplying the Hungarian railroads, were in allied hands along with the Szurduk Pass. Only at the Vulkan Pass were Romanian detachments still

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225 Actually the Romanian 11 ID had 15 battalions and 12 batteries (Dabija, Vol. II, p. 32).

226 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 34

holding on; they were dislodged by the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Sunkel's Group had reached their objective, the international border south of the Romanian Schyl. The threat to the Maros railroad was ended. German units no longer needed in the area were free for their planned deployment at Hermannstadt.

### **c. The Romanians and Russians retreat in the Dobruja, 10-19 September**

After the extraordinarily quick and decisive successes won in Dobruja by 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army in their first operation, they paused until 12 September before pursuing the enemy. This delay, which was little to the liking of GFM Mackensen, was caused by logistical problems and a desire to let the first elements of the arriving VI Turkish Corps get closer. To make the attack as powerful as possible, G.Lt Toshev deployed the bulk of his Army entirely in the area between the Danube and the Dobric-Medzidie railroad; only the 1 Bulgarian CD would advance east of the rail line.

In the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army came within artillery range of Zayonchkovsky's Army, which was stationed between Lake Oltina, Kara Omer and Mangalia. Toshev's northern wing - Lt Col. Bode's German Brigade<sup>227</sup> and Bulgarian 1 ID - began to attack on the 13<sup>th</sup>; they were able to drive the Romanian 9 ID and the Serbian Division back about four kilometers. Parts of 5 Romanian ID, which was just arriving, backed up the retreating troops. The Bulgarians' other infantry units were content just to move up to the enemy positions. Their cavalry gained ground east of the railroad.

The Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army resumed their offensive on the next day with a strong left wing, trying to push the enemy toward the sea. But Zayonchkovsky, taking fresh courage from the arrival of Romanian reinforcements (5 and 2 ID, plus 15 ID which was rebuilt with new troops), also decided to attack on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Bode's Brigade found it easy to throw the already shaken Romanian 9 ID back on the 14<sup>th</sup> to a line stretching from Lake Marleanu toward the south. As 2 Romanian ID arrived, it was caught up in the retreat, and both divisions withdrew toward

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227 This Brigade consisted of Major Hammerstein's detachment plus a German infantry regiment and a k.u.k. 30.5 cm mortar battery.

Talisman. The German success couldn't be further exploited because the outcome of the encounter battle between the Russian corps and the 1 and 4 Bulgarian ID had still to be decided. Finally the Bulgarians were able to push their opponents back to the Teke Deresi - Kara Omer front.

The results of the day's fighting, especially on the northern wing, robbed Zayonchkovsky of all his confidence. During the night he led his army back to the line Rasova-Enigea-Copadin-Tuzla.

On 15 September the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army was in pursuit, striving to envelop Zayonchkovsky's Army on both wings. The Russian Army commander wanted to take advantage of the isolation of the German brigade, which was far in front, and early on the 16<sup>th</sup> had his right wing fall upon Bode. However, the Romanians collapsed; the German battalions counterattacked and even overran the Romanian artillery.

Toshev ordered a decisive attack for the 17<sup>th</sup>; it was to be carried out by all his infantry units in the area between the Danube and the railroad. Since the heavy artillery didn't deploy in time, however, the operation had to be postponed until the next day. Then the Bulgarian 4 ID was able to gain some ground from the Serbian Division (stationed west of Copadin).

Toshev attacked anew on the 19<sup>th</sup> with the goal of breaking through the enemy center, which was already wavering. However Zayonchkovsky counter-attacked here as well as on the eastern wing. The result was a wild, raging encounter battle. The fighting convinced the Bulgarian army commander that the offensive strength of his divisions, which had no more reserves and were suffering from lack of ammunition, was exhausted. The enemy's numerical strength was also coming into play; the Romanians had 2, 5, 9, 12, 15 and 19 ID plus 5 Calarsi Bde, and the Russians had 61 and 115 ID, 3 CD, and the Serbian Division. Therefore G.Lt Toshev pulled back the center and right wing of his army somewhat; he intended to temporarily revert to the defensive while awaiting the arrival of reinforcements. He placed the first two regiments of the approaching 25 Turkish ID on his right wing to keep it from being enveloped.<sup>228</sup>

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228 Dabija, Vol. I, pp. 340 ff.

#### **d. Command decisions regarding the East, through mid-September**

##### The Romanians

The course of the Romanian Army's operations by mid-September had hardly satisfied the expectations of the high command or of public opinion in the Kingdom. The conquest of Transylvania, which they had hoped could be carried out quickly and with a minimum of casualties, was still far from being accomplished. The high command, in their HQ at Buftea, were receiving rebukes about this from their allies in the form of more or less friendly "advice." The North, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies had indeed been able to occupy the great basins on the eastern and southern edge of Transylvania. However, until now they had been unable to achieve victory over Arz's Army, which had always been able to avoid a decisive action by withdrawing in brilliantly conducted actions. The appearance of German troops in front of Hermannstadt and in the Hatszeg basin, where they had even opened a counterattack, compelled the Romanians to be cautious.

Meanwhile the situation in Dobruja had developed into a catastrophe. After the surprisingly quick fall of Turtukai and the evacuation of Dobric and Silistria, the Romanian and Russian units streamed back to the north. After another retreat in the night of 14-15 September it seemed doubtful at Buftea whether their opponents could be halted in front of the Cernavoda-Constanta railroad. If this important transportation line fell into enemy hands, Romania would have lost its only land route to the Black Sea. The capital as well as the armies stationed in Transylvania would be endangered from the east.

In his distress, King Ferdinand was advised by Minister President Bratianu to convoke a council of war, which was held at his HQ on the 15<sup>th</sup>; all the Romanian army commanders participated. Those from the Transylvania front were despondent about the chances that the campaign would succeed. General Averescu, commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, still had the most confidence; he proposed to eliminate the unbearable pressure in Dobruja with a blow against the Bulgarians. For this purpose the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should be reinforced south of Bucharest and then would cross the Danube. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army, pinned down by Zayonchkovsky's Army in front of the line Rasova-Copadin-Tuzla, would be hit from the rear and destroyed.<sup>229</sup> In his bold imagination,

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229 Kiritescu, "Istoria razboiului pentru intregirea Romaniei 1916-1918" (Bucharest, 1922), Vol. I, p. 218. Dabija, Vol. I,

Averescu already saw Turtukai reconquered, Ruscuk occupied, and Romanian cavalry entering Razgrad.

King Ferdinand eagerly adopted Averescu's ideas. At the suggestion of Bratianu he appointed the energetic general commander of "Army Group South", which would control all the Romanian and Russian units facing the Bulgarians. General Valeanu would take command of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, to which the 21 and 22 ID would be added from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Thus the strength of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army increased to 53 battalions, 24 squadrons and 56 batteries. The Dobruja army already had 124 battalions, 31 squadrons and 89 batteries.<sup>230</sup> The Romanians were confident that with this force (totaling 177 battalions, 55 squadrons and 145 batteries) they could beat the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army, which they quite accurately estimated had 73 battalions. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies, weakened by giving up troops, would stay on the defensive; only the North Army was authorized to continue attacking in conjunction with 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army.

This decision represented a complete alteration of the original planning for the war. The main focus had shifted to the southern front, which had already been reinforced since the start of operations by seven infantry and one cavalry divisions (a third of the entire Romanian Army); including the Russians, the front now had 15 infantry and 2½ cavalry divisions. Just 10 infantry and 1 cavalry divisions, plus 4 Calarasi brigades, remained in Transylvania.<sup>231</sup>

#### The other Entente countries

The latest measures of the Romanian high command, in which Brig. General Iliescu had assumed the duties of General Zottu (who'd taken sick), met with a mixed reception from their allies. Both Field Marshal William Robertson (Chief of the English Imperial General Staff) and French Generalissimo Joffre let it be known through their military attachés that they believed a decision should be sought by an energetic operation against Austria-Hungary; Romania should continue to attack in Transylvania to support Russia. Joffre and Robertson were also of the opinion that the Russians should quickly send further units to guard Dobruja. For this purpose Joffre was even willing to forego the

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pp. 336 and 359

230 Averescu, "Operatiile dela Flamanda" (Bucharest, 1924), p. 30 and Appendix 1

231 The 17 ID, ruined at Turtukai, isn't included in these calculations.

services of four Russian brigades which Alexeiev had promised to send to the French theater of operations.

The Stavka Chief of Staff felt otherwise. Alexeiev flatly disagreed with the proposal made by the Western powers after the fall of Turtukai that the Russians should throw 150,000 to 200,000 men into the Balkans and lengthen their front 500 versts to the south. He did agree that a Balkan offensive, by establishing contact with the Army of the Orient, could give Russia access to the badly needed heavy guns which were being produced in the factories of its allies. For the present, however, Alexeiev was counting more heavily on the success of a new offensive which the Russian Southwest Front would launch on 16 September; the objectives were Halicz on the southern wing and Kovel on the northern. On the 11<sup>th</sup> Alexeiev told a representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry that if the French and English were so concerned about the fate of Romania they should send three divisions to Sarrail so he could relieve the Romanians from the south. He now refused to reinforce the Russian expeditionary corps in Dobruja because he didn't want to abandon the offensive in Galicia. In his opinion the war in eastern Europe would be decided on the Russian front. If that front were weakened, "the Germans would here become masters of the house."<sup>232</sup>

Anyway, in mid-September Alexeiev believed that the situation in Dobruja wouldn't deteriorate any further. And even if it did, he would rather withdraw to the lower Danube than send more divisions into Dobruja. The Stavka Chief of Staff disagreed with several persons in the Tsar's HQ who feared the specter of a German-Bulgarian thrust over the Danube delta into the heart of Russia. Under no conditions would he agree to a Balkan campaign that would interfere with developments in the principal Russian theater of operations.

### The Central Powers

In mid-September the high commands of the Central Powers were also making significant decisions regarding operations in the East. The German OHL was paying increased attention to events in Transylvania, especially to the campaign to quickly throw the Romanians back by Petroseny and Hermannstadt. To ensure centralized command here, GdI Ludendorff found it necessary to re-arrange the chain of command in Transylvania as already

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232 From publications of the Stavka and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in Russian; Red Archives, Vol. XXIX, pp. 9 ff.)

suggested by GO Conrad on 31 August. Returning to this suggestion, on 11 September Ludendorff proposed that the HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army<sup>233</sup> should assume command over the troops fighting in southern Transylvania. The Army would be led by GdI Falkenhayn, the former Chief of the General Staff. The northern sector would remain under the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

GO Conrad concurred immediately. In a conference at Pless on the 13<sup>th</sup>, he and GFM Hindenburg agreed that G.Lt Staabs' troops should be reinforced by 76 Res ID and then organized as 9<sup>th</sup> Army. It was planned that they should advance toward the east; along with 1<sup>st</sup> Army, they would drive out the Romanians who'd invaded Transylvania. The new order of battle would take effect when GdI Falkenhayn arrived on the scene.

1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ was advised of these arrangements on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile Group Staabs was still under orders to drive the enemy from the Petroseny area. Also still in effect were the instructions by the k.u.k. high command to G.Lt Morgen (described above) to carry out delaying actions on the eastern front.

Meanwhile the conviction was growing in the German high command that no change in the military situation could currently be anticipated along the stationary fronts in the West and Southwest, in the Russian theater of operations, or in Macedonia. The only way to carry on a war of movement and to recover the initiative was to unleash an offensive against Romania. Therefore on 15 September GFM Hindenburg issued the following order as the first from the "Inter-Allied High Command":

"For now the principal task of the armies placed under the overall command of His Majesty the German Emperor is to hold fast to all positions on the Western, Eastern, Italian and Macedonian fronts while sending all other available units against the Romanians."

These decisions by the opposing parties foreshadowed the next strategic moves on the enormous chessboard of eastern Europe. On the 16<sup>th</sup> General Alexeiev once more sent Brussilov's armies to attack on both sides on the Dniester and in Volhynia. For the Central Powers, GdI Falkenhayn was to first defeat the enemy at Hermannstadt and then with his right wing advance along the

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233 The HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army had held a small part of the Eastern front at Nowogradok until July 1916, but then had been dissolved due to a lack of troops.

northern foot of the Fogaras Mountains - driving east along with 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The Romanians, on the other hand, were preparing to cross the Danube south of Bucharest and then to strike the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army from the west and north.

## ***C. The Romanians are driven out of Transylvania***

### **1. The Battle of Hermannstadt**

#### **a. Falkenhayn's plan of operations**

GdI Falkenhayn arrived at Deva on 17 September; on the 19<sup>th</sup> he assumed command over the units he'd been assigned.<sup>234</sup> He also inherited the tasks allotted to G.Lt Staabs, whose group now made up the western portion of the new German 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Since the mop-up in the Petroseny basin was practically finished, all German units not needed there were to be shifted to Hermannstadt. Here, together with the groups of Krafft and Schmettow already stationed north of the city, they would strike the Romanians deployed to the south. Thus the principal operations in Transylvania became the responsibility of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army.

#### The prospects for 9<sup>th</sup> Army

At first Falkenhayn intended to implement a double envelopment by falling upon the enemy at both points where their wings touched the northern mountain slopes. After surveying the area on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, however, he changed his mind because of the lack of roads along the wooded slopes of the Czibin and Fogaras Mountains. On the other hand, there was an accessible line of ridges in the Czibin Mountains which the Alpenkorps, advancing from Sinna, could use to reach the Red Tower Pass and block the road. If the other units simultaneously launched a concentric assault toward the northern outlet of the Pass, they could win a victory and annihilate the enemy.<sup>235</sup>

Meanwhile agreements were concluded between Teschen and Pless to ensure unity in the handling of Arz's and Falkenhayn's armies. Conrad suggested that orders to both armies should be prepared jointly by the two high commands and issued through the k.u.k. AOK, and GFM Hindenburg concurred. In reality, however, even the first order to 9<sup>th</sup> Army was sent from Pless, a precedent which was followed thereafter. 9<sup>th</sup> Army was led solely by the

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234 Falkenhayn, "Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen die Rumänen und Russen 1916/17" (Berlin, 1921), Vol. I, p. 14

235 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 23 ff. and 29

German OHL, which often intervened in the details of the campaign.<sup>236</sup>

The order issued on the 19<sup>th</sup> instructed 9<sup>th</sup> Army "to strike the enemy who'd invaded Transylvania, in combination with 1<sup>st</sup> Army." Initially 1<sup>st</sup> Army would "delay the enemy advance and hold the Kokel and Maros positions, while remaining linked with 7<sup>th</sup> Army." Local, small-scale attacks should be launched against Romanian columns which advanced out of the Görgey Mountains. Now that the enemy had been driven from Petroseny, 9<sup>th</sup> Army "would assemble their strength to envelop from both sides the enemy who'd advanced to Hermannstadt." Thought was given to shifting the German 89 ID from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Army for this purpose. The right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army should prevent the Romanians from advancing through either Orsova or, especially, Mehadia; the left, if placed under unbearable pressure, could pull back in conjunction with 1<sup>st</sup> Army through Mediasch (on the Little Kokel by Dicsö Szt. Marton).

However, Falkenhayn was no longer considering a double envelopment attack on the enemy south of Hermannstadt. He had already decided instead to reach out for the road on which his opponents would have to retreat and had issued the preliminary orders. The Alpenkorps would assemble at Sinna and Poianu, the German troops at Petroseny (after leaving behind two battalions and two batteries) were moving to Reussmarkt, and the 76 Res ID was detraining at Markt Schelken. Col. Szivo's Group and the reinforced 144 Inf Bde were placed directly under HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### The prospects for 1<sup>st</sup> Army

GdI Arz's tasks were to gain enough time for 9<sup>th</sup> Army to assemble and then to strike the enemy at Hermannstadt. He could point with satisfaction to the fact that in three weeks of fighting with vastly larger Romanian forces he had given up relatively little ground and used his own army economically. His somewhat reduced covering troops (61 ID and the reinforced 1 Lst Huss Bde) were still stationed in front of the Maros-Kokol position. The newly-formed 71 ID had recently shown considerable skill in maneuver in the Königsdorf action. Three and a half divisions (72 ID, 39 Hon ID, half of 37 Hon ID and the German 89 ID) had hardly been engaged and were ready for the decisive operations. Arz still intended to delay any advance by the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies with just the covering troops in front of the Maros-Kokol position for as long as possible, but to hold the

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236 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 31 ff.

position under all circumstances by committing troops from the reserves.

Arz wasn't concerned about his northern wing, stationed in the Kelemen Mountains and the upper Maros valley. He also had no fear of an enemy breakthrough in the Görgeny valley, where they would eventually find themselves in a sack. To be prepared here for all possibilities, on the 20<sup>th</sup> he sent half of 37 Hon ID forward to Teke. The situation of I Res Corps was more difficult, because here a new thrust by the enemy could throw back the considerably weakened defenders (19 Lst Mtn and 1 Lst Huss Bdes) for quite a distance and threatening the northern flank of 71 ID. If this happened, G.Lt Morgen intended that the right wing of the 71<sup>st</sup> should stand their ground to remain linked with Schmettow, while the left wing swung back. Thus the front of 71 ID would face toward the east, still guarding the left wing of Falkenhayn's Army. A gap would develop between 71 ID and 1 Lst Huss Bde, but it could be filled by 89 ID which on the 20<sup>th</sup> moved to Demeterfalva (16 km east of Maros Vasarhely).

Thus 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ had prepared counter-measures that would make it possible to offer resistance to the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies long enough until Falkenhayn could defeat the enemy at Hermannstadt. Later, when the victorious 9<sup>th</sup> Army pushed to the east, Arz intended to join the advance with as strong a southern wing as possible.<sup>237</sup>

Fortunately for the allies, the enemy remained quiet on the eastern front of Transylvania. 71 ID, which no longer was in contact with the enemy, sent outposts forward to the edge of cannon range from their main position.<sup>238</sup> In the next few days these outposts were attacked several times, but never pushed back. Behind the Romanian scouting detachments that carried out these attacks, our aerial observers spotted large camps east of the Alt and troops building trenches. This indicated that the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would stay in place for some time. The enemy was also inactive in front of Hermannstadt; for now they had no inkling of the calamity hanging over their heads. The commander of I Corps, General Popovici, had been in command of the troops at Hermannstadt since the 14<sup>th</sup>; he was disturbed only by the lively scouting activity of Cavalry Corps Schmettow in the area east of the city. To deal with this annoyance, the 13 ID was

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237 Arz, p. 115

238 During this period, Lt Col. Imreh's Gendarmerie Regiment of 71 ID was dissolved due to a lack of officers; the personnel were divided among the other Hungarian units.

instructed to drive the allies off the heights between  
Cornatielu and Porumbacu d.j. on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>239</sup>

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239 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 69 ff.

The allied order of battle as of 19 September<sup>240</sup>**9<sup>th</sup> German Army**

Commander = Prussian GdI Erich von Falkenhayn

Chief of Staff = Prussian Col. Hesse

## XXXIX German Reserve Corps

Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Staabs

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major Merkel

Strength = 26¼ bns, 2½ sqdns, 23 batties, 3 tech comps, 3 air comps (dets); 20,830 foot, 275 horse, 81 guns, 116 MG

. Col Ritter von Szivo's Group (HQ of k.u.k. 10 Cav Bde) = 5870 foot, 45 horse, 23 guns, 28 MG

. Danube Group (Lt Col von Nossek) = ¼ of V Bn/76; k.u. Lst Bn II/33; 3 & 4 Batties/FHR 16; two 37 mm marine cannon

. 145 Inf Bde (Col. Fiebich-Ripke) = Bns VI/48, V/69, VI/BH 1, V/BH 3; FJB 19; k.u. Lst Bn I/28. ½ 5 Sqdn/Hon HR 4. 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 25; 10.4 cm Can Batty 16, 15 cm How Batty 46

. G.Lt Sunkel's Group = 14,960 foot, 230 horse, 50 guns, 88 MG

. 187<sup>th</sup> German ID (G.Lt Sunkel) = 6 bns [IR 187 & 189], 7 batties, 1 tech comp

. k.u.k. 144 Inf Bde (Col Andreas Berger) = Bns V/71, V/Hon IR 10, IV/Hon IR 18; k.k. Lst IR 9 [2], k.u. Lst IR 1 [3]; k.u. Lst Bns IV/3, II/5. 3 Sqdn/Hon HR 10. 5 Batty/HFKR 3, 6 Batty/FHR 8, 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 9, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 25, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 12

. Attached - 3 bns from German Alpenkorps (2 from 1<sup>st</sup> Jaeger Regt, 1 from 2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Regt)

. Corps troops = German Foot Arty Regt 14 [3]; k.u.k. Flak Batty 19. 5 Comp/PB 3, 2 Ma Comp/PB 5. Flieger Comps 31, 32; Ger Flieger Det 241

## Group Krafft

Commander = Bav G.Lt Krafft von Delmensingen

Strength = 7600 foot, 120 horse, 86 guns, 54 MG

. German Alpenkorps (Krafft's own command) = 6 bns [Two bns of 1<sup>st</sup> Jaeger Regt, one bn of 2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Regt; Bav Leib IR (3)], 1 sqdn [3/Bav Chevleg Regt 4], 7 batties [from FAR 203, Mtn Arty Bn 6]; 2 tech comps

. Attached from 187 German ID = 3 bns [IR 188], 1 sqdn [6/DR 16], 7 batties [main body of FAR 231]

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240 Although the organization is shown as of the 19<sup>th</sup>, strength figures are based on data from 15 September 1916.

## Cavalry Corps Schmettow

Commander = Prussian G.Lt Graf von Schmettow

Chief of Staff = Prussian Capt. von Schwerin

Strength = 10 bns, 27 ½ sqdns, 4 cav rif bns, 16 batties, 1 tech comp, 1 armored train. 11,400 foot, 3050 horse, 78 guns, 64 MG

. 51<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (GM Tanarki) = 8800 foot, 250 horse, 50 guns, 17 MG

. 200 Hon Bde (Col von Farkas) = Hon IR 301 [2], 302 [3]

. 201 Hon Bde (Col von Eölbey-Thyll) = Hon IR 300 [2], 305 [3]

. 1 &amp; 2 Sqdns/Hon HR 4; ½ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5

. 51 Hon FA Bde (Col Mattanovich) = HRFKR 51 [4], HRFHR 51 [4]; 3 Batty/Hvy HFAR 51

. ¾ 3 Comp/SB 9; Armored Train # VIII

. German 3<sup>rd</sup> CD (G.Lt Graf von Schmettow) = 10 sqdns [HR 18; Bav Chevleg Regts 4 & 5], 12 guns [Horse Arty Bn/FAR 15], 13 MG. 1<sup>st</sup> CD (GM Chevalier de Ruiz) = 2600 foot, 1800 horse, 16 guns, 34 MG

. 6 Cav Bde (Col von Pongracz) = HR 7 [4], 14 [4]

. 7 Cav Bde (Col Edl von Pollet) = HR 4 [3], 12 [4]

. Cav Rifle Bns (1 apiece) of HR 4, 7, 12, 14

. Horse Arty Bn 1 [4]; ¼ 3 Comp/SB 9

## Approaching by train...

*German* 76 Res ID (G.Lt von Elstermann) = 9 bns [Res IR 252, 253, 254], 1 sqdn [3/UR 1], 9 batties [Res FAR 56, 58]. About 7200 foot, 120 horse, 36 guns, 54 MG**TOTALS** for 9<sup>th</sup> German Army = 54 ¼ bns, 32 sqdns, 4 cav rif bns, 70 batties, 6 tech comps, 13 Flieger comps (dets), 1 armored train. 47,030 foot, 3565 horse, 281 guns, 288 MG**Aus-Hung. 1<sup>st</sup> Army**

Commander = GdI von Arz

Chief of Staff = Col Joseph Huber

*German* I Res Corps

Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Morgen

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major von Hahnke

Strength = 39 ¼ bns, 19 sqdns, 1 cav rif bn, 37 batties, 4 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp, 1 armored train. 32,060 foot, 1840

horse, 139 guns, 162 MG

. 71<sup>st</sup> ID (GM Goldbach) = 12,280 foot, 900 horse, 32 guns, 44 MG

. 141 Inf Bde (Col Lähne) = IR 82 [3]; Comb IR of Lt Col Nobile Divizioli [3]

. 142 Inf Bde (GM Anton Klein) = Just Comb Hon IR of Col Liposcak [3]

. k.u. 19 Lst Mtn Bde (Col von Szabo; attached from 61 ID)

- = k.u. Lst Bns III/1, II & V/3, I/4, I/6
- . Lst Huss Bn 9 [3]; 2 Comp/SB 8
- . 71 FA Bde (Col Falbrecht) = 9, 10, 11, 12 Batties/FKR 16, 5 Batty/HFKR 2, HRFHR 71 [4]<sup>241</sup>; 4 & 6 Can Batties plus 1 How Batty of Mtn AR 12; 10.4 cm Can Batty 14, 15 cm How Batty 2
- . Attached to Div HQ = Col Imreh's Gendarme Regt [3]; k.u. Lst Eta Bn V/26; ¼ BH Eta Bn 2. Huss Regt 2 [5]. Armored Train VI
- . k.u. 1 Lst Huss Bde (Col. Csecsi-Nagy; 4060 foot, 720 horse, 4 guns, 18 MG) = Lst Huss Regts 1 [4], 2 [4]; k.u. Cav Rif Bn 12; Lt Col Kopfstein's Comb BH IR [3]<sup>242</sup>; k.u. Lst Bn II/12 (from k.u. 19 Lst Mtn Bde), 3 Batty/HRFHR 71 (from 71 FA Bde)
- . 39<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Blasius von Dani) = 8120 foot, 102 horse, 53 guns, 46 MG
  - . 77 Hon Bde (Col Lengerer) = Hon IR 9 [2], 11 [2]
  - . 78 Hon Bde (Col Daubner) = Hon IR 10 [2], 16 [2]
  - . 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 15; 3 Comp/SB 5
  - . 39 Hon FA Bde (Col Riedl) = HFKR 39 [4], HFHR 39 [4], 1 & 2 How Batties/Hvy HFAR 39; 3 & 4 Can Batties plus 2 How Batty of Mtn AR 9
- . 89<sup>th</sup> German ID (GdI Freih. von Lüttwitz) = 9 bns [IR 333 & 375; LW IR 9], 1 sqdn [4/DR 11], 9 batties [FAR 89]
- . Corps troops = 3 heavy field batties [Bav Fuss Arty Bn 4 with 14 guns]; Flak Batty 24; 5 Comp/PB 5, 4 Comp/PB 9; Flieger Comp 13

## VI Corps

Commander = FML von Fabini

Chief of Staff = Col. Balassa

Strength = 22 ½ bns, 5 ¼ sqdns, 1 foot sqdn, 24 batties, 3 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp, 1 armored train. 13,200 foot, 448 horse, 95 guns, 55 MG

- . 61<sup>st</sup> ID (GM von Grallert) (minus k.u. 19 Lst Mtn Bde) = 4360 foot, 200 horse, 47 guns, 8 MG
  - . k.u. 16 Lst Mtn Bde (Col Bernatsky) = k.u. Lst IR 17 [3], 29 [2]
  - . k.u. Lst Bn IV/19
    - . 3 & 4 Sqdns, plus a foot sqdn, of Hon HR 4; ¼ of 2 Sqdn/Dalmatian Mntd Rifle Bn. 6 Comp/SB 7
    - . 61 FA Bde (Col von Dobner) = RFKR 61 [4], RFHR 61 [4]; 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 12, 10.4 cm Can Batty 15, 15 cm How Batty

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241 Batties 1, 2 and 4 of HRFHR 71 hadn't joined yet, and Batty 3 was with k.u. 1 Lst Huss Bde.

242 Kopfstein's Regt was from 142 Bde of 71<sup>st</sup> ID; its fourth battalion had not yet joined.

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- . Attached to Div HQ = Major Ziegler's Gendarme Bn, Armored Train XI
- . 37<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Haber) (minus 73 Hon Bde and 37 Hon FA Bde, detached to XI Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army) = 3360 foot, 200 horse, 4 guns, 20 MG
  - . 74 Hon Bde (Col Pogany) = Hon IR 14 [3], 15 [3]
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 5. 4 Comp/SB 5
  - . 9 Batty of FKR 35
- . 72<sup>nd</sup> ID (FML Hefelle) = 5480 foot, 48 horse, 38 guns, 27 MG
  - . 143 Bde (Col Edl von Barwik) = Comb IR 105 [3]; Bns V/62, VII/63 and VIII/63
  - . Independent = Comb IR of Col Segner [1 ½] & Baatz [2]
  - . ½ 2 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 5; 8 Comp/SB 9
  - . 72 FA Bde (Col Köchert) = FKR 35 [3], 5 Batty/FKR 25, FHR 35 [2], 5 Batty/FHR 8, 5 Batty/FHR 8, 6 Batty/FHR 16 (being re-armed), 10.4 cm Can Batty 9, 15 cm How Batty 1
- . Corps troops (all joined after 19 Sept) = 15 cm Can Batty 11, 15 cm How Batty 58, 30.5 cm Mor Batty 10; Flieger Comp 33

Army troops = One 12 cm cannon batty; Flak Batty 18; k.k. Lst Sap Det 1/1

**Totals** for 1<sup>st</sup> Army = 61 ½ bns, 24 ¼ sqdns, 1 1/3 cav foot bns, 63 batties, 8 tech comps, 2 Flieger comps, 2 armored trains. 45,260 foot, 2288 horse, 2345 guns, 217 MG

**Totals** for the allied units fighting in Transylvania = 115 bns, 56 ¼ sqdns, 5 1/3 cav rif bns, 133 batties, 14 tech comps, 5 Flieger comps (dets), 3 armored trains. 92,290 foot, 5853 horse, 515 guns, 550 MG

## **b. Deployment for the battle, 22-25 September**

### 22-24 September

The Alpenkorps began their climb on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and the advanced guard reached Dus. 187 ID began to detrain at G. Poldu, as did 76 Res ID north of Hermannstadt.

On the same day, parts of 13 Romanian ID attacked as ordered. The enemy won some ground from 3 German CD in the direction of Rothberg, but lost it back to Schmettow's dismounted horsemen, assisted by several companies of 51 Hon ID which hurried to their aid. Only the Gregoriberg (# 598), which provided an

excellent observation point, remained in Romanian hands. But the 7 Cav Bde of GM Ruiz's 1 CD was pushed back to the line Kolun-Holzmengen, so that their link with the left wing of 3 CD could only be maintained on the northern bank of the Haarbach.<sup>243</sup> Against Popovici's wishes, some battalions of 23 Romanian ID surged forward to reconnoiter toward Orlat, but were driven back by 187 ID after seesaw fighting. Major Reiner's weak Landsturm battalion still held onto the southern edge of Hermannstadt; on the 18<sup>th</sup> they had even repulsed a strong Romanian thrust. Reiner continued to cover the evacuation of military and government property from the city, which lay between the two fronts, also making it easier for the allies to deploy for battle.<sup>244</sup> Fortunately also for Falkenhayn, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Romanians were being driven from the Vulkan Pass.

Although Falkenhayn reckoned that the Romanian attack by Hermannstadt would continue, in the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup> he issued orders for the deployment for battle. By the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> the forces were to be stationed as follows around Hermannstadt: 187 ID to the southwest, 51 Hon ID to the northwest and 76 Res ID to the northeast. These three divisions made up XXXIX Res Corps. The Alpenkorps would move up to a point a day's march from Red Tower Pass. Schmettow's Corps was instructed that if pressed by the enemy they should pull back, but that their center and eastern wing should hold on stubbornly to the northern bank of the Alt. In order to block the plains in the Alt valley with artillery fire, the Corps was given long-range guns.

To the surprise of the allies, 23 September passed without any combat. In front of 7 Cav Bde the enemy even evacuated the northern bank of the Alt at Glimboka. The Alpenkorps reached the Cindrelu # 2248 and on the next day the Vrf. Negovanul nr. # 2136 without fighting. Since the enemy opposite 9<sup>th</sup> Army also remained inactive on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the k.u.k. AOK (which earnestly wanted the blow against I Romanian Corps to succeed) ordered 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ to shift 89 ID to Schässburg as Falkenhayn had requested the day before. To support his Army's center, weakened by the movement of 89 ID, Arz sent half of 37 Hon ID as his reserve to Szasz Regen.

However, the advance of the Alpenkorps hadn't remained completely undetected. Reports about troop movements in the

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243 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, pp. 36 ff. Dabija, Vol. II, p. 69

244 Arz, p. 111

Czibin Mountains were forwarded up to General Popovici, who therefore requested reinforcements. General Culcer, however, refused to help because the "principal operation of 1<sup>st</sup> Army" was planned to take place on the Schyll River.<sup>245</sup> In the event the Romanians were again very active in this sector on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, although they didn't compel Falkenhayn to take any counter-measures. Culcer meanwhile asked that if his opponents did attack at Hermannstadt he should be helped by the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Crainicianu however wasn't inclined to send troops into the narrow area between the Alt and the Fogaras Mountains. Instead he proposed on the 24<sup>th</sup> an offensive by all of 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies. The high command, whose attention was still turned to the Danube front, ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army that if necessary they should "only reinforce the detachment at Ucia d.j. and send cavalry west to stay in closer contact with I Corps."

General Popovici was now seriously alarmed by numerous reports about the advance of German troops in the Czibin Mountains; he sent one battalion apiece (with artillery) into the Satului valley toward Fundul Riului and into the Lotru valley toward Vionasca. He instructed both his divisions to hold reserves in readiness, and ordered 1 Calarasi Bde to secure the Alt valley as far as Freck.

#### 25 September

On 25 September, when the deployment was complete, Falkenhayn issued orders for the attack that would start on the next day. The Alpenkorps, advancing from the line Vrf. mare - Prezbe - Gyhan and keeping guard toward the south, would seize the road leading into the Pass; part of the Division would advance past the road to block the path for pack animals that led through the western edge of the Fogaras Alps. XXXIX Res Corps would attack with 187 ID from Orlat along the foot of the mountains, with 51 Hon ID west of Hermannstadt, and with 76 Res ID east of the city in the direction of Talmesch. The troops were being intentionally sent around Hermannstadt, a city inhabited mainly by Germans, so that this center of Transylvania Saxon culture could be spared damage as much as possible. The Cavalry Corps was instructed to protect the left flank of 76 Res ID and to delay any advance by Crainicianu's Army toward the west. As Staabs' Corps moved forward, a detachment of the Cavalry Corps was to advance over the Alt from the northeast toward the entrance to Red Tower Pass.<sup>246</sup>

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245 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 76

246 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, pp. 41 ff.

Except for a rear guard, the Romanians evacuated their forward position on Mt Gregori on the 25<sup>th</sup>, which temporarily gave their opponents the impression that a wide-ranging retreat was being prepared. Therefore in the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup> G.Lt Staabs ordered an immediate attack, during which detachments from 51 Hon ID took Mt Gregori that evening.<sup>247</sup>

Meanwhile a reported arrived from 144 Inf Bde that the enemy had penetrated their position along the border at several points; Falkenhayn, who'd established his HQ at Mühlbach, wasn't concerned. He didn't want to divert a single man from the impending battle. In a conference with Col. Huber, GdI Arz's Chief of Staff, Falkenhayn made sure he could rely on support, per their agreement, from 1<sup>st</sup> Army even though the enemy was once again very active along Arz's front in the Kelemen Mountains and in the Görgeny valley.

On the eve of the battle, the opposing infantry were of roughly equal strength; the allies' 35 battalions had just 500 to 600 men apiece while the 25 Romanian battalions were at full strength. However, Falkenhayn's artillery was greatly superior. To his 54 batteries (including three 21 cm mortar batteries), the Romanians could oppose just 16 batteries (including two 12 cm howitzer batteries).<sup>248</sup>

### **c. The first two days of fighting, 26-27 September**

#### 26 September

26 September was a glorious autumn day. Early in the morning the allies pounded the Romanian trenches with shells to prepare the way for the attack. After stubborn fighting, the 187 ID wrested the towns of Guraro and Poplaka from the enemy. However, the left wing of 23 Romanian ID continued to hold firmly to the heights farther south, and to the Valare. GM Tanarky's 51 Hon ID, which had already come over to the south bank of the Cibin during the night, advanced as far as the northern slope of the knoll east of Opolaka; the eastern wing

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247 From k.u. Captain Papay's Magyar manuscript presented to the military archives - "The Liberation of Transylvania: The k.u. 51 Hon ID in the campaigns against Romania 1916-1918"

248 Ortlepp, "Die Kämpfe bei Hermannstadt im Lichte rumänischer und englischer Militär-literatur" (in "Wissen und Wehr", Berlin; 1930 edition, pp. 167 ff.)

established themselves in front of the Romanian positions. The Division couldn't win any further success. G.Lt von Elstermann's 76 Res ID, along with two attached Honved battalions, advanced over the Gregoriberg. In the afternoon they repulsed a Romanian counterattack from Schellenberg, and in the evening were on the road that leads east from Hermannstadt.<sup>249</sup>

Under Cavalry Corps Schmettow, the German 3 CD and two squadrons from the k.u.k. 7 Cav Bde forded the Alt at Kercz. The main body pivoted to the west and encountered the enemy at Porumbacu d.j.; one regiment was stationed at Vistea to guard against Romanian horsemen in the east.<sup>250</sup>

One battalion of the Alpenkorps had already climbed toward the town of Red Tower around midnight; during the day the Division managed to reach the road through the Pass at several points between Boitia and Caineni. General Popovici recognized the danger that his I Romanian Corps could be cut off, and threw reserves from the north into the Pass. Moreover, smaller Romanian detachments also attacked toward Caineni from the south. Thus the enemy was able to keep the Bavarians from crossing to the eastern bank of the Alt, or from advancing out of the Pass to either the north or south.<sup>251</sup>

Falkenhayn was only partly satisfied with the results of the first day of the battle. If XXXIX Res Corps had advanced more quickly they would have lessened the danger that the Romanians' 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could rip apart the net which had been cast around their Alt Corps. It was also possible that the encircled Romanians could attempt to break out. Moreover, Army HQ at Mühlbach had received no news from the Alpenkorps. The situation demanded a

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249 Elstermann, "Die 76. Reserve-Division in den Schlachten bei Hermannstadt und am Geisterwald (25./9 - 5/10.1916)" in "Nachrichtenblatt der 76. Reserve-Division", Issues # 14 & 15; Hanau, 1927; p. 23

250 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Prior to the start of the battle the 3 German CD was stationed west of the k.u.k. 7 Cav Bde. Before attacking, they moved behind the Bde's line, so that on the 26<sup>th</sup> Schmettow's Corps was deployed (from west to east) as follows: 7 Cav Bde, 3 German CD, 5 Cav Bde. Except for the two squadrons with the Germans, neither of the Aus-Hung. bdes of 1 CD seem to have taken any part in the fighting, since their activities aren't mentioned in the text.

251 "Das Königlich Bayerische Infanterie-Leib-Regiment im Weltkrieg 1914/18" (Munich, 1931), pp. 213 ff.

quick resolution. Therefore Falkenhayn ordered Staabs' Corps to continue to attack energetically on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The Alpenkorps was to keep I Romanian Corps from retreating, while fending off the enemy advancing from the south. From GdI Arz, Falkenhayn procured an infantry regiment and three batteries from 89 ID, which were sent to Vizakna [Salzburg] as an Army reserve.<sup>252</sup>

On the Romanian side, it was necessary to recover the area behind I Corps. Therefore General Culcer quickly sent five battalions and a battery from 20 ID (stationed on the Danube) by train to the north; they would attack from the Lotru valley up to the ridge on the border in the area west of Red Tower Pass. General Popovici was authorized to pull his front back sector-by-sector, while energetically thrusting against the enemy in his rear. Popovici himself was hoping to be relieved by 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. However, on the 26<sup>th</sup> the high command at Buftea were still not in agreement about whether to order a relief attempt to benefit the two divisions south of Hermannstadt. They contented themselves with a roundabout method of getting information about the possible use of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army by demanding a situation report from General Popovici.<sup>253</sup>

#### 27 September

On the second day of the battle, 27 September, Staabs' Corps attacked again after strong artillery preparation; the opposing twenty Romanian battalions now stood along a shorter front. The other five battalions had been sent against the Alpenkorps. 187 ID took the Valare and the Oncesti from 23 Romanian ID and drove them back over the Trinkbach. By evening Sunkel's Division had taken Michelsberg, but lost it again, and stood on the heights north of this town. To their left, 51 Hon ID had repulsed a counterattack, then took the sector between the heights north of Heltau and the southern edge of Schellenberg. Farther east, the left wing of 76 Res ID at Kastenholz was able to drive 13 Romanian ID back over the Haarbach, but couldn't move any further ahead.

Two of the regiments of Schmettow's Corps were stationed on a front facing west and southwest at Porumbacu d.j. and Szarata. One regiment at Kercz blocked the approach of the 2 Calarasi Bde which, however, turned back without attacking.

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252 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, pp. 49 ff.

253 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 100 and 176. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

However, the exact meaning of this sentence is very obscure.

The situation of the Alpenkorps was less favorable. Their own attack had stalled, and in most places they had to give up the road through the Pass to the onrush of the five Romanian battalions, who stormed forward with the courage of desperation. At some points, however, the Alpenkorps managed to at least keep the road under fire. They repulsed the battalions of 20 ID, climbing from the south toward Mt Robu.<sup>254</sup> The left wing of Krafft's Group at Gyhan threatened the rear of the 23 Romanian ID, stationed at Michelsberg.

Thus the situation of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army was extremely tense in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>. G.Lt Staabs' troops had pushed the enemy back, and Schmettow's cavalry had performed brilliantly, but victory was by no means won. Falkenhayn was particularly concerned that the Alpenkorps might not be able to hold out in their extended position, under attack from the Romanians in the north, east and south. Moreover, there was a continuing danger that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, which on the 27<sup>th</sup> looked like it was starting to advance, might intervene. To anticipate both dangers, Staabs' Corps would have to press the enemy more sharply. Falkenhayn ordered them to do so on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and assigned them the regiment that had been brought up from 89 ID. The k.u.k. high command now also gave him full control over the main body of 89 ID, which would move to Henndorf and Jakobsdorf on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

The commander of I Romanian Corps was also fully aware of the seriousness of the situation. By an airplane sent to Craiova, he reported that only quick intervention by 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could save him. General Culcer forward this plea to Buftea; he also proposed that because of the difficulty of keeping the road open to General Popovici the latter should withdraw toward 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Since this would leave the Red Tower Pass open, Culcer felt it would be necessary to send a strong unit from the south into the Alt valley; they would guard the roads in the passes leading into Wallachia through Calinesci and Titesci, since the detachment of 20 ID alone was too weak for the job.<sup>255</sup>

#### **d. Relief attempt by 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, 27-29 September**

Meanwhile the Romanian high command had themselves finally initiated measures to help the sore-pressed I Corps. Around 9:00 AM on the 27<sup>th</sup> they ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to advance and attack

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254 Ortlepp, "Kämpfe", pp. 181

255 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 109 and 113

during the day; the goal was the line Cornatielu-Agnetheln-Jakobsdorf-Henndorf. The North Army was also ordered to thrust forward on the 27<sup>th</sup> to reach a line running from Kaisdorf through Hejjasfalva, Szekely-Keresztur and Kibed to Szovata.

After the departure of 21 and 22 ID to the Danube front on 22 September, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian HQ had pulled back the main bodies of their three remaining divisions a considerable distance. 4 ID was at Sinca Vch., 3 ID at Olt Bogat and 6 ID at Streitfurt and Sombor. Only outposts had been left on the front line that had been reached on 15 September. After pulling back, the divisions were building positions in the rear.

Because of delays in transmitting messages on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the orders for the advance weren't issued from Army HQ at Kronstadt until early in the afternoon. 4 ID was to advance on both banks of the Alt to Nou, 3 ID through D. Tekes and Scharisch to G. Schenk, and 6 ID through Repts and Seiburg to Bekokten. From these preliminary goals the troops would deploy to occupy the southern bank of the Haarbach between Cornatielu and Henndorf. 2 Calarasi Bde would maintain a link with the Alt Corps at Talmesch, while 3 Calarasi Bde did the same with the North Army at Kaisdorf.<sup>256</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had taken up a defensive stance, couldn't immediately begin to advance; their departure was delayed. Then they marched on the 27<sup>th</sup> until deep into the night in order to reach their initial objectives: Vistea d.s. (2 Calarasi Bde), Fogaras (4 ID), D. Tekes (3 ID), Seiburg (6 ID) and Katzendorf (3 Calarasi Bde). Urged to quickly continue the march, on the 28<sup>th</sup> the 2 Calarasi Bde and the southern column of 4 ID reached Arpasiu d.j. after some minor skirmishes with hussars of the 6 Cav Bde. The main body of 4 ID occupied Rucoru. West of Scharisch the 3 ID threw back the northern wing of Pongracz's Brigade and in the evening entered G. Schenk. After skirmishes with the outposts of 71 ID, the 6 ID reached Bekokten. The 3 Calarasi Bde was engaged in some fighting west of Schweischer before camping for the night in that town.

When the attack of 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army had pushed 6 Cav Bde back to the west, a gap ten kilometers wide developed between that Bde and 71 ID. Since the enemy might advance here, the commander of 89 ID (GdI Georg Freih. von Lüttwitz) anticipated an order from Falkenhayn and sent his leading troops to Hundertbücheln and Retisdorf. G.Lt Morgen erroneously reported to Falkenhayn that

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256 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 175 ff.

71 ID had to pull back under enemy pressure to Henndorf and Jakobsdorf; the Division was ordered to hold on stubbornly to the line Steinberg # 750 - Meschendorf - Erkedt. If, however, they were compelled to retreat they should do so always facing the east as requested by Falkenhayn. Thus 71 ID would serve only the needs of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army. Since the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army had also already given up the German 89 ID, Arz found himself in a very difficult situation, all the more so because the Romanian North Army had again been advancing since the 26<sup>th</sup> (as described farther below).

Crainicianu's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army continued to attack on the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the southern bank of the Alt the advance by 2 Calarasi Bde and by half of 4 ID was hindered by fire from German artillery on the northern bank and by brilliant rear guard fighting conducted by Schmettow's few squadrons; the Romanians finally could only reach Skorei and Chertiisiora. The northern brigade of 4 ID, harassed by the hussars of GM Ruiz's 1 CD, moved forward only to Földvar. 3 ID at first were deceived by the bluffs of 6 Cav Bde; they finally took Sachsenhausen, but there found themselves in a precarious and exposed position because their neighbor on the right, 6 ID, had been less successful. This Division had set out from Bekokten, sending a column on the left toward Agnetheln and another on the right toward Jakobsdorf. The right column collided with German 89 ID, which was also on the move. The Romanians stormed forward in dense masses that were decimated by the German artillery and machine guns. The survivors fled to the Windmühlberg, abandoning twelve guns. A sharp Romanian counterattack recovered three of the guns, cost the Germans heavy casualties, and checked the pursuit. The left column of 6 Romanian ID, opposed by several hussar squadrons of Pongracz's Brigade, had almost reached Schönberg when they learned of the catastrophe of the right column; then they withdrew to the Windmühlberg. The 3 Calarasi Bde was repulsed by the outposts of 71 ID and stayed over night again at Schweischer.

In the evening the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army was spread out along a front of 67 km. The left wing was far in advance, but still ten kilometers short of Cornatielu and Szakadat, which 4 ID was supposed to have reached by evening of the previous day (as air couriers from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had informed I Corps on the 28<sup>th</sup>.)<sup>257</sup> Meanwhile, however, the battle of Hermannstadt had already been decided south of the city.

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257 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 178 and 188

**e. Victory over Ist Romanian Corps, 28-29 September**

In the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> General Popovici was understandably very uneasy. 23 ID had been pushed back from the west to the line Michelsberg-Heltau and to the northern edge of the town of Westen. Concerned about a possible advance by Schmettow's cavalry, Popovici had also pulled back 13 ID from their position far to the northeast and deployed them on the line Westen-Racovitia. Moreover he had concentrated all his supply trains at Porcest and Talmesch, and stationed 1 Calarasi Bde as his reserve at the latter village. Thus he was already preparing to retreat to the south; this was consistent with an order he'd received from the high command (dated the 26<sup>th</sup>), which was conveyed by special agents through Kronstadt and instructed him to attack toward the south. This order hadn't mentioned that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was advancing to his relief. Popovici thought that the battle could be won only if 4 ID arrived in time; he believed that they were just a few kilometers away, but in reality the Division's exhausted troops had stopped at Fogaras in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>258</sup>

The German attack on the 28<sup>th</sup> struck an enemy that was already damaged by heavy casualties. Moreover, the morale of the Romanian troops was shaken by exaggerated reports that the Alpenkorps had blocked the narrow mountain passes in their rear, and by bombs dropped from German planes on the railroad stations and staff headquarters.

The principal goal of the attack by Staabs' Corps on the 28<sup>th</sup> was the western wing of 23 Romanian ID. Driven in front by Sunkel's battalions and pinned down in the rear by parts of the Alpenkorps which stormed the Götzenberg, by evening the 23 ID pulled back amidst sometimes fierce fighting to the line Zoodt - Heights # 614. Thus they lost their connection with 13 ID, which was attacked by 76 Res ID. To restore a continuous front, at noon Popovici also pulled 13 ID back to the line Heights # 614 - Racovitia, and shifted 1 Calarasi Bde into the gap which had appeared between his divisions, into which 51 Hon ID was threatening to advance.

Since the main weight of XXXIX Res Corps was directed against the Romanian 23 ID, Popovici ordered the less-beleaguered 13 ID to support their neighbors. But this order had no effect. 13 ID feared encirclement from the east by Schmettow, whose cavalry had entered Freck while sending three squadrons down to the La

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258 Ortlepp, "Kämpfe", pp. 181

Cetata Heights # 846; in the afternoon the Division evacuated their positions on their own initiative.<sup>259</sup>

In the evening Popovici's Corps was hemmed into a narrow area around the northern outlet of the Red Tower Pass. The circle of fire from their opponent's batteries grew ever closer, relentlessly pounding the already disorganized clumps of troops. Since help from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could no longer be expected, General Popovici had to decide on a retreat over the mountains. To open the road through the Pass, he had already sent three battalions and a mountain battery south from Boitia around 1:00 PM, instructing them to drive the Germans from the slopes west of the road. The few exhausted companies of the Alpenkorps in this sector were pushed aside. The Alpenkorps moreover also had to defend themselves against the battalions of 20 ID attacking from the Lotru valley.

Now all the Romanian vehicles began a wild flight through the Pass. Since parts of the road were still within range of German machine guns, there were some dramatic scenes during the night-time retreat.<sup>260</sup> Finally, however, the Romanians saved almost all their artillery. On the other hand, the large number of wagons overturned in the Alt bore witness to the ruthless haste with which the retreat was carried out.

In the Fogaras Mountains east of the Alt, the infantry were able to cross the ridge along the border on a number of paths. In the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> the left-wing brigade of 23 ID were the last foot soldiers to leave the battlefield, on which the Romanians left 3000 prisoners, 13 guns and a large amount of military equipment in the hands of the victors. Until noon on the 29<sup>th</sup> the 1 Calarasi Bde at Sebes covered the mountain crossing of the badly defeated Corps. In the evening the completely disorganized troops arrived at Caineni and Grablesci. Border troops held a rear guard position on the line of ridges west of Surul. West of the Alt the 20 ID was still trying in vain to capture Mt Robu.

Although Falkenhayn hadn't encircled and completely destroyed the enemy as he had planned, the allies had still won an outstanding victory over the Romanian I Corps. The enemy was cleared from the Hermannstadt basin. The way was clear for the next assignment: to fight the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army.

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259 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 117

260 Ortlepp, "Kämpfe", pp. 184

## **f. The other sectors in Transylvania during the Hermannstadt battle, 25-28 September**

### On the western wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army

On the same day when Falkenhayn's completed their deployment at Hermannstadt, General Culcer was preparing to strike a blow south of Petroseny which he expected to have a considerable impact.

On 25 September the 11 Romanian ID, reinforced to 22 battalions and 83 guns, attacked the border positions of 144 Inf Bde, occupied by 9 battalions. In the sector west of the Vulkan Pass, guarded just by outposts, two enemy columns managed to break through and advanced to a point in front of the Oboroca Heights. To save the troops stationed at the Vulkan Pass and on both sides of the Szurduk Pass from being cut off, in the night of 25-26 September Col. Berger pulled them back to a position running along the heights north of the towns of Zsilyvajdevulkan, Petroseny and Petrilla. This retreat was completed without being noticed by the enemy. Thus the important coal mines were once again abandoned to the enemy.

To reinforce 144 Inf Bde, which was supposed to prevent a further Romanian advance at any price, Battalion V/69 was brought over from Mehadia where the enemy was still inactive. And more substantial help was on the way. After a request from Hindenburg to reinforce the armies fighting Romania, Conrad had taken 2 Mtn Bde from the Isonzo front, where the seventh battle was dying down, and sent them to Transylvania.<sup>261</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup> they had left Podmelec; on the 26<sup>th</sup>, when the first trains reached Transylvania, they were sent from Piski to Puj to support 144 Inf Bde. Command over both brigades was assigned to Prussian GM von Busse, who arrived on the 28<sup>th</sup> with the HQ of German 301 ID (which had no assigned troops of their own).<sup>262</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, when Falkenhayn's Army began their decisive attack at Hermannstadt, Col. Berger's battalions were taking up their new positions, toward which the Romanians were probing cautiously. The only hard fighting took place around the

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261 The following was the order of battle of Col. Panzenböck's 2 Mtn Bde - Bns III/8, III/55, II/70; FJB 12, BH FJB 3; ¼ 1 Sqdn/Dalm Mntd Rif Bn; 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 22. There were 4200 riflemen plus 1000 trained replacement troops.

262 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 44

Oboroca, which fell into enemy hands on the 27<sup>th</sup>. However, the defenders directly to the north prevented the Romanians from climbing down into the Strell valley.

The decline in the Romanians' fortune at Hermannstadt forced General Culcer to order the 11 ID to halt in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>; they were told to have six battalions and three batteries ready to leave the area.<sup>263</sup> There was some fighting as the 11 ID established their lines very close to those of the allies. The latter meanwhile were making preparations for an attack, since Falkenhayn had instructed GM Busse to recover the line along the border.

#### On the front of 1<sup>st</sup> Army

Arz's Army had also once more crossed swords with their opponents (Presan's Army) while the Hermannstadt battle was raging. Already on 25 September, but more forcefully on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the right wing of the Romanian North Army advanced in numerous small columns. After initially successful resistance, the 16 Lst Mtn Bde which was guarding the upper Maros valley had to withdraw when their northern wing was pushed back; they took up a position forming a half-circle east of Ratosnya. This put an end to another of G.Lt Morgen's plans for an offensive. He had intended to attack with the southern wing of I Res Corps in conjunction with 9<sup>th</sup> Army after 39 Hon ID had been relieved by half of 37 Hon ID; now, however, 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ had to shift 39 Hon ID to the Army's northern wing.

GdI Arz was convinced that until the end of the Battle of Hermannstadt (which was just starting on this day - the 26<sup>th</sup>), and the further advance to the east of 9<sup>th</sup> Army, he would have to be very frugal in using his troops. He also regarded the Maros-Kokel position, to which he would withdraw in the last extremity, as primarily just a moral support for his Army. Prolonged defense of this long line of trenches, which in the north ran through wooded areas, was hardly feasible with his weak forces. Therefore he was trying to make a stand for as long as possible ahead of this position. If the Romanians resumed their advance, he intended to strike back at them in the G6rgeny valley and then to concentrate in the north so as to fall upon the enemy in the Maros valley. For this purpose 39 Hon ID was already assembling their reserves on the left wing.

On 27 September, when the Romanian high command sent 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

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263 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 59

toward Hermannstadt to relieve I Corps, they also ordered the North Army to capture the line Libanfalva - Kibed - Körispatak - Hejjasfalva. For this purpose 14 ID would form the pivot at Ratosnya, while 8 ID threw back their opponents in the Libanfalva-Remete-Kibed sector as would 7 ID in the area between Körispatak and Hejjasfalva. 2 CD, which had still been staying by Csik Szereda, would be the link between 7 ID and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, while 15 Inf Bde, as the Army's reserve, moved from Gyergyó Alfalu to Parajd.<sup>264</sup>

However the 14 Romanian ID, which was only supposed to stay in place, attacked anew on the 27<sup>th</sup>. In the afternoon they broke through the lines of 16 Lst Mtn Bde in the Maros valley, whereupon the Bde abandoned the narrow part of the valley and withdrew to Deda. Quickly reinforced by a battalion of 37 Hon ID, on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Landsturm were able to prepare to defend themselves at Deda without being disturbed, since the Romanian 14 ID was content with the occupation of Ratosnya. In general the 8 and 7 ID didn't stir from their stations. 2 CD, moving through Lövéte, reached Dalya on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

The new enemy advance in the Maros valley was already causing 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ on the 27<sup>th</sup> to return to an emphasis on their original mission - to guard the southern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army and remain linked with that command. They were also convinced that they could concentrate on this assignment because it seemed that there was no longer much danger to Falkenhayn's Army (which was now winning the decision at Hermannstadt) from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army due to the latter's distance from the battlefield. Moreover, the portion of 1<sup>st</sup> Army's front between the Görgeny and Gr. Kokel valleys had again remained undisturbed on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, if the Romanians continued to advance in the Maros valley GdI Arz intended to concentrate the half of 37 Hon ID and VI Corps behind his northern wing, while I Res Corps with 39 Hon ID would also take over the defense of the Görgeny valley. Then VI Corps would be employed as envisioned in the plans drawn up on the 26<sup>th</sup> for an offensive.

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264 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 289 ff.

## 2. Advance from Hermannstadt and through the Geister Woods

### a. 9<sup>th</sup> German Army begins to advance, 29 September-1 October

#### Analyzing the Romanian situation

When Staabs' Corps moved forward to attack again early on 29 September, they encountered no enemy north of the Red Tower Pass. The beaten Romanians had fled over the mountains. After this victory, both of the allied armies were ready to carry out the second part of the task they'd been assigned on the 24<sup>th</sup>, namely "by concentrating all units to launch an envelopment attack to defeat if possible the southern wing of the Romanian main body ahead of Fogaras." For this purpose the 9<sup>th</sup> Army would first have to block the Red Tower Pass and shift to the east. 1<sup>st</sup> Army would cover this maneuver.

At Talmesch a Romanian pilot was taken prisoner early on the 29<sup>th</sup>; he was carrying an order from the Chief of Staff of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which had been sent to General Popovici around 1:30 AM. The message, which hadn't been encoded, read: "I have the honor to report that as of yesterday evening (28 Sept) the troops of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were 15 km from your positions. This morning they will be on the march between 4:00 and 5:00 AM. We are coming with reinforcements and ammunition."

If the events that had unfolded opposite Schmettow's Corps and the southern wing of Arz's Army had left any doubt about the intentions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, this letter provided full clarity. The actions between the Haarbach and the Alt on the 29<sup>th</sup>, already described above, were for Falkenhayn additional proof that all of Crainicianu's Army was marching toward the west. Now that the Romanians' Alt group had been defeated, a further advance by 2<sup>nd</sup> Army through Fogaras could only be desirable since it would give the allies an increased opportunity to envelop them. The pre-condition, however, was a rapid diversion of 9<sup>th</sup> Army toward the east and a successful stand by 1<sup>st</sup> Army until this movement was finished.

#### The opposing plans

In Falkenhayn's order issued in the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup>, G.Lt Staabs was instructed to assemble 187 ID and 76 Res ID immediately on both sides of the Alt at Scorei. 51 Hon ID would

relieve the Alpenkorps on the 30<sup>th</sup>, so that the latter could then follow the other two German divisions along the northern foot of the Fogaras Mountains. However, the planned re-deployment of the Alpenkorps would be time-consuming. Moreover, GM Tanarky objected to the intended employment of his 51 Hon ID on the defensive, since he considered it a snub and since the Division lacked mountain equipment.<sup>265</sup> The command was retracted, and the Alpenkorps would continue to defend the Red Tower Pass. XXXIX Res Corps would move as quickly as possible with their advance guards to reach the line Szakadat (76 Res ID) - Glimboka (51 Hon ID) - Cornatielu (187 ID). The Army's reserves that weren't needed by Corps Staabs were to be sent immediately to G.Lt Schmettow, who was instructed to hang on stubbornly north of the Alt for as long as he could. Only in extreme need should he withdraw to the northern bank of the Haarbach to guard the entry points into the mountains downstream from Jakobsdorf. If it proved impossible for 89 ID to remain at Hundertbücheln, they would take up a defensive position upstream from Jakobsdorf.<sup>266</sup> Falkenhayn wanted to see an attack by the units stationed south of Schässburg; he asked 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ to have 71 ID take part in a thrust by 89 ID, in which case G.Lt Morgen would command the operation. But Morgen had concerns about this idea, especially since the continuing pressure on 19 Lst Mtn Bde was forcing that unit to withdraw to the Maros-Kokel position. He asked for reinforcements so that he could hold his long front.

To 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ this was a welcome opportunity to explain to Teschen the difficulties of the defensive operation, especially since the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies were again advancing, and to ask for a division to be sent to Maros Vasarhely. Besides needing additional strength so that 1<sup>st</sup> Army could carry out their defensive assignment, GdI Arz considered it desirable to have more Aus-Hung. troops take part in the next blow by 9<sup>th</sup> Army. In the event the k.u.k. AOK, based on an earlier agreement with the German OHL, did order two more mountain brigades to Transylvania; however, their deployment with either 1<sup>st</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Army would be decided later based on the situation.

In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> General Crainicianu first learned from Buftea that I Corps had been driven back over the Fogaras Mountains. Thus it was too late to come to their aid. And Crainicianu recognized that his widely-extended Army could easily be stricken from the north and also driven into the

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265 Nagy, "A Romania ellen hadjarat 1916-1917" (Budapest, 1922), Vol. I, p. 148

266 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 65

mountains. Therefore he decided to pull back his isolated left wing; then he intended to resume the attack, this time against the 89 German ID that had so greatly damaged his 6 ID. For this purpose, on the 30<sup>th</sup> the 6 ID would hold onto the Windmühlberg while in the night the 3 ID marched back to Scharisch and 4 ID to Calboru and Fogaras. 2 Calarasi Bde would secure the Army's left flank at G. Schenk. 2 CD, which had been assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and reached Mehburg on the 29<sup>th</sup>, would move to Meschendorf, from which they could fall on the allies' rear at Bekokten.

#### Advances by both sides

From these orders issued by both sides, most of which were carried out, no fighting developed between the Haarbach and Alt on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Only the Romanian troop stationed south of the Alt (half of 4 ID plus 2 Calarasi Bde) were engaged, because they received the order to retreat too late. At dawn they attacked the 1<sup>st</sup> Saxon Hussars [HR # 18] at Chertiisiora and threw them back through Porumbacu d.s., where the Saxons established contact with the first troops of 76 Res ID as they arrived.<sup>267</sup> The Romanian units in question then began their march to the rear around noon, only reaching Ucia d.s. and Dragusiu by nightfall. On the Army's right wing the 2 CD came under fire from outposts of the k.u.k. 71 ID, pulled back, and finally spent the night at Reps instead of Meschendorf. The 3 Calarasi Bde, which had been instructed to cooperate with 2 CD, spent the night 10 km farther west.

The Romanian thrust toward Porumbacu caused Falkenhayn to order G.Lt Staabs to shift his troops sharply to the south during their assembly and subsequent advance. But the men, exhausted from three days of combat, didn't get far beyond the battlefield on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Schmettow's Cavalry Corps was united on the northern bank of the Alt River. 89 ID stayed at Hundertbücheln without becoming engaged. The Alpenkorps, while still repulsing Romanian thrusts on Mt Robu, also extended the line along the outlying western ridges of the Fogaras Mountains.

While Falkenhayn's Army shifted for their advance to the east, 1<sup>st</sup> Army came under renewed attack by Presan's divisions, which were now finally acting in accordance with their orders of the 27<sup>th</sup>. The Romanian 14 ID stayed in place. 8 ID attacked between the Görgeny valley and the upper reaches of the Little Kokel. Hettlinger's Group of the k.u.k. 61 ID was able to stand fast

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267 "Der König-Albert-Husaren im Weltkrieg" (Dresden, 1926), pp. 182 ff.

throughout the day; however, after night fell their lines were broken and they had to withdraw to Görgeny Szt. Imre. The outposts of 39 Hon ID were pushed back about four kilometers on Heights # 961 (northeast of Remete) and 1 Lst Huss Bde had to give up ground as far as the line Sovarad-Siklodkö-Eted. The already damaged 19 Lst Mtn Bde was assaulted by 7 ID; their line was broken at three places, and they retreated to Martonos and onto the western bank of the brook that flows into the Big Kokel at Betfalva. This attack by Presan's Army had pushed the inner wings of VI and I Res Corps back almost to the Maros-Kokel position.

The retreat of 19 Lst Mtn Bde caused 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ, as already mentioned, to request reinforcements, and forced 71 ID to pull back half of the outposts located in front of their left wing.

1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ expected a general Romanian offensive on the 30<sup>th</sup>. However, there were just limited thrusts against Hettlinger's Group, 1 Lst Huss Bde and 19 Lst Mtn Bde, during which the defenders were pushed back somewhat farther toward the line that was the goal of Presan's Army (Libanfalva-Kibed-Hejjasfalva). In a special order the 7 Romanian ID was ordered to hasten their advance with a strengthened southern wing, so that they could assist the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which on the 29<sup>th</sup> had been defeated (as described above) by 89 German ID.<sup>268</sup>

Since the Romanian attacks were relatively weak it was possible to shift half of 37 Hon ID, as planned, to the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army which was now the Army's principal sector. It would be necessary, on the other hand, to once more shift the main body of 71 ID to the south so that the Division could take part in the thrust by 89 ID on 1 October, as desired by Falkenhayn. Thus the valley of the Gr. Kokel would be left almost undefended, and this was the area in which the Romanians were advancing in relatively greatest strength. Thus G.Lt Morgen in particular was greatly concerned for the left flank of the attacking group he would be leading, and for the lengthy supply line of Goldbach's 71 ID from Schässburg. Therefore he demanded that 19 Lst Mtn Bde should be reinforced by an infantry regiment plus artillery, but 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ had no such units available.

Nevertheless GdI Arz promised that 71 ID would take part in the thrust to the south, which anyway couldn't take place before 2 October because the Division would have to shift their main body to the right wing during the 1<sup>st</sup>. Arz would allay the concerns

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268 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 292

of the commander of I Res Corps (whose authority in the north extended to Szasz Regen and finally into the Görgeny valley), by pulling 16 Lst Mtn Bde behind 72 ID and then shifting this Brigade to join 19 Lst Mtn Bde. Thus 61 ID would be united, but several days would pass before this was accomplished. Correctly recognizing the opportunities before him, GdI Arz assumed responsibility for the gamble of a thrust by his right wing to the south after assuring himself that his high command concurred. To ensure that military operations in Transylvania took place under a united command, on 1 October the 1<sup>st</sup> Army was placed under Falkenhayn's orders.

On this day (1 October) the Romanian North Army continued their advance, but in decreasing force. Hettlinger's and Csecsi-Nagy's groups were pushed back to the Maros-Kokel position. The 19 Lst Mtn Bde, placed directly under G.Lt Morgen, had to pull back to a line between Körispatak and the western edge of Szekely-Keresztur. Undisturbed by this threat, 71 ID in pouring rain assembled their main body - 7 battalions, 5 squadrons and 10 batteries - in the area of Denndorf and Steinberg (Point # 731). They left just 11 companies, 2 squadrons and 3 batteries, plus VI Armored Train, in their former positions as a shield toward the east (under the commander of 142 Inf Bde, GM Anton Klein).

#### The end of the Romanian advance in Transylvania

The continuing Romanian attacks were inconsistent with the intention of the high command at Buftea. Already in the morning of 30 September they had let General Presan know in two orders that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had crossed the Danube south of Bucharest and that allied relief offensives to help the Bulgarians should therefore be anticipated in Transylvania. The high command now instructed that attacks there should cease. They went on, "The 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies must maintain resistance with their available units at any price until the operation in the south is successful."<sup>269</sup> The necessary defensive measures should be initiated.

On 1 October the Romanian high command was more explicit; around 9:00 AM they informed the commander of North Army:

"The offensive undertaken to relieve I Corps is no longer up to date. Therefore it has been decided that tonight the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army should pull back to the line Heviz - Olt Bogat - Sarkany - Persiani. The Supreme HQ is of the opinion that in order to work together with 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the North Army

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269 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 293 ff.

should move their left wing back to the positions they had organized before beginning the offensive. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army has been ordered to stay connected with North Army by using 2 CD."

Therefore in the evening of 1 October General Presan ordered that 14 ID would stay in place at Ratosnya, as would the Bistrita Detachment in the Kelemen Mountains. 8 ID's defensive sector would run along the line Al. Fancsal - Remete - Kibed - Eted. Since part of this line lay on the other side of the Austro-Hungarians' prepared Kokel position, 8 ID would have to continue to attack. 7 ID was to defend a line running approximately from Kobatfalva to Bögöz, and would have to retreat to do so. 4 Calarasi Bde would maintain the link between 7 and 8 ID. A brigade which 2 CD had left with North Army would secure the southern wing at Homorod Szt. Pal. 15 Inf Bde stayed in the Army's reserve at the village of Parajd.

On 1 October the divisions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army completed their march back to the line they'd been assigned on 29 September. 4 ID, along with 2 Calarasi Bde, reached Voivodeni, Vojla, Kl. Schenk and the area further north; 3 ID was already at Scharisch. Since 6 ID on the Windmühlberg was under heavy fire from the German 89 ID and requested reinforcements, during the night 3 ID was shifted to Bekokten and Moha, to the right of 6 ID. Moreover, the northern brigade of 4 ID would deploy next to the left wing of 6 ID on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. 2 CD, along with 3 Calarasi Bde, was stationed between Seiburg and Schweischer to cover the gap between 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies.

Surprisingly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ wasn't informed of the order issued at 9:00 AM on 1 October to North Army, which also referred to the withdrawal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army behind the stretch of the Alt between Sarkany and Heviz. But when General Crainicianu learned that the southern wing of 7 ID was posted at Betfalva, he was concerned that his opponents might thrust into the gap of 33 km between the Armies, which was covered only by 2 CD. He requested a division to extend the southern wing of North Army and block the road leading over the Bogat Ridge. If not, he would have to withdraw behind the Alt between Sarkany and Heviz to protect the three roads leading through the passes to Kronstadt. At 6:25 PM on the 1<sup>st</sup>, Crainicianu received authorization to retreat as he had proposed. The fact that Crainicianu's decision to retreat, only taken at this point, had already been announced to the North Army casts a very unfavorable light on the methods of the Romanian high command. It is also quite significant that although Falkenhayn had already won a significant victory at Hermannstadt the Romanian

armies were informed on 1 October for the first time by Buftea that a German general "Falkenstein" was in command and was launching a serious offensive in order to divert Romanian troops from the Danube front to the north.

Under German 9<sup>th</sup> Army, on 1 October the XXXIX Res Corps reached the line Porumbacu d.s. - Cornatielu after exhausting marches on roads turned to bottomless mud by the rain. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> they were supposed to continue to advance with their main body in the south, and weaker units farther north. Schmettow's Cavalry Corps, which stood ready next to Leschkirch and which had noted that the enemy was pulling back, was to join the advance of Staabs' Corps. G.Lt Morgen would attack toward Bekokten with the German 89 ID and the majority of the k.u.k. 71 ID. Falkenhayn paid no heed to new objections from Morgen. He instructed Arz to be sure to hold the line east of Schässsburg and Erdö Szt. György, while 71 ID could withdraw if necessary to a front on the heights east of Schässsburg and on the Steinberg. Falkenhayn stated that he could live with a withdrawal by the center and left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army if it became necessary.<sup>270</sup>

## **b. The advance on both sides of the Alt River**

### 2-3 October

During the advance on 2 October the only obstacles which XXXIX Res Corps had to overcome were caused by the soaked roads and paths. There were no actions, because the enemy had already withdrawn to Kl. Schenk. By evening, Staabs' Corps had thus reached without fighting Ucia d.j., Vistea d.j., and the area 6 km east of Sachsenhausen. The Cavalry Corps nearly reached G. Schenk.

Activity was livelier for G.Lt Morgen's group, whose two divisions were supposed to attack around 9:00 AM. The assembly of 71 ID was delayed by the bottomless roads. However, in the morning 89 ID attacked by themselves against the heights west of Bekokten. They found themselves in a hornets' nest, because the 3 and 6 Romanian ID counterattacked. Both German regiments were driven back and suffered substantial casualties. The third regiment of 89 ID (which had been attached to Corps Schmettow) launched relief attacks, but they were unable to alter the situation. The same was true of 71 ID. When their main body finally arrived on the Steinberg they found themselves

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270 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 71

threatened from Meschendorf and Moha and therefore had to deploy with their front facing east. Moreover, in the afternoon one of the regiments of the 71<sup>st</sup>, which had come forward to the heights 4 km east of Moha, was driven back by parts of 3 Romanian ID.<sup>271</sup>

G.Lt Morgen had stayed at Maros Vasarhely, and thus missed a chance to coordinate operations on the battlefield. In the evening he ordered both divisions to occupy the heights northeast and southwest of Retisdorf. He judged that the situation was very serious and was concerned that he would have to withdraw behind the Haarbach if the enemy renewed their advance. Fortunately his two divisional commanders were less pessimistic and resolved to stay in their position on the next day. This was also Falkenhayn's desire; he wanted the divisions to bring their intermingled units back in order so that they would again be ready to attack on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Developments on 3 October proved the divisional commanders to be correct.

During 2 October the units of 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army received the order to retreat behind the Alt and the Gr. Homorodbach, where they would block the roads through the passes into the Burzenland. The 3 and 6 ID therefore didn't pursue their opponents, but in the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> were already drawing back toward Scharisch. Crainicianu intended to create defensive positions with half of 4 ID at Sinca Vch. and Persiani. 3 ID would guard the road to the Bogat Pass at Heviz and the road and railway to Agostonfalva east of Katzendorf. Between the two divisions, two battalions would deploy east of Comana d.j. on the western slope of the Geisterwald. The second brigade of 4 ID would cover the Army's withdrawal north of Fogaras, while 2 Calarasi Bde did the same in the plains farther south. 6 ID was placed in the Army's reserve; one brigade was sent to Vledeny and the other to Al. Rakos. 2 CD was instructed to maintain the connection with the North Army from Petek.<sup>272</sup>

The withdrawal was supposed to be finished that night, but was delayed by the wretched state of the roads. Thus on 3 October the 3 ID just got to Comana d.j. and 6 ID to the Venetia d.j. - Sarkany area. Only the brigade of 4 ID reached their goal, the narrow point in the valley by Sinca Vch. and Persiani. 2 Calarasi Bde established a line of skirmishers farther west. The rear-guard brigade of 4 ID at Fogaras was pushed back in the afternoon of the 3<sup>rd</sup> by the leading troops of 187 ID, and spent the night south of Mundra.

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271 Bajnoczy, pp. 102 ff.

272 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 216 ff.

On the allies' side the 51 Hon ID and 76 Res ID reached the area southwest of Fogaras without seeing action, and encamped. The Cavalry Corps entered Scharisch. Detachments from 89 and 71 ID occupied the heights which they had lost the day before.

The k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army wasn't engaged on 2 October. Thus 16 Lst Mtn Bde, including Lt Col. Hettinger's group, could be pulled behind the front without interference from the enemy. The Army commander GdI Arz intended to begin to pursue on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, but on this day the 8 Romanian ID attacked the center of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. 39 Hon ID was able without great difficulty to repulse the enemy along the line Görgey Szt. Imre - Oroszi. Farther south the adjacent 1 Lst Huss Bde, however, was pushed back to part of the Kokel position which jutted out to the east. This compelled Arz to quickly send 16 Lst Mtn Bde, which had assembled at Schässburg, to the point of penetration. 19 Lst Mtn Bde, now commanded by Col. von Berzeviczy, was no longer in contact with the enemy, because the 7 Romanian ID had already marched back to Szekely-Udvarhely per the orders they'd received on the 1<sup>st</sup>; this Division had outposts entrenched on the line Kobatfalva-Bögöz. A cavalry division created from 4 Calarasi Bde and the Rosiori Bde which 2 CD had left behind was guarding the left wing of North Army at Homorod Szt. Pal and Homorod Almas.

#### 4 October

For 4 October, GdI Falkenhayn ordered 9<sup>th</sup> Army and the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to develop their advance into an attack. XXXIX Res Corps would advance between the Fogaras Mountains and the Alt, while a weak detachment on the left moved along the northern bank of the Alt through Calboru. The Cavalry Corps would advance through Felmern. Morgen's attacking group (89 and 71 ID) would push toward the southeast. The parts of 1<sup>st</sup> Army that didn't take part in the attack were supposed to pin down the enemy with lively activity.<sup>273</sup>

Under 1<sup>st</sup> Army, GM Grallert prepared 16 Lst Mtn Bde on the 4<sup>th</sup> for a counterattack northeast from Nyarad Szereda. Since the Brigade's movement along the insufficient narrow-gauge railroad was very slow, the attack couldn't begin until the 5<sup>th</sup>. These preparations were scarcely disturbed by the enemy. Four Romanian thrusts against 39 Hon ID remained ineffective. From several indications, GdI Arz gained the impression that the Romanian North Army would soon start to retreat. He was

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273 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 75

planning an energetic pursuit, in which the main effort would be made on the southern wing. For this purpose, at midnight on the 5<sup>th</sup> the HQ of VI Corps would move to Maros Vasarhely to assume command over 61 ID, 1 Lst Huss Bde and 39 Hon ID. The northern group of the Army (72 ID and half of 37 Hon ID) would be led by GM Haber.<sup>274</sup> At the same time Morgen's attacking group, which was already deeply involved in the operations of 9<sup>th</sup> Army, would transfer with Conrad's consent to that Army. On 4 October the 71 ID reached Seiburg without fighting, and 89 ID the area farther south.

Under 9<sup>th</sup> Army, Schmettow's Corps reached Felmern on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Corps Staabs advanced vigorously; in the evening 187 ID was at Sarkany and 51 Hon ID at Vadu. The leading troops of 76 Res ID enveloped the rear-guard brigade of 4 Romanian ID south of Mundra, attacked them and drove them back.<sup>275</sup> The 76<sup>th</sup> reached Siercaitia and late in the afternoon even took the heights south of Sinca Vch., which formed the left pillar of the position which 4 ID was building to a point north of Persiani. As a result, the 11 Inf Bde of 6 ID, which had gone to Vledeny in the Army's reserve, was called back by II Corps HQ and sent to Sinca Vch. The 2 Calarasi Bde pulled back to Sinca Noua. III Corps, which made up the Army's right wing, occupied Heviz with one brigade of 3 ID and the ridge east of Homorod with the other. Outposts were stationed at Galt, then south and north of Repts as far as the railroad. Farther north, between Draas and Dalya, the 12 Inf Bde (which originally was supposed to be in the Army's reserve) held a defensive position. In front of them 2 CD had been holding Petek and Mehbürg since the day before.

#### Falkenhayn's analysis of the situation

In the evening of 4 October GdI Falkenhayn felt that the time had come to outline the next step of the operations. He saw that the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was retreating to the southeast. On the next day it would become apparent whether or not this Army intended to offer resistance on the western edge of the Geisterwald. The North Army seemed to be bending 7 ID on their left wing back to Szekely-Udvarhely. Cavalry apparently filled the gap between the two armies. If these conclusions were correct, Falkenhayn wanted to quickly reach the Kronstadt basin with his strong right wing. Then he would have to decide

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274 FML Hefelle, the commander of 72 ID, had been taken ill.

Until the arrival of his successor, FML Bandian, Colonel-Brigadier Barwik was leading the Division.

275 Elstermann, "Nachrichtenblatt der 76. RD", Issue 2 for 1929

whether to continue the pursuit of 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army toward Ploesci or to shift the main body of 9<sup>th</sup> Army left to attack the North Army. Falkenhayn gave preference to the former plan, and hoped to leave the task of guarding against Presan's Army to Schmettow's cavalry and the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. He also wanted the Alpenkorps to join the offensive of the main body of 9<sup>th</sup> Army with an advance through the Red Tower Pass to Pitesci.

Falkenhayn sent his observations to both high commands and requested a decision. For the moment, however, the important task was to first reach the Kronstadt basin. With this goal, Staabs' Corps was to make a powerful attack to break the Romanians' resistance and then to thrust through the Geisterwald. Morgen's Corps was instructed to lay hands on the crossing points over the Alt near Comana d.j. and Haviz. There was not enough room for a concentric advance by the Cavalry Corps against the Geisterwald; therefore they were shifted to Seiburg and Stein on the Army's left wing. Here they would secure the flank and maintain connections with 1<sup>st</sup> Army. 8 Mtn Bde<sup>276</sup>, which had come from the Isonzo and was detraining in Hermannstadt, would immediately advance into the Alt valley. It was intended to deploy this Bde west of Königstein and toward the Kronstadt-Campulung road, so they could open the Törzburg Pass from the south. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was to pin down the enemy on their front.

Now (on the 4<sup>th</sup>) the 8 Romanian ID repeated their vain attacks between the Görgeny valley and Kibed. Then the enemy were observed to be moving to the rear, so GdI Arz ordered his divisions to remain on the Romanians' heels. In particular, 72 ID was to take the entrance into the valley east of Deda and prepare to advance into either the Maros or Görgeny valley. By evening there was an increasing number of reports that the enemy was about to retreat. Therefore orders for the pursuit were issued before midnight. If the Romanian North Army did pull back, the 61 ID (including 1 Lst Huss Bde) would advance through Kibed, Eted and Martonos while 39 Hon ID advanced through Parajd. It was planned that afterwards the 61 ID would continue to move through Szekely-Udvarhely to Csik Szereda, and 39 Hon ID from Parajd to Gyergyó Szt. Miklos. 1 Lst Huss Bde, shifted to the south wing, would maintain a link with Schmettow's Corps. Plans were afoot for GM Haber's Group to advance through the Görgeny and Maros valleys.

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276 The order of battle of Col. Paul Rath's 8 Mtn Bde included Inf Bns I/15, IV/24, III/35, IV/48; BH FJB 5; ¼ 1 Sqdn/UR 12; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 16.

### **c. The Battle of the Geister Woods, 5 October**

After a series of rainy days, on 5 October the sun re-appeared and quickly dried the soaked ground. This made it easier to maneuver.

G.Lt Staabs originally intended to first have the artillery of 76 Res ID and 51 Hon ID fire; the infantry wouldn't attack until an envelopment maneuver farther north by 187 ID could take effect. However, when news arrived that a long Romanian column was coming forward from Vledeny (this was the 11 Inf Bde on its return march), G.Lt Staabs released 76 Res ID and 51 Hon ID to attack. Fog which lay in the deep parts of the valley until 11:00 AM diminished the effectiveness of the artillery preparation, but made it easier for the infantry to approach the Romanian position. So the attackers gained ground quickly.

Meanwhile the 187 ID penetrated the enemy's northern flank. The Romanian infantry on the right wing fell into confusion as they evacuated their position around 2:00 PM. Then the Germans pushed ahead to the line of guns. The troops in charge of the teams of horses panicked and fled back to Zeiden, where they were finally halted by the Army's staff. The attackers captured 43 guns.

Now the Romanian main body also left the battlefield; II Corps, which had suffered heavy casualties, retreated in great disorder along the two mountain roads leading east.<sup>277</sup> They were followed by G.Lt Staabs' victorious divisions, which by evening reached Sinca Noua and the area farther north.

Under I Res Corps the German 89 ID was able to capture the bridge at Comana d.j., which had been only partly burnt, almost without fighting. Near Repts the k.u.k. 71 ID struck the outposts of 3 Romanian ID and in the afternoon drove them back in a sharp action. In the evening they entered Repts, and at night they fought enemy rear guards east of the village. The Romanians were covering the withdrawal of 3 ID, which began after midnight; parts of 3<sup>rd</sup> Division moved through the Bogat Pass, while the main body came through Al. Rakos toward Marienburg. By afternoon the 12 Inf Bde had already withdrawn through Homorod Ujfalu to F. Rakos. GM Klein's group (142 Inf Bde), which hitherto had efficiently screened the shift of the

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277 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 523 and 527

main body of 71 ID and blocked the Gr. Kokel valley, assembled in Kaisdorf; they were supposed to move through Schweischer to join the rest of the Division.

Schmettow's Cavalry Corps moved behind I Res Corps, without disturbing its march, to Schweischer where they began to clash with the Romanian 2 CD. Gen. Crainicianu had given the 2 CD the unrealistic assignment of riding through Katzendorf and Heviz along the eastern bank of the Alt and to the south, then falling on the rear of the allies who were pushing east from Sarkany. When the Romanian high command re-assigned the Division to North Army on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the horsemen were no longer expected to carry out this impossible assignment.

Contrary to the expectations of 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ at Klausenburg, the Romanians in front of the Army's center and northern wing continued to hold their trenches on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Thus when Bernatsky's Brigade began to counterattack at dawn they encountered a foe prepared to defend themselves. However, thanks to the elan of 16 Lst Mtn Bde the Romanians north of Kibed were thrown back beyond the Kokel position. Enemy counter-thrusts east of this position were repulsed. The 8 Romanian ID once again stormed forward against Heights # 1030 (9 km north of Kibed) and at Görgeny Szt. Imre, but suffered a bloody defeat at the hands of 39 Hon ID. 19 Lst Mtn Bde, which had fallen back farther in the last few days, concentrated their main body at Erdö Szt. György and sent them forward on the 5<sup>th</sup> as far as Körispatak. Scouts moved ahead to Gagy, where they were checked by the enemy.

The defeat of 8 ID caused General Presan concern that the Division could be pushed back to the north, away from its supply route (the Parajd-Gyergyó Alfalu road). Therefore he ordered them to hold on stubbornly to the entrance to the valley at Parajd; 7 ID should help out with parts of their right wing. To protect this side column, which would be sent through Eted and Atya against the flank of the attacking Hungarians, the main body of 7 ID would again move to Szekely-Keresztur. Furthermore the Army's reserve, 15 Inf Bde, was placed at the disposal of 8 ID. As will be related below, however, the outcome of the Battle of the Geisterwald would decisively influence the operations of the Romanian North Army.

### **3. The Romanians cross the Danube at Flamanda, 1-4 October**

While Falkenhayn's Army was victoriously advancing from Hermann-

stadt to Kronstadt, the fate of the Romanian Danube operation - which their high command and the government at Bucharest hoped would fundamentally change Romania's already precarious military situation - was also being sealed.

#### The Romanian plans

After the Crown Council on 15 September, in which it was decided to attack the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army, Averescu began feverishly to initiate the necessary preparations, particularly for the Danube crossing. On the 29<sup>th</sup> he was able to report that all was ready. On this day, however, the high command also received tidings of the catastrophic defeat which I Corps had suffered at Hermannstadt. Already it was less likely that the offensive against Bulgaria could substantially improve Romania's overall situation.

Now the influence of Romania's allies once again played an important role. On 15 September General Joffre had expressed the opinion that the Romanians should could continue their attacks in Transylvania; on the 19<sup>th</sup>, however, he had recommended that the attacks should cease. On the 28<sup>th</sup> he demanded that the Romanians should immediately and finally put an end to the danger threatening them from the Bulgarian side with a powerful blow against Toshev's Army.<sup>278</sup> Thus support would be provided to the Orient Army in their attempt to recover the lost town of Florina. Because of Romania's dependence on its allies, King Ferdinand believed he had to take Joffre's opinions into account; without regard to the deterioration of the situation in Transylvania, he ordered his southern army group to begin the offensive.

Averescu issued his instructions on 30 September. On 1 October the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should cross the Danube at Flamanda, "to make the offensive by the Dobruja Army easier and to threaten the enemy's rear and line of retreat in the direction of Dobric." The Dobruja Army should initially attack to pin down the allies along their front. After the advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army over the Danube became effective, Zayonchkovsky would begin "an all-out offensive" to throw most if not all of his opponents into the Danube.

On the Dobruja front there had been only a short pause in the continuous fighting which had lasted until 19 September.

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278 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 374. Larcher, p. 166

Already on the 21<sup>st</sup> the Romanian group on the eastern wing renewed their attack. They took Buj-Enghez from the newly-arrived 25 Turkish ID and advance to Azaplar, where they were opposed by Bulgarian cavalry. But already during the night the Romanians were thrown out of Buj-Enghez, and then lost all the other ground they'd gained. New fighting on the 24<sup>th</sup> didn't alter the situation.

Meanwhile the rest of VI Turkish Corps (15 ID) and a brigade of the 12 Bulgarian ID arrived at Dobric behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army. The German 217 ID was approaching by train. GFM Mackensen planned to renew his offensive, with the capture of the Cernavoda-Constanta railroad as its goal.

Then on the 28<sup>th</sup> German aviators reported massive troop movements from Bucharest toward the Danube and the existence of a large park of wagons at Pueni. This signified that an attack over the Danube was imminent. General Toshev thereupon quickly sent a total of 13 battalions and 4 batteries from Silistria, Razgrad and Ruscuk toward Turtukai. Moreover the leading detachment of 217 ID, which was just arriving in Dobric, was sent ahead immediately to Turtukai. Despite the threat to the rear of 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army, Mackensen (who brought his HQ ahead to Dobric at the end of September) didn't think a Romanian thrust over the Danube would be particularly effective. He still intended to start his attack against the Constanta railroad as soon as possible.

#### The Romanians cross the river

Before Mackensen's planned attack developed, on 1 October Averescu opened his own offensive on two fronts. He had 14 infantry and 2 ½ cavalry divisions with a total of 195 battalions, 55 squadrons and 169 batteries under his command. This was the strongest force that had ever been placed under a Romanian army commander. His opponent GFM Mackensen had just around 110 battalions, 30 squadrons and 72 batteries. This total includes all of VI Turkish Corps, the Bulgarian brigade that had just joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, and the troops guarding the Danube under GdI Kosch's LII German Corps HQ, but not the German 217 ID. Thus Averescu had roughly twice the troop strength of Mackensen.

Before dawn on 1 October the infantry of 10 Romanian ID began to cross the Danube at Flamanda on pontoons and small vessels. They spread out on the southern bank, where they were engaged against the garrison of Ruscuk and a battery of the k.u.k.

Danube Flotilla's land group, which were hurled against them.<sup>279</sup> In the afternoon two regiments of 21 Romanian ID also crossed the river and took up a front against Bulgarian militia battalions coming up from Turtukai.

Simultaneously with the river crossing the Romanians began to construct a military bridge. But the construction was thrown badly off schedule in the afternoon due to bombing from German planes. Also, some troops still waiting to cross the river suffered substantial casualties in this attack. To prevent more units from reaching the southern bank, in the afternoon GdI Kosch (who was coordinating operations against the attackers) ordered the k.u.k. Danube Flotilla to send some of its vessels from their anchorage in the Belene Canal "to destroy this bridge."<sup>280</sup> The Flotilla had meanwhile released some floating mines against the bridge, but they failed to reach their target. On the other hand, an attempt by the Romanians to also cross the river at Martin (12 km northeast of Ruscuk) was nipped in the bud.

Meanwhile the Romanians had created a bridgehead which included the towns of Braslen and Sarnabei, but they were pushed out of the latter town during the night. Their position was not enviable. They had almost no artillery. Although the bridge was finally completed around 7:00 PM, a storm which featured a violent downpour broke it up three times during the night. Early on 2 October the rest of 21 ID, several batteries, and the necessary supply trains could finally start crossing the bridge. Soon afterwards the Romanians on the south bank attacked again, trying to widen the bridgehead toward Gargale, Novoselo and Tetovo.

#### Intervention of the k.u.k. Danube Flotilla

Then an event unfolded that the Romanians hadn't expected. Ships of the k.u.k. Danube Flotilla sailed to the area where the enemy had crossed and took up stations in the rear of the Romanian infantry fighting on Bulgarian soil. Gen. Averescu had paid too little attention to the opposing flotilla when he made his preparations. He had placed Romanian guns on the island of Cinghinarele, which lay at the eastern outlet of the Belene Canal, but had neglected to block the waterway with mines.<sup>281</sup>

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279 Kellner, p. 35

280 Wulff, p. 192. Schmidtke, "Völkerringen um die Donau" (Berlin, 1927), p. 74

281 Ortlepp, "Der rumänische Donauübergang bei Flamanda-

Now, at 8:00 PM on 2 October, the patrol boats "Barsch" and "Viza" fired all their ammunition at the bridge and at the Romanian infantry stationed on both ends. Around 10:45 AM the monitors "Bodrog" and "Körös" also arrived and took part in the successful task of destroying the bridge. However, the enemy artillery fired with increasing strength against the monitors. In the afternoon the gun turrets of "Bodrog" were smashed by direct hits, and "Körös" also suffered substantial damage. Both ships broke off the action and sailed back to Belene.

The gallant intervention of the Danube Flotilla and the continuing bombing attacks by German planes greatly disrupted the river crossing and had a powerful impact on Averescu. He began to doubt that the operation would succeed, and at noon on the 2<sup>nd</sup> went to report to Supreme HQ. He demanded that the Romanian flotilla, hitherto held back at Rasova, should be committed along with airplanes and a large force of heavy artillery to defeat the dangerous Aus-Hung. monitors; however, it would take two days for the artillery to arrive. Because of all these problems, as well as the stormy weather, he advised that the rest of the river crossing should be postponed for two days. The high command concurred. Thus the crossing was taking on the appearance of merely a diversionary operation. The two divisions already on the south bank would be pulled back to a small bridgehead at Rahovo [Rjahova]. All un-needed troops - especially the artillery (and even the infantry guns) - were to pull back to the north bank.<sup>282</sup> The troops involved didn't get these orders until 11:00 PM.

Early on the 3<sup>rd</sup> the monitors "Szamos" and "Leitha", taking the place of "Bodrog" and "Körös," came to the crossing area, but their attempt to get near the bridge was hindered by the well-handled Romanian batteries. Therefore floating mines were released to break up the bridge. The explosions created three broad gaps that made traffic impossible for hours. Meanwhile the ring around the desperately fighting Romanians was being closed ever tighter by the gallantly attacking Bulgarians. And the first companies of the German 217 ID were arriving in front of Rahovo by truck.

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Rjahova" in "Wissen and Wehr" (Berlin, 1930 edition - p. 588).  
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For an eyewitness account of the Flotilla's action, see Martiny, "Bild-Dokumente aus Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (Graz, 1939), pp. 46-48.

282 Averescu, pp. 95 ff.

The Romanians are defeated

Then at 3:00 PM on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Averescu received a totally unexpected order from his high command - the Danube operation was to be completely abandoned. The situation in Transylvania, which was getting worse each day, obliged the Romanian leadership to divert troops who were urgently needed to defend the threatened borders of their country. Therefore they ordered that 22 ID should be sent immediately to 1<sup>st</sup> Army and 21 ID to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. 10 ID would evacuate the southern bank of the Danube during the night.

Averescu carried out this order with great reluctance. Implementation was moreover made difficult by a new thrust against the bridge around sunset by the monitors "Enns" and "Traun." The monitors released two barges and several floating mines which once again broke up the bridge; it was repaired only with difficulty. The Romanians came back to northern bank of the river over the restored bridge (which again was damaged by mines on the 4<sup>th</sup>) and on skiffs and pontoons.

The assignment of the rest of 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army (10, 16 and 18 ID plus 1 CD) was now merely to guard the northern bank of the Danube between the mouths of the Alt and Argesu. On 6 October the 10 ID was sent off to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; on the 7<sup>th</sup> the 16 ID was instructed to follow them into the Prahovo valley.

Such was the end of the Romanian Danube offensive, which had been undertaken with such high hopes! The k.u.k. Danube Flotilla had played a very glorious part in causing it to fail.

The Russo-Romanian army in the Dobruja had no better luck. Gen. Zayonchkovsky had ordered 61 Russian ID to attack Buj-Enghez while the neighboring Romanians on his army's eastern wing (19 and 5 ID plus 5 Calarasi Bde) attacked Amuzacia. The western wing, along with the Danube Flotilla, would only deliver a strong artillery fire. The Russian Navy, on the Black Sea, threatened the town of Mangalia.

The powerful attacks which began on 1 October, and hit the Turks especially hard, achieved the usual initial success. But fierce counter-thrusts by the Bulgarians led to see-saw fighting in which the enemy divisions were hard-pressed to retain the meager ground they had gained. In the night of 3-4 October Gen. Zayonchkovsky had to report that on the 4<sup>th</sup> he would commit his last reserves. His opponents didn't falter and were even able to detach troops toward Rahovo. The Dobruja army, after

attacking for three days, was now awaiting help from 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army<sup>283</sup>, which by this time was already evacuating the south bank of the Danube. Nevertheless Zayonchkovsky continued his attacks. They gained no ground, and only increased his already lengthy casualty figures.<sup>284</sup> Finally on the 7<sup>th</sup> Zayonchkovsky was instructed to fall back onto the defensive and to send 15 ID to North Army as quickly as possible. On the 12<sup>th</sup> he had to give up 12 ID to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. On the other hand, the Dobruja army received as replacements the Russian 3 Rifle Div and 8 CD.

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283 Dabija, Vol. I, p. 412

284 In the first six days of October the 19 Romanian ID lost 45 officers and 3150 men (Dabija, Vol. I, p. 421).

#### 4. Recovery of eastern Transylvania, 6-14 October

##### a. Measures taken by the commanders, and fighting on 6 October

###### The Romanians change plans again

The failure of the Danube crossing at Flamanda and the advance of Falkenhayn's Army to the east after the victory at Hermannstadt occurred simultaneously. Concerned about the armies on the northern front, the Romanian high command again turned their primary attention to Transylvania. They became fully aware of the seriousness of the situation on 5 October when they received Gen. Crainicianu's report of the outcome of the Battle of the Geisterwald. Since it seemed there was nothing to fear in Dobruja, the high command decided to return to their original plan for an offensive in Transylvania. Therefore they wanted to create a *mass de manoeuvre* in the basins on the upper courses of the Alt and the Maros, for which they would divert divisions from Army Group South.<sup>285</sup> In addition, the Romanians asked the Stavka to send two Russian corps through Marosheviz toward Bistritz.<sup>286</sup>

In a letter to the Tsar on the 7<sup>th</sup>, King Ferdinand stressed the importance of this operation and declared that it was the only possible way to open a route over the Carpathians for Letschitzky's Army.<sup>287</sup> The Romanian King now asked for three corps and said it was desirable that the Russo-Romanian forces in Transylvania should total at least 20 divisions. But great speed was necessary, because if the Romanian troops retreated to the mountains on the border it would be significantly more difficult for the Russian corps to carry out their mission.

In the night of 5-6 October the Romanian high command ordered that until the deployment of reinforcements the North and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies should actively defend their current positions. The North Army in particular was warned not to start an offensive on their own, regardless of the situation. On the other hand 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had been falling back to Kronstadt, was told to "Offer resistance, while maneuvering with the right wing!" A postscript contained the information that a brigade of 22 ID was

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285 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 231 and 307

286 Zayonchkovsky, Vol. VI, p. 94

287 Red Archives, Vol. XXIX, p. 32

being sent by train to Rucaru (10 km southwest of the Törzburg Pass), and the entire 21 ID with four heavy batteries to Kronstadt.<sup>288</sup>

### The allied plans

However, the Romanian plan to resume the offensive in Transylvania was crossed up by the rapid advance of the allies.

On 5 October Falkenhayn, who on this day moved this HQ ahead to Hermannstadt, received an answer to the proposals he'd submitted to the high commands the day before. Hindenburg and Conrad agreed that the principal task of Falkenhayn's two armies was to first win a decisive victory over the Romanians in Transylvania. Only afterwards would the planned offensive to Ploesci [Ploesti] become feasible. For this purpose an envelopment attack to cut the Kronstadt-Ploesci railroad was recommended. This measure would be particularly effective since it would eliminate the Romanians' only line of supply by rail. (It was known that the enemy were still unable to use the railroad through the Gyimes Pass, which had been substantially damaged by Aus-Hung. troops during their retreat.) Whether and to what extent 9<sup>th</sup> Army would have to shift to the north to strike a decisive blow in Transylvania was left to Falkenhayn's judgment.

On the previous day (4 October) the allied high commands had altered the organization of the Eastern front. The German South Army was taken out of Archduke Charles' Army Group and from the 5<sup>th</sup> made up a new army group, along with 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, under the command of GO Böhm-Ermolli. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> plus the German 9<sup>th</sup> Armies, now made up the new "Front" of Archduke Charles Franz Joseph. The Archduke-Successor moved his HQ to Grosswardein, which indicated that despite the Russians' continuing attacks in Galicia and Volhynia the main effort would now be made on the Romanian front. The Archduke was briefly on leave; until he returned on 12 October his Front would consist only of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies, while 1<sup>st</sup> Army would remain under Falkenhayn's orders.

In agreement with the high commands, Falkenhayn had decided to do as much damage as possible to the enemy while they were still in Transylvania. He clearly recognized that the two Romanian armies in the eastern part of the province were becoming separated. This was verified by air observers who reported on the 5<sup>th</sup> that long columns of Romanian troops and supply wagons

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288 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 230

were moving along the roads through the Geisterwald; they also noted lively train traffic in the direction of Kronstadt. Thus the battered 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army was making its way through the Kronstadt passes, while the North Army was still stationed relatively deep into Transylvania. However, it was to be expected that the latter force wouldn't tarry for long with their extended southern flank exposed, but would soon pull back toward the Gyimes, Bekas and Tölgyes Passes. Little success could be won by pursuing them frontally on the narrow mountain roads; therefore on the 5<sup>th</sup> Falkenhayn ordered 1<sup>st</sup> Army to quickly reach the area around Csik Szereda with a strong right wing. Then it would be possible to thrust to the north and perhaps drive the enemy away from their routes of retreat.<sup>289</sup>

#### Fighting on 6 October

Falkenhayn ordered that the units of 9<sup>th</sup> Army should continue their pursuit on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Thus XXXIX Res Corps would advance through Tohanulu vch. toward Törzburg and Rosenau as well as through Vledeny toward Kronstadt. I Res Corps would drive the enemy completely out of Reps and then have 71 ID pursue them through the Bogat Pass and, with a detachment on the left, through Al. Rakos. Cavalry Corps Schmettow, whose horses were very worn out, would secure the Army's left flank at Mehbürg and Königsdorf, while scouting toward the northeast.

On 6 October the 76 Res ID moved along the road to Poiana Morului without seeing action; ahead of them the 11 Romanian Inf Bde occupied the point where the road debouches from the hills at Tohanulu vch. The main body of Staabs' Corps came upon parts of 4 Romanian ID at Vledeny; they quickly pushed the enemy back. After a see-saw action in the afternoon, they took possession of the outlet from the forested mountains into the plain of the Burzenland. Then 4 Romanian ID withdrew at one bound through Kronstadt to the northern exit of the Predeal Pass; they were exhausted when they reached this position in the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>290</sup>

Under I Res Corps the 71 ID had to drive back enemy rear guards and then cross the Alt; so they fell behind the German 89 ID, which reached Heviz before them and took their place for the march toward the Bogat Pass. Therefore 71 ID sent just a strong side column toward Al. Rakos and concentrated all their other troops at and south of Reps. In front of Cavalry Corps

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289 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 80

290 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 234 ff.

Schmettow the 2 Romanian CD had pulled back so quickly that there were no actions. 3 CD stopped for the night at Homorod and Katzendorf, and 1 CD in the Königsdorf-Mehburg area.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> GdI Arz had the center of his Army continue the attack they'd successfully initiated the day before. 61 ID and the right wing of 39 Hon ID advanced through Sovarad against weakening resistance, and the half of 37 Hon ID in the Maros valley was easily able to gain ground toward Ratosnya. It was becoming clear that the Romanian North Army was starting to retreat.

The reasons for this were the defeat which 8 ID had suffered on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and the rapid withdrawal of the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army whereby Gen. Presan's southern flank was endangered. In the night of 5-6 October he had ordered 7 ID to abandon the plan for supporting 8 ID, and to march back to Csik Szereda. 8 ID would withdraw toward Tölgyes and 14 ID to Marosheviz. Soon after issuing this order, however, North Army HQ learned of the plans of the high command (described above) to deploy a group in the Gyergyó and the Csik for a new offensive. Now Presan decided to limit the extent of his retreat, which he'd originally intended to continue to the upper reaches of the Alt and the Maros. His three infantry division (14, 8 and 7) would stop along a line of ridges in the Görgény and Hargitta Mountains, while blocking the roads leading into the Gyergyó and the Csik. In the Army's reserve, 15 Inf Bde and 4 Calarasi Bde would go to Gyergyó Szt. Miklos and 2 CD to Kezdivasarhely.

The Romanian retreat also caused the allies to make new dispositions. Effective at midnight (6-7 October) GO Conrad transferred XI Corps from 7<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> Army. This would enable the latter to initiate an envelopment attack against the enemy in the upper Maros valley. The German Emperor, through the "Supreme Allied Command" let Teschen known on the 6<sup>th</sup> that he expected the allied troops "to pursue the withdrawing enemy without stopping so that the Romanians will leave Transylvania only after being thoroughly beaten." This order was passed on to Falkenhayn.

## **b. The Battle of Kronstadt, 7-9 October**

By the evening of 6 October GdI Falkenhayn had the impression that the enemy who were retreating in front of 9<sup>th</sup> Army didn't intend to make a stand on the Transylvania side of the mountains. He concluded that the Romanian troop movements,

about which there were many reports, were intended to reinforce the already badly-weakened 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and to enable it to conduct an orderly retreat through the passes. Therefore he emphasized the importance of quickly seizing the entries into the passes on the southern edge of the Burzenland. In the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> he designated Kronstadt as the target of Corps Staabs' offensive. A small detachment of troops familiar with mountains would work their way around the Schuler Heights south as far as F. Tömös to block the railroad and highway. I Res Corps would reach Marienburg with 89 ID and Köpecz with 71 ID. The Cavalry Corps was sent to Barot with instructions to prevent sorties by the Romanian horsemen.<sup>291</sup>

In the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup>, the Romanian high command had ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to occupy the line Sepsi Szt. György - Heights # 663 and # 704 - Kronstadt - Törzburg Pass. Only if the situation grew very critical would they fall back to offer resistance at the foot of the mountains (on the line Maksa - Lisznyo - Tatrang - Dersztye - Rosenau - Törzburg). Therefore if necessary Kronstadt would be given up.

In the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup>, Gen. Crainicianu still intended to have 8 Inf Bde of 4 ID - reinforced by parts of 11 Bde - hold on stubbornly to the D. Muscelului (3 km east of Zernesti). 9 Inf Bde of 22 ID, which had arrived at Rucaru, was to come forward very quickly to the Törzburg Pass. The parts of 4 ID that had pulled back through Vledeny, reinforced by battalions from 11 Inf Bde, would defend Kronstadt. 3 ID was assigned to defend Hills # 704 and # 663, which rise from the plain. 21 ID, as it arrived from the Danube, would enter the front between Kronstadt and 3 ID.<sup>292</sup> In an Army order issued early on the 7<sup>th</sup>, Crainicianu addressed an urgent appeal to his troops to offer stubborn and active resistance in this fight, which would be decisive for Romania. He intended to let his opponents attack II Corps, stationed between Törzburg and Kronstadt, and to use III Corps farther north to mount a counterattack against the left flank of Falkenhayn's Army. However, some of the divisions and brigades which were still retreating toward the border passes didn't get Crainicianu's orders until around 3:00 PM on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Several units had already passed the sectors they were supposed to defend and had to be brought forward again.

#### 7 October

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291 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 82

292 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 236 ff.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> the advanced guard of the 76 Res ID was able to move through the narrow valley at Zernesti and into the plain without encountering strong resistance. Here, however, they were suddenly pounded by Romanian artillery stationed on the D. Muscelului and had to pull back again into the shelter of the woods. To force the enemy out of their well-chosen position, an envelopment attack was planned. The Division's main body deployed through Zernesti while a side column on the left moved through Holbak and Wolkendorf. This deployment consumed the entire day. Meanwhile the 9 Romanian Inf Bde came up behind their 8 Bde and occupied the ridges stretching from the Magura to Törzburg.

G.Lt Staabs assigned the capture of Kronstadt to his two northern divisions. Thus at 1:00 PM on the 7<sup>th</sup> the 51 Hon ID was to attack from the village of Weidenbach toward the heights on the western edge of Kronstadt, while 187 ID fought along and east of the road leading south from Marienburg. However, when flames rose from the Kronstadt railroad station early on the 7<sup>th</sup>, G.Lt Sunkel of the 187<sup>th</sup> believed it was a sign that the city was already being evacuated and started to advance directly from Heldsdorf toward Kronstadt. Only one battalion with a strong force of artillery were sent through Szentpeter.

In the afternoon, after pushing back Romanian rear guards, both of G.Lt Staabs' divisions approached the city. Then they were opposed by a strong enemy force. This was the northern half of 4 ID, which hadn't got the above-mentioned order to defend the city until 3:00 PM when they were already marching toward the Predeal Pass, but then quickly turned around. In heavy fighting that raged into the night, the advanced guard of 187 ID (IR 189) penetrated the northern part of the city. 51 Hon ID was halted by G.Lt Staabs in front of the western edge, because he didn't want the allies to risk shooting at each other in night-time street fighting.<sup>293</sup>

The Romanian 3 ID didn't receive Gen. Crainicianu's order until 3:30 PM, when they were at Tatrang. Then they hastened forward, sending one brigade apiece toward the towns of Szentpeter and Honigberg, which meanwhile however had been occupied by the side detachment of 187 ID. By dawn the next morning the Romanians drove the weak German detachment out of both these places and from Hill # 704. The 21 ID detrained in Predeal Pass and during the night moved up in echelon to the sector between Szentpeter and Kronstadt; from Predeal they also sent detachments to block

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293 Nagy, Vol. I, p. 183

the valleys of the Big and Little Weidenbach. 12 Inf Bde of 6 ID was halted in its march to the rear at Keresztvar and moved forward again; in the evening they reached the town of Uzon. 3 Calarasi Bde stayed put at Hosszufalu. To enable 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to offer prolonged resistance, the high command was also sending the second brigade from 22 ID and all of 10 ID from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

Under I Res Corps the leading troops of 89 ID reached Marienburg in the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>. The main body was spread out over a great distance as far back as the Bogat Pass. 71 ID stayed in the area around Köpecz.

Because of the distance of the Cavalry Corps from the battlefield, Falkenhayn didn't think they could enter the fighting in time. When GdI Arz reported that the Romanian North Army was pulling back on his front, but seemed to be delaying their withdrawal at Szekely-Udvarhely, 1 CD was sent toward Szt. Egyhazas-Olahfalu to cut off parts of the retreating Romanians if possible. Only the German 3 CD would continue to ride east through Barot. The two divisions camped for the night at Homorod Szt. Pal (1 CD) and Homorod Okland (3 CD).

#### 8 October

The 8<sup>th</sup> of October went well for 76 Res ID. The powerful fire of their heavy batteries and the advance of their enveloping columns forced the Romanian 8 Inf Bde to give up the D. Muscelului. Then 9 Inf Bde intervened through Törzburg. They were opposed by Hon IR 302, which had been sent to Zernesti and attached as a reserve to 76 Res ID; the Hungarians threw the enemy back and threatened their line of retreat at Törzburg.<sup>294</sup> Now both the Romanian brigades gave up the strong Magura-Törzburg position without a fight and pulled back to the trenches along the border on the heights at the Törzburg Pass. Two German battalions with artillery advanced up the valley of the Klein Weidenbach to cut off the road at Predeal. The contingency measures taken by Gen. Crainicianu, however, made it impossible to repeat in the Predeal Pass the same maneuver that had succeeded at Red Tower Pass.<sup>295</sup>

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294 Arminius, "Die 76. Reserve-Division in der Schlacht bei Kronstadt" (in Nachrichten-Blatt der 76. Reserve-Division, Issues # 14 and 15; Hanau, 1927)

295 Ortlepp, "Die Operationen der römänischen 2. Armee in Siebenbürgen" (in Nachrichten-Blatt der 76. Reserve-Division, Issue # 3; Hanau, 1929)

At Kronstadt the 187 ID had been unable to win a decision during the night of 7-8 October. Therefore at 7:00 AM G.Lt Staabs sent them forward again to attack, along with 51 Hon ID. After taking the city the 187 ID was to pursue into the Tömös Pass while the Honved garrisoned and secured Kronstadt.

In bitter hand-to-hand fighting that lasted until 2:00 PM on the 8<sup>th</sup>, the 51 Hon ID wrested the heights west of the city, crowned by strong entrenchments, from the stubborn defenders. Meanwhile the German IR 189, which had received no rest through the entire night, pushed the Romanians south house by house. The left side-column of 187 ID, which had pulled back to the Weidenbach south of Brenndorf, was reinforced by parts of the Division's main body and again advanced toward Hill # 704. Yet once more the Germans were forced onto the defensive here by counter-thrusts.<sup>296</sup>

Already in the night of 7-8 October Gen. Crainicianu had prepared a plan for the situation in which his opponents continued their attacks against the center of his Army but didn't thrust south from the Alt valley; if this happened the 3 ID, 12 Inf Bde and 3 Calarasi Bde were to fall upon the Germans' northern flank. Toward noon the left brigade of 3 ID thrust from Szentpeter toward Kronstadt while the right brigade on Hill # 704 guarded toward the north; moreover Romanian artillery fire paralyzed traffic on the Marienburg-Kronstadt road. 12 Inf Bde, following 3 ID from Uzon, turned toward Brenndorf.

To repulse this dangerous attack on the flank, IR 189 was pulled from Kronstadt and thrown against the enemy who were attacking from Szentpeter. Mopping up in Kronstadt was left to the Honved. G.Lt Sunkel sent his sparse reserves toward Hill # 704. He had no concerns about the steadiness of his troops. His trust in them was so great that after repelling the Romanian thrust on the flank he once more sent IR 189 to Kronstadt; the Regiment would speed up the capture of the city and then push toward the Tömös Pass. Falkenhayn actually would have been happy to see the enemy continue their drive toward the lower Weidenbach, because the advance of G.Lt Morgen's corps into their flank and rear would become all the more effective.

But the first units of 89 ID by evening had hardly moved beyond Brenndorf; the Division was delayed by destroyed bridges, the

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296 Vogel, "Die Befreiung Siebenbürgens und die Schlachten bei Targu Jiu und am Argesch" (in "Der grosse Krieg in Einzeldarstellungen"; Oldenburg, 1918; Issue 33)

resistance of weak Romanian detachments, and the exhaustion of the troops. Nevertheless, the first appearance of German helmets on the Romanian flank was enough to cause disorder among parts of 12 Inf Bde. 71 ID reached the Hidveg - Szasz Magyaros - Lüget area and sent the attached HR # 2 forward to Arapatak. 1 CD reached Szt. Egyhazas-Olahfalu; the enemy, however, had already moved through the town. The German 3 CD spent the night at Barot.

### 9 October

On 9 October the rising morning sun shone over an allied victory in the Burzenland. Because of the loss of Kronstadt and the threat from the north, the Romanians had begun to retreat during the night. Instructions which Crainicianu had already issued on 8 October in case the outcome of the battle was unfavorable now came into effect. The units fell back as follows: 12 Inf Bde and 3 Calarasi Bde to Nagy Patak and Keresztvar (on the roads leading to the Bodza Pass), 3 ID to Tatrang (on the way to the Altschanz Pass), 21 and 4 ID with 21 Calarasi Bde to the northern end of the Tömös Pass. They were all supposed to offer prolonged resistance along these routes into Romania.

In the morning the allies immediately pursued the Romanian rear guards, but there was no further serious fighting. They found rich booty in Kronstadt, where 200 railroad cars loaded with rations fell into the victors' hands. Moreover, 25 guns had been captured during the battle. On the other hand, the number of prisoners was small.<sup>297</sup>

Crainicianu no longer bore responsibility for the beaten 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army. He was given the newly-created post of General Inspector of the Field Army, serving in a liaison role between the fighting units and supreme HQ. His successor at 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was the energetic General Averescu, who retained the confidence of the King despite the defeat he'd suffered at Flamanda.<sup>298</sup>

Averescu was already intervening decisively on the 9<sup>th</sup>. He abandoned the idea of offering prolonged resistance at the enhances of the passes, because he feared the troops here would be particularly vulnerable to his opponents' heavy artillery. Therefore the defenders would concentrate in the inner parts of the mountain valleys. 12 Inf and 3 Calarasi Bdes would take up positions south of Magyarbodza, 3 ID in the Altschanz Pass and

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297 Vogel, "Befreiung Siebenbürgens", p. 58

298 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 256

21 ID in the Tömös Pass. 2 Calarasi Bde would move farther back to Predeal. As 10 ID arrived it would deploy on the border ridges to block the valleys of both branches of the Weidenbach. The now united 22 ID was entrusted with the defense of the Törzburg Pass. 4 ID was moving by rail to the Ploesci area, where Averescu wanted them to assemble in his Army's reserve.

As General Averescu took command over 2<sup>nd</sup> Army for the second time, he received an unfavorable impression of the force's condition. He reported to the King that the troops had low morale, which he ascribed mainly to the destructive power of the allied heavy artillery. "Everything depends upon our opponents' next move", he went on. "Resistance will be possible if we are given time to fortify this line [the one Averescu had chosen], to bring order out of chaos and to again lift the spirits of the troops. If however, the enemy exploit the advantages they have won, then our resistance will be problematic and it will be necessary to continue the retreat toward positions on the border." <sup>299</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> the Romanian high command decided to send another unit from Dobruja to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (5 ID). Unlike his superiors, who wanted to send this Division to Buzeu, Averescu planned to have them detrain at Ploesci. In return he would concentrate all parts of 6 ID in the Buzeu valley. Averescu estimated that the fighting power of the units coming out of the heavy fighting south of the Constanta railroad wasn't very great. He felt that the morale of his Army would more likely increase if they received instead the Russian 3 Rifle Div, which was being sent to join Zayonchkovsky. Finally it was decided that 5 Romanian ID would stay in Dobruja after all; for the time being Averescu would have to get by with the troops already available.

Fortunately for 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, the victors were also exhausted after their strenuous marches and numerous actions. 8 Mtn Bde had arrived at Borivoi [Berivoi] on the 8<sup>th</sup> and was sent toward Heights # 1733 northwest of Königstein; however, the leading troops only reached Forsthaus (15 km southeast of Borivoi) on the 9<sup>th</sup>. South of Törzburg village the 76 Res ID encountered new enemy resistance. 51 Hon ID came up to Al. Tömös, 187 ID to the outlet of the Altschanz Pass, 89 ID to Tatrang and Pürkerec, and 71 to Tartlau. The German 3 CD reached Sepsibükszad on the 9<sup>th</sup>; in front of them the main body of 2 Romanian CD had already ridden out of the town the day before, sending ahead a column on the right (one brigade) which

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299 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 259

entered Kezdivasarhely on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **c. Arz's Army and the right wing of Falkenhayn's Army through 9 October**

#### The advance of 1<sup>st</sup> Army

During the Battle of Kronstadt the advance of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army also gathered momentum.

As Falkenhayn had ordered on the day before, in the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> GdI Arz took measures to unite VI Corps for a thrust on the road from Szekely-Udvarhely to Csik Szereda. The advanced guard was 1 Lst Huss Bde, already standing ready at Szekely-Keresztur. They would be joined by 61 ID; the latter, however, would first drive the enemy from the narrow part of the valley east of Parajd and then be relieved by 72 ID. 39 Hon ID would advance alongside the 61<sup>st</sup>; the Honved began the necessary movement to the side, in part by truck, in the night of the 6<sup>th</sup>. The 72 ID would advance along the Parajd-Gyergyó Alfalu road and in the Görgény valley. Arz expected the half of 37 Hon ID and the southern wing of XI Corps to drive back the enemy who were still holding out in the Maros valley.

Almost undisturbed, the Romanians continued the withdrawal they'd initiated on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On the 8<sup>th</sup> they stood once more, just as they had a month earlier, along a line of ridges in the Görgény and Hargitta Mountains. Since Corps Fabini, as ordered, were shifting to the right, they had lost contact with the enemy in most places. Only at Parajd was the rear guard of Romanian 8 ID pushed back by 16 Lst Mtn Bde and Lt Col. Kopfstein's Bosniaks on the 7<sup>th</sup>. On the same day the Landsturm Hussars reached Szekely-Udvarhely without fighting; 19 Lst Mtn Bde came up to Szt. Lelek and the leading troops of 39 Hon ID to Makfalva. GM Haber's group (72 ID and half of 37 Hon ID) didn't advance much beyond their original positions.

GdI Arz now spurred on his divisions to advance quickly and regain contact with the enemy. The pursuit continued smoothly on the 8<sup>th</sup>, but there were only unimportant skirmishes with rear guards. 1 Lst Huss Bde reached Szt. Egyházas-Olahfalu; 1 CD also rode into the town from the south. Under 61 ID the 19 Lst Mtn Bde came up to Fenyed; 16 Lst Mtn Bde, after waiting to be relieved by 72 ID, only got as far as Korond and Sofalva. 39 Hon ID, on the other hand, marched energetically into Martonos. The main body of 72 ID reached Szovata and their left side-

column advanced somewhat beyond Libanfalva. The half of 37 Hon ID reached Palota and then sent columns to the right and left into the mountains, seeking to envelop the enemy who were making a stand in front of them. XI Corps joined the advance with their southern wing. According to an intercepted wireless message from Alexeiev, the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army would seek in a few days to advance in conjunction with the Romanians into the Kirlibaba - Dorna Watra area; therefore 73 Hon Inf Bde, which originally was supposed to rejoin 37 Hon ID, now was shifted in reserve of XI Corps to Dorna Watra.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> GdI Arz's columns came up against the defensive front of Presan's Army. At the Tolvajos Pass the 1 CD, attacking along with Col. Csecsi-Nagy's Landsturm Hussars, were able to break through the Romanian position. The garrison fled back to the eastern bank of the Alt and were pursued by GM Ruiz's Hussars as far as Csik Szereda. Thereafter the entire 7 Romanian ID evacuated their position; in the evening they had one brigade apiece at Csik Menasag and Csik Szepeviz. As for the infantry of the k.u.k. VI Corps, the 19 Lst Mtn Bde reached Szt. Egyhazas-Olahfalu; the marching column of 39 Hon ID was coming up between Szekely-Udvarhely and Szt. Lelek, with 16 Lst Mtn Bde behind them. In Haber's group, the main body of 72 ID advanced against the 8 Romanian ID, which occupied the pass and heights southeast of Mezöhavas. Their side-column on the left pushed back Romanian rear guards and reached Laposnya. In front of the column in the Maros valley the enemy's 14 ID deployed at Göde-Mesterhaza; they even attempted an envelopment attack, but were repulsed. Then the Honved began their own envelopment.

#### The right wing of German 9<sup>th</sup> Army

On the right wing of German 9<sup>th</sup> Army, the Alpenkorps were at first assigned a purely defensive mission at the Red Tower Pass after the Battle of Hermannstadt. G.Lt Krafft intended to hold firmly to the line of ridges along the border in the mountains on both sides of the Pass. On 30 September the Romanians were already mounting strong thrusts on the western bank of the Alt, which increased noticeably as time went on. However, German counterattacks on 3 and 4 October compelled the enemy to stay quiet.

On the eastern bank of the Alt, G.Lt Krafft wanted to extend the front along the ridge from Caineni to Heights # 1824 on the border and then to the Surul; soon afterward he planned also to

include the highest peak in Transylvania, the Negoi # 2536.<sup>300</sup> The first step in the operation would be to take a jumping-off point, the mountain road leading past Heights # 1824 to Caineni.

While preparations for this venture were under way, Krafft was asked by his Army commander on the 6<sup>th</sup> whether he would be able to break through in the direction of Pitesci if reinforced by two Aus-Hung. mountain brigades. Krafft replied that this was feasible, but added that he would rather see his Alpenkorps relieved by an Aus-Hung. division, so that they could join the impending decisive actions at and south of Kronstadt. But Falkenhayn didn't agree, largely because of the time that would be lost while Krafft was being relieved.<sup>301</sup>

Meanwhile the Romanians were bringing order to their beaten I Corps so it could defend this important invasion route. 23 ID was stationed east of the Alt, and the dismounted horsemen of 1 Calarasi Bde at Scare guarded the mountain path leading through the Moscovul Ravine. A brigade of 13 ID, along with parts of 20 ID, took over defense of the area west of the Red Tower Pass. Other troops of 13 ID in approximately brigade strength were held in reserve at Grableschi.

The planned thrust against Heights # 1824, supported by artillery, was undertaken on 9 October. The Romanians refused to be driven back.<sup>302</sup> It was therefore necessary to await the arrival of Aus-Hung. mountain troops and German heavy artillery.

On the other hand, meanwhile the efforts of GM Busse's group to drive the enemy over the border near Petroseny were crowned by complete success.

The initial attacks west of the Tulisa Heights by Col. Panzenböck's 2 Mtn Bde (on 2 October) didn't break through. On the same day the Romanians were even still pushing against parts of 144 Brigade stationed on the heights farther north.

On 3 October Col. Panzenböck's battalions were finally able to drive the enemy from the Oboroca, while the movement of the leading troops threatened the western flank of 11 Romanian ID.

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300 From a manuscript presented to the Military Archive by Dr. F. Hereus (Hamburg, 1932): "Die Erzwingung des Rotenturmpasses durch das verstärkte Alpenkorps im Oktober und November 1916."

301 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, pp. 89 ff.

302 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 156

Concerned that they might be cut off, this Division retreated along the entire front to the border ridges, which they occupied on the 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>303</sup> The pursuers, who entered Petroseny on the 4<sup>th</sup>, stayed hard on the heels of the Romanians and extended their western wing as far as the heights of Sigleu primo (# 1685). Thus the Petroseny coal fields were finally rid of the enemy.

At the end of September the Romanians had taken several battalions from Orsova to reinforce 11 ID. This movement hadn't remained hidden from Szivo's watchful group, who sensed that it provided an opportunity to drive the enemy from Hungarian soil. Szivo's troops attacked on 1 October, supported by fire from the Bulgarian outposts south of the Danube. After initial success, however, the operation had to be halted; the enemy, who apparently had been warned by traitors, offered strong resistance. Once again Szivo's group, which on the 3<sup>rd</sup> was placed under GM Busse, had to restrict themselves to the defensive. Even this wasn't easy. On 4 October the enemy made an envelopment assault from the north and pushed the Landsturm units of the Danube group back to the western edge of Oasszonyret. The Belgrade Military Government thereupon sent an Etappen battalion and a mountain battery to help out; they recovered the lost area from the Romanians.

#### **d. Falkenhayn tries to break out from southeastern Transylvania**

On 8 October, when there was no longer any doubt concerning the outcome of the Battle of Kronstadt, the two high commands came to an agreement about the next phase of the campaign. The allies had gained the impression that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army intended to withdraw from the Burzenland toward Buzeu while the main body of the North Army pulled back in the direction of Piatra. It was believed that both Armies would defend the mountain passes along the border. It was possible that the Russians would reinforce the North Army and that Romanian and perhaps also Russian troops would be sent to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Therefore it was desirable to clarify the enemy's troop dispositions and lines of retreat as soon as possible.

GdI Falkenhayn received on 8 October (the day when he moved his HQ to Fogaras) an order to keep pushing the enemy sharply as they withdrew, and to take the crossing points through the mountains. The Uz valley was designated the southern border of

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303 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 61 ff.

1<sup>st</sup> Army. From the mountains the cavalry and infantry on 9<sup>th</sup> Army's left wing were to reach Ocna, and to quickly destroy the rail and telegraph connections leading through Moldavia in a north-south direction. The order continued, "Once the mountain border with Moldavia is secure, presumably the 9<sup>th</sup> Army should advance into Romania, while guarding toward Buzeu, with its main body in the direction of Bucharest." Finally Falkenhayn was informed that he would be assigned the German 8, 3 and 5 Cavalry Brigades (which would form 6 CD), as well as the 12 Bav ID which was already moving by rail through Transylvania and the 11 Bav ID which was to follow them. The 10 Mtn Bde, just arriving at Hermannstadt from the Isonzo, would reinforce the Alpenkorps.

On 9 October, when Falkenhayn was at the ruined castle of Marienburg to watch the beaten Romanians fleeing into the passes, he had to finalize decisions for continuing the campaign. It is noteworthy that he summoned the commander of 71 ID, GM Goldbach, to hear his opinion because this general had been Chief of Staff to XII Corps at Hermannstadt before the war and was known to be very knowledgeable about the area. Goldbach advised that the allies should break through into Wallachia from the Vulkan and Szurduk Passes, and then roll up the Romanian front from the west to the east.<sup>304</sup>

#### Falkenhayn's plan

Falkenhayn, however, had come to a different conclusion. Impressed by the victory that had just been won, he believed that he should continue - as he had intended already on 6 October - to cross the mountains at the same time as the enemy and in the direction of Bucharest.<sup>305</sup> Therefore the pursuit would take place along the entire front between the Red Tower and Bodza Passes. Falkenhayn planned to send the reinforcements, as they arrived, to whichever sector was the first to break the enemy line, so that the other crossing points could then be opened from the side and rear. The attack south of Petroseny would cease. Falkenhayn's plan was consistent with the order he'd received the day before from Teschen, under which his main body would advance toward Bucharest. For this purpose Falkenhayn made some changes to the existing corps assignments; he created new groups and gave each of them their assignments.

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304 Based on a personal recollection by the author of this description of the campaign, Hofrat Kiszling; at the time he was a Major and as Chief of Staff to 71 ID was present at this conference.

305 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, pp. 96 ff.

G.Lt Krafft and the Alpenkorps, which already had 10 Mtn Bde attached, would also command 2 Mtn Bde (to be transferred from the Vulkan Pass). They would "gradually shift into the Alt valley in the general direction of Pitesci; first they would thrust past Curtea d'Arges, cooperating with the attack by the Army's center in the Kronstadt area."<sup>306</sup> G.Lt Morgen was ordered to advance with 76 Res ID and 8 Mtn Bde through the Törzburg Pass toward Campulung. G.Lt Staabs with his remaining units (51 Hon ID and 187 ID) would break through the Predeal and Altschanz Passes toward the line Sinaia-Isvorele. The 89 ID, placed directly under 9<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, would move through the Bodza Pass; they would also block the passes leading through the forested mountains farther east as far as the Putna valley. The advance to Ocna which had been ordered by the high commands would be carried out by G.Lt Schmettow, using his cavalry plus the 71 ID which was being sent to him by forced marches through Kezdivasarhely.<sup>307</sup>

The attacks to the south, however, would be feasible only if 9<sup>th</sup> German Army were free of concern about the security of the rear. therefore 1<sup>st</sup> Army was ordered to guard the rear of 9<sup>th</sup> Army under all circumstances against the Romanian North Army. Thus their first task was to secure the crossing points through the mountains between the Uz valley and the right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, and then to hold them fast. The main effort would continue to be made on their right wing.

#### The attacks by 9<sup>th</sup> Army

On 10 October the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army, in their new organization, strove to reach the border. Under I Res Corps Col. Rath's 8 Mtn Bde crossed the border ridge and descended into the upper Damobita valley. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the 76 Res ID pushed into Moeciu d.j. after considerable fighting. On the next day they encountered strong Romanian entrenchments built along the border, which they were unable to capture by frontal assault. Then 8 Mtn Bde won the decision; on the 11<sup>th</sup>, despite a very difficult advance through terrain covered by a primeval forest, they continued their descent. On the 12<sup>th</sup> they took the 22 Romanian ID by surprise from the flank and rear, forcing the enemy to give up the heights along the Törzburg Pass.<sup>308</sup> On the

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306 From a manuscript by Heréus.

307 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 98

308 Kiszling, "Angriff und Verteidigung im Gebirge. Die Öffnung des Törzburger Passes durch die 8. Gb. Brig." (in Mil.

13<sup>th</sup> Morgen's Corps set off in pursuit, and in the evening Rath's Brigade entered the town of Rucaru after further fighting. However, it wasn't possible to inflict substantial damage on the Romanian 22 ID, which pulled back in time. They took up a new position south of Rucaru.

South of Kronstadt, under XXXIX Res Corps the 51 Hon ID, which had been rejoined by Hon IR 302 and reinforced by parts of 187 ID, climbed toward the Predeal Pass. The main body of 187 ID came through the Altschanz Pass and pushed into the Schanz Pass as well as along the road leading toward the border at the Bratocea Pass. However, by the 13<sup>th</sup> it had only been possible to penetrate the enemy's border defenses, which were well constructed and also strengthened by nature, in the Schanz Pass. 89 ID passed through the Magyarbodza basin on the 10<sup>th</sup>; after numerous skirmishes, by the 13<sup>th</sup> they reached the border at the Tatarhavas Pass and in the sector southeast of the town of Kraszna. Here they also came upon well-built trenches that were occupied in strength.

Under Cavalry Corps Schmettow, the 71 ID hurried through the Haromszek in forced marches; on the 11<sup>th</sup> their advanced guard reached Bereczk and the main body the area around Kezdivasarhely. On the next day Goldbach's Division stormed the heights along the Ojtoz Pass (defended by 2 Romanian CD); on the 13<sup>th</sup> they followed the enemy up to Sosmezö. On the 14<sup>th</sup> they crossed the international border in further fighting during which the enemy was reinforced. Meanwhile the 3 German CD took up quarters north of Kezdivasarhely to recuperate.

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

Like the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army, Arz's Army was engaged in a pursuit on 10 October. They met little resistance, since Gen. Presan - disregarding the instructions of his high command to hold his current position - felt it was advisable to withdraw to the border. Here the routes over the mountains would be guarded by 14 ID in the sector between the Bistricioara Heights and the Bekas Pass, and by 7 ID farther south as far as the Uz valley (inclusive). Their withdrawal was to begin on 11 October. The 8 ID, along with 15 Inf Bde, was to move back quickly to Piatra, whence they could be shifted by rail to the Ojtoz Pass. This was necessary because the retreat of 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies in different directions had created a large gap between them, which

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wiss. Mitt., Vienna; 1927 edition, pp. 548 ff.). Morgen, p. 110. Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 99.

couldn't be closed by 2 CD alone. Therefore the 15 ID, coming by rail from Dobruja, was also being sent to the Ojtoz area. For the same reason 7 Inf Bde of 4 ID was stationed near the sources of the Putna and Zabala.<sup>309</sup>

Under the k.u.k. VI Corps, on the 10<sup>th</sup> the 19 Lst Mtn and 1 Lst Huss Bdes enlarged their bridgehead east of Csik Szereda. 1 CD pushed the rear guards of 7 Romanian ID back to the east and descended into the Lower Csik. The leading troops of the main body of Fabini's Corps (39 Hon ID and 16 Lst Mtn Bde) reached Szt. Egyhazas-Olahfalu. On the next day a brigade of 1 CD rode into the Kaszon basin, while the other brigade pushed after the enemy in the Uz valley and on the 12<sup>th</sup> reached the border. Fabini's advanced guard reached Csik Szepviz on the 11<sup>th</sup>. In front of them the 7 Romanian ID and 4 Calarasi Bde pulled back to the heights along the Gyimes Pass, where they took up a position to guard the rail line and road. FML Fabini now ordered 39 Hon ID, which entered Csik Szereda on the 11<sup>th</sup>, into the Uz valley so that they could reach the area around Darmanesci by this short route. 16 Lst Mtn Bde was sent to join the 19<sup>th</sup>; the now re-united 61 ID was instructed to advance through the Gyimes Pass into the Trotusu valley, along with the Landsturm Hussars. 1 CD was to be relieved by 39 Hon ID; then it would pull back to Kezdivasarhely to rejoin Corps Schmettow. Both of Fabini's divisions reached the border by the 14<sup>th</sup>, having seen almost no action. Here, however, they came upon strong rear guards of 7 Romanian ID; the main body of this division deployed as ordered at Comanesci.

GM Haber's Group advanced through the Gyergyó toward the Bekas and Tölgyes Passes. At first 72 ID encountered little resistance. Behind the quickly-withdrawing 8 Romanian ID they crossed the G6rgeny Mountains and on the 11<sup>th</sup> had already reached the plains of the Gyergyó Valley. Two days afterward they encountered strong resistance at the towns of Bekas and T6lgyes. The half of 37 Hon ID had difficult work in the narrow Maros valley because they received little help from XI Corps (whose reserves were stationed behind their northern wing). On the 11<sup>th</sup>, however, the Honved were able to emerge from the narrowest part of the pass at Marosheviz. Now the southern wing of XI Corps also gained ground toward the east in the Kelemen Mountains. The advance of the northern wing of Arz's Army was halted on the 14<sup>th</sup> by strong Romanian resistance east of Hollo, north of Belbor and on the Dragoiessa - Saru Dornei road. Lt Col. Sander's Detachment was now placed by XI Corps under its

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309 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 319 ff.

proper HQ, the 72 ID. The artillery of 37 Hon ID, which until now had stayed back with 4<sup>th</sup> Army in Volhynia, began to arrive in Transylvania. GdI Arz had asked to be given another corps HQ. Therefore on 14 October the HQ of FML Freih. von Lütgendorf's XXI k.u.k. Corps took over Group Haber; this HQ had been re-assigned on the 6<sup>th</sup> from the 11<sup>th</sup> Army (in south Tyrol) to 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

#### A pause in the campaign

There were almost no important developments on the right wing of Falkenhayn's Army through mid-October. The only exception occurred south of Petroseny on 11 October. Here, after the departure of 2 Mtn Bde, some Romanian detachments penetrated the thin line of outposts which GM Busse's group had deployed on the Sigleu primo heights. There was lively seesaw fighting until the 13<sup>th</sup>, when the last peak which the enemy had captured two days earlier was recovered.

By 14 October the German 9<sup>th</sup> and k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Armies had driven the Romanians completely from Hungary and Transylvania (except for small stretches of the border at Orsova, Bekas and Tölgyes). On the border, however, the enemy stood fast, determined to defend their own land. This stubborn resistance caused Falkenhayn to realize that his plan of crossing the mountains south of Kronstadt at the same time as the enemy wasn't feasible. He would have to find new routes for his breakthrough into Wallachia.

### **5. The relief offensive by Sarrail's Army of the Orient, 12 September to mid-October**

The fighting on the Macedonian front was closely connected with the Romanian war.<sup>310</sup>

According to the allies' agreement, the attack by the Army of the Orient was supposed to precede Romania's declaration of war but the Bulgarian offensive which opened on 17 August crossed up this plan. The course of this offensive has already been summarized above. General Sarrail was urged by Joffre to deliver a counter-blow, but first he had to shift some of his units. The main assault was to be carried out by the bulk of

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310 Klumpner, "Die Entente-Armeen auf dem Balkan im Jahre 1916. Ein Beispiel für die Schwierigkeiten koalierter Kriegführung" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1934 edition, p. 509)

the Serbian Army east of Lake Ostrovo, over the mountains toward the bend in the Cerna southeast of Monastir. The Serbs' left wing west of the Lake, reinforced by two French divisions and the Russian brigade, were supposed to force their way through Florina into the plains in the direction of Monastir. Since the Romanians and Russians in Dobruja had meanwhile pulled back toward the Cernavoda-Constanta railroad, the attack by Sarrail's Army of the Orient now would serve as a relief offensive for Gen. Zayonchkovsky's hard-pressed army of Dobruja.

The first onslaught of the Serbs, French and Russians started on 12 September; they forced the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army in the plains to retreat to Florin

## 6. Analysis of the campaign

After the campaign in Transylvania had gone on for just seven weeks, the main body of the Romanian Army was again on the borders from which they had invaded Hungary on 27 August in the hope that after a quick and easy advance they would plant their banners on the Royal Palace in Budapest. Disappointed, defeated, and treated with reproach by their allies, in mid-October the Romanians were back where they had started to operate under some of the most favorable circumstances ever recorded in the history of war.

### Errors of the Romanian leadership

The first blow to fall upon the Romanians, and the one which can be regarded as the start of their entire catastrophe, was the fall of Turtukai. In this action around the "bridgehead without a bridge" the strategic reserve (10 and 15 ID), which had been earmarked for Transylvania, was already drawn into the whirlpool of events. Soon thereafter two divisions (2 and 12 ID) from 1<sup>st</sup> Army and one (5 ID) from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were diverted to Dobruja. Nevertheless the Russo-Romanian units in Dobruja, now entrusted to the command of Russian General Zayonchkovsky, withdrew continuously toward the north.

At the same time when they were pulling three divisions from Transylvania the Romanian high command ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies on 9 September to stop advancing. This order, and the weakening of 1<sup>st</sup> Army in particular, were certainly errors by the leadership. The apportionment of equal strength to each of the three armies which invaded Hungary at the start of the offensive had made it impossible to concentrate at a decisive point. A concentration under 1<sup>st</sup> and North Armies should have been attempted; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which was the farthest from the initial objective (the Maros line) should have been much weaker than the others. 1<sup>st</sup> Army could have very quickly blocked the Maros valley at Deva and cut the important railroad there. With a powerful thrust through Bistritz the North Army could have opened the way through the Borgo Pass for the Russians and thus made it possible to strike through the Prislop Pas into the Maramaros basin. If 1<sup>st</sup> Army had thus occupied the narrow valley of the Maros between Deva and Karlsburg (hindering their opponents from bringing up reinforcements) while North Army was in place along the Bistritz - Szasz Regen front, the Austro-Hungarians opposing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would have had to pull back quickly behind the Maros to avoid being cut off regardless of

how weak the 2<sup>nd</sup> had been left.

But the course taken - to weaken 1<sup>st</sup> Army and use it merely as a pivot for the advance of 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies - offered no possibility of preventing the arrival of German and Aus-Hung. divisions by train and of forcing the defenders to quickly retreat behind the Maros. Even if the three armies sent against Transylvania had been able to advance unhindered according to plan in their original strengths, their significant superiority in numbers would have been wasted in a purely frontal attack to reach the Maros.

The continued withdrawal of the Dobruja army toward the much shorter line south of the Cernavoda-Constanta railroad caused the Romanian high command to completely lose their nerves, and led to the disastrous council of war on 15 September. In this conference it was decided to mount a pincers attack against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army; this entailed reinforcing 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with two more divisions (21 and 22 ID) from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and sending them over the Danube south of Bucharest. The Romanian armies in Transylvania would be completely inactive.

#### Course of the allied advance

While the Romanians prepared for their Danube operation in the second half of September, they fully lost the initiative in the north. The deployment of the German and Aus-Hung. divisions for the counter-offensive could unfold almost without interference. GdI Falkenhayn took over the newly-formed 9<sup>th</sup> German Army. This was certainly an unusual turn of fate, since the final occurrence leading to Falkenhayn's fall from the position of Chief of the German OHL had been the Romanian question; now he was named to lead an army against Romania. Since there were other errors charged against his military record (in the battles of Verdun and the Somme), it was certainly somewhat risky to put him in charge of an operation which it was hoped would free the Central Powers from the strangling encirclement about to engulf them. But in the Transylvania campaign he was able to put to rest the somewhat unjustified aspersions cast on his ability by proving to be a bold and successful Army commander.

The defeat of the Romanian 11 ID, which had broken into our lines through Petroseny, was already under way when Falkenhayn arrived. Then followed his offensive at Hermannstadt against the I Romanian Corps, which had been left for too long unsupported by their own high command. Finally Falkenhayn moved quickly east against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, using the wall of the

Fogaras Mountains to protect his southern flank.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, sent to save I Corps when it was almost encircled south of Hermannstadt, arrived too late. At the same time Averescu's crossing of the Danube at Flamanda also misfired. Now for the first time the Romanian high command realized that they had committed a serious blunder - contrary to the spirit of military leadership - by making a major effort in the secondary theater of operations in the south. Very quickly they sent six divisions (four from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and two from Dobruja) back to the northern front.

Meanwhile the 2<sup>nd</sup> and North Armies were trying to hold onto the chain of mountains west of the Gyergyó, the Csik and the Burzenland; they wanted to prepare a new offensive out of these basins with Russian help. But Staabs' Corps overran the crumbling Romanian defensive position in the Battle of the Geisterwald. Thereafter all of Crainicianu's Army hastened back toward Kronstadt. The first divisions from the Danube front did arrive in time to offer support to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army as it quickly drew back to the border.

At first seven divisions had been sent to the south from Bucharest (the assembly point of the strategic reserve) and from Transylvania; by mid-October six divisions had again been ordered back to the northern front. Almost a third of the Romanian Army had thus spent a month moving back and forth; in neither location did these divisions win a decision. This proves the inadequacy of the Romanian high command.

In the first three weeks of the campaign GdI Arz used his weak divisions and brigades, which were still not completely ready, very economically. He fought delaying actions and covered the approach of the troops who would carry out the counter-offensive. During the battles of Hermannstadt and the Geisterwald he provided protection from the Romanian North Army. 7 ID of the latter Army, advancing on its southern wing, had gained more ground than any other Romanian unit - 130 km - by marching through the Uz valley to Székely-Kersztur. It had taken 23 days to reach this point (not counting the 16 days when the high command had ordered a halt to the advance). This was a daily progress of 5.6 km, hardly a token of a rapid offensive. When 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was in trouble at Kronstadt the North Army, which until now had lost very few men or equipment, made not the slightest effort to provide relief to Crainicianu by thrusting with some units from the north toward the Haromszek. Their troops at the Tolvajos Pass had their lines broken by weak

Austro-Hungarian units, and then fell back hurriedly to the border. This time they made the march in just six days. General Presan had no desire for a trial of strength against the energetic thrust by Arz's Army, which had now built up sufficient reserves.

The powerful allied operation in Transylvania aimed at very specific goals and was completely successful. The same was true of the campaign by Mackensen's Army Group. In two weeks they advanced 120 km (measuring along the Danube), captured two fortresses, and nearly reached the narrowest part of Dobruja. Neither Sarrail's offensive on the Macedonian front (which started on 12 September) nor the temporary incursion by the Romanians onto the southern bank of the Danube at Rahovo had caused the Central Powers' commanders to weaken 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army.

#### Evaluation of the Romanian Army

Responsibility for the outcome of the campaigns in Transylvania and southern Dobruja, so disappointing for the Kingdom of Romania, cannot be assigned entirely to the Romanian high command and the leaders of their Armies. Romanian military historians have frankly conceded that part of the blame also lay with the troops.<sup>311</sup>

For two long years the Romanian Army had been a spectator of the great struggle of the nations, but had not learned anything from watching the titanic conflict. The infantry, inadequately equipped with machine guns, attacked impetuously and made too little use of the terrain. Naturally they suffered heavy casualties. They were prone to mass panic, especially when under fire from heavy artillery. The Romanians' own artillery was weak and not adept at cooperating with the other arms. On the defensive, the infantry failed to entrench adequately. The cavalry relied primarily on mounted action and were insufficiently trained to fight on foot.

However, it shouldn't be inferred that Romanian regiments didn't know how to fight bravely when led by capable officers. The Romanians didn't allow themselves to be taken prisoner easily; at any rate they showed considerable skill in seeking shelter in the forested mountains when the situation became critical.<sup>312</sup>

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311 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 335 ff.

312 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. I, p. 97. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - However, there is anecdotal evidence to the contrary regarding

The greater military experience of the Central Powers' troops was of vital significance in this first campaign. Only this factor, plus their incomparably superior leadership, was able to offset the Romanians' numerical superiority. It also justified hope that the war could be continued successfully on the other side of the mountain wall around Transylvania.

## **V. The Russian Offensive in Fall 1916**

### ***A. Brussilov's attack at the start of September***

#### **1. Alterations in the Stavka's plan of attack**

In Part II we described how in August the Tsar's Chief of the General Staff, GdI Alexeiev, drew up the plan for a new general offensive against the Central Powers' Eastern front, featuring a large-scale operation by Southwest Front against Galicia and Hungary. The orders of the Stavka were already influenced by the obligations which the Tsar's Empire had assumed in the military convention with Romania on 17 August. The Russians had promised that as soon as their new ally fell upon Transylvania, they would attack the entire length of the Aus-Hung. front from Bukovina to Volhynia with great determination. Alexeiev wasn't content with this, but in addition to the powerful effort by Southwest Front he also called upon the West and North Fronts to enter the fighting. Thus he wanted to unleash an enormous battle from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the narrow passage of the Danube through the Iron Gate. His idea was consistent with the guidelines that had dominated the military plans of the Entente commanders since the start of 1916 - to fall upon the two central Empires as simultaneously as possible from all sides with great strength. The North Front was to strike on 27 August, while the West and Southwest Fronts followed on the 28<sup>th</sup>. But as this date approached, Brussilov and Evert expressed their apprehensions and complaints to Alexeiev.

Based on intelligence reports about the arrival of troop trains

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the Romanians' willingness to fight on when cornered. 80% of the Turtukai garrison had quickly surrendered. "Ordinary Russian soldiers regarded their allies with the utmost contempt, not least when these allies surrendered to Russian units, mistaking them for Bulgarian ones." (Stone, pp. 276-77)

in Galicia, the staff at Southwest Front had concluded that their opponents were assembling a reserve army of eight divisions (Aus-Hung., German and Turkish) near Lemberg. Brussilov was concerned that Hindenburg could cross him up with a counter-offensive, and on 22 August asked the Stavka to provide him with a strategic reserve.<sup>313</sup> General Evert reported on the 24<sup>th</sup> that the concentration of his attacking troops and the incorporation of reserves couldn't be completed in time, and asked that his attack be postponed until the first day of September.<sup>314</sup>

On the 25<sup>th</sup> the Tsar's Chief of Staff replied to both Front commanders. He reproached Gen. Evert for having 3<sup>rd</sup> Army attack the Tobol bridgehead prematurely, thus drawing the Germans' attention to the area where the main attack would be directed (toward Kamien-Kaszysky). Now an involuntary postponement of the attack was indeed unavoidable; it was re-scheduled for 2 September. However, Evert was told to be sure that the thrust to Kamien-Kaszysky was carried out in coordination with 8<sup>th</sup> Army's advance. Alexeiev brushed aside Brussilov's concern about a possible counterattack from the Lemberg area, citing the Southwest Front's superior strength and the fact that their powerful reserves (eight divisions) would be sufficient to check any eventual counter-thrust by Hindenburg. Anyway, the German commander would be compelled anyway to "submit to our will" because of Romania's intervention as well as the attacks against Halicz, Mikolajow and Maramaros-Sziget. Alexeiev had to reluctantly concede that the impact of the simultaneous general offensive would be lost if the West Front attacked later than Brussilov. The Russian Chief of Staff chose a compromise solution; he advised Gen. Brussilov to have his armies attack in sequence from the left to the right wing, separated by two or three days' time, thus filling the span of time until Evert could join in. But Brussilov, energetic and willing to assume responsibility, turned down this suggestion on military and psychological grounds, and Alexeiev had to give in.

Since the plan for a general offensive had fallen through, the HQ at Mogilev went a step further. Future events that would be of the greatest importance would all take place in the south. Therefore on 25 August GdI Ruszky, who was now commanding the North Front in place of Kuropatkin, was informed that the Tsar wanted to abandon the offensive in the north and the intervention of the Navy so that the substantial forces

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313 Klembovsky, pp. 94 ff.

314 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 64 ff.

available here wouldn't become involved in a lengthy campaign.<sup>315</sup> However, Ruzsky should let his armies believe that their attack was only being postponed, and would continue to threaten the Germans in the area by Tukum (60 km west of Riga).<sup>316</sup>

The commander of the Southwest Front was informed that, since the operation in the north was now canceled, his wish for a strong strategic reserve would probably be granted by sending him two corps. On 25 August Brussilov had again reminded his armies of the goals they'd already been assigned,<sup>317</sup> and designated the 29<sup>th</sup> as the date when the attack would commence.<sup>318</sup> But this deadline also couldn't be met, because the commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Army had meanwhile requested a postponement. General Brussilov didn't feel there were sufficient grounds to postpone the operation, but didn't want to give Gen. Shcherbachev an excuse, in case the attack failed, to shift the blame on his Front commander as he had done in January 1916. Therefore he did hold off the offensive of 7<sup>th</sup> Army - and of all the others - until 31 August.<sup>319</sup>

## **2. Deliberations and measures of the Aus-Hung. high command (26-30 August)**

### Conrad's analysis of the Russian plans

The k.u.k. high command kept well informed about the Russians by intercepting wireless broadcasts and analyzing prisoners' statements. On 26 August, in a general order to the Archduke-Successor, they characterized developments since the breakthrough battles of Luck and Olyka as follows: "In exploiting the success won by Brussilov's armies in earlier months, the Russian high command has shifted major reinforcements from the North and West Fronts to continue the offensive toward Brest-Litovsk on one side, and toward Lemberg on the other. They sought the first objective by advancing through Baranowicze and Kovel to cut off the bulge in the front by Pinsk. They sought the latter objective mainly by striking through Dubno-Brody and on both sides of the Dniester through Buczacz and Kolomea-Stanislau."

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315 Zayonchkovsky, p. 61

316 *Ibid.*, pp. 64 ff.

317 *Ibid.*, p. 66

318 Klembovsky, p. 92

319 Klembovsky, p. 97

Conrad's judgement about the result of the Russian offensive toward Brest-Litovsk was: "The attack on Baranowicze failed completely; the attack along the two railroads toward Kovel (from Sarny and Rovno) came to a halt on the Stokhod after very heavy [enemy] casualties." The staff at Teschen had concluded correctly that the Russians had now given up their offensive north of the Pripyat so that they could attack south of the river (over the lower Stokhod and between the rail lines leading to Kovel) with strong forces. Moreover it was expected that the enemy, who had strengthened their front southwest of Luck with IV Sib Corps, would in the near future fall upon the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army with XL, IV Sib and VIII Corps "to break through in the direction of Vladimir-Volynsky and Sokal, or at least to pin down the German and Aus-Hung. units stationed here."

In analyzing the situation in east Galicia the high command stated that the Russian offensive toward Lemberg had come to a momentary halt in most places. Since their thrust through Brody had been checked, the Russians had shifted the pressure toward the south, in order to attack through Tarnopol and Zborow to Lemberg. It was expected that the assault would continue on both sides of the Zborow-Zloczow railroad with eight divisions (V Sib, XVII, VII and VI Corps).

As for the operations toward Lemberg along the Dniester, GO Conrad was of the opinion that the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies would stop their offensive for now because of their heavy casualties and the fact that their flank toward the Carpathians was growing ever longer. It was known in Teschen that the Russians had shifted units over the Dniester toward the north. The high command therefore reckoned that the enemy was building here an attacking group of at least six divisions. On the other hand, it seemed that pressure was now removed from the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. According to current information, 7<sup>th</sup> Army was confronted by nine or ten Russian infantry divisions and four to five cavalry divisions. Another division also seemed to be moving by train to Bukovina. Probably the enemy now wanted to make their main effort in the Forest Carpathians because of the Romanian intervention; they would open a general attack to break into Hungary and Transylvania through Dorna Watra, Kirlibaba and Jablonica (on the Tartar Pass). To conclude this communication, the k.u.k. high command asked Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ at Chodorow to report whether or not they agreed with the analysis, what measures they had taken for shifting troops rapidly into the Carpathians, and whether they needed additional reserves in the current situation.

The situation of the Archduke's Army Group

On 27 August GM Seeckt replied to Teschen that Army Group HQ largely concurred with the outlook of the k.u.k. high command. However, it still wasn't completely clear whether 9<sup>th</sup> Army, in its new deployment, was supposed to cover the left wing of the Russian Southwest Front or to carry on an offensive toward Hungary. In any event, the enemy was striving to secure the Carpathian passes. If in fact the Russians did leave just XLI and XII Corps (each of three divisions) in front of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, then the un-needed units of that Army could reinforce the neighboring armies. Hitherto the strength of 7<sup>th</sup> Army had been sufficient to carry out their defensive mission, but it was expected that the number of Russian divisions opposing them would increase. The best way to check an attack into the Forest Carpathians would be to thrust ahead with the right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The Army Group was considering whether the troops on hand were sufficient for such an operation; they didn't want to weaken 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, but intended to next send 7<sup>th</sup> Army the 39 Hon ID from the South Army. If necessary South Army in turn could be reinforced by the Army Group's reserves. For now the 5 Hon CD could be given up by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the 7<sup>th</sup>. Three German divisions (105 and 199 ID, 10 Bav ID) were stationed near railroads so they could be quickly shifted around.

Reports arriving for the AOK at Teschen meanwhile completed the picture of the situation. In the last few days, aviators had observed lively troop movements opposite South Army's left wing and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's right wing. Intercepted messages and prisoners' statements also indicated that the enemy was reinforcing their 11<sup>th</sup> Army at Zborow. GO Conrad was convinced that the Russians were concentrating eight or nine divisions in this area. In front of South Army's right wing, the Russian XXXIII Corps had been identified in addition to units already detected. In the eastern Forest Carpathians, four divisions and a strong cavalry force were apparently concentrated between the upper Bilyj Czeremosz and Fundul Mondovi. Therefore heavy Russian attacks were anticipated against Kirlibaba and Mestecanesci.

Impact of the Romanian invasion

In this tense situation, on the evening of 27 August GO Conrad at Teschen received the report that Romania had declared war on Austria-Hungary. He immediately instructed Archduke Charles' Army Group to send Hon IR 302 to Transylvania; the rest of 51 Hon ID had gone there already. The German Eastern Command sent GO Böhm-Ermolli the German 25 Cav Bde from Kovel; on 29 August

the Bde arrived at Ozydow, and was deployed on the northern wing of V Corps to replace 1 Lst Huss Bde which had left by train for Maros Vasarhely.

The k.u.k. high command also chose 39 Hon ID to reinforce 1<sup>st</sup> Army. This worn-down Division, however, first had to be built up with some troops from 55 ID, and wouldn't be available for transport until 30 August at the earliest. On 28 August GO Conrad expressed to the Germans at Pless his concern that the Romanians advancing over Transylvania's eastern border might thrust against the flank and rear of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army. As suggested by Falkenhayn, it was decided that 10 Bav ID (in the reserves of Archduke Charles' front) would deploy in the area of Borgo Prund and Bistritz.

On 29 August the Archduke-Successor received the order to shift the Bavarian Division; at the same time he was informed by Teschen that under current circumstances a thrust by the right wing of Kövess' Army was out of the question. Actions on the right wing of Bothmer's Army already were heralding the proximity of the Russian onslaught. At Delejow and Toustobady the enemy was quite active; Russian infantry were shoveling toward the positions of XIII and VI Corps. In the evening of 28 August, Russian scouting detachments entered the trenches of GM Freih. von Abele's 2 CD (attached to XIII Corps) but were driven out. On the left bank of the Dniester prisoners were taken from the XXXIII Corps. Despite the impending Russian attack, on 30 August the 39 Hon ID left Halicz by train. Although 105 German ID was still in reserve here, this Division was at only half strength since the fighting at Stanislau. Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ intended to shift 199 German ID from Kalusz to the Dniester.

#### First actions at the corner of the three countries<sup>320</sup>

Meanwhile on 28 August the first actions were already occurring at the three countries' corner and at Dorna Watra between weak Aus-Hung. outposts and the Romanian advanced guards. The troops of GM Czito's 11 Hon CD were arriving on this day to cover the right flank of FML Habermann's XI Corps. Russian cavalry appeared on Romanian soil east of Dorna Watra. Papp's Brigade pulled their endangered right wing back to the Bernarielul Heights. Aviators noted lively troop movements in front of XI

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320 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The corner of the three countries ("Dreiländerecke") was the point at which the borders of Austria, Hungary and Romania came together.

Corps' center, in the upper Moldava valley. There was no longer any doubt that the Russians were preparing to attack toward Dorna Watra and the Prislop Pass, and that this operation would follow a Romanian thrust toward the flank and rear of XI Corps. The Corps had just 14,000 men - including many Landsturm troops - to cover the crossing point through the mountains to Borgo Prund as well as the Dorna Watra - Kirlibaba road, along a front of 40 kilometers. It was now urgent to immediately bring reserves up to cover the Army's right flank and to support XI Corps.

In this situation, GO Pflanze-Baltin ordered XI Corps to stand fast to the end against the impending attack. The Carpathian Corps was instructed to hold a regiment of 40 Hon ID in readiness at Kirlibaba. Pflanze informed Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ that he intended to send 5 Hon CD (already on the scene) plus any reinforcements as they arrived through Borgo Prund to XI Corps. He suggested moreover that the German 2 Bicycle Brigade, stationed at Luhi, should be shifted through Borsa to his Army's right wing. Behind the center, at Klauzura Kozmieska, he himself concentrated six battalions of the newly-arrived 117 German ID with heavy artillery. He intended to wrest the Kukul back from the Russians on 30 August with these units plus troops from 34 ID, and then thrust further ahead in the direction of the Kostrzyca. The left wing of 200 German ID would join this operation. GO Pflanze-Baltin arranged with Army Group HQ to pull the burnt-out 202 Hon Bde from the Klauzura Kozmieska sector when the attack began. The Bde would be filled up with Landsturm and held in readiness at Körösmezö, where parts of 117 ID would also be held back.

Meanwhile Gen. Letschitzky had sent 3 Cauc Coss Div, placed on the left wing of XII Corps, toward the Pantyr Pass. On 28 August three of the Cossack regiments took 3 CD by surprise at Rafailowa, forcing them to withdraw from their advanced position back to the Pantyr Pass. The Russians thrust forward, and in the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup> once more attacked 3 CD.<sup>321</sup> Farther north a Cossack detachment rode forward as far as the valley where the Bystrzyca Solotwinska has its source, and climbed the Siwula Heights. To protect the open flank of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, covered only by cavalry, GO Pflanze-Baltin with the concurrence of Army Group HQ sent the German 2 Bicycle Bde by railroad and then foot marches from Raho to Brusztura. The Archduke-Successor ordered

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321 Sacken, "Geschichte des k.u.k. Dragoner-Regiments Friedrich August König von Sachsen Nr. 3" (Vienna, 1927), Vol. II, pp. 420 ff.

Kövess' Army to remain very active so as to prevent the advance of further Russian units against the flank of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army.

### **3. The battle in the Forest Carpathians, 30 August-3 September**

Gen. Letschitzky had organized his main force into three attack groups for the invasion of Hungary. XI Corps (11, 12, 32, 79 and 82 ID) was at Tatarow, Zabie and Jablonica. XVIII Corps was in the area between Jalowiczora and the Kirlibaba Brook; it had just been re-organized with 64 ID, parts of 37 ID, and the Ussuri Coss Div. The main body of III Cavalry Corps (103 ID, 10 CD and the 1 Don and 1 Terek Coss Divs) was at Fundul Moldovi. Letschitzky wanted to pin down his opponents on the Tartar Pass with the right wing of XI Corps, while the main body of this Corps developed an envelopment attack through Szybeny into the Ruszkova valley and toward Maramaros-Sziget. The main blow of XVIII Corps would be delivered through the trackless mountains toward the Prislop Pass and Borsa. III Cavalry Corps (with the attached 103 ID) would advance toward Jacobeny-Kirlibaba while their 1 Terek Coss Div plus the Romanian Bistrita [Bistritz] Detachment thrust from the east through Dorna Watra. The goal of the latter operation was to crush the allies in the southernmost corner of Bukovina with a pincers attack.<sup>322</sup>

On 30 August, a day before Letschitzky's attack, his opponents carried out a short assault of their own in the Forest Carpathians. Parts of the German 117 ID and of the k.u.k. 34 ID attacked 32 Russian ID on the Kukul and captured the entire position on the heights. The Russians counterattacked, but couldn't recover the area they'd lost. The defeat of 32 ID gave the Russians the impression that the allies had anticipated the XI Corps' offensive.<sup>323</sup> Also the planned pincers offensive toward Dorna Watra couldn't be carried out for the moment, since the Romanian Bistrita Detachment still hadn't assembled on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

On the extreme right wing of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, on this day the 11 Hon CD completed their deployment in the defensive sector between the three countries' corner and Dorna Watra. The Romanian outposts had been pulled back. Scouting detachments from 11 Hon CD crossed the heights at the border to clarify the

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322 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 79 ff.

323 Zayonchkovsky, p. 80

situation on the flank of the k.u.k. XI Corps. It was determined that the Romanian troops east of the Negra valley occupied strong positions. Russian cavalry appeared east of Dorna Watra. Russian artillery increased their activity along the front north of the Golden Bistritz, and between the Kirlibababach and the Bilyj Czeremosz. A strong force from III Russian Cavalry Corps (103 ID plus parts of 10 CD and of 1 Don Coss Div) were moving out of the upper Moldava valley toward the center of the k.u.k. XI Corps.

#### The main Russian attack

After prolonged artillery preparation, the Russians started to attack in the afternoon of 31 August against the sector between Mestecanesci (# 1292) and Botosul (# 1475). The dismounted uhlans and dragoons of 8 CD, with the Landsturm troops of 215 Inf Bde, repulsed the attack in hand-to-hand fighting; on 1 September they stood fast in their positions on the heights against new thrusts. After heavy fighting, in the evening the enemy was finally able to penetrate the trenches of GM von Fluck's 8 CD north of Czokanestie. Reserves were brought up quickly during the night from 11 Hon CD and 40 Hon ID; on 2 September they counterattacked under Col Edl. von Dokonal (the commander of 15 Cav Bde). They prevented the enemy from penetrating the valley of the Golden Bistritz, but by the 3<sup>rd</sup> weren't able to drive them completely from the positions of 8 CD. Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ and GO Pflanzler-Baltin placed at the disposal of XI Corps the reinforcements that had just arrived at Borgo-Prund (the leading battalion of 10 Bav ID and the rifle battalion which had now been assembled from 5 Hon CD). FML Habermann moved two Bavarian companies and the cavalry riflemen forward to Czokanesti [Czokanestie].

The Carpathian Corps engaged in bitter fighting on 31 August.<sup>324</sup> Strong forces from XVIII Russian Corps sought on this day to thrust down from the Tomnatik Ridge into the upper Cibo valley. The 1 German ID held out in their positions on the Stara Wipczyna and at Sarata. But the outnumbered East Prussians were also assaulted from the valley of the Bilyj Czeremosz. Here the Russians enveloped the Germans and thrust back the left wing of 1 ID to the Zupania Heights.

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324 Gottberg, "Das Grenadier Regiment Kronprinz Nr. 1 im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1929), Vol. II, pp. 30 ff. Dornberg, "Infanterie Regiment Herzog Karl von Mecklenburg-Strelitz Nr. 43" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1923), pp. 113 ff.

The right wing of 200 German ID, jutting forward from Jablonica toward the Russian lines, was still holding the Kaptarka Heights. G.Lt Conta sent a regiment from this Division to the Pnewie Ridge; with Pflanzer-Baltin's agreement, he pulled back the rest of the Division to the Baba Ludowa - Ludowa - Smotrec line of ridges so that they would avoid encirclement.

On 1 September the 1 ID was subjected to a new attack. The East Prussians on the Stara Wypczyna [Wipczyna] repulsed the onslaught; the Russians who'd penetrated the lines west of this strong point were thrown back again to the north in see-saw fighting on 2 September. The left wing of 1 ID and the Jaeger battalions of 200 ID which had been sent to the Listowaty Heights were also able on the 2<sup>nd</sup> to fend off the Russians who'd been thrusting toward their rear from the valley where the Bilyj Czeremosz has its source. On 3 September the attack of the XVIII Russian Corps, which had almost broken the center of Corps Conta, came to a halt. The German 1 ID had exhausted its last strength in the three days of fighting. To reinforce them, GO Pflanzer-Baltin sent Hon IR 306 from Körösmezö and Hon IR 30 from Kirlibaba.

When the German 200 ID pulled back on 1 September from their advanced position on the Stoupany-Stepanski ridge, they were followed by the left wing of XI Russian Corps. On 3 September these Russians attacked the line of heights from Baba Ludowa through Ludowa to Smotrec with strong forces. The German 117 ID had meanwhile held onto the Kukul despite Russian counterattacks; but they didn't have the strength to continue their own offensive because they had to stretch their right wing as far as the Smotrec Ridge. G.Lt Conta had to shorten his front to keep his extended lines from being broken. New Russian troops (the Ussuri Coss Div) came up the Bilyj Czeremosz valley on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, apparently to attempt another envelopment of 1 ID. The Russian 64 ID now made their way up the northern slope of the Magura toward the positions of 40 Hon ID. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> the Honved came out of their trenches and drove the enemy out of no-man's land.

#### Fighting on the two wings of 7<sup>th</sup> Army

Only minor fighting took place on the extreme right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army during the first days of September. But the Russians were moving infantry and cavalry toward Dorna Watra; a Russian force, apparently a division, appeared suddenly at Neagra Saruliu. 5 Hon CD, arriving at Dorna Kandreny, reinforced the right wing of XI Corps. The k.u.k. high command also sent two more battalions

of 10 Bav ID, which was approaching Bistriz by train. This was considered sufficient to prevent the threatened incursion into the rear of the k.u.k. XI Corps. At the same time the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group felt compelled to shift the German 1st IR 35 (part of the reserves assembled at Bursztyn) by train to the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army.

On the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, troops from the Russian XI Corps attacked the positions of 3 CD east of the Pantyr Pass on 31 August. The defenders were able to repulse the Russians. The III Cav Rifle Bn of 3 CD and LW UR 6 of 6 CD drove back the enemy who'd advanced onto the Siwula Heights. Detachments of 59 ID which had been sent into the upper valley of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska dispersed some Cossacks by the village of Huta. On 1 September the 2 German Bicycle Bde, which had hastened forward by train and then on foot from Luhi, took over the defense of the left wing of Pflanzer-Baltin's Army on the border crest between the Pantyr Pass and Siwula Heights. On the same day the defensive sector between 3 CD and the left wing of I Corps was placed under Col Savoly; he was given Hon IR 307 to reinforce the weak line of outposts stationed along the border ridge from Wyzna preluka through Douha to Ploska.

GO Pflanzer-Baltin wished to attack to drive the enemy back again toward Rafailowa. But already in the night of 31 Aug-1 Sept troops from XI Russian Corps advanced against the Douha Ploska mountain line and on the next day thrust back the left wing of Savoly's group toward Klauzura Dosina. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> the left wing of 34 ID was also heavily assaulted west of the Tartar Pass and driven from their positions on the heights. The parts of 117 ID deployed on the Wyzna preluka likewise were sharply attacked and in severe difficulty. The Russians reached the line of ridges stretching northwest of the Tartar Pass and could at any moment thrust toward Körösmezö and into the flank of I Corps. In this emergency GO Pflanzer-Baltin threw his last reserves, which he'd been holding at Körösmezö (parts of 117 and of 34 ID plus Landsturm), toward his left wing. They were supposed to counter-attack on the 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>325</sup>

#### 4. The campaign in east Galicia north of the Dniester

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325 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original says the counterattack was to be launched on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, but in fact it occurred on the 4<sup>th</sup> and is described farther below.

### **a. The Russians penetrate the southern wing of Bothmer's Army, 31 August-3 September**

GdI Shcherbachev had been ordered by Brussilov to take Halicz. Toward the end of August he shifted XXXIII Corps, now assigned to him, over the Dniester toward the north. In front of the southern wing of Bothmer's Army he assembled a striking group consisting of this Corps and three others, organized as follows: XXXIII Corps (1 & 2 Trans-Amur Border Divs; 108 ID), XXII Corps (1 & 3 Finn Rif Divs)<sup>326</sup>, II Corps (26 ID, 3 Turkestan Rif Div), XVI Corps (41, 47 & 113 ID). Shcherbachev also had II Cavalry Corps (9 CD, 6 Don Coss Div, Caucasian Native CD) on the northern bank of the Dniester, ready to pursue. South of the river the XLI Corps (74 ID & 3 Trans-Amur Div) would carry out a secondary thrust at Stanislau.

While in the night of 30-31 August GO Kövess was pulling 30 ID from the front at Stanislau, so he could shift it to his Army's extended right wing, units of XLI Russian Corps were already crossing the lower Bystrzyca Solotwinska to attack along the road to Kalusz. On the front between the Dniester and Zlota Lipa Russian infantry crept forward to within storming distance of the positions of XIII and VI Corps. The destructive fire of the Russian artillery opened around 5:00 AM on the 31<sup>st</sup> along the entire front from Stanislau to Zawalow. The area between Delejow and Toustobady, where the enemy hoped to punch through Bothmer's southern wing with a massive assault, was the most heavily bombarded.

#### 31 August

After eight hours of artillery fire, in the afternoon the Russian infantry left their jumping-off points in dense waves. On the road and rail line toward Kalusz their thrust was soon shattered in front of the positions of GdI Gerok's XXIV Res Corps (119 ID and 48 Res ID). Here the enemy fled back to their starting points under fire from Aus-Hung. and German batteries. A second Russian attack, directed against Zagwozdz in the defensive sector of the k.k. 21 LW ID, was also unsuccessful. All positions on the northern wing of Group Hadfy and of Corps Gerok were held. In the evening troops of 48 Res ID mounted a counter-thrust and threw some Russian units which had entered their trenches back to the Bystrzyca Solotwinska.

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326 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Beilage 19 shows the Russian 23 ID also attached to XXII Corps, but the Division is not listed in the text as participating in the attack.

Shcherbachev's onslaught against the southern wing of South Army proved to be more dangerous. After a prolonged and destructive bombardment, around 2:00 PM the Russian XXXIII Corps delivered a mighty blow against the positions of the k.u.k. XIII Corps at Delejow and Konczaki Str. The 15 and 36 ID were unable to withstand the surging masses and their lines were broken. Since counterattacks against the enemy penetration could no longer succeed, FML Csicseric had to pull his Corps back to a line between the Magsa Heights # 356 and Horozanka.

Meanwhile the XXII (Finnish) Corps had assaulted the only division of VI Corps - 12 ID - in their position west and north of Toustobody. The Austrians repulsed the first Russian onslaught. In the afternoon however, after new drumfire they were driven back north of the road to Horozanka. This incursion and the retreat of the neighboring XIII Corps forced FML Fabini, the Corps commander, to withdraw the whole 12 ID to the line Horozanka-Panowice. At Zawalow on the Zlota Lipa troops of the II Russian Corps penetrated the trenches of 1 Res ID, but were then thrown back when the Germans counterattacked.

Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ had meanwhile shifted the German 105 ID from Halicz to the northern bank of the Dniester and assigned it to GdI Bothmer. The battalions of this Division were inserted amid the wreckage of XIII and VI Corps, but couldn't plug the gaps that had developed. Therefore after night fell GdI Bothmer was compelled to pull the troops of both corps, plus those of 105 ID and the right wing of 1 Res ID, back to a prepared, continuous position west of the line Byszow-Panowice-Nosow. When the Army Group HQ learned that the Russians had penetrated the flank of the South Army they moved 199 German ID from Kalusz to Halicz as the new Army Group reserve.

### 1-3 September

In the morning of 1 September troops of the XXXIII Russian Corps pushed against the positions of 2 CD on the Magsa Heights. This attack collapsed under our artillery barrage. The XXII (Finnish) and II Russian Corps followed their withdrawing opponents. They reached Byszow, Horozanka and Zawalow and during the day opened artillery fire against the new battle line of XIII and VI Corps. GdI Bothmer was sure there would be a new assault; in the night of 1-2 September he took a regiment from 199 ID and sent them to the front to take the place of the burnt-out troops of XIII Corps. 15 and 36 ID had a total of

just 1600 riflemen left. To create a unified command over Bothmer's southern wing, Army Group HQ placed 2 CD, the remnants of XIII Corps, 105 ID, 12 ID and 1 Res ID under GdI Gerok's XXIV Res Corps HQ. G.Lt von Oppeln-Bronikowski took over from Gerok the northern wing of Kövess' Army (119 ID and 48 Res).

While GdI Gerok was taking over Bothmer's right wing early on 2 September, strong Russian forces between the Dniester and Zlota Lipa were moving up to the positions of the newly-constituted XXIV Res Corps. The thunder of the cannon was swelling noticeably on the Zlota Lipa, and in the afternoon reached such an intensity east of Brzezany that it seemed to herald an imminent Russian assault against Corps Hofmann. Army Group HQ now deployed all the troops of 199 ID behind Bothmer's southern wing.

The XVI Russian Corps was already attacking on the 2<sup>nd</sup>; their leading troops established themselves firmly on the west bank of the Ceniowka Brook in front of 55 ID. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> the Russian XXXIII, XXII and II Corps moved gradually toward Corps Gerok until they were right next to the trenches. But in front of 105 and 12 ID the advance of the Russian infantry was checked by artillery, and they couldn't develop their attack.

There was heavy fighting by Corps Hofmann. In the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> the Russian XVI Corps attacked the town of Brzezany with five regiments from 113 and 47 ID (a total of 14 battalions). At Szybalin several waves of Russian troops overran LW IR "Zloczow" # 35 and drove into the woods southeast of Brzezany. The enemy quickly extended their penetration toward the south. The Bavarian Res IR # 4 from 199 ID had to be brought up quickly from Bothmer's southern wing to support the defenders. At dawn on the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps Hofmann was able to recapture the lost positions.<sup>327</sup> The enemy was only able to hold onto a small piece of the front north of the Litiatin-Brzezany road.

## **b. Actions at Zborow, 31 August-5 September**

Sakharov's 11<sup>th</sup> Army directed their efforts against the northern wing of South Army and the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in the area between Zborow and Jaroslawice. Russian artillery fire began early in the morning of 31 August. It reached its greatest

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327 In this counterattack Lt Col. Josef Wächter of IR # 88 was especially distinguished. He was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

strength at noon, when their opponents' positions were considered to be ready to be attacked. The Russians sent VII Corps plus troops from VI and XVII Corps forward, on a front just 10 kilometers wide, to break through toward Zloczow. North of the Zlota Ga. Heights and at Jaroslawice German troops (197 and 195 ID) fended off the assault in heavy fighting. A powerful blow struck GM Ritter von Willerding's k.u.k. 32 ID on the northern wing of IX Corps and caused them extreme distress. The Division's line was broken on the road to Pluhow along a 4 km front. The Russians drove forward, repulsed counterattacks, and captured six guns.

The battle raged fiercely on 1 September. The Hungarians of 32 ID counterattacked early in the morning, seeking to make good their losses. They gained ground south of the road to Zborow. The Russians at the same time renewed their own offensive in full strength. Eben's Group at Jaroslawice stood fast against a larger enemy force in see-saw fighting. But the situation became critical when the Russians pushed the left wing of the k.u.k. 32 ID back past Grabkowce. Now the enemy stood upon the flank of 197 ID. On the road to Zborow, Russian troops with armored cars were already thrusting toward Meteniow. GdI Eben bent his right wing sharply back to the west and brought up reserves from 195 ID. GO Böhm-Ermolli sent parts of the German 115 ID to the point of penetration and ordered Group Eben and IX Corps to hold on. Command over the German detachments stationed behind the left wing of South Army and the right of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (these were parts of three different divisions - 115, 195 and 197) was given to German G.Lt Melior, who also was in charge of the remnants of the k.u.k. 32 ID still holding out between the road and the rail line. All these troops were supposed to drive the enemy back to Zborow.

G.Lt Melior's group began their counterattack early on 2 September, and were successful. Grabkowce was recovered from the enemy in stubborn fighting.<sup>328</sup> But when Melior's troops wanted to push on farther toward Zborow, the Russians again stormed the entire front. This time the enemy were completely rebuffed at Jaroslawice. They were able to penetrate the lines only on the Zlota Ga. Heights, and here a German counter-thrust expelled the Russians from the trenches they'd conquered.

On 3 September GdK Sakharov again sent his infantry to attack in many waves, but couldn't punch through the front, which was

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328 Kaiser-Buchholtz-Renovanz, "Das Infanterie Regiment Nr. 171 im Weltkrieg" (Oldenburg, 1927), pp. 182 ff.

supported by German units. Then he had to pause to regroup.

The emergency of Bothmer's Army had compelled the allied high commands on 2 September to divert 3 German Gd ID, which had been moving to Transylvania; their main body was sent to Halicz and one regiment to Zloczow. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> the Prussian Leib Hussar Brigade from Grywiatky was also sent to Zloczow. When the Russians stormed the lines of Corps Hofmann at Brzezany on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group designated Podwysokie as the assembly point for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guard Division.

## 5. The fighting by Linsingen's Army Group

### a. The last days before the Russian attack, 28-30 August

#### The situation of 4<sup>th</sup> Army

From 28 to 30 August the Russian 8<sup>th</sup> Army increased their artillery and trench mortar fire on the positions of Litzmann's Armeegruppe between Zaturcy and Pustomyty; their scouts probed the front. The Russians were steadily shoveling forward opposite Corps Szurmay and Group Beckmann; some counter-measures initiated by the defenders were a failure, just as was the case in June. GdI Litzmann strengthened the garrison in the trenches of 11 ID with three German battalions. Thus in all divisional sectors - except for that of 37 Hon ID, which seemed to be in the least danger - German and Aus-Hung. troops defended the foremost line together in roughly equal strength. Infantry from 108 ID were backing up Leonhardi's Cavalry Group. As reserves, Litzmann had in readiness a strong northern group behind the junction of Csanady's and Szurmay's Corps, as well as a weaker southern group behind the left wing of Group Beckmann.<sup>329</sup> Moreover, the German Eastern Command had, on their own initiative, sent Jaeger Regt 6 as a reserve to Koniuchy. Finally, behind Litzmann's northern group of reserves GO Tersztjanszky had available the German IR 42 at Lokaczy.

Thus the order of battle of the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army was the following (German units and commanders are italicized):

*(Reinforced) X Corps*

*Commander = G.Lt Schmidt von Knobelsdorf with Lt Col. Drechsler*

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329 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 114 ff.

as Chief of Staff

- . 29<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schön)
  - . 58 Inf Bde - IR 92 [3], 94 [3], 74 [3]
  - . 37 Inf Bde - IR 78 [3] only
  - . 2 Res Sqdn/HR 2; 4 Comp/SB
  - . FKR 29 [4], 3 Batty/FHR 29, 3 & 4 Batties/29 Hvy FAR; Batties 4/241, 3 & 5/26, 4/62, 2/84; three batties of captured Russian guns
- . 121<sup>st</sup> ID (GM Ditzfurth)
  - . 241 Inf Bde - Res IR 7 [3], 56 [3]; I Bn/60 (line); a recruit depot
  - . 2 & 3 Sqdns/JPR 12; 241 & 260 Pioneer Comps
  - . FAR 241 [8]; Flak Batty 115
- . 19<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Hülsen)
  - . IR 74 [3], 91 [3]; II Bn/60; a recruit depot
  - . 2 & 3 Sqdns/HR 17; 1 & 5 Comps/10th Pioneers
  - . FKR 62 [5]; Batty 6/26; three batties of captured Russian guns; Flak Batty 140
- . 20<sup>th</sup> ID (G.Lt von Schöler)
  - . 40 Inf Bde - IR 77 [3], 79 [3], 92 [3]; III Bn/60; a recruit depot
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 17; Bike Comp/Jaeger Bn 10; 2 & 3 Comps/10th Pioneers
  - . FAR 10 [6], 46 [6]; 5 Batty/Res Fuss AR 16; two batties of captured Russian guns
- . Corps troops - 3 Batty/Res Fuss AR 14, II Bn/Res Fuss AR 16 [3]

Armeegruppe Litzmann was placed over the remaining three components ( X Corps, Corps Szurmay, and Group Beckmann) Commander = GdI Litzmann, with Major Freih. von Rottberg as Chief of Staff

X Corps (FML Csanady, with Lt Col. Resky as Chief of Staff)

- . 37<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Haber)
  - . 73 Hon Inf Bde - Hon IR 13 [1 ½], 18 [2]
  - . 74 Hon Inf Bde - Hon IR 14 [1 ½], 15 [14]
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/HR 5; 4 Comp/SB 5
  - . Hon FKR 37 [4], 2 & 4 Batties/Hon FHR 37, 1 & 2 Batties/Hon Hvy FAR 37; 15 cm Can Batty 5
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Jemrich)
  - . 19 Inf Bde - IR 40 [3]; Bns V/62, V/103; FJB 4, 29; IR 378 [3]
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns/LW UR 3; 7 Sqdn/HR 2; 4 Comp/SB 10
  - . 3 & 4 Batties/FKR 2; FHR X [4]; 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 2; 1 Batty/Res Fuss AR 1
- . 10<sup>th</sup> LW ID (GM von Stocken)

- . 180 Inf Bde- IR 372 [3], k.k. LW IR 24 [3]
- . 5 Sqdn/DR 7; 3 Comp/2nd Pioneers
- . II Bn/FAR 97 [4]; 2 & 4 Batties/FKR 13; 1, 2 & 3 Batties/FHR 13; 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 13
- . (Half of...) 13<sup>th</sup> LW ID (FML Edler von Kalser)
  - . 25 LW Inf Bde - LW IR 1 [3]; a bn-equivalent of Tyrol Jaeger comps (Italian); two March bns (of XXIII series)
  - . 5 & 6 Sqdns of LW UR 5; 6 Comp/1 SB (No artillery)
- . Corps troops - 1 Comp/9 Pioneer Bn; a Lst sapper comp; a balloon unit

Corps Szurmay (FML Szurmay, with Lt Col. Röder as Chief of Staff)

- . 70<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Mouillard)
  - . 207 Hon Inf Bde - Hon IR 313 [2], 315 [2]; I Bn/Hon IR 314; II Bn/IR 217
  - . Hon Hussar Bn 70 [2]; 4 Comp/SB 9
  - . 1 Batty/FKR 70, 1 Batty/FKR 13; 1 & 3 Batties/FHR 70, 1 & 3 Batties/FHR X; a 10.4 cm cannon batty; 2 & 3 Batties/LW Fuss Arty Bn 11
- . 11<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Obauer)
  - . 4 Inf Bde - IR 89 [1 ½], 90 [1 ½]
  - . 22 Inf Bde - IR 58 [1 ½], 95 [1 ½]
  - . Attached - IR 217 [2]; III Bn/46
  - . 1 & 2 Sqdns/LW UR 1; 5 Comp/SB 13
  - . FKR 1 [4], 4 Batty/FKR 2; 1 & 2 Batties/FHR 11, 1 & 3 Batties/Heavy FAR 11, 6 Batty/FHR 16, 1 Batty/FHR 37; 1 Batty/LW Fuss Arty Bn 11
- . Corps troops - One battery of captured Russian guns; 4 Comp/PB 4, a Lst Sapper det; a balloon unit

Group Beckmann (HQ of 108 ID; G.Lt Beckmann with Capt. von Jagow as Chief of Staff)

- . Cav Group Leonhardi (HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> CD - FML Freih. von Leonhardi)
  - . 10<sup>th</sup> CD (GM von Bauer)
    - . 4 Cav Bde - HR 10, 13
    - . 8 Cav Bde - HR 9, UR 12
    - . 10 Cav Rifle Bn; III Bn/265, an Ersatz bn
    - . Horse Arty Bn 10 [4], 1 Batty/FHR 11
  - . 7<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Graf Marenzi)
    - . 11 Cav Bde - DR 10, UR 2
    - . 20 Cav Bde - DR 12, UR 3
    - . 7 Cav Rifle Bn; Horse Arty Bn 7 [4], 5 Batty/FHR 11
- . (Independent) 18 Cav Bde - DR 9, UR 13, half of Horse Arty Bn 4 [2]
- . (Independent) 2 Gd Cav Bde - Gd UR 1 & 3; I Bn/IR 265; 2 Batty/Gd Horse Arty Bn; Pioneer Det 15

. Group troops - A 15 cm naval cannon batty  
 . 5 Inf Bde - IR 97 [3], 137 [3]; FAR 243 [6], 1 Batty/II Gd  
 Fuss Arty Bn, 7 & 8 Batties/Res Fuss AR 11; Flak Batty 171; one  
 battery of captured Russian guns; two pioneer comps

In reserve of Armeegruppe Litzmann - IR 377 [3], Bn II/265; two  
 Ersatz bns of 108 ID; II Bn/ Hon IR 314; Res Sqdn/DR 1; Batties  
 3/FKR 13, 3/FHR 37

Army troops - IR 42 [3]; Flieger Comps 10 & 20; Flieger Det 38  
 In German East Command reserve - Jaeger Regt 6 [3]  
 TOTAL strength = 47 k.u.k. and 67 German bns, 50 k.u.k. and 18  
 German sqdns, 61 k.u.k.. and 64 German batties. Grand total was  
 thus 114 bns, 68 sqdns, 125 batties

Armeegruppe Litzmann anticipated the next enemy onslaught with  
 resolution. All indications were that this time the Russians  
 wouldn't strike along the upper course of the Stokhod, since  
 their strength was reduced on this part of the front. The  
 supposition was strengthened for the allied commanders by  
 interrogating prisoners taken by X German Corps; none of them  
 had any knowledge of plans to attack.

#### The situation on the northern wing of Linsingen's Army Group

The Russian "Special Army", which lay opposite the right wing of  
 Armeegruppe Bernhardi, received a new commander on 28 August.  
 GdK Gurko replaced General Bezobrazov because neither the Stavka  
 nor the HQ of Southwest Front were satisfied with the capability  
 of the latter.<sup>330</sup> The Tsar was especially concerned about the  
 fate of his Guards. Therefore when Nicholas II held the  
 audience in which he named General Gurko to command the Special  
 Army, he asserted that "to his sorrow" this valuable offensive  
 asset had hitherto not been employed "with sufficient prudence";  
 the Guards "had suffered enormous casualties, without having the  
 effect which had been expected. Because of the qualities of the  
 newly-appointed commander, the ruler trusted that Gurko would  
 successfully lead the best troops in the Empire."<sup>331</sup>

Upon assuming his new post, General Gurko learned about the  
 preparations already initiated for an attack. He became  
 convinced that neither the instructions issued by his

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330 Zayonchkovsky, p. 64. Broussilov, pp. 222 ff. Knox, Vol.  
 II, pp. 473 ff.

331 Gurko, "Russland 1914-1917 - Erinnerungen an Krieg und  
 Revolution" (Berlin, 1921), p. 127.

predecessor, the limited understanding of his subordinates of the conditions necessary to win a breakthrough, nor the terrain selected for his Army's thrust made it likely that the operation would succeed. He wanted to completely cancel the campaign against Kovel in its present form.<sup>332</sup>

During these days Armeegruppe Bernhardi hadn't yet noticed the change of mood on the enemy side. The Russians were even increasing their artillery fire against 107 ID and the k.u.k. II Corps up until 30 August, while moving their trenches forward. These circumstances, plus the fact that during the last week the enemy had deployed three fresh corps in front of Corps Fath, seemed to show that the Russian generals planned to deliver a sharp blow against Bernhardi's front even though their troops on the Stokhod were rather inactive for the moment. Therefore on the 30<sup>th</sup> GO Linsingen shifted toward Powursk a regiment from the German units assembled around Kovel.

In Hauer's reinforced Cavalry Corps, on 28 August the allies opened the second attack which G.Lt Clausius had been preparing to wrest from the Russians their bridgehead at Tobol. The strong artillery (over 150 guns) was directed by German Lt Col. Bruchmüller, already famous for masterminding artillery preparation in breakthrough attacks. But the guns were unable to break the resistance of the enemy garrison, so that the eight German battalions which stormed ahead from the north and west were only able to make slight progress. The town remained in Russian hands; farther east the Bavarian cavalry of Hellingrath's Division, along with the Aus-Hung. DR Kaiser # 1, won back part of their original first line. The general attack had failed to break through, and G.Lt Clausius decided to pull his storm troops back to their starting points after darkness fell.<sup>333</sup> Army Group HQ now halted the operation, since there was no longer any chance for a decisive success. That evening Linsingen ordered that by the 30<sup>th</sup> the Aus-Hung. 1 CD and Prussian Leib Hussar Brigade should be relieved from the front and sent to Kovel; both cavalry units were needed in other parts of the theater of operations. Moreover, the Bav CD was to return the four cavalry regiments they had borrowed from Gronau's neighboring group.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> the Bavarians at first repulsed some weak Russian thrusts; in the evening, however, they evacuated the advanced

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332 Gurko, p. 129. Knox, Vol. II, p. 475

333 Meienborn and Goebel, p. 128. Shurmann, p. 255.

Frauenholz, p. 261. Bernhardi, "Denkwürdigkeiten", p. 446.

position they'd conquered the day before. GdI Linsingen intended that G.Lt Clausius should return to his own command sector under Armeegruppe Bernhardi; he instructed Corps Hauer to place their remaining infantry under the HQ of 1 German LW ID. In the next few days most of the batteries which had been brought from other units were returned to their owners, and Bernhardi also received back the small infantry units that weren't needed. On the 30<sup>th</sup> G.Lt von Jacobi, the commander of 1 LW ID, took over the sector between the Loknica Brook and the adjoining wing of the Bavarian cavalry.

In the new arrangement of the front northeast of Tobol, 1 LW ID resumed control of their own three regiments; in addition they had Res IR 251 (from 75 Res ID) and the k.u.k. 9 CD. Lst IR 37 was attached to the weak Bavarian CD. IR 344, which belonged to the German 86 ID, was pulled back into the Army Group's reserve, and on the next day was sent to Werchy. The Russians, exhausted from the lengthy fighting and concerned with a large-scale reorganization within their own 3<sup>rd</sup> Army<sup>334</sup>, didn't interfere with any of these allied troop movements.

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334 Zayonchkovsky, p. 61

**b. The First Defensive Battle at Szelwów-Swiniuchy, 31 August-3 September**31 August

On 31 August Kaledin's Army - which now had five infantry corps (two of which had three divisions)<sup>335</sup> - struck in the direction of Poryck, against Tersztyanszky's Army. The defenders' neighbor to the south, Armeegruppe Marwitz, was confronted only by the relatively weak wings of 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies at their junction and was merely harassed; however, from the early morning hours a destructive hail of shells fell upon Armeegruppe Litzmann. The enemy artillery concentrated above all on Cavalry Group Leonhardi, Corps Szurmay, and the 10 German LW ID (which was assigned to the k.u.k. X Corps). In the morning parts of the Russians' VIII, IV Sib, and XL Corps attacked in the sector between Korytnica and Szelwów.<sup>336</sup> Behind the northern wing of the attacking infantry, at Sadowo, a massive cavalry force (12 CD and the Orenburg Coss Div) were standing ready.

In Cavalry Group Leonhardi, the shaken defenders of 10 CD north of Korytnica were the first to be driven back by the onslaught of the Siberians.<sup>337</sup> Leonhardi's center also fell back and the southern wing of 11 ID, adjacent to 10 CD, crumbled considerably. The divisional reserves weren't able to check the enemy, who took Korytnica and sent advanced troops forward to Swiniuchy. Only 2 Gd Cav Bde on Leonhardi's southern wing held their ground. The nearest German troops guarded this Brigade's left flank in the direction of the area penetrated by the Russians, and offered prolonged resistance to the enemy until G.Lt Beckmann could initiate an effective counterattack from the Swiniuchy area with the southern reserve group.<sup>338</sup> GdI Litzmann had also sent Jaeger Regiment 6, which had been placed at his disposal, to join these battalions. In hard fighting that lasted until evening, the counterattack reached the western edge of Korytnica, brought forward the southern wing of 11 ID, and

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335 Brussilov had sent the HQ of XXIII Corps to 9<sup>th</sup> Army (Knox, Vol. II, p. 479). Both of the Corps' divisions had stayed with 8<sup>th</sup> Army. 53 ID was assigned to XXXIX, 20 ID to XL Corps.

336 Klembovsky, p. 97. Zayonchkovsky, p. 67. Vinogradsky, pp. 209 ff.

337 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 118 ff.

338 Wulffen, pp. 63 ff. Senftleben, "Das 1. Garde Ulanen Regiment im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1929), pp. 266 ff.

plugged the dangerous hole in the line.<sup>339</sup> Leonhardi's front was secured by German troops, behind whom the badly-disorganized cavalry and Landwehr assembled. The 10 CD had lost 1770 men; their dismounted force now consisted of no more than 570 riflemen. In total Leonhardi's two and a half Aus-Hung. cavalry divisions had lost 2460 men.

In the morning the center and north wing of 11 ID were pushed back at several points; the lines of 70 Hon ID south of Szelwów were broken by the 2 Rif Div of XL Russian Corps. The first counterattack, carried out by Honved units, failed. But the German battalions inserted into the front of Szurmay's Corps stood fast and were easily able to limit the Russian advance; then with help from Litzmann's northern group of reserves, to which GO Tersztyanszky added yet another German regiment, they everywhere pushed back the enemy who'd penetrated our lines. The Russian 4 Rif Div attacked 10 LW ID of Csanady's Corps several times, but suffered a bloody defeat.<sup>340</sup> The enemy only bothered Csanady's northern wing, as well as the X German Corps (where G.Lt Schmidt-Knobelsdorf took command this day), with gunfire.

#### 1-2 September

Over night the situation in the key sectors of the battle, by Szelwów and Korytnica, was still somewhat unclear. To reinforce Armeegruppe Litzmann, GO Linsingen sent 4<sup>th</sup> Army the German IR 346, which came to Iwaniczyn the next morning by train. The neighboring Group Beckmann was instructed to send light and heavy batteries to Marwitz.

At dawn on 1 September the allies counterattacked and completely recovered the foremost trenches south of Szelwów; by Korytnica, on the other hand, they weren't fully successful. Lively fighting again flared up along Litzmann's entire front, beginning on that of 108 ID. The resolute enemy launched thrusts against Corps Szurmay, but they shattered on the firm defenses. At noon strong Russian units again fell with force on

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339 Walther, "Das Res. Infanterie Regiment 265 in Angriff und Abwehr 1914 bis 1918" (Zeulenroda, 1933), pp. 163 ff. Schenk zu Schweinsberg, Bornefeld and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Das Gross-Herzogliche Mecklenburg Jäger Bataillon Nr. 14" (Berlin-Oldenburg, 1926), pp. 124 ff. Menges, "Kriegsgeschichte des Königl. Preuss. Reserve Jäger Bataillons Nr. 4" (Berlin-Oldenburg, 1927), pp. 185 ff.

340 Sichelstiel, [k.k.] "LW IR 24", p. 118

the northern wing of Group Beckmann; at Korytnica they thrust forward to the west. But the mass of Russian troops was soon struck by destructive defensive fire on two fronts, and had to flee back after suffering heavy casualties. Then the Russians made repeated assaults against the sector of 2 Gd Cav Bde (reinforced by infantry) between Korytnica and Pustomyty; each attack, however, collapsed in front of the obstacles.

In two days of bitter fighting the enemy had lost very many dead and wounded, and the allies took more than 1100 prisoners. The counterattacks at Korytnica, however, had also cost the defenders dearly. Therefore GdI Litzmann was content on this part of the battlefield to hold onto the lines he had reached; with the agreement of Army HQ he decided to avoid unnecessary casualties rather than to attempt to recover all of the original position. At most such an operation could have gained a psychological success, but not any real tactical advantage. Including the recently arrived 346<sup>th</sup> German IR, Litzmann still had five battalions in reserve; he looked forward to further developments with confidence.<sup>341</sup>

GO Linsingen had meanwhile taken the regiment that Armeegruppe Bernhardt no longer needed and sent them through Vladimir-Volynsky to 4<sup>th</sup> Army; on 2 September they were in position east of that city. On this day, however, the enemy refrained from infantry attacks, and only directed artillery fire against their opponents.

### 3 September

On the next day (3 September), Kaledin's Army again attempted to break through. Their efforts were directed mainly against Corps Szurmay plus the adjacent northern wing of Beckmann. But the attackers recoiled from the energetic resistance of the allies; small parts of the front of 11 ID wavered but the situation was rectified by the intervention of reserves. Szurmay's defense was very effectively supported by his neighbors Beckmann and Csanady, whose batteries pounded the enemy infantry from the flanks. In the evening the commander and soldiers of Armeegruppe Litzmann saw that their difficult combat assignment had been crowned with complete success. The ruthless commitment of masses of infantry had cost the Russians new and painful losses.<sup>342</sup> "The strategic and tactical gains [of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian

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341 Litzmann, Vol. II, p. 123

342 FML Szurmay had already reported on 2 September that according to sober estimates there were about 5000 Russian

Army] were both nil."<sup>343</sup>

That evening, at Linsingen's command the regiment which had been held ready at Vladimir-Volynsky rolled ahead by train to the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Since the creation of the Hindenburg-front the German Eastern command had developed a unique method by which a limited number of troops could counter the Russian attacks that were developing in various sectors. Several good regiments were stationed in readiness at major railroad stations, so that they would quickly use the substantially-improved rail net to move to threatened areas where they'd be thrown into the battle. After their mission was accomplished, these troops would again take to the rails to carry out the same assignment in another place. Thus the German Eastern command multiplied the effectiveness of their forces, which were numerically inferior to the Russian masses, while being always able to provide a sufficient number of troops at the correct, decisive moment when they could prevent an enemy breakthrough. This system of "flying reserves" had already proved effective in the high summer, and remained in the following period the most efficient method of conducting a successful defense.

### **c. The Russian West Front fails to attack**

The allied commanders had also expected a Russian attack against Armeegruppe Bernhardi at the end of August. Gurko's Army did open strong artillery fire on 31 August against the German 107 ID and k.u.k. II Corps. In the next few days they continued to dig ahead into no-man's land; however, the expected enemy offensive didn't materialize in this part of the front, or that of Corps Fath (where on 31 August and 1 September Group Kneussl came under a livelier bombardment than hitherto). From 3 September activity for Bernhardi's troops declined to the normal level of defensive trench warfare.

Alexeiev, the Russian Chief of the General Staff, had agreed with GdI Evert that the latter's West Front would open their offensive toward Kovel on 2 September. Therefore on 29 August General Gurko had passed on to his subordinates the orders which had been prepared by his predecessor Bezobrazov; he himself, however, doubted there was any possibility of success. The

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corpses lying along his front. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, after the attacks were repulsed, the estimate of fatal casualties was just as great.

343 Klembovsky, p. 97

attack was supposed to be delivered by the Special Army's strong center with three corps (I and II Guard plus XXX).<sup>344</sup> In 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army Gen. Lesch had finally implemented a revised order of battle on the 30<sup>th</sup>;<sup>345</sup> his delay was perhaps due to Corps Hauer's counterattack at Tobol. By 1 September the XXXIV and III Corps were to have taken up positions in the crowded Tobol bridgehead (with the latter on the left). Farther south the XXVI Corps, to which 4 Finn Rif Div was now assigned, would take over the line along the Stokhod as far as the northern wing of XLVI Corps.<sup>346</sup> The reserves consisted of XXV Corps at Maniewiczze and the majority of the cavalry, which were still at their original posts. The Army still included the battered I Sib Corps, which however was under orders to transfer to the sector of 10<sup>th</sup> Army. 3 CD had been ordered to join the units in Dobruja. Gen. Lesch didn't issue orders for the attack until the night of 31 August-1 September. XXIV Corps would strike the main blow supported by III and XXVI Corps; if the operation succeeded the right wing of XLVI Corps would join in with a thrust to Bol. Obzyr.

However, the offensive by West Front which was envisioned in these orders didn't occur. If the assault had opened on 2 September as scheduled, the unprepared 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would probably have been defeated because of the haste with which the attacking troops would have had to rush to their new positions.<sup>347</sup> This factor caused Gen. Evert, who was deliberate and always inclined to caution, to report to the Stavka that the attack couldn't take place until the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> at the earliest. Fundamentally, however, Evert was of the opinion that - since Gurko also had so

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344 Zayonchkovsky, p. 64

345 *Ibid.*, pp. 61 ff.

346 It's not clear to which corps the 27 and 78 ID belonged.

In July 1916 they had made up Bulatov's Combined Corps; since Russian sources do not mention this HQ afterwards, it must have been dissolved for some time prior to the end of August. 27 ID had fought against Cavalry Corps Hauer at Tobol and as of 31 August was still stationed in this area along with 4 Finn Rif Div and 65 ID (the latter from XXVI Corps). 78 ID was on the Stokhod between Bol. Obzyr and Stobychwa, on the right wing of XLVI Corps and presumably under that Corps' command.

347 Zayonchkovsky (p. 63) passes very harsh judgment upon the "preparations to attack by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army under Evert's orders," stating in particular that "the allotment of the artillery and the instructions issued to commanders and troops were chaotic and faulty."

little confidence in his Army's prospects of success - the planned operation was completely impossible. He pointed out the local difficulties in the sector of the Special Army and alluded to the fact that Lesch's premature attempt to widen the Tobol bridgehead had failed; there were no other places at which the Russians could force their way over the river. Meanwhile the allies had been given time to strongly fortify their line. The commander of the West Front therefore suggested that instead of trying to break through with one blow his men should gradually push their opponents back behind the Turya. This would force the allies to draw as many troops as possible from other battlefields to the Kovel area. A second suggestion, based on reports that the Germans had weakened their positions north of the Pripyat in front of 10<sup>th</sup> Army, was that three corps should attack in the Smorgony-Krevo sector.

### ***B. Intervention by the Stavka***

The general offensive, which Alexeiev had intended to direct with the Tsar's armies plus the fresh Romanian forces, had achieved nothing. The Stavka themselves had decided not to have the North Front attack; Gen. Ruzsky restricted his efforts to holding onto his positions. At the start of September he ordered his armies to carry out only limited local operations.<sup>348</sup>

The West Front had already missed the point in time when their intervention toward Kovel could have supported the Southwest Front and done their opponents substantial damage. Once again Brussilov's units had been thrown by themselves into fighting which had cost them many casualties. By 3 September the results were by no means impressive. But it seemed that the center of the Southwest Front had won a success that could be exploited if 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies kept up their pressure on the allies' brittle lines. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army's initial success had quickly been wiped out, but perhaps a stronger blow directed at the same point would have better luck.

As previously, Alexeiev clung firmly to the idea of driving a mighty wedge into the allied front in the Kovel area. Paying heed, though, to Evert's objections and proposals, he decided that the strategic goal which hitherto hadn't been obtained by frontal assaults or by an envelopment from the north might now be accomplished with an envelopment from the south.<sup>349</sup> For this purpose Alexeiev regarded the two Guard corps, which hadn't been

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348 Zayonchkovsky, p. 121

349 *Ibid.*, pp. 69 ff.

fully utilized by West Front and were now stationed there doing nothing, to be an especially valuable military resource.

On 3 September Brussilov received his orders from the Stavka at Mogilev. He was to take over the Guard infantry from Evert and incorporate them into 8<sup>th</sup> Army. Thus reinforced, Kaledin's Army would carry out a powerful attack toward Vladimir-Volynsky and Milatyn and beyond, in the general direction of Grubieszow. From Vladimir-Volynsky they would swing north and thrust to Kovel. The West front would leave only enough units on the lower and middle Stokhod for defensive purposes, while assembling a strong reserve behind the left wing of the Special Army to cover the flank of Kaledin's attacking group. The Guard cavalry were placed directly under the Stavka.<sup>350</sup> The instructions given Gen. Evert on 11 August - to capture Kovel with an attack through Kamien Kaszyrsky, were explicitly canceled.<sup>351</sup>

Since the next offensive, which the Stavka hoped would be decisive, would once more be directed by Southwest Front, Alexeiev strove to ensure that his concepts about the general outline and goals of the operation, as well as the necessary troop concentration, were clear to Brussilov. On 4 September Alexeiev informed the Front commander that even if the allies did reinforce in front of Southwest Front, the Russian side would still have overall numerical superiority. Anyway, it seemed that the troops were spread rather evenly along the entire Front. The new units would make it possible to now gather "a strong army to carry out a decisive attack against the Germans in one direction." The thrust to Grubieszow had favorable prospects of success, because from this area the Russians could turn either against Kovel or Lemberg.

Brussilov proposed that the the attack should be limited to the Vladimir-Volynsky - Poryck sector, and demanded further heavy batteries and airplanes for 8<sup>th</sup> Army. He complained about the shameful inactivity of the West Front, and stated that the terrain facing that Front, along the middle and lower Stokhod,

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350 Klembovsky, pp. 99 ff.

351 Zayonchkovsky, p. 65. Four pages later this author describes how Russia's military forces were deployed at this time in the European theater of operations. On the battlefield north of the Pripyat there were 61 infantry and 17 cavalry divisions; south of the Pripyat were 79½ infantry and 22 cavalry divisions. In addition, 2 infantry and 1 cavalry divisions were in Dobruja.

was more favorable for an offensive than were the forests and swamps of the Vladimir-Volynsky - Kovel area. Alexeiev wouldn't go into this issue. He agreed only that the sector to be attacked should be narrowed, while promising to provide heavy artillery and airplanes. After further requests from Brussilov, the Stavka decided that from the reserves in movement on the railroads the VII Sib Corps should join 7<sup>th</sup> Army and III Cauc Corps the 11<sup>th</sup> Army. On 10 September the Army commanders Kaledin, Sakharov and Shcherbachev were informed that with the help of the fresh units they were receiving they should begin a long and energetic operation on the 16<sup>th</sup>; great results were expected.

### ***C. The period through the next major clash of arms, 4-15 September***

#### **1. The battle continues in the Forest Carpathians**

##### 4-7 September

Since 4 September Gen. Letschitzky with the main body of his troops had been pushing without interruption against the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, which barred his way to Transylvania and Hungary. On his extreme left wing he had assembled an attacking group with the units of III Cavalry Corps (1 Terek Coss Div, 10 CD, 1 Don Coss Div). They were supposed to penetrate the flank of the k.u.k. XI Corps and operate alongside the Romanian Bistrita Detachment. Because of the concentration of these Russian and Romanian forces the k.u.k. high command had already been obliged on 2 September to place a second battalion from 10 Bav ID at the disposal of XI Corps.

The Bavarians arrived at Dorna Watra on 4 September, while the Russians were beginning to stir on the heights north of the town. 1 Terek Coss Div inched toward Dorna Watra from the north. At the same time another group from this Division advanced from the east against the D. Negrii and penetrated the thinly-held positions of 11 Hon CD. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the parts of Bav IR 16 deployed south of Dorna Watra drove the enemy back; the Cossacks gave up their flank attack and pulled back on the 7<sup>th</sup> behind the Negra Brook. Meanwhile the Romanian Bistrita Detachment remained inactive in the area south of Saru Dornei.

The Russians launched very strong attacks against the positions that protected the valley of the Golden Bistritz and thus the only route running behind 7<sup>th</sup> Army's front, the major road from

Kirlibaba to Prislop Pass. Here every part of the trenches would be contested until they were safe from the Russians. Any local breakthrough could lead to the loss of the entire position and the retreat of Corps Habermann. In the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> the Terek Cossacks repeatedly broke into the positions of Brigade Papp on the heights north of Dorna Watra, but each time were thrust back to the north by the resolute defenders. Since September 4<sup>th</sup> the Russian 103 ID had again been trying to widen the small penetration they'd made on 1 September north of Czokanestie. Here the Russians could already peer into the Bistritz valley, but were held in place by GM Freih. von Schnehen's 8 CD; parts of 5 Hon CD, of 40 Hon ID and of Bav IR 16 hurried forward to support Schnehen. The trench fighting was carried on by both sides with great bitterness until finally the Russians, exhausted from fruitless sapping attacks, had to evacuate the last part of 8 CD's trenches which they had occupied.

There were also massive Russian assaults day after day in the barren terrain between the Kirlibaba Brook and the Czarny Czeremosz. The prolonged fighting and bad weather strained the defenders severely. The high, forested mountains were lost in fog while the lower elevations were damp from rain. Late in the evening of 4 September the Russian XVIII Corps struck the left wing of 1 German ID with concentrated strength and placed the exhausted East Prussians in a dangerous situation. G.Lt Conta wanted to send Hon IR 306 and two German Jaeger battalions to the southeast from the Comanowa Heights in an envelopment counter-attack, but instead had to send the German Jaeger to Szybeny to support 200 ID. Troops from the Russian XI Corps had fallen upon this Division, and despite a desperate defense had broken through the thin German battle lines between the Skoruszny and Smotrec Heights. The German Lst IR 35, after arriving at Leordina in the afternoon of the 5<sup>th</sup>, was sent to reinforce 200 ID, which was able to hold on despite the penetration of the center.

Meanwhile the fighting to possess the border heights west of the Tartar Pass was no less heavy. Here, on the left wing of I Corps, Aus-Hung. and German units (parts of 34 and 117 ID) began to counterattack on the 4<sup>th</sup>; they were trying to throw back the strong forces from Russian XI Corps which had driven over the Wyzna preluka Heights. The allies gained ground along the border crest step by step. On the 5<sup>th</sup> the Russians in turn launched a counter-blow. They thrust from the wooded southern slopes of Mounts Douha and Ploska into the Dosina valley. In furious fighting at Klauzura Dosina, Col. Savoly's Group (Hon IR

307 reinforced by Landsturm) prevented the Russians from descending into the upper Tisza valley. On the border ridge between the Tartar Pass and the Wyzna preluka the left wing of 34 ID, supported by German troops, was able to hold on only with difficulty. GdK Kirchbach was inclined to pull back to a prepared position north of Körösmezö, but was ordered by GO Pflanzner-Baltin to stay in place. Meanwhile GO Conrad, with Ludendorff's agreement, had diverted 10 Bav ID, which had been en route for Bistritz, to Maramaros-Sziget; the HQ of Army Group Archduke Charles placed a regiment of this Division (Res IR 6) at the disposal of I Corps.

While Kirchbach's left wing was engaged in heavy defensive fighting on the Wyzna preluka and at Klauzura Dosina, 3 CD with the attached German 2 Bicycle Brigade attacked on 4 September from the Pantyr Pass. This group gained ground toward Rafailowa, but on the 7<sup>th</sup> was hit by a Russian counter-stroke and brought to a halt.

On the same day the center of the Carpathian Corps suffered a setback. In the area south of Sarata strong units from XVIII Russian Corps struck Hon IR 306, which had been deployed on the left wing of 1 ID; they drove the Hungarians from their trenches and on the 8<sup>th</sup> smashed through the broken line and deep into the flank of the East Prussians. 1 ID was separated from the right wing of 200 ID, which was fighting west of the uppermost course of the Bilyj Czeremosz. Threatened with envelopment, by the 9<sup>th</sup> Conta had to evacuate the Magura and the Stara Wipczynna; he took 1 ID back behind the Cibo valley and over the Hungarian border to the northern slopes of the Cimbroslawa Wk. and the Gura Rucada. 200 ID also evacuated their positions on the Preluzny Heights and pulled their right flank back to the border ridge.

#### A change in command for the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army

On the 7<sup>th</sup> the emergency of the Carpathian Corps had already forced Archduke Charles' HQ to divert the Bav Res IR 8 and five batteries from their journey to Maramaros-Sziget, and to send them to Borsa. These reinforcements arrived on the 8<sup>th</sup>, at the time when 1 ID was retreating, and were immediately deployed by G.Lt Conta on the heights north of the Prislop Pass. They were soon followed by other troops of 10 Bav ID - the Bav Res IR 6 from Körösmezö and parts of Bav IR 16 from Dorna Watra - in order to support the thinly defended center of the Carpathian Corps. The battered Hon IR 306 was returned to 202 Hon Inf Bde.

During these days when one crisis developed after another in the

Forest Carpathians, the command structure within 7<sup>th</sup> Army was reorganized. Pflanzer-Baltin's standing had suffered since his defeats in June 1916. The German OHL objected to his ruthless method of breaking up units to send them to various parts of the front and was reluctant to entrust German troops to his impetuous leadership.<sup>352</sup> However, several suggestions by the OHL that Pflanzer-Baltin should be replaced by a cooler-minded commander received no hearing at Teschen. Conrad had a high regard for Pflanzer since the latter's defense of the Carpathians in winter 1914-15 and his offensive in spring 1915; even after the war Conrad was always heard to say that the man was his best Army commander. Therefore the only concession to the OHL in June was that GM Seeckt was appointed the "Over-all Chief of Staff" to 7<sup>th</sup> Army (and soon afterwards became Chief of Staff to Archduke Charles' Army Group). However, Pflanzer-Baltin felt that GM Seeckt was interfering with his work, and as an old k.u.k. General submitted only with reluctance to German hegemony. There was friction and differences of opinion between him and the Army Group HQ. To overcome this problem, after the young Archduke-Successor also complained about the unstable and impetuous leader of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, in a letter dated 4 September the commander-in-chief FM Archduke Friedrich told GO Pflanzer-Baltin to report himself sick and to ask to be relieved. At the end of this letter, Archduke Friedrich explained how difficult it was for him to make this demand of such a long-serving and distinguished General; however, personal considerations had to take second place to the enormous demands of this greatest war of all times.

GO Pflanzer-Baltin did report himself sick on the 7<sup>th</sup> and asked to be relieved; his request was soon approved by Emperor Franz Joseph (the next day). GdK Kirchbach was named the new commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. His Chief of Staff was Col. Demus.

GFM Hindenburg had meanwhile placed at the disposal of Army Group Archduke Charles two German corps commanders with their staffs - G.Lt Surén (with HQ of XXV Res Corps) and G.Lt Fuchs (with HQ of X Res Corps). On 9 September G.Lt Surén took over Kirchbach's former command (117 ID, 34 ID and 202 Hon Inf Bde). The HQ of I Corps found new employment in Bukovina. Here on 15 September the 8 CD, 5 Hon CD, 215 Inf Bde and 40 Hon ID were placed under a new I Corps led by FZM von Scheuchenstuel. Only 11 Hon CD and Papp's Brigade were still under FML Habermann's XI Corps.

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352 Cramon, "Bundesgenosse", p. 62

Actions in the second week of September

Gen. Letschitzky continued his attacks in the second week of September, seeking to cross the main crest of the Forest Carpathians before the advent of winter. He tried to thrust past the Prislop Pass with XVIII Corps (37, 43 and 64 ID plus the Ussuri Cossacks); the newly-reorganized XXIII Corps (whose staff had come from 8<sup>th</sup> Army's sector and now had 79 and 82 ID) pushed against Conta's right wing.<sup>353</sup>

Thus the 40 Hon ID, German 1 ID and - as they arrived - the troops of 10 Bav ID had to repulse new Russian thrusts; the see-saw fighting in the areas of the Capul, the Cimbroslawka Wk. and the heights north of the Prislop Ridge lasted until 15 September. At the same time Conta's left wing, the 200 ID, checked all the enemy's efforts to win the mountain line Rotundal - Baba Ludowa - Smotrec. Also the Aus-Hung. and German units fighting on the border heights of the Tartar and Pantyr Passes (117 ID, 34 ID, 202 Hon Inf Bde, 3 CD and 2 Bicycle Bde) were able from 8 September to hold their ground in stubborn actions against a series of attacks by XI Russian Corps. But the exhaustion of the German and Aus-Hung. divisions, growing worse every day, was already so great that on the 10<sup>th</sup> GdK Kirchbach asked Army Group HQ to reinforce the 200 km wide front in the Carpathians.

The battle front of Kövess' Army between the Forest Carpathians and the Dniester was generally quiet after 1 September. The main exception was the upper Bystrzyca Solotwinska sector, where advanced detachments from 59 ID fought daily actions against enemy outposts. On 8 September some units from the widely-dispersed XII Russian Corps attempted to make a diversionary attack at Bohorodczany. On the northern wing of FZM Ritter von Benigni's VIII Corps they pushed into the foremost positions of 42 Hon ID, but were soon thrust back. Otherwise there were just daily artillery actions and sorties in no-man's land, especially in the Stanislau sector. On 12 September G.Lt Fuchs' X Res Corps took command over the group formerly led by Oppeln-Bronikowski (119 ID and 48 Res ID).

**2. The First Battle on the Narajowka**The withdrawal to the Narajowka

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353 Zayonchkovsky, p. 81

In difficult fighting at Brzezany on 4 September the Bavarian Res IR 4 of 199 ID drove the enemy out of the positions of 55 ID. In the night the Russian XVI Corps pulled back through the Ceniowka sector. While this was happening, Shcherbachev was already preparing to resume his attack against Bothmer's southern flank. In the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Russians sent three corps (XXXIII, XXII and II) against the Aus-Hung. and German divisions that were under Gerok's overall command. At Byszow the first assaults collapsed under artillery fire in front of the positions of the k.u.k. XIII Corps and German 105 ID, and suffered heavy casualties. On the other hand, the Russians penetrated the trenches of 12 ID at Hnilcze. Troops from 199 German ID hurried to the scene and threw back the enemy. The Russian artillery resumed their bombardment. In the afternoon the 2 CD and some units from German 199 ID which had been inserted in the front of the weak XIII Corps carried out a thrust toward the Magsa Heights. Meanwhile the Russians attacked in thick waves and got into the trenches of the German 105 and k.u.k. 12 ID. Defeated in hand-to-hand combat, Gerok's center fell back with heavy losses. Now a gap 10 km wide developed in the line at Byszow and Hnilcze. The last available battalions of 119 German ID, which meanwhile had been brought up from Halicz, weren't able to close the gap. Therefore GdI Bothmer found himself forced to pull back both Gerok's Group (2 CD, XIII Corps, 105 ID and VI Corps plus troops from 199 ID and 1 Res ID who had tried to seal off the penetration) and XV Turkish Corps to a new line. It ran from the mouth of the Gnila Lipa to Bolszowce and then up the Narajowka to a point south of Lipnica dolna; from here it turned northeast to the Zlota Lipa. GO Kövess had to extend the left wing of his Army (119 ID) to Halicz. To protect his northern flank he brought up 30 ID, which had been in reserve behind Group Hadfy. Because of the tense situation, Army Group HQ decided on the 5<sup>th</sup> to unite 3 Gd ID - which was on trains with its main body approaching Burzstyn [Bursztyn] and parts at Zloczow - behind the right wing of Bothmer's Army.

Early in the morning of 6 September the Russians fell upon the rear guards which Gerok had left on the heights east of the Narajowka and forced them to withdraw into their main position. During the day General Shcherbachev brought his XXXIII, XXII and II Corps up to the new lines held by Group Gerok. In the evening fighting broke out between the Russians and 2 CD at the mouth of the Gnila Lipa.

The events of the last 24 hours compelled the allied high command to divert GM Hesse's 208 ID, which had been traveling

toward Transylvania, to follow 3 Gd ID into the Bukaczowce-Bursztyn area. The German Emperor was concerned that the Russian offensive could lead to the loss of the oil fields at Drohobycz, which were essential to the war economy. Following his instructions, on GFM Hindenburg asked the k.u.k. high command on the 6<sup>th</sup> to order Archduke Charles' Army Group to stand fast. In turn the Archduke-Successor received instructions in which he was reminded that because of the tense situation in southeast Galicia he had already been given three divisions chosen for use against the Romanians - first 10 Bav ID, then 3 Gd ID and now 208 ID. The k.u.k. high command stated their expectation that with these reinforcements the front in the area north of the Carpathians would be held. If further German reserves were pinned down by the Russian offensive, the planned operations against Romania couldn't be carried out.

On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ ordered that GM von Lindquist's 3 Gd ID, which was detraining east of Rohatyn, should be inserted in Group Gerok's front during the night of 6-7 September and that 105 ID should be pulled into South Army's reserve. The OHL had instructed that the latter Division would then be transferred to Prince Leopold's front. To replace it, Prince Leopold would send 216 German ID to South Army. The Archduke-Successor placed FML Fabini's VI Corps HQ at the disposal of the k.u.k. high command. The last division still serving under this Corps (12 ID) was re-assigned to the weak XIII Corps on the southern wing of Gerok's Group.

#### Successful defense of the new positions

In the night of 6-7 September, six Russian divisions - 1 and 2 Trans-Amur Border ID, 1 and 3 Finnish Rifle Divs, 3 Turkestan Rif Div and 26 ID - came up to Group Gerok's battle lines; they intended to make a surprise attack over the Narajowka at dawn to overrun the defenders without any artillery fire. At Bolszowce and Skomorochy the 199 and 105 ID, along with battalions of 3 Gd ID which hurried to the scene, repulsed the first onslaught. Meanwhile 2 CD also succeeded in checking the enemy who'd advanced over the Gnila Lipa as far as the Halicz railroad station. Batteries of the German 119 ID had supported our cavalry with flanking fire from the southern bank of the Dniester.

When the surprise assault failed, the Russians opened strong artillery fire. After this prolonged bombardment, during 7 September the Russian divisions attacked three more times over the Narajowka, trying to break through Bothmer's southern flank.

The German troops fighting along the river (119 ID, 3 Gd ID and 105 ID)<sup>354</sup> shattered all the breakthrough attempts. The attackers were only able to carve out small bridgeheads on the western bank of the river at Bolszowce and Skomorochy. Thick waves of attacking Russians collapsed in front of the positions of 1 Res ID and of XV Turkish Corps on the rolling hills between the Narajowka and the Zlota Lipa and at Potutory (on the border between the Turks and Corps Hofmann).

In the night of 7-8 September and on the following day Shcherbachev continued his massive assaults against the right wing and center of Bothmer's Army. At Halicz troops of the weak XIII Corps hurled the enemy back after they had penetrated the front near the mouth of the Gnila Lipa. Once again the main effort of the enemy took place at Bolszowce and Skomorochy, where there was bitter fighting. The 119, 105 and 3 Gd ID lost several trenches, but the Germans quickly drove the Russians out of any positions which they penetrated.<sup>355</sup> At Lipnica dolna the 1 Res ID shot the assaulting columns to pieces. The XV Turkish Corps also held out in heavy fighting between the Narajowka and Zlota Lipa. At Troscianiec a Turkish regiment struck the retreating Russians with hand grenades and bayonets; the Turks returned to their own positions with hundreds of prisoners. Countless bodies lay in front of Gerok's battle lines. In the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> the Russian attack ended in a complete collapse. In the night Shcherbachev pulled his badly-diminished troops back over the Narajowka. The Aus-Hung., German and Turkish divisions - fighting side-by-side under Gerok's leadership - were victorious along the entire front after two days of see-saw fighting.

On the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, Gen. Sakharov attacked Bothmer's Army again on the 4<sup>th</sup>, in the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>, and early on the 6<sup>th</sup> between the Zlota Ga. Heights and the village of Majanow. He was unsuccessful. Group Eben (parts of 115, 197 and 195 ID plus the k.u.k. 14 and 33 ID) prevented the enemy VII and XVII Corps from entering their lines. After the morning of 6 September Sakharov restricted the activity of his Army's left wing to patrol operations and (especially) artillery fire. Gen. Brussilov assigned III Cauc Corps to him and sent VII Sib Corps to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. With these reinforcements the offensive at Zborow and on the Narajowka was to be resumed on 16 September.

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354 The 105 German ID still hadn't left the front as ordered.

355 Schulenburg, "Die Geschichte des Garde-Füsilier Regiments" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1927), pp. 148 ff.

### **3. Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ prepares to face the next Russian onslaught**

The heavy pressure against the Carpathian Corps and strong concentrations of enemy forces at Rafailowa forced GdK Kirchbach, the new commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, to ask Army Group HQ on 10 September for reinforcements. GM Seeckt forwarded this request to Teschen. The k.u.k. high command, however, declared that they couldn't send units to 7<sup>th</sup> Army because of the need to keep reinforcing Transylvania. Since the Russian front had been weakened in front of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the AOK demanded that the Archduke-Successor should provide his own support for the Carpathian front. At Chodorow it was decided on 11 September that 30 ID, held in readiness south of Halicz, should be sent to 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

Now reports arrived that the Russians were making new preparations to attack on the front north of the Dniester. But meanwhile the whole of the German 208 ID had arrived at Bukaczowce; moreover the trains carrying German 216 ID were already unloading at Podwysokie (east of Rohatyn). On the other hand the burnt-out 105 German ID had been sent to Prince Leopold of Bavaria's front. GdI Bothmer wanted to anticipate the impending Russian offensive by thrusting toward the lower Zlota Lipa with the six German division still available (119, 199, 3 Gd, 1 Res, 208 and 216 ID), but GM Seeckt wouldn't agree to this plan. Seeckt did agree with GdI Bothmer that a successful offensive operation would raise the troops' spirits, but didn't want to release all his reserves because in the current uncertain situation it might be necessary to rapidly deploy them at another place.

In an effort to solidify the defenses of the decisive front north of the Dniester, on 11 September Archduke Charles Franz Joseph ordered XIII Corps, which was in need of rest, to transfer to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's quiet front. On the other hand, GO Kövess sent two battalions of 119 German ID to the southern wing of Group Gerok. Two days later Army Group HQ initiated a major re-shuffling of the units. All of 119 German ID was assigned to South Army, after which that HQ sent 12 ID and 2 CD to follow the troops of XIII Corps (who were already marching) to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Two corps were placed over the four German divisions on the right wing of Bothmer's Army: X Res Corps (G.Lt Fuchs) had the 119 and 199 ID, while XXIV Res Corps (GdI Gerok) had 3 Gd and 1 Res ID. Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army the 36 ID was rebuilt from the remnants of XIII Corps plus the 72 Inf Bde; they relieved 5 ID, which was sent to the southern wing of VIII Corps to in turn make 59 ID

available for 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Thus 3<sup>rd</sup> Army consisted of VIII Corps (5 ID, 6 CD), XIII Corps (36 ID, 42 Hon ID), and Hadfy's corps-sized Group (21 LW ID, 48 Res ID with some attached German Landsturm); 12 ID and 2 CD remained directly under Army HQ.

Because the Russians were moving closer to Gerok's Group, and because of an intercepted wireless message which had been broadcast from a station of VII Sib Corps at Tarnopol, Army Group HQ already felt obliged on the 12<sup>th</sup> to shift the German 208 ID away from Bursztyn and closer to the front; they also ordered 216 ID to move from Rohatyn to Pomorzany. The picture changed on the 13<sup>th</sup>. A report that VII Sib Corps had arrived in the area north of Podhajce led to the conclusion that this Corps would attack the important road junction of Brzezany. Further reports that troops were shifting behind the Russian front toward the north, however, made it again seem more probable that the enemy would deploy VII Sib Corps in their thinly-occupied lines north of the Kozowa-Brzezany road, next to VI Corps. On the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> the Russians opened lively artillery fire at Zborow and Brzezany, and along the Narajowka. Russian infantry sought to move closer to the positions of 1 Res ID and the Turkish XV Corps. Archduke Charles Franz Joseph sent 208 ID to the Lipnica Gorna area and 216 ID to the Brzezany sector. From the reserves which Prince Leopold of Bavaria's front had assembled to protect Lemberg, the Leib Hussar Brigade had meanwhile deployed behind IX Corps and the German Infantry Regiments 226 and 373 behind Group Eben.

#### **4. Developments by Army Group Linsingen**

##### Operations

On 4 September the defensive battle of the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army died out; it was followed by skirmishing with advanced troops and by cannonades. Since the danger threatening their front had passed, Army Group HQ pulled back reserves; they took over again one of the regiments they'd sent to reinforce Litzmann and shifted it to Armeegruppe Bernhardi (behind Corps Fath). The X German Corps sent IR 60 of 121 ID to Ozierany. With the agreement of GFM Prince Leopold and the German OHL, GO Conrad ordered 37 Hon ID to Transylvania. The Honved Infantry Regiments were relieved by a German regiment on 7 and 8 September; command over the sector was given to Col. Seh, the artillery brigadier of the 37<sup>th</sup>, who was still in place with his batteries.

The enemy began meanwhile to prepare for their next blow toward Vladimir-Volynsky; the West Front, following orders from the Stavka, shifted available troops to Gurko's Army and to the neighboring 8<sup>th</sup> Army of Brussilov's Front. At first the allies didn't detect these movements behind the Russian lines; they noted only that the Russian units that had been fighting Litzmann's and Marwitz' Armeegruppen were shifting to the south. On 7 September the HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army even believed this was a sign that the enemy apparently had given up their intention of attacking Litzmann's front. But this glimmer of hope soon disappeared when it became certain that on the contrary the Russian forces weren't being weakened but rather were being substantially reinforced.

Already on the next day Russian radio messages revealed that XXV Corps had taken the place of the Guards in front of Bernhardi; then both Guard corps moved to the area south of the Polonka, opposite the Korytnica-Szelwów sector. Enemy activity grew constantly along the entire defensive front of Tersztyanszky's Army. Their reconnaissance patrols probed the lines. The Russians constructed saps forward and widened their maze of trenches, especially opposite the southern half of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The enemy also resorted to weapons which they had seldom employed to date. Thus in the night of 10-11 September they released chlorine gas against 20 German ID between Zaturcy and Zubilno and sought to enhance its effectiveness by firing gas grenades. But the defenders weren't taken by surprise; thanks to their defensive equipment they suffered hardly any casualties and had no difficulty repulsing the Russian infantry that afterwards probed forward. In Beckmann's sector the enemy mined toward the German lines at Pustomyty, but the defenders anticipated the Russian plans and on the 8<sup>th</sup> exploded a counter-mine. On the 15<sup>th</sup> the enemy did explode a mine of their own, but gained no success.

As soon as the Russian plans were clear, both GFM Prince Leopold and GO Linsingen hastily sent reinforcements to 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Already on the 9<sup>th</sup> a regiment from 49 Res ID arrived at Vladimir-Volynsky; they were followed by other units, including heavy batteries and the main body of 115 ID. The German IR 60 was placed under GO Tersztyanszky in his Army's reserves and deployed behind the southern wing of Schmidt-Knobelsdorf's group, where it could also help the neighboring k.u.k. X Corps if necessary. For an Army Group reserve, Linsingen pulled a regiment of 86 ID from Bernhardi's right wing and sent them to Ozierany. On 9 September FML Sorsich took command over 70 Hon ID.

During this time, Corps Hauer on Linsingen's northern wing once more had to endure some difficult days. On 8 and especially 9 September the Russians prepared to attack, unleashing a lively artillery bombardment which included large-scale use of gas shells; in the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup> the XXVI and III Corps moved forward. 1 LW ID, whose southern wing on the Loknicabach had been taken over on the 7<sup>th</sup> by the k.u.k. 9 CD, temporarily lost several outposts in their northern sector. The Bav CD at Stare Czerwiszcze was hit repeatedly by stubborn assaults. But G.Lt Hellingrath's cavalry in their defensive works - consisting of a chain of outposts - held their ground; on this and the following two days, supported by German Landwehr, they defied the Russian infantry which ran forward after continuing artillery bombardments. With Linsingen's permission, Hauer brought up two infantry regiments, but they didn't have to enter the fighting because all enemy thrusts collapsed with bloody losses upon the resistance of the Bav CD.<sup>356</sup>

Therefore this offensive operation initiated by the Russian West Front in the Tobol sector, which was "a complete surprise" to the Stavka, ended in defeat.<sup>357</sup> Corps Hauer was still engaged in some hand grenade fighting on the 12<sup>th</sup>. But for the immediate future there was apparently nothing to fear from the enemy, who were soon building their own defensive works. GdK Hauer could send the Army Group's reserve, a regiment of 75 Res ID, back to Werchy behind Clausius' neighboring group.

#### Plans and preparations of both sides

For the offensive scheduled for the 16<sup>th</sup>, Brussilov would have his 8<sup>th</sup> Army - reinforced to seven corps (16 divisions) - strike the main blow. The Army's commander Kaledin had been advised on the 5<sup>th</sup> that he should concentrate the corps in his center to create a powerful striking group, while leaving one corps in reserve.<sup>358</sup> Brussilov finally set the objectives on the 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>359</sup> Utilizing the Guard infantry's attacking strength, Kaledin's Army would break through to Vladimir-Volynsky and toward Poryck. 11<sup>th</sup> Army (which received III Cauc Corps) and 7<sup>th</sup> Army (reinforced by VII Sib Corps) would attack toward Lemberg (the latter Army would first take Halicz). 9<sup>th</sup> Army still had its old assignments.

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356 Frauenholz, pp. 264 ff. Gebattel, pp. 176 ff.

357 Zayonchkovsky, p. 71

358 *Ibid.*, pp. 70 ff.

359 Klembovsky, p. 100

Brussilov asked Evert to have the Special Army pin down the Germans on the upper course of the Stokhod with local attacks. Alexeiev suggested that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should attack to deceive the allies. That Army, however, had been wounded in the premature and pointless fighting at Tobol; now this setback, meaningless in itself, had a negative effect on the planning for the great offensive. Evert declared that he would first have to regroup and refused his neighbor's request for immediate assistance.<sup>360</sup> By 16 September the preparations of the West Front entailed only the shifting of 1 Trans-Baikal Coss Div to the southern wing of Gurko's Army and the deployment of XXXIV Corps in reserve northeast of Roziszczce, according to the Stavka's original orders. Toward the end of the month the HQ of XXVI Corps, apparently with at least the 4 Finn Rif Div, was moving south to Gurko. All three Guard cavalry divisions were placed behind 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the area east of Luck.

Because of the threatening preparations of their enemy, the allies also made some last-minute preparations. GO Linsingen gave GO Tersztyanszky authority over the German troops who'd been brought behind Litzmann's endangered front and assembled in the areas around Lokaczy and Koniuchy. By 14 September Beckmann's Group freed up two German Jaeger battalions, which were sent from Iwanicz by train to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. After the Russian attack was repulsed, the original front of Leonhardi's Cavalry Group was divided into two sub-sectors, both commanded by Germans. Besides their own troops, these Germans led the weak units of the Aus-Hung. cavalry divisions deployed in the first line. 21 Cav Bde, which had been serving since summer with 7 ID in the sector of Armeegruppe Marwitz, rejoined its proper command, the 4 CD.

Day by day the Russians worked their way systematically closer to the positions of Armeegruppe Litzmann; finally they began to make openings in their barriers in front of Corps Szurmay. On the eve of the new battle GO Linsingen carried out a personnel change involving two of his sectors. Relations had become very

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360 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The repeated failure of Evert to heed "suggestions" from his nominal superior HQ, the Stavka, requires some explanation. "Alexeiev...acted as Commander-in-Chief for the weak and incompetent Tsar but he didn't not have the authority to enforce his orders on Evert and Kuropatkin, who had been his seniors in the Russo-Japanese War." (Onacewicz, "Empires by Conquest" [Fairfax, 1985], Vol. II, p. 74)

tense between GdI Litzmann and his Army commander GO Tersztyanszky; to avoid repercussions, Litzmann and GdK Marwitz exchanged places on 16 September as leaders of their respective Armeegruppen.<sup>361</sup>

Opposite Marwitz's original Armeegruppe, the 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had extended the lines of their left-wing V Corps over the Lipa to the town of Strzemilcze; 11<sup>th</sup> Army had also shifted the adjacent XLV Corps farther to the south. Linsingen thus had no concern about the southern wing of his Army Group. 4<sup>th</sup> Army, on the other hand, was now confronted along a front of about 24 km (from Tereszkowiec to Zaturcy) by a mass of Russian troops - four corps, behind which was also the IV Sib Corps. Thus on roughly the same length of front as the Army had held in June at Olyka-Luck it faced twice as many enemy units. There was no longer any doubt that the Russians would attack here. Clearly recognizing the situation, on 15 September GO Tersztyanszky commented that "An attack along the entire front of Armeegruppe Litzmann is anticipated, along with an - apparently diversionary - assault against the southern wing of the reinforced X [German] Corps. Once again the main Russian effort will be in the sector from Pustomyty to north of Szelwow, involving the Guards and XL Corps, and probably also the rebuilt IV Sib Corps. The attack...seems designed to break through in the direction of Vladimir-Volynsky regardless of the cost. Moreover we must consider the possibility that the entire Guard cavalry, now resting southeast of Luck, will also be brought up to seek the decision."

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361 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 124 ff.

## ***D. Fighting in the second half of September***

### **1. The Second Defensive Battle at Szelwów-Swiniuchy, 16-23 September**

To form the center of the "phalanx" that was supposed to open a gap in Tersztyanszky's lines, the Russian Army commander GdK Kaledin deployed the two Guard corps (I Corps with 1 & 2 Divs, II Corps with 3 and Gd Rif Divs) on a front about 10 km wide opposite the Lokaczy-Swiniuchy sector. XL Corps (2 and 4 Rif Divs, 20 ID) on the Guards' right and VIII Corps (53, 102, 125 ID) on their left would attack at the same time. Behind each wing of this attacking group was stationed a division of V Cavalry Corps (11 and 12 CD). Finally, the IV Sib Corps was held ready in reserve at Lawrow.<sup>362</sup>

#### 16 September

The Russian artillery opened the battle around 6:00 AM; their fire encompassed the front of Marwitz's new Armeegruppe with growing intensity from the center of Beckmann's group through Pustomyty to the center of Corps Csanady. GO Tersztyanszky gave GdK Marwitz control over all the German units held in readiness behind his Armeegruppe (three infantry and one artillery regiments), and moved the Army's reserve (German IR 60) to Rudnia on the Turya. The enemy's first, limited thrusts soon broke down under a barrage in front of Beckmann, Szurmay and the 10 German LW ID. At the same time, however, the fire from the Russian batteries opposite the German X Corps, initially at a low level, now gained strength against the Corps' center (19 and 121 ID) and against the adjacent wing of the k.u.k. 29 ID. Thus the allies had to anticipate a possible attack here. Therefore GO Linsingen shifted the regiment of 86 ID in his Army Group reserves from Ozierany to Nowy Dwór, behind the threatened sector. But the Russian infantry mostly stayed in their own trenches, sending forward just a few patrols.

At 1:00 PM the four Russian corps packed together in front of Group Marwitz came out of their lines and charged impetuously toward their objectives, which had been clearly indicated to the defenders by the preceding bombardment. Bitter fighting erupted

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362 Klembovsky, p. 101. Zayonchkovsky, pp. 71 ff.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Per Beilage 20 the Orenburg Cossacks were also in reserve, behind the Guards' center.

along the entire front between Pustomyty and the forests south of Zaturcy. The central sector of Beckmann's Group checked six assaults by VIII Russian Corps south of Korytnica, inflicting bloody losses.<sup>363</sup> North of this town, and as far as Bubnow, the I Guard Corps attacked the inner wings of Group Beckmann and Corps Szurmay. The k.u.k. Hussar Regiments # 10 and 13 played a glorious role in the determined defense by Beckmann's troops.<sup>364</sup> The southern wing of GM Obauer's 11 ID was held by IR # 58 and 95 (each consisting of just a few companies); initially they gave way to the pressure of the elite Russian troops. But then both Regiments held fast with support from the reserves stationed in the sector of Col. Edmund Hauser's 22 Inf Bde. They finally recovered their positions with a powerful counterattack to which vigor was added by two German battalions provided by the Armeegruppe. The charge by II Russian Guard Corps made some small dents in the defensive line at Wojnin and Szelwow, but the ground was soon recovered.

FML Csanady's X Corps fought the Russian XL Corps. Some of the attackers penetrated trenches in the southern sector of 10 LW ID, but IR 372 made sure that none of them left the area alive. The 372<sup>nd</sup>, as well as the adjacent k.k. LW IR 24, stood fast so firmly against all the following assaults that the divisional commander (GM Stocken) could turn down offers of reserves from FML Csanady with full confidence. On the northern wing of GM Jemrich's 2 ID, the 20 Russian ID achieved a small penetration against FJB 29. A counterattack was mounted by Battalions III/40 and V/62 plus several German companies, to which the Corps commander added the other two battalions of IR 40; the allies prevented the enemy from advancing any further, then by 4:00 PM drove them back completely. Meanwhile GO Tersztyanszky had agreed to GdK Marwitz's request for the Army reserves stationed behind X Corps on the road east of Wojmica, but these troops were no longer needed. During the entire day Col. Seh's detachment was hit by artillery fire, but never attacked by infantry.

In the late afternoon, after a short but extraordinarily heavy bombardment, the Russians fell once more upon Armeegruppe Marwitz with reinforced strength. However, most of the advancing waves soon collapsed under the destructive barrage. At twilight parts of the Russian I Guard and VIII Corps attempted a third assault on both sides of Korytnica, but it suffered the same fate as the preceding attempts against

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363 Vinogradsky, pp. 214 ff.

364 Walther, pp. 174 ff.

Beckmann's fighters.

Early on the 16<sup>th</sup>, GdI Litzmann had taken over from Marwitz his newly assigned sector, the southern part of Linsingen's Army Group. For a long time this area had ceased to be the target of Russian attacks. Also during the latest battle that was raging farther north there was no particular increase in combat activity here, and no reason for concern. Litzmann ordered 43 Res ID to support their neighbor Beckmann with oblique fire from their batteries, and to let him know if any other help was requested.<sup>365</sup>

When the grim fury subsided on the entire battlefield in the evening, GdK Marwitz was able to report with certainty that all of his positions had been held; during the day he had moved most of his reserve units closer to the flashpoints of the struggle, but both he and his corps commanders still had fresh troops available. GO Linsingen announced that on the next day a regiment would be arriving at Iwaniczzy as reinforcements. To best indicate the intensity of the battle, which in places had been waged with hand grenades, Marwitz stated that many troops had completely expended their reserve supplies of ammunition, which had to be hastily replaced. 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was satisfied, based on reports from lower-level commanders, that this time the Aus-Hung. regiments, as well as the Germans, had always fought admirably. The defensive victory was in large measure due to the well-directed, extremely effective artillery fire; the Aus-Hung. batteries alone had used up 50 to 60,000 rounds. Considering the magnitude of the success, in which the enemy had been denied the decisive breakthrough they were seeking with such strong forces, the allied casualties were reasonable.<sup>366</sup>

In the evening the enemy everywhere had to pull back to their starting points; their troop casualties had been quite substantial.<sup>367</sup> A Russian study ascribes their defeat above all to their opponents' overwhelming artillery. However, it doesn't

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365 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 127 ff.

366 In 4<sup>th</sup> Army the Aus-Hung. troops lost 255 killed, 1128 wounded and 568 missing; the German troops lost 218 dead, 683 wounded and 22 missing. Total casualties were thus 473 dead, 1811 wounded, 590 missing.

367 Thus Armeegruppe Marwitz reported that lying in front of the parts of the front "that the troops can observe" there was a total of about 12,000 Russians by a "conservative" estimate. 200 unwounded prisoners had been taken during the day's fighting.

gloss over the fact that in the course of the summer campaign, with its many costly offensive battles, the elan and tactical skill of the Tsar's infantry had already sharply declined. The ranks had always been refilled, but with hastily-trained replacements of lower quality.<sup>368</sup>

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368 Vinogradsky, p. 211 and pp. 216 ff.

17-19 September

On the next two days the enemy carried out fruitless thrusts against the southern wing of X Corps. Otherwise sudden concentrations of artillery fire by both sides filled the short breathing space before the next major action. All the activity of the Russians, who - as far as could be determined - were keeping their storming positions thickly occupied, indicated to the allies that new attacks were imminent. The defenders therefore labored to make their badly-damaged works capable of resistance. Five batteries were added to the artillery of Corps Szurmay. To relieve part of the trench garrison and at the same time to reinforce them, Marwitz made available to this Corps the two regiments of 115 ID. FML Szurmay requested extra replacement troops for his Aus-Hung. infantry, which had long been under strength and now had suffered new losses, but the k.u.k. high command couldn't accede.<sup>369</sup> They replied that because of the unfavorable replacement situation the defenders would have to get by with just the regularly-scheduled March battalions, and informed 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ that in the future they were not supposed to pass along requests for any new troops beyond the schedule.

Meanwhile GO Linsingen was looking for more reserves; he took a regiment of 75 Res ID from Bernhardt's right wing and placed it behind Armeegruppe Marwitz. When the Russian infantry worked ahead again toward the lines of Group Beckmann on 18 September, and it seemed that the enemy was building up forces in their lines by Pustomyty with parts of IV Sib Corps, the Army Group moved the two German regiments which they had held at Bielopol and Poryck closer to the front. On the next day the allied commanders received proof that they had correctly estimated the measures and intentions of the enemy.

On 19 September Brussilov instructed Kaledin to have his Army repeat their attack with the same objectives. The artillery would pound their opponents' fortifications for a whole day to soften them up; the infantry would strike at dawn of the next day.<sup>370</sup> Thus the Russian batteries started to hammer the positions of Armeegruppe Marwitz at 8:00 AM. The allied guns weren't slow to respond, and in particular kept the assembly points of the Russian infantry under effective fire. GO

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369 Under 11 ID, the IR # 58 had just 300 riflemen and IR # 95 had 700; in 70 Hon ID the Hon IR # 314 had 238 riflemen and Hon IR # 315 had 471.

370 Vinogradsky, pp. 218 ff.

Tersztyanszky empowered Marwitz to call upon both of the regiments attached from the Army Group in case of an enemy assault. One was held in readiness behind 11 ID and the other behind Group Beckmann. But the latter unit was to be committed only in extreme need, since it had been ordered to return to GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria in exchange for another regiment. The regiment of 49 Res ID at Vladimir-Volynsky that was supposed to move by train to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was held there for a while, awaiting the development of events; then the troops were sent to Iwaniczky.

At some points the roar of the Russian guns, which were also firing gas shells, swelled to drumfire. In the afternoon the enemy advanced against Corps Szurmay and, with weak groups, also against 10 LW and 2 ID of Corps Csanady. The concentrated fire of the defenders either nipped these assaults in the bud or soon forced the Russians back into their trenches while inflicting heavy casualties. GdK Marwitz recognized that the artillery fire had been extraordinarily strong, more powerful than that of 16 September; on the other hand the activity of the Russian infantry was nowhere near as great. "It seems that at many points the Russians under our excellent artillery fire didn't dare to leave their trenches. In the Szelwow area it was repeatedly observed that the Russian artillery were firing into their own trenches to force the infantry to advance." Nevertheless, Marwitz believed the offensive would continue. To stiffen the defense he had, in addition to the reserves in each corps' sector, seven German battalions; his Army commander had nine more on hand.

#### 20 September

The night was very unquiet; almost without interruption the enemy harassed Group Beckmann and Corps Szurmay with sudden bursts of artillery fire or infantry probes. It was followed around 4:00 AM on 20 September by a sudden, general and powerful assault; as on the 16<sup>th</sup>, the front of Armeegruppe Marwitz was the target between Beckmann's center and 10 LW ID (inclusive). Essentially the defenders checked this onslaught, but the enemy tenaciously renewed their attempt, ruthlessly expending manpower. The Russians penetrated the trenches of 11 ID west of Bubnow but were quickly thrown out by a counterattack. The Russian Gd Rif Div was shattered in an attempt to take the Wojnin Heights. South of Szelwow the 3 Gd ID broke through the first line of 70 Hon ID, while 4 Rif Div penetrated the lines of 10 LW ID north of the village. But the Landwehr division commander, GM Stocken, was able to restore the situation on his

own, without using the Corps reserves which FML Csanady sent him. The German IR 60, marching south in the Army's reserve, was halted behind 2 ID because an attack against X Corps' center was also anticipated. Under 70 Hon ID a counterattacking group of about four battalions assembled in the second line, to which Marwitz sent two German battalions as a backup; soon after 8:00 AM this group drove the enemy from the foremost Honved trenches. Marwitz was able to report that both Corps Szurmay and Csanady were again in full possession of their positions, just as was Beckmann. The sixth assault thus was already defeated.

The enemy, however, weren't daunted; at 9:00 AM they struck the left wing of Group Beckmann with a seventh assault. The German defenders, mingled with the cavalry riflemen and dismounted horsemen of 10 CD, had to pull back toward the west from their defenses, which had been practically destroyed by the lengthy bombardment. The attackers, especially the two elite units of the Guard (the Preobrazehnsk and Semenov Regiments), thrust onward toward Swiniuchy and established themselves firmly in Korytnica and the adjacent forest to the north; the Guards were accompanied on the left by 15 ID of VIII Russian Corps. Beckmann's center held fast under the commander of 2 Gd Cav Bde, Col. von Arnim. The right wing of 11 ID, although hard-pressed by I Gd Corps, was able to bend back at a right angle toward the west and to extend their line with help from IR 58 and German reinforcements. Then G.Lt Beckmann was able to seal off the penetration with his last forces. Marwitz ordered one of the regiments behind his line, formerly in the Army's reserve, to counterattack. Moreover he arranged with Army HQ to leave two battalions of IR 60 behind Szurmay's sector, since the latter had now used up all his reserves while Csanady still had more than ten intact battalions.

The Russians now directed all their efforts toward exploiting the initial success they had won at Swiniuchy, and hastily sent more men to the area. Allied airmen spotted thick troop concentrations behind the enemy's battle lines in the area from Pustomyty to Watyn and above all in the woods east of Korytnica. After noon troops provided by Marwitz - a total of eight German battalions - mounted a concentric counterattack from the south, west and northwest. Progress was made only by Korytnica.<sup>371</sup> The Russians had stationed many machine guns along the edge of the woods they had captured, and reinforced 1 Gd ID with parts of IV

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371 Dr. Hanns Mayer, "Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments Prinz Moritz von Anhalt-Dessau (5. Pomm.) Nr. 42 während des Krieges 1914/18" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1927), pp. 154 ff.

Sib Corps. The German counterattack came to a halt in the afternoon; Beckmann's front had lost a sector 3 km wide and 1 km deep. Meanwhile Corps Szurmay had easily repulsed an attack on 11 ID and 70 Hon ID; the situation by Corps Csanady was almost completely quiet. Csanady's neighbor to the left, X German Corps, had only been bothered during the day by enemy artillery fire. Since IR 60, originally deployed behind the junction with Csanady, had moved far to the south GO Linsingen brought up a regiment from his Army Group reserves - battalion by battalion - from Ozierany to a point behind the right wing of X German Corps.

Except for IR 60 (which was backing up the bent-back flank of 11 ID), all of the troops which 4<sup>th</sup> Army had originally stationed behind Armeegruppe Marwitz had by evening been thrown into the battle. Despite heavy losses, the enemy didn't seem inclined to give up the bloody game.<sup>372</sup> GdI Litzmann promised to send more battalions to his neighbor Marwitz during the night to help out as reserves behind Beckmann's left wing and center. GO Linsingen and GFM Prince Leopold were taking measures to immediately send German reinforcements. The first fresh unit, a Landwehr regiment, had already detrained at Iwaniczky and was hastening to the front.

#### 21-23 September

During the night of 20-21 September there was quite lively fighting in Beckmann's sector. As the sky lightened at dawn on the 21<sup>st</sup> the Germans resumed their attack north of Korytnica. They encountered stiff resistance from the enemy, who themselves initiated counterattacks. Thus the fight ended in stalemate. Army Group HQ didn't expect that this attack could gain any success that would justify further casualties and ordered Beckmann to revert to the defensive until sufficient new units, especially heavy batteries, were in place. Meanwhile German Landwehr were held in readiness at Swiniuchy. To lead all of the troops concentrated in the northern part of Group Beckmann the commander of 43 Res ID, G.Lt von Runckel, was summoned from Litzmann's neighboring sector. The enemy asked if they could use the pause in fighting to bury their dead, but GdK Marwitz refused, since he recognized that the intention of his Russian counterparts was to spare future attackers the sight of the mass of bodies littering the ground. The battle died down into cannonades from both sides.

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372 For example, the 3 Gd ID had no more than 26 infantry officers left. (Zayonchkovsky, p. 74)

On the same day the leading elements of the reinforcements sent by Prince Leopold of Bavaria and by Linsingen arrived. They included one regiment from 49 Res ID, one from 75 Res ID (hitherto the northernmost Army Group reserves stationed on the lower Stokhod for Hauer's and Clausius' sectors) plus Landwehr and parts of a combined regiment. The German Eastern Command was sending heavy batteries taken from Woyrsch's Army Group.

In the following three days the artillery duel continued along Marwitz's front; sharp fighting continued to flare up in the storm-center around Korytnica. Marwitz was preparing a strong counter-blow. To make way for the stream of German troops, the HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army moved the staffs and herds of horses from Leonhardi's cavalry group back to Grybowica and Krylow, between the Luga and the Bug. The group HQ which had been commanding the three Aus-Hung. cavalry divisions (4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>) was dissolved on 22 September. The weak remnants of their combat troops - except for the artillery - were pulled from the front. The three divisional commanders were instructed to incorporate replacement troops and to carry out a new organization developed by the high command. Each of the cavalry regiments was to consist of a mounted detachment (of 3 to 4 squadrons) and a dismounted detachment (of equal strength). GO Conrad suggested that 10 CD should be moved to southeast Hungary, rebuilt there and employed against the Romanians. GdI Ludendorff, acting for the German OHL, declined "because at the start of October German reserves [in Volhynia] will be needed to be placed under the high command."

The Russians were also busy with their preparations. Allied air reconnaissance determined that the enemy continued to deploy new masses of troops against Marwitz. On 22 September an intercepted wireless message revealed that the XXV Corps of Gurko's Army was changing stations. On the next day the same source of information indicated that the HQ of that corps was moving to Szepiel, while that of XXVI went to Torczyn and HQ of XXXIV Corps to Bielostok. Thus all were in motion toward Tersztyanszky's Army. At the same time it seemed that I Guard Corps was being relieved by the rebuilt IV Sib Corps. The activity of the reinforced Russian air units was noteworthy.

## **2. The storm of the Russian bridgehead at Zarecze, 18 September**

Just as the enemy sought to pin down the X German Corps during

the Second Battle of Szelwow-Swiniuchy with increased artillery fire, they wanted to also pin down Armeegruppe Bernhardi. A strong rain of shells fell upon the group's right wing and on the k.u.k. II Corps. Brisk infantry skirmishes developed in no-man's land in front of Rusche's Division. But the enemy's behavior didn't fool the allies at all; they soon recognized that the Russians intended merely to draw as many units as possible to Bernhardi's sector and to pin them down so as to help the operations planned against the fronts farther south.

The onslaught which GdK Bernhardi anticipated at the end of August hadn't materialized. The units once massed under Gurko's and Letsch's Armies - the Guards as well as the corps that had recently come to the Stokhod - had been shifted farther south. Therefore it was clear to Bernhardi that the Russians had renounced their plans of breaking through to Kovel in his sector. Since 29 July the enemy had possessed an advantageous sally port in their extensive bridgehead at Zarecze; having failed to use it as the base for an offensive, they were still determined to hold onto it. Although the Russians' penetration had been sealed in long and costly fighting and their freedom of movement on the western bank of the Stokhod had been limited since the storm of the sand dune (on 20-21 August), the rest of the dangerous bulwark remained in their hands. Therefore the allied commanders still wanted to drive the Russians completely from Zarecze and back onto the eastern bank. To wear down the garrison, GM Pongracz's 53 ID kept them under constant fire. The entire defensive position was carefully studied. At Bernhardi's order, G.Lt Clausius' Group HQ (attached to 53 ID) prepared a detailed plan for conquering the bridgehead and driving all the Russians from the western bank of the Stokhod.

In mid-September, after the Russians had again suffered a bloody defeat at Tobol, the tension on the Stokhod front noticeably declined. Bernhardi felt this was a favorable opportunity to surprise the enemy with a well-prepared blow and to inflict substantial damage.<sup>373</sup> The attack was scheduled for 18 September.

On this day the sectors led by Generals Kneussl and Hauer - the immediate and more distant neighbors of 53 ID - sought to divert the Russians with sudden bursts of artillery fire (as they had done already in the preceding days). Around 11:00 AM the batteries concentrated by 53 ID under the command of artillery

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373 Bernhardi, "Denkwürdigkeiten", p. 447. By the same author, "Eine Weltreise 1911/12", Vol. III, pp. 211 ff.

Brigadier Col. Adler began their own devastating work. At 3:00 PM a subordinate commander, recognizing that the front of the shaken enemy was crumbling, struck forward on his own responsibility from the south against the left flank of the bridgehead. This initial thrust brought the attackers into the rear of the garrison. Soon afterwards, in the northern sector of 53 ID (51 LW Bde) three attacking groups - one Aus-Hung. and two German - moved forward under the commander of 21 Bavarian Brigade Col. Schulz.<sup>374</sup> The allied troops (one battalion from LW IR 11, one company from LW IR 12 and two companies from k.u. Lst IR 6 in addition to detachments from Prussian and Bavarian regiments) won a brilliant success.<sup>375</sup> In one bound they overran several lines and soon set up their own defenses along the Stokhod. Advanced detachments thrust briefly onto the eastern bank; after returning they destroyed the plank bridges which the Russians had constructed. The defenders' power of resistance was completely broken; whole units laid down their arms in surrender. 31 officers, more than 2500 men plus 17 machine guns of 77 Russian ID fell into the hands of the victors, who themselves had lost barely 150 men (including 18 killed). The enemy didn't attempt to counterattack.

In the next few days the newly-conquered trenches were incorporated into the already existing framework of defenses and improved. The units that had been brought up only for the attack returned to their parent organizations. 51 LW Bde, which had fought in front of Zarecze since the end of July, returned to 26 LW ID.<sup>376</sup>

For the rest of the month friend and foe were content to hold their permanent positions along the Stokhod. The northern half of Linsingen's Army Group, under Bernhardt and Hauer, became a quiet front.

### **3. Actions at Perepelniki and the Second Battle of the Narajowka, 16-24 September**

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374 The strength of the attacking units was 24 inf comps (7 Aus-Hung., 17 German), 25 batties (13 Aus-Hung., 12 German) and 1 ½ sapper comps (all Aus-Hung.). There were 107 guns (63 Aus-Hung., 44 German) and 27 trench mortars (4 Aus-Hung. and 23 German).

375 "Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 150", Vol. I, pp. 304 ff. Stengel, p. 75

376 Wisshaupt, "Die 52. Landwehr Infanterie Brigade", p. 420

Sakharov's attacks

After the defeat at Zborow, GdK Sakharov had built up a new striking group on the left wing of his 11<sup>th</sup> Army from XVII Corps (3, 35 ID) and VII Corps (13, 34 ID; Inf Bde Saratov).<sup>377</sup> He held III Cauc Corps (21, 52 ID) in reserve so that with their fresh units he could exploit any success and thrust ahead toward Lemberg. After a cannonade lasting eight hours, as ordered by Brussilov he started his offensive on 16 September on the front between the railroad leading to Zloczow and the Sereth; he hoped that his opponents' positions had been so badly damaged by the guns that they could be overrun. But when his divisions opened their assault in the afternoon they encountered destructive defensive fire. The Russian infantry, advancing in thick waves, collapsed with heavy casualties in front of the positions of 197 German ID. Between Manajow and Zwyzyn, on the front of the k.u.k. IV Corps (14 and 33 ID) the Russian assault fell apart in its first stage. Only at Hukalowce (southeast of Perepelniki) were enemy infantry able to set foot in some parts of the trenches held by 195 ID. Then German reserves threw the Russians out of the lost trenches in hand-to-hand combat. The prudent GdI Eben had foreseen this new Russian onslaught in time. In addition to IR 373 (which had already come to the village of Pluhow), the German Eastern Command sent GO Böhm-Ermolli some artillery; for GdI Eben they shifted to Zloczow two battalions of the German 6<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Regiment that had been separated from 195 ID in August. Moreover, Prince Leopold of Bavaria assembled the remaining parts of the German 49 Res ID at Lemberg.

After prolonged artillery preparation, in the afternoon of 17 September the Russian VII and XVII Corps again attacked the sector between Jaroslawice and Manajow. This attack also collapsed in front of the positions of the 197, 195 and k.u.k. 14 ID. Weak thrusts by V Sib Corps in the Graberka-Luh sector were checked by the fire of the Budapest 31 ID. Since the Russians lacked the strength to continue attacking after this defeat, the fighting slowly died down on 18 and 19 September.

Shcherbachev's attacks

On 16 September GdI Shcherbachev attacked Bothmer's Army on the front between Skomorochy and Potutory with tightly concentrated units - II and XXXIII Corps plus parts of XVI and of XXII

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377 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 71 ff.

Corps.<sup>378</sup> He opened the assault in the morning with heavy fire from his artillery that struck the lines from the left wing of 3 Gd ID to the right of Corps Hofmann. The strongest fire was directed upon the positions of 1 Res ID at Swistelniki and those of XV Turkish Corps between the Narajowka and the Zlota Lipa. GI Bothmer, who'd already anticipated the Russian onslaught, had his reserves (German Res IR 18 and 208 ID) ready at Lipnica dolna. Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ sent German 216 ID on the march from Brzezany to Nadorozniow to that they could operate along with Bothmer's reserves.

Around noon the Russian divisions advanced in thick waves against 1 Res ID and XV Turkish Corps. After hard fighting that surged back and forth, in the afternoon the lines of 1 Res ID were broken at Swistelniki, and the Turks' right wing was pushed back east of Lipnica dolna. German reserves (Res IR 18, 208 ID and parts of 216 ID) counterattacked but couldn't restore the situation. Late in the afternoon the 1 Res ID had to pull back behind the Narajowka, and the 3 Gd ID to their right lost the heights southwest of Swistelniki. Although the Russians advanced with tremendous impact over the Narajowka, in the evening they were brought to a halt by 1 Res ID plus the reinforcements that had hurried to the area.<sup>379</sup>

Gen. Shcherbachev sought to exploit his success, and renewed the attack on the 17<sup>th</sup> with XXXIII and II Corps. But the German units which had been pushed back to the western bank of the Narajowka weathered the storm, as did the Turks on the front between this brook and the Zlota Lipa. Meanwhile GdI Gerok assembled the German reserves placed at his disposal (208 and 216 ID) into a striking group; in the afternoon he sent them to attack, along with parts of 1 Res ID and of 3 Gd ID. In see-saw fighting the ground lost on the first day of the battle on the right wing of XV Turkish Corps was regained, and it was possible to wrest from the Russians at Swistelniki some of their gains of the day before.

The German thrust was so powerful that Shcherbachev believed an entire army had been unleashed in response to his attack. He had meanwhile learned that the Germans had brought two new

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378 Zayonchkovsky, p. 111

379 "Geschichte des Res.-Inf.-Regiments 3" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1926), pp. 126 ff. Neumann, "Die Geschichte des Res.-Inf.-Regiments 59" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1927), pp. 174 ff. Schulenburg, "Die Geschichte des Garde-Füsilier Regiments" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1926), pp. 148 ff.

divisions to the Narajowka - 208 ID from the Western front and 216 ID from Lake Narotch; he reported to the Stavka that his offensive had collided with these concentrated forces. Gen. Alexeiev was displeased because the Russian reinforcements sent to Galicia were being deployed at various points by Southwest Front. On 19 September he demanded that Brussilov should place III Cauc Corps under 7<sup>th</sup> Army, in addition to VII Sib Corps which had already been assigned. North of the Tarnopol-Zloczow railroad the 11<sup>th</sup> Army had no prospect of winning a decisive success but had enough units for defensive purposes. Therefore Brussilov placed III Cauc Corps under Gen. Shcherbachev and sent them to him in forced marches.

The Army commander meanwhile sought to keep up the pressure on the Germans along the Narajowka by sending in parts of VII Sib Corps. On 18 and 19 September Gerok's Corps continued the attack they'd started on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Despite powerful artillery preparation, Gerok gained no further significant advantage, while parts of his Corps suffered severe losses. At Swistelniki the Russian 23 ID and 13 Sib Rif Div were identified in addition to the units originally deployed (XXXIII and II Corps). Since it was known that the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was also getting III Cauc Corps, GdI Gerok halted his attack on 20 September. He had succeeded in sealing off the penetration of the front, but Swistelniki hadn't been recaptured.

The Russians still tried on the 21<sup>st</sup> to thrust forward at various parts of the front between Skomorochy and Lipnica dolna. Then the fighting in this sector died down. In the area farther northeast, the Russian XVI Corps attempted an envelopment attack two days later; their target was the front of XV Turkish Corps which bulged forward southwest from the Zlota Lipa, south of Potutory. The Russians didn't win any noteworthy success. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the Turks, assisted by artillery fire from Corps Hofmann, had to repulse yet another Russian thrust south of Potutory. Then there was a pause in the fighting. Gen. Shcherbachev interrupted his offensive so that he could assemble fresh units for a new blow.

#### Allied troops movements

Already on 17 September, while Gerok's Corps was still trying to win a decision, the German Eastern Command responded to a request for help from GM Seeckt by sending parts of the German 49 Res ID from Lemberg to Lipnica dolna. Here these troops were in the reserves of Archduke Charles' Army Group. GdI Bothmer moved the Leib Hussar Brigade, which had been in reserve behind

the northern wing of South Army, to Nadorozniow and pulled the battered 1 Res ID from the front. Between 21 September and 2 October this Division moved by train from Podwysokie to the Dvina front. To replace 1 Res ID, G.Lt Kruge's 36 Res ID came to South Army. Their first elements arrived at Bukaczowce on 23 September. On the same day there was a reorganization within South Army: the sector from the Dniester to Skomorochy was placed under X Res Corps (119 and 199 ID) and the sector from Skomorochy to the Popielicha Heights was under Group Gerok (3 Gd, 208 and 216 ID).

During this period the situation for the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was generally quiet. There were larger-scale actions only on 16 September on the northern wing. On this day Shcherbachev tried to divert his opponents' attention from the primary targets on the Narajowka with an advance by XLI Russian Corps against 48 Res ID south of the Dniester. The Russian diversionary attack was checked by the defenders' artillery fire.

The troop movements within Kövess' Army which had been ordered earlier were completed by 20 September. FZM Benigni's VIII Corps (6 CD, 5 ID) now held the Siwula Heights-Bohorodczany sector; FML Csicseric's XIII Corps (42 Hon ID and 36 ID; the latter included 72 Inf Bde) held the adjacent sector as far as Pacykow. FML Hadfy's Group (21 LW and 48 Res ID) occupied the area between Pacykow and the Dniester. On 20 September the 59 ID left by train for the Forest Carpathians.

#### **4. Continuation of the Battle in the Forest Carpathians, 16-24 September**

Toward the middle of September, the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army was reinforced by 59 ID.<sup>380</sup> This Division, which came from North Front, was sent to the Carpathians and deployed against the Pantyr Pass. But GdI Letschitzky demanded that he should be given at least a corps. In a report to Front HQ on 10 September he described the enormous difficulties of attacking in the Forest Carpathians. Height after height had to be wrested from his opponents in prolonged fighting. The majority of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were fighting in trackless mountains, without sufficient ammunition or provisions. Since 31 August the Army had lost at least 10,000 combatants; the troops were exhausted and their

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380 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original says the Russian 59 ID went to 7<sup>th</sup> Army, but it's clear from the context and from Beilage 18 that this is a misprint for 9<sup>th</sup> Army.

capacity for attacking diminished day by day. But the offensive had to continue without delay so that the route to the Hungarian plains could be opened before winter snow covered the mountains.

Gen. Letschitzky expressed his great disappointment over the dilatory operations of the Romanians. It was hardly possible any longer to count on help from these allies. The Germans and Austro-Hungarians had long recognized the danger of being attacked from the flank in the Carpathians, and had brought significant reinforcements to Dorna Watra and Körösmezö in the last two weeks. The Russian troops alone were bearing the full brunt of the fighting. However, since the Stavka was expecting the Southwest Front to break through decisively toward Vladimir-Volynsky, Brussilov couldn't heed Letschitzky's request for reinforcements; he consoled his subordinate with the assurance that the Romanian offensive would bring relief to the Russian left wing.<sup>381</sup>

#### Actions on the Aus-Hung. right through 19 September

In the second week of September the Romanian North Army broke out of the valley where the Maros has its source and toward Szasz Regen. On 16 September a group from their 14 ID reached the Petrosul Heights in the Kelemen Mountains. FML Habermann sent dismounted horsemen from 11 Hon CD plus Landsturm troops to the D. Maiereselu Heights to keep the Romanians from using the route along the ridge extending from the Petrosul to the Three Countries' Corner. A bicycle company of XI Corps blocked the Dorna valley. Meanwhile Lt Col. Sander's detachment from VI Corps was sent to the Bistricioara Heights to strike the enemy on the main ridge. On 18 and 19 September this detachment threw back the Romanian advance along the ridge, despite counter-thrusts; on the 19<sup>th</sup> they were placed under FML Habermann. Moreover, as already related, he was given Col. Hodula's 73 Hon Inf Bde (which meanwhile had come to 1<sup>st</sup> Army as part of 37 Hon ID); thus 7<sup>th</sup> Army's important supply line from Borgo Prund into the Dorna valley was reliably secure.

On 16 September, the same day when Presan's Army in the Kelemen Mountains reached the Petrosul, the Romanian Bistrita Detachment, supported by Russian troops, crossed the Negra brook to attack 11 Hon CD's thinly-held front. At the same time the Russians kept the positions of Brigade Papp on the heights north of Dorna Watra under strong artillery fire. Because of this threat, FML Habermann sent Hon IR 18, the first component of 73

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381 Klembovsky, p. 82

Hon Inf Bde to arrive, into the sector between Dorna Watra and the Three Countries' Corner.

The Bistrita Detachment displayed little determination in their attack against the flank of the k.u.k. XI Corps. The Romanian battalions worked their way forward slowly toward the positions of 11 Hon CD on the heights. Weak thrusts collapsed under the defenders' fire on 17 and 18 September at Sara Dorna, on the 19<sup>th</sup> at Serisoru, and on the 20<sup>th</sup> once more at Sara Dorna.

Meanwhile the efforts of III Russian Cavalry Corps against the Dorna Watra-Jacobeny sector were equally unsuccessful. In stubborn positional fighting which lasted without a pause until 20 September the Gendarmerie battalions and Landsturm of Brigade Papp, along with cavalry riflemen from 8 CD and 5 Hon CD and supported by two detached battalions of 10 Bav ID, kept the enemy from entering the valley of the Golden Bistritz.

On the heights north of Kirlibaba the troubles of I Corps meanwhile continued to mount. On 17 September the forward position of 40 Hon ID which jutted ahead of the Tatarca Heights toward the Luczina stud-farm had to be abandoned to a Russian envelopment assault. In the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup>, after strong artillery fire, units from the enemy XVIII Corps attacked the Tatarca Heights but were repulsed. In the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> the right wing of 40 Hon ID and left of 8 CD had to give way to the overwhelming pressure and pull back. Thus the right wing of the Carpathian Corps on the Cimbroslawa Wk. was threatened with envelopment. G.Lt Conta sent two battalions [II and III/Res IR 6], a field artillery regiment and a heavy battery of 10 Bav ID to Kirlibaba as reinforcements; they immediately intervened in the fighting and, with the troops of I Corps, prevented the Russians from advancing on the Dedul Ridge and on the ridges running north between the Kirlibaba and Cibo brooks. But the situation remained tense because the enemy was assembling strong forces on the heights north of Kirlibaba and apparently determined to thrust into the valley of the Golden Bistritz.

#### The center and left of 7<sup>th</sup> Army through 19 September

Under the Carpathian Corps, on 16 September the right wing of the German 1 ID on the eastern slopes of the Cimbroslawa Wk. was attacked without success by troops from the Russian XVIII Corps. The Ussuri Coss Div and infantry from 43 Russian ID climbed onto the border ridge from the valley of the Bilyj Czeremosz to the west to go around the entrances to the Prislop Pass, blocked by 10 Bav ID. In combat with this large enemy group a weak force

of just two German Jaeger battalions (plus mountain artillery) from 200 ID lost the Comanowa Heights; on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, however, the Germans defended the Pirie Heights and kept the Russians from descending into the Vaser valley.

The newly-reorganized XXIII Russian Corps (79 and 82 ID) was already starting on 16 September to renew the attacks on the main positions of the German 200 ID, which ran on the right bank of the Czarny Czeremosz past the Ludowa railroad to Ludowa town and blocked the river valley at Jawornik. The East Prussian Jaeger battalions, fighting in dispersed groups, repulsed all assaults with machine gun fire and hand grenades.

XXIII Russian Corps attacked again on 17 September. Covered by thick fog, in the morning the Russians pushed into the positions of 200 ID on the Baba Ludowa. Driven from the summit in difficult fighting, the Division hastily gathered together its Jaeger companies on the heights on the left bank of the Czarny Czeremosz which climbed up to the border ridge, and on the ridge leading northwest of the Baba Ludowa. The Germans held fast to this line and repulsed new Russian assaults on 18 and 19 September.<sup>382</sup>

It was already quite cold in the mountains. On the peaks it started to snow on 17 September. The lower elevations were damp from rain and the roads had turned to mud that exhausted horses and pack animals, while bogging down guns and vehicles. The Russian XI Corps could make their way forward only slowly along the northern slopes of the massif of the Czornahora, which was over 2000 meters high, thickly forested, and split up by ravines. On 18 September the 32 Russian ID attacked the right wing of 117 German ID and captured the Smotrec Heights. The Russians' 11 and 12 ID meanwhile moved toward the Kukul and the Tartar Pass. Their 59 ID advanced on Rafailowa, where they fell upon the k.u.k. 3 CD in their advanced position and on 19 September pushed the defenders' right wing back to the Durny Heights.<sup>383</sup>

Meanwhile GM Jesser's 30 ID arrived at Körösmezö. The greater part of this Division was deployed on the right wing of Corps Surén in place of the burnt-out 202 Hon Inf Bde on the thinly-guarded front between the Wyzna preluka and Durny Heights.

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382 Ehrenfurth, "Die Geschichte des Res.-Jäger-Bataillons 17" (Berlin, 1926), pp. 43 ff.

383 Sacken, pp. 424 ff.

Analysis and counter-measures of the allied commanders

Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ asked G.Lt Conta for his evaluation of the situation; on 19 September he reported on the events of the last few weeks. The Russians had first attacked the right wing of the Carpathian Corps with three divisions (64, 37 and 43 ID), seeking to break through and to capture the Dorna Watra - Kirlibaba - O Radna road. Now the enemy was thrusting with strong forces against 40 Hon ID and also drawing troops from their 103 ID into the area northeast of Kirlibaba. Since the Russians apparently didn't have any fresh units available opposite the German 1 ID, G.Lt Conta expected that Division to be able to hold onto the Cimbrosława Wk. despite their own losses. However, this seemed possible to him only if 40 Hon ID prevented the enemy from breaking through at Kirlibaba.

Besides the front at Kirlibaba, G.Lt Conta was concerned about the left wing of his Corps. Here the German 200 ID was under constant attack by three Russian divisions. Because of the condition of the 200<sup>th</sup>, he feared that their exhausted Jaeger battalions couldn't hold the current positions for long. G.Lt Conta also complained that although 10 Bav ID had been placed at his disposal, he couldn't deploy the Division as a unit in the front north of the Prislop Pass after many of their troops had been split up to patch holes in the front. G.Lt Conta asked for fresh units to relieve the over-tired combat troops of 200 ID and to strengthen the incomplete positions on the border crest.

Army Group HQ certainly understood that 200 ID was in a difficult situation, but gave priority to reinforcing 40 Hon and 1 German ID because the Russians were already nearing the Kirlibaba-Prislop road. On 18 September GdK Kirchbach had already intended to use 59 ID, which had been allotted to him, in the endangered Kirlibaba sector. He also planned to carry out several troop movements. Lt Col. von Scholz's Landsturm group (k.k. Lst Inf Bns 23 and 24), which had been with 215 Inf Bde, would join 8 CD. The k.u. Lst IR 20 would join 3 CD, while the detachment under Col. Frater currently with that Division (Inf Bn IV/50 and half of I/6) would rejoin 59 ID. 202 Hon Inf Bde from the left wing of XXV Res Corps and Hon IR 306 from the Carpathian Corps would move to XI Corps. The HQ of 215 Inf Bde would rejoin its own division (30 ID), and the detached battalions from 10 Bav ID would join their comrades within the Carpathian Corps. Once 59 ID arrived, GdK Kirchbach intended to move the battered 1 German ID out of the front and into the Army's reserves.

However, days would go by before these changes could be implemented. 59 ID wasn't ordered to leave Kalusz for the Carpathians until 20 September, and their combat troops wouldn't arrive at O Radna until the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Since relief for 40 Hon ID and 200 ID was urgently necessary, Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ advised GdK Kirchbach to temporarily bring a battalion of Bav IR 16 from Dorna Watra to Kirlibaba, and to extend the right wing of XXV Res Corps so that it could take over part of 200 ID's front. But GdK Kirchbach couldn't agree to the first proposal due to the ongoing Russian attacks at Dorna Watra. As for the second proposal, XXV Res Corps didn't want to weaken their front, since there were unreliable troops of Romanian and Italian nationality among the units of the k.u.k. 34 ID stationed at the Tartar Pass. Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ decided instead to send Lst IR 37 to the over-taxed German 200 ID, where they would join Lst IR 35 (already arrived from Bukaczowce).

#### The right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army from 20 September

Along the entire lengthy front of 7<sup>th</sup> Army there was heavy fighting on 20 September and in the following days. In the Kelemen Mountains, units from VI and XI Corps fought the Romanians and held fast opposite the Petrosul despite enemy counter-thrusts. On 22 September the commander of 73 Hon Inf Bde, Col. Hodula, took over the sector south of the Three Countries' Corner. He would use Hon IR 13, which had meanwhile arrived in the upper Dorna valley, to relieve Lt Col. Sander's Group and to recapture the Petrosul. Before this plan could be implemented, however, the situation made it necessary to instead employ the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment under I Corps.

On 20 September the Romanian Bistrita Detachment resumed their hesitant offensive against the sector between the Three Countries' Corner and Dorna Watra, which was defended by the dismounted horsemen of 11 Hon CD and parts of Hon IR 18. The slowly advancing Romanians captured the Vrf. Munceilor Heights on the 21<sup>st</sup>. However, they were struck by a counterattack and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> pulled back into the Negra valley and also from the eastern slopes of the D. Negrii toward Sara Dorna.

While the Bistrita Detachment tried in vain to break into the Dorna valley from the east, Gen. Letschitzky was pushing from the north toward Dorna Watra with strong units of the III Cavalry Corps. Although the Terek and Don Cossacks made heavy attacks on the important Bernarielul Heights on 20 and 21 September, they were repulsed by Brigade Papp's steady

Gendarmerie battalions and Landsturm. In the next few days the Russians merely pounded Dorna Watra with a strong cannonade.

Meanwhile the tension hadn't slackened for FZM Scheuchenstuel's I Corps. On the heights east of the Cibobach Gen. Letschitzky assembled troops from 103, 64 and 37 ID and sought with this concentrated force to thrust into the valley of the Golden Bistritz. In the afternoon of 20 September, after unremitting attacks, the enemy broke through the positions of GM Schnehen's Group (8 CD, 215 Inf Bde) at three points southwest of Fundul Moldovi. On 21 September Schnehen's troops were able to check the Russian onslaught along the line of high ground from Botosul to Dedul Ridge. 40 Hon ID had meanwhile also stoutly withstood enemy thrusts north of Kirlibaba and in the Cibo valley in bitter fighting. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, however, the Russians broke into the badly damaged trenches of the Honved. Despite a frightful combat, it wasn't possible to fully recover the lost ground. On 23 September the Polish uhlans and Czech dragoon riflemen of 8 CD, the Landsturm of 215 ID, the Honved of 40 ID, and the Bavarian battalions attached to these units were forced to endure the destructive fire of the Russian artillery. The exhausted defenders were in dire need. In the afternoon the oncoming Russians forced the right wing of 40 Hon ID to waver, and drove them into the valley of the Golden Bistritz. By expending their last strength, the allies were able to once more wrest most of the lost ground from the enemy. On 24 September the impetuous Russian thrust, which had nearly driven Scheuchenstuel's Corps away from the Carpathian Corps, came to an end just in front of Kirlibaba, and on the heights leading south from the Dedul Ridge into the valley of the Golden Bistritz. The emergency of I Corps meanwhile forced GdK Kirchbach to move Hon IR 13 from the Kelemen Mountains, where they had been supposed to relieve Lt Col. Sander's group, and to send them marching to Kirlibaba. As the first combat troops of 59 ID arrived by train at O Radna, they were quickly sent to the same destination, and on 24 September they deployed in the front between Group Schnehen and 40 Hon ID. GM Kroupa, the commander of 59 ID, was placed in charge of this sector.

#### The center and right of 7<sup>th</sup> Army from 20 September

In the area of the upper Czarny Czeremosz, the Russian attacks on 20 September culminated in massed assaults against the Prussian Jaeger battalions of 200 ID, which were spread out widely along the front. The Russian XXIII Corps sought by concentrating their strength to drive their opponents from the high ground ascending to the border crest and from the ridge

northwest of the Baba Ludowa Heights. Five times the Russian waves crashed against the positions of 200 ID, and five times they collapsed with heavy casualties. Finally in the sixth onslaught the enemy was able to break into the thin battle lines of the Prussian Jaeger battalions, but they were thrown out of the trenches in hand-to-hand combat. The Russian XXIII Corps thrust forward again in the evening for a seventh time, but once more suffered a bloody defeat.

On 21 September the Russians renewed their attacks on the Carpathian Corps. In the sectors of the East Prussian 1 ID and the Bavarian 10 ID on the Cimbrosława Wk. and on the heights north of the Prislop Pass the enemy onslaught soon collapsed under artillery fire. In stubborn defensive fighting the right wing of 200 ID maintained themselves on the Comanowa and Pirie border heights. But the group from this Division stationed on the Mokryn Ridge were hit in the flank by Russians coming up from the Czeremosz valley, and pushed back to the Albin Heights. The enemy were able to widen their foothold on the Baba Ludowa but couldn't gain ground on the ridges running to the northwest or at Szybeny. On 22 September the Russians' advance was hindered by rain on the lower elevations and by snow storms on the heights. In the night of 22-23 September they penetrated the area south of the Ludowa Heights, but couldn't thrust forward to Szybeny; in the next morning they were driven back by the Prussian Jaeger. The Russians assembled new forces and renewed their assault with XXIII Corps on the 24<sup>th</sup>. In difficult fighting the German Jaeger battalions, despite their declining strength, once more held on; at Szybeny they kept the enemy from climbing up to the border crest. The German 1st IR 37 now arrived and was attached to 200 ID.

On the right wing of Corps Surén, after intense artillery preparation troops from the German 117 ID assaulted the Smotrec Heights; they captured the summit but couldn't hold it against strong Russian counterattacks. On 21 September and the following days the 32 Russian ID tried to support the advance of XXIII Corps; this led to lively fighting against the positions of 117 ID on the heights.

On the extreme left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, the Viennese 3 CD in the Durny Heights-Rafailowa sector was stricken on 20 September by a new thrust of the 59 Russian ID; the cavalry division was pushed back to the border heights on both sides of the Pantyr Pass. To help this sorely-tested unit, the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group suggested to GdK Kirchbach that he should thrust forward with Surén's left wing. But the Army commander reported that he

didn't have enough units to carry out a successful attack. Surén's Corps meanwhile had to give up the two battalions attached from 10 Bav ID, which joined the Carpathian Corps. Moreover the 202 Hon Inf Bde now had to be shifted to the Army's right wing. The 117 ID and k.u.k. 34 ID were fending off new Russian attacks. The newly-arrived troops of 30 ID would defend the front between the Wyzna preluka and Durny Heights. In this situation, Army Group HQ decided to send 12 ID, which had been relieved from South Army, by train to Taraczkös to prevent the Russians from enveloping the Pantyr Pass.

The front of Surén's Corps was mostly quiet on the next two days (21 and 22 September). On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the Russians started to move closer to the border heights on both sides of the Tartar Pass.

## 5. Preparations of both sides for the next major encounter, 23-30 September

### The Russian plans

The Russian high command had intended, along with their Romanian partners, to crown the long summer campaign with a decisive success in battle. But the offensive which Southwest Front opened with significant forces on 16 September had gained only trifling, partial advantages. The fighting on the Narajowka and at Korytnica had shown that the opposing side was still unshaken and wouldn't give in to weight of numbers. This recognition spurred the Russian leadership to even greater exertions so that the opportunities which at one time had seemed to beckon wouldn't be wasted. On 23 September the Stavka re-assigned the Army of Gurko, who until now had no opportunity to prove his capabilities, to Southwest Front. Brussilov's new Army, as well as his 8<sup>th</sup>, would each lose a corps. One of the corps thus made available would go to 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Alexeiev didn't make a binding decision regarding the use of the other corps, but only made it clear that the Tsar wanted to assemble troops on the south bank of the Dniester; a thrust in the general direction of Kalusz would ease the way for the difficult frontal assault by 7<sup>th</sup> Army. The starting time and objectives of the offensive by Brussilov's armies were left to his discretion. It was clear that the Stavka expected only the Southwest Front to win the decision, since they instructed the commanders of the West and North Fronts merely to have reserves ready to send south.<sup>384</sup>

Brussilov decided, as he informed the Chief of Staff on the 24<sup>th</sup>, that with the help of his new units he would assemble eight corps for a mighty offensive toward Vladimir-Volynsky. Only one corps (XXVI) would be sent to 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Thus he renounced the idea of reinforcing 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Orders to his army commanders were issued the same day. Gurko received two corps from 8<sup>th</sup> Army, XXXIX and XL (the latter without 2 Rif Div). He would attack toward Vladimir-Volynsky with four corps to the right of the northern Luga, while guarding the upper course of the Stokhod so as to prevent any danger to his flank from Kovel. 8<sup>th</sup> Army, deployed to the left of the Luga, would thrust toward Grubieszow. The 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies retained their earlier assignments. 9<sup>th</sup> Army, joined by XXVI Corps, would advance simultaneously with Romanian troops toward Bistritz and then

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384 Klembovsky, pp. 102 ff. and Appendix 17. Zayonchkovsky, pp. 84 ff.

from the line Kirlibaba-Bistritz toward Maramaros Sziget. The general offensive was to start on 29 September.

The Russian military historian Zayonchkovsky later criticized Brussilov's dispositions very sharply; he even accused the General of disobeying orders from Mogilev and carrying on the next operations on his own despite all the intentions of the Stavka. The weak-willed and modest Alexeiev allowed this to happen by the way he worded his orders. By instructing that two corps should be sent to the south he'd indicated that this was already the decisive point and that Brussilov's northern wing should be given "an inactive or only diversionary role." However, this evaluation hardly stands up under examination of all the evidence. It is quite possible that prior to the issuance of the Stavka's orders there was a difference of opinion between Alexeiev and Brussilov regarding whether the offensive toward Vladimir-Volynsky should be continued or canceled. Of these two men who were the most influential of the Russian leaders the commander of Southwest Front had a stronger will, and he knew how to defend his own ideas. However, Alexeiev certainly placed the Special Army under his control so that the planned breakthrough to Vladimir-Volynsky would have greater weight. Even if Brussilov had sent all of the units in question to his left wing, the main body of his Front would still remain in the north under the tightly-massed armies of Gurko and Kaledin.

Brussilov had never given up hope that he could decisively defeat the Central Powers in the Kovel area; now as colder weather impended he was doing everything possible to implement the Stavka's original battle plan.

The k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army was observing the enemy's activity with tense anticipation. The Russian troop movements toward the front and the heavy concentration in the area behind it went on without lessening. The enemy were replacing their burnt-out units with noticeable haste. The newly-arrived corps (XXV and XXXIV) were relieving the divisions stationed on both sides of Zaturcy, thus deploying between the XXXIX and XL Corps. This constituted a threat to the Aus-Hung. X Corps and the right wing of Schmidt-Knobelsdorf's neighboring group. Therefore on 24 September GO Linsingen had already placed the German IR 341 from his reserves under Tersztyanszky; it was held in readiness behind Kisielin. Reports about the enormous Russian preparations opposite 4<sup>th</sup> Army compelled GO Conrad, in a message to GFM Hindenburg on the 26<sup>th</sup>, to summarize as his opinion about the situation, "that we are dealing here with the greatest effort which the Russians have

made to thrust through our front since the start of their offensive."

#### Operations of Linsingen's Army Group

Meanwhile there was no pause in fighting. The enemy dug trenches forward toward Group Beckmann. Therefore Marwitz hastened to complete his preparations for the counterattack which was supposed to reconquer the terrain near Korytnica that had been given up on 20 September. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, two strong German groups (about 20 battalions and 57 batteries) made an envelopment assault against the enemy's foremost position. Led by G.Lt Runckel and by the commander of 115 ID, GM von Kleist, they cut off the garrison and captured even more than the lost trenches. Their blow struck the enemy by surprise just when the latter were tightly massed for an attack of their own, and thus inflicted especially heavy casualties.<sup>385</sup> Counterattacks by the Russian Guards were shattered. The neighboring sectors of Szurmay and Csanady, and also of Litzmann, had effectively supported Beckmann's operation with feint attacks. The German X Corps kept the enemy occupied during this time with sorties into no-man's land.

The setback the Russians had suffered didn't keep them from tenaciously carrying out their preparations to attack Armeegruppe Marwitz. Therefore in the last days of September the allies faced an impending major battle. Strong reserves were organized and deployed as appropriate. The northern part of X Corps as far as the Turya (Col. Seh's Group) was placed under FML Kalser of 13 LW ID. Under Beckmann, GM Kleist commanded the center and G.Lt Runckel the left wing as far as the k.u.k. 11 ID (which was now led by GM Ritter von Metz).

GO Tersztyanszky believed that the Russians would strike on a wide front (from Tereszkowiec to Semerynki), and expected the main effort to be made on both sides of the road from Zaturcy to Vladimir-Volynsky. To securely guard this area, Prince Leopold sent yet another German regiment on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Falkenhayn's Corps on the northern wing of Armeegruppe Litzmann was also provided with reserve troops.

#### Operations of 2<sup>nd</sup>, South and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies

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385 The victors took around 3000 prisoners, more than 40 machine guns, and 2 guns. Klembovsky (p. 104) states that 10 Sib Rif Div lost 100 officers, 6000 men, 48 machine guns and 2 guns.

General Sakharov, commanding 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, had to give up III Cauc Corps to 7<sup>th</sup> Army on 19 September; nevertheless he still continued to attack. After strong artillery preparation, on 23 September he once more sent VII and XVII Corps against the southern wing of Böhm-Ermolli's Army. But all the Russian efforts were in vain. On the Zlota Ga. Heights, at Jaroslawice, at Perepelniki and in the Graberka area by Zwyzyn the German and Aus-Hung. forces - 197 and 195 ID of Corps Eben, 14 and 33 ID of the k.u.k. IV Corps - held fast to their lines. Only at Manajow were the enemy able to penetrate the trenches of the k.u.k. IR 72 on a front of about a kilometer. A battalion of the German 195 ID parried the blow. In the night of 23-24 September the German IR 171, which had hastened forward from Iwaczow, recovered the lost trenches in a bayonet attack after a short and bloody struggle.<sup>386</sup> In the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>, Sakharov renewed the action at Manajow with XVII Corps and sought to push through the positions of the k.u.k. 14 ID by this town regardless of casualties. However, German and Aus-Hung. batteries repulsed all the massed attacks. The Russian infantry stormed forward against Manajow one more time in the night of 25-26 September. This surprise operation also ended in a complete defeat for the Russians. Now their XVII Corps, exhausted and weakened by severe losses, finally gave up the offensive. Quickly exploiting this favorable opportunity, on the 29<sup>th</sup> the 195 ID thrust ahead and at Perepelniki took an 800 meter-long trench from the enemy.

Since 24 September the situation for the South Army was mostly quiet, but aviators detected lively troop movements behind the Russian front. General Shcherbachev was preparing for a new assault. He pulled the battered XXXIII Corps and 23 ID out of the line and inserted the newly-arrived III Cauc Corps (21 and 52 ID) between II and XVI Corps. During this pause in major fighting, the II Corps suffered a setback. To improve the Narajowka front, on 27 September troops from 208 German ID mounted a well-prepared attack near Lipnica dolna and penetrated the positions of 3 Turkestan Rif Div. The Russians tried in vain to recover the lost trenches in a night-time counterattack.<sup>387</sup>

Only minor actions occurred during these days along the quiet front of GO Kövess' 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. They broke out on the Bystrzyca Solotwinska, in the no-man's land in front of VIII and XIII

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386 Kaiser-Buchholtz-Renovanz, pp. 187 ff.

387 Klembovsky, p. 104

Corps. At some points in the defensive sector of Group Hadfy near Stanislau there was increased artillery activity.

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

The heavy fighting in the Forest Carpathians continued to rage everywhere after 24 September. Every day the Russian artillery strongly bombarded the positions of Brigade Papp at Dorna Watra. Enemy aviators threw bombs on the town. The Russians dug saps on the Bernarielul Heights, but weren't able to wrest this important strong point from Papp's gallant Brigade, which was supported by two battalions from 10 Bav ID.

On 25 September action also flared up once more on the front between Dorna Watra and the Three Countries' Corner. The Romanian Bistrita Detachment probed toward the positions of 11 Hon CD and those of the adjacent parts of 5 Hon CD, but didn't make a serious attack. On the other hand, Lt Col. Sander's Group on the main ridge of the Kelemen Mountains was heavily assaulted in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> and the following day. Stronger forces from Romanian 14 ID pushed out of the Maros valley against the flank and rear of the k.u.k. XI Corps and sought to penetrate between this Corps and the northern wing of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. This danger, and the advance of Presan's Army toward Szasz Regen, compelled GdK Kirchbach on the 27<sup>th</sup> to again move Hon IR 18 of 73 Hon Inf Bde, which had come to Dorna Watra, to the right wing of XI Corps; it arrived here on the 29<sup>th</sup>. At the same time Hon IR 306, which had been given up by the Carpathian Corps, was sent to the main ridge of the Kelemen Mountains to extend the right wing of XI Corps.

In the last days of September General Letschitzky continued his efforts to break through to the Jacobeny-Kirlibaba road in the valley of the Golden Bistritz. FZM Scheuchenstuel's I k.u.k. Corps opposed the attacking Russians with great stubbornness on the southern slopes of the Dedul Ridge and north of Kirlibaba. Here, in the sector of 40 Hon ID, there was bitter hand grenade fighting in the night of 24-25 September. On the 25<sup>th</sup> this Division had to repulse weaker Russian attacks, which however were renewed in greater strength in the following two days. In the afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup>, after heavy preparatory fire by the artillery, Letchitzky mounted a thrust toward Kirlibaba with the 103, 37 and 64 ID massed closely together. This thrust hit the left wing of GM Schnehen's Group (8 CD, 215 Inf Bde, and parts of 73 Hon Inf Bde and of 5 Hon CD) and the adjacent 59 ID on the southern slope of the Dedul Ridge. The gallant but outnumbered defenders lost part of one trench, which however they were able

to wrest back again from the enemy. On the next day renewed drumfire pounded the positions of Corps Scheuchenstuel. Around noon GM Schnehen's Group and 59 ID were again under heavy attack, but this offensive was also defeated. The Russians thrust ahead one more time in the afternoon; this time also they were only able to penetrate a small part of the front at Kirlibaba. The penetration was sealed off by 59 ID.

At the same time when heavy fighting raged at Kirlibaba, the Russian artillery in the area between the Cibobach and the source of the Bilyj Czeremosz was extraordinarily active. Here the 43 ID and Ussuri Coss Div launched isolated attacks against the positions of the German 1 ID and Bavarian 10 ID, all of which were repulsed. The XXIII Russian Corps made a heavier assault against the long line of the German 200 ID between the Pirie and Smotrec Heights. The Division, which had been weakened by casualties and had only received some Landsturm as reinforcements, lost the Ludowa area in these encounters; however, they were able to prevent a breakthrough in the key sectors, where individual strong points held out. In bitter hand-to-hand fighting that lasted until the 28<sup>th</sup>, the Germans were able to recover many of their lost outposts.

The Russian XI Corps directed their efforts against XXV Res Corps (German 117 ID; k.u.k. 34 ID, 30 ID and 3 CD; German 2 Bicycle Brigade). On the 25<sup>th</sup> there were weak attacks by the Russian 32 ID from the east and north against the southeast end of the Czornahora Ridge [Smotrec], and by 11 ID against the ridge south of the Kukul; all these attempts were checked by 117 German ID while they were still developing. Two days later, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the k.u.k. 34 ID at the Tartar Pass - supported by parts of 117 ID - repulsed attempts by 12 Russian ID to approach their lines. 3 Cauc Coss Div, reinforced by infantry from 59 ID, probed toward the border heights on both sides of the Pantyr Pass, guarded by 30 ID and 3 CD, but didn't make a serious attack.

On the left wing of 3 CD, which was troubled only by artillery fire, FML Edl. von Hinke's 12 ID had meanwhile arrived from South Army. Between 26 and 28 September they deployed in the sector between the Pantyr Pass and Siwula Heights. Therefore the HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group ordered that the 2 German Bicycle Brigade should transfer to the Carpathian Corps.

The Russian offensive in the Forest Carpathians died down toward the end of September. The XVIII and XXIII Russian Corps had been bled so badly that they could only mount local thrusts.

Despite all the efforts of both these corps, they had failed to break through at Kirlibaba and in the Ludowa area. The Russian III Cavalry Corps had also been unsuccessful in their envelopment attack at Dorna Watra. The Romanians had failed to provide the expected support. After repeated demands from Letschitzky, on 24 September Brussilov finally promised to send XXVI Corps as reinforcements. On the 26<sup>th</sup> the Army commander decided to halt the attack toward Bistritz until the new units arrived by train; the troops at the front should meanwhile be content to consolidate their lines with small operations.

On 24 September Brussilov told Sakharov and Shcherbachev to renew their attack in the general direction of Lemberg. This time Sakharov planned to make his main effort along the Brody-Zloczow road. Shcherbachev selected as his target the bend in the line of South Army which jutted forward south of Brzezany. The two commanders decided to open the battle on the same date, 30 September. The principal offensive of Southwest Front, which would culminate in a combined onslaught by the 8<sup>th</sup> and Special Armies, was postponed until 2 October at the request of General Gurko.

### ***E. Brussilov's last general offensive***

#### **1. The defensive Battle of Korytnica-Zaturcy, 1 October to mid-month**

General Gurko had regrouped the troops of the Special Army. They had been reinforced by units from their neighbors Kaledin and Letsch (the latter under West Front) to seven corps and three cavalry division. To provide sufficient weight for the assault by the left wing, in other sectors of the front Gurko deployed dismounted cavalry in the trenches alongside the extended lines of infantry. The attacking troops between Semerynki and Szelwów included parts of XXXIX Corps and all of XXV (3 Gren Div, 46 ID), XXXIV (56, 104 ID) and XL Corps (20 ID, 4 Rif Div). I Turkestan Corps assembled around Kaszowka as a reserve; they were replaced on the northern wing by 4 Finn Rif and 5 Don Coss Divs. Under 8<sup>th</sup> Army Kaledin had chosen both of the Guard Corps, which had been rebuilt, plus VIII Corps for the attack; available regiments of the IV Sib Corps were attached to them. The right wing of V Corps would pin down their opponents at Tereszkowiec. 2 Rif Div and the main body of V Cavalry Corps were in Front reserve. The Guard cavalry east of Luck were still in the Stavka's reserve. According to Gurko's plan, 1

October and the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> were devoted to artillery preparation.<sup>388</sup>

To be armed against the gathering storm the allies had considerably augmented their artillery, especially the heavy batteries. They had about 12 divisions ready to defend the area where the offensive was anticipated, facing 17 Russian divisions. The total strength of Tersztyanszky's Army, including the reserves which the higher HQ had made available in the Army's sector, was 120 battalions, 62 squadrons and 162 batteries (including 39 heavy batteries) as of 1 October.<sup>389</sup> The three k.u.k. cavalry divisions undergoing reorganization had been instructed to have some units available to intervene.

#### 1-5 October

On 1 October the Russian artillery fired for effect against Armeegruppe Marwitz and the neighboring sector of X German Corps. During the day the bombardment swelled to an extraordinary intensity that had never been reached in earlier battles. Above all, the enemy firestorm pounded the northern half of Group Beckmann, both wings of Corps Szurmay, and the center of the k.u.k. X Corps. The commanders brought their reserves nearer to the threatened parts of the front. The activity of the enemy infantry, however, was restricted to probing attacks; whenever such attempts were observed the Russian assembly areas were hit by the defenders' batteries. Waves of attackers who ventured out of their own maze of trenches, in many cases driven forward by shots from their own batteries, were cut down by defensive fire. In the X German Corps, G.Lt Schöler's 20 ID was under a continuous heavy bombardment, which at times extended also to 121 ID. GO Tersztyanszky gave IR 341 (of 86 ID) to the Corps commander, who concentrated all available reserves on the right of his sector. At Linsingen's command, Bernhardi sent the last regiment of 75 Res ID still in his area to Ozierany.

The events of 1 October were the prelude to the battle which burst out on the next day with full fury along the front between Korytnica and Zubilno. After daybreak the enemy artillery began to rage with an intensity that - as Marwitz reported - reminded him of "conditions in the West"; it included a plentiful

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388 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 86 ff.

389 There were 32 battalions, 45 squadrons and 77 batteries of Aus-Hung. troops, and 88 battalions, 17 squadrons and 85 batteries of German troops.

expenditure of gas shells. In the morning parts of II Russian Guard Corps penetrated a small part of the trenches of 11 ID, but were soon thrown out by companies of the sector reserve. Later in the morning all of Kaledin's attacking corps stormed forward, joined at noon by Gurko's. The grim struggle lasted throughout the day. The Russian commanders continued to push their thickly-deployed masses forward, sometimes using force, regardless of the casualties inflicted by the defenders' death-dealing guns. The Guards made seventeen failed assaults between Korytnica and Wojnin against Beckmann and Szurmay; XXXIV Russian Corps, which attacked Csanady's lines twelve times, was equally unsuccessful. Many of the attacking waves were able to break into very limited parts of the positions, but then were always pushed back, either by the original defenders in hand-to-hand combat or by quickly-mounted counterattacks. The allies' high-level commanders had sufficient reserves for this purpose. 20 German ID, in their advanced position between Zaturcy and Zubilno, fought a bitter struggle with the Russians' XXV Corps and 53 ID until evening, when they expelled the intruders from the last trenches they'd entered.

On 3 October, after an attack collapsed in front of Beckmann's northern wing, Kaledin's Army refrained from further attempts for the rest of the day. Marwitz surmised correctly that the enemy's heavy batteries had used up their ammunition.<sup>390</sup> But Gurko urged his troops on to new assaults which led to heavy fighting - lasting until nightfall - for the k.u.k. X Corps and the neighboring Germans. The defenders, including Battalion V/103, FJB 29 and LW IR 24 under Csanady, brilliantly passed this new test of their staying power. A Russian surprise attack with gas grenades also failed. The backbone of the successful defense was the powerful artillery; the Aus-Hung. batteries under Marwitz had fired 96,000 rounds since 1 October.

The two days of sharp defensive fighting hadn't involved any large-scale counterattacks; nevertheless they didn't pass without significant casualties. It was necessary to provide fresh men for the foremost lines. For this purpose Linsingen gave Armee-gruppe Marwitz a regiment from 86 ID which Litzmann didn't need; the Army Group reserves behind the center of Group Schmidt-Knobelsdorf were shifted to the southern wing.

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390 Zayonchkovsky (p. 90) states that the Russian batteries weren't able to suppress "the barrages of their opponents' powerful artillery." Gurko complained on the 3<sup>rd</sup> about insufficient ammunition supplies.

On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the battle flared up anew along the entire front. Both Russian armies thrust against Marwitz and the German 20 ID; on the blood-soaked fields in front of Korytnica, Bubnow, Wojnin, Szelwów, Zaturcy and Zubilno they strove in vain to make a breach in the dam with which Tersztyanszky's Army blocked the way to Vladimir-Volynsky. A small penetration of 11 ID's position was eliminated; an advanced position of the northern wing of Schöler's Division was lost but then recovered. Afterwards, by evening the allies were in full control of their lines.

On the next day there were still some occasional bursts of artillery fire and lively skirmishing, but even this activity died out quickly. The enemy was exhausted.

#### Alexeiev changes his strategy

While the battle in front of Vladimir-Volynsky was still raging, the Russian Chief of Staff Alexeiev was confronted by some serious questions. General Letschitzky's 9<sup>th</sup> Army was supposed to be advancing from Dorna Watra on the extreme left wing of the Tsar's armies in conjunction with the Romanians, but their attack had stalled. Letschitzky was awaiting reinforcements for his units, which were spread out over a wide area. The Romanians were complaining that the General wasn't supporting them<sup>391</sup>, and after the Battle of Hermannstadt made urgent appeals to Mogilev for help. Alexeiev saw that his original plan of operations needed to be modified, and on 2 October shared his analysis of the general situation with the commander of the Southwest Front. Because of the weakness of the artillery available north of the Pripyat, there was no opportunity to seriously grapple with the Germans in that area. The offensive of the Western Powers in France was proceeding only slowly. Germany therefore had enough units to throw against Romania, which already had suffered one substantial defeat. The intentions of the Germans in Transyl-vania weren't clear yet, but there were indications that they might undertake a powerful blow in the direction Agiudu-nuou - Focsani, which was the most dangerous possibility. Such a thrust could rip apart the Russo-Romanian front, or even lead to an invasion of the Tsar's southern provinces. With a thrust in another direction - against Galatz - the Germans could fully encircle the Romanian Army. To fend off this danger, the southern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army would have to be considerably reinforced at the expense of the 8<sup>th</sup> and Special Armies, even if this meant canceling any further

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391 Klembovsky, pp. 105 ff. Zayonchkovsky, p. 83

attack toward Vladimir-Volynsky. One or two corps from the North and West Fronts would be sent to Dobruja.

Alexeiev demanded to know Brussilov's opinion of these statements. The latter couldn't refute the reasoning of the Chief of the General Staff and went along with his proposals; he asked only to keep one corps as a strategic reserve. Soon (on 4 October) Alexeiev issued by telephone an order based on this exchange of ideas, before Brussilov's Chief of Staff Klembovsky could change his pliable commander's mind. The staff at HQ of Southwest Front still believed they could break their opponents' resistance in front of Vladimir-Volynsky; the two armies of their northern wing had plentiful reserves and it seemed a shame to prematurely terminate the offensive. At Mogilev the Stavka couldn't pluck up their courage to make a firm decision. It was mainly the Tsar, as Alexeiev let it be known on the 5<sup>th</sup>, who was absolutely opposed to continuing an operation that promised only large casualties and small results. The Stavka issued a message at the same time leaving the final decision to Brussilov's judgement, and ordering that XXXVI Corps from the West Front should be sent south. Possibly a corps would be sent from North Front as well.

General Gurko confidently hoped to inflict serious damage on the Germans if he pressed them without letting up; for this purpose he was already assembling a strong attacking group in front of Zaturcy. On 6 October, eight hours after the last orders were sent to General Brussilov, Alexeiev wired that the Tsar had been informed of Gurko's intentions and would agree to continue the offensive in Volhynia if Brussilov felt that this would be advantageous. In any event, however, 9<sup>th</sup> Army would need quick help from other parts of the Southwest Front.

Meanwhile the situation of the Romanians deteriorated from day to day. Their northern group, while seeking to stay linked with the main body of their armies to the left, might thereby lose their tenuous connection with the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army on their right. The Romanians therefore urged that the Russians should extend their front to the south. Alexeiev basically agreed and ordered that besides the corps already chosen to reinforce 9<sup>th</sup> Army (XXVI and XXXVI) the IV Sib Corps should also be sent. To allow Letschitzky to concentrate upon his new task with full attention, the Stavka would organize the northern half of his existing force into a new 8<sup>th</sup> Army. Kaledin and his staff would therefore move to Kolomea; the units which he had hitherto commanded would be reassigned to the Special Army. This was also agreeable to Brussilov, since it meant that the next

operation toward Vladimir-Volynsky would be under the complete control of the energetic General Gurko.

Thus on 2 October, while Brussilov's general offensive was still in full gear, Alexeiev hadn't concealed the fact that he no longer believed the Southwest Front could win success in battle against the Central Powers based on his plans. Increasingly he looked to the future with foreboding; in Transylvania he was content to leave the initiative to his opponents and was thinking only of counter-measures. It is true that after some wavering the Stavka finally gave in to the commander of Southwest Front on 6 October, but all the orders they issued from Mogilev made it clear that they had changed their own outlook. The main priority would be to support Romania. Brussilov wasn't given any new strategic goals, and the hope of causing the downfall of the Central Powers with a breakthrough in Volhynia was abandoned. The Stavka was no longer demanding attacks toward Kovel, but only permitting them in order to avoid dampening the local commanders' thirst for action. They didn't expect the operation to succeed and wouldn't provide any more reserves for it. One of Alexeiev's intentions may have been to give Gurko, who was considered an excellent general, an opportunity to prove his capabilities.<sup>392</sup>

#### Changes in the allied order of battle

The pause in fighting was used in 4<sup>th</sup> Army's area to reorganize the divisional sectors of Szurmay's and Csanady's Corps. As Conrad demanded, 70 Hon ID was to be pulled from the front and sent to Transylvania, where it had originally been formed to defend the province. On 7 October its former sector was taken over by the staff of German 10 LW ID, which at the same time came under Szurmay's command. The adjacent southern portion of the k.u.k. X Corps was placed under the HQ of 13 LW ID; the 2 ID still held the center of this Corps, and Linsingen assigned a German brigade HQ to take over the northern sector.<sup>393</sup> The mixture of German and Aus-Hung. troops, which had proved its worth in the defensive fighting, was maintained in the individual defensive sectors. The entire northern part of Beckmann's group was now under the HQ of 115 ID. Linsingen had already provided four fresh battalions on 4 October, but immediately afterward sent far more troops by transferring

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392 Zayonchkovsky, p. 91

393 Until this brigade HQ arrived, FML Kalser continued to control the sector; he didn't take over the new area assigned to his Division until the 10<sup>th</sup>.

almost all of Armeegruppe Bernhardi's reserves. Under Corps Fath it was necessary to relieve the Polish Legion.<sup>394</sup> The Poles were sent to Baranowicze in the area of Army Group Woyrsch, and on 7 October their sector was divided between 26 LW ID and 4 ID of II Corps. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the hitherto unemployed HQ of G.Lt von Wernitz's 86 German ID took command over the right half of Fath's front (Kneussl's sector). German troops relieved 11 Bav ID, making it available for the Romanian theater of operations. The scattered units of 86 ID (whose infantry were stationed with the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army) were gradually assembled according to their correct order of battle.

On 5 October GO Conrad again offered the German OHL the 10 CD for service in Transylvania, but was told that it was intended that all three k.u.k. cavalry divisions would be used on the Eastern front to free up German troops who were "urgently" needed elsewhere.

#### Operations from 7 October to mid-month

On 7 October the enemy greatly increased their artillery fire against Tersztyanszky's Army, expending gas shells. This bombardment and the usual preparations for an infantry assault betrayed their intentions. Without waiting for further clarification, Marwitz therefore asked for reserves. General Gurko had completed his arrangements quickly; he deployed I Turkestan Corps in front of Zaturcy and replaced 53 ID (on the northern wing of XXV Corps) with 102 ID from XXXIX Corps.<sup>395</sup>

8 October was a day of major action for Armeegruppe Marwitz and the right wing of X German Corps. Strongly swelling Russian artillery fire was the prelude. In the afternoon Group Beckmann repaid the Russians with a powerful and effective bombardment of their maze of trenches; the enemy in turn replied only with small-caliber guns. The Russian infantry attacks were not quite as strong as previously. The k.u.k. 11 ID and 13 LW ID easily

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394 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The movement of the Poles was part of the Germans' ultimately unsuccessful plan to create a large Polish Army. See L. Dudek, "Polish Military Formations" in "War and Society in East-Central Europe", Vol. XIX (New York, 1985), p. 459. "The idea was to form a Polish army to be employed in operations against Russia, allowing the transfer of the German troops thus released to the western front....At the end of November the Polish Legion was transferred [from Aus-Hung. control] to the Kingdom of Poland for training."

395 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 98 ff.

drove back their opponents. In front of 2 ID, and especially by the Slovakian FJB 29, the Russians stubbornly advanced five times, but each time recoiled with heavy losses. In Kalser's sector of X Corps some brilliantly handled batteries prevented any attack with oblique fire from the northern bank of the Turya. However, Gurko's main efforts were directed against the southern wing of Schmidt-Knobelsdorf's Corps. The 20 German ID carried on a difficult action against XXV Russian Corps and the Turkestanis. Four times the thick waves of attackers thrust ahead. The defenders finally used hand grenades to win a decision in the trench fighting.

The latest defeat forced the enemy to remain quiet for the next three days. Now the staff and infantry of 70 Hon ID moved back entrain at Vladimir-Volynsky. The batteries of 37 Hon FA Bde also left for Transylvania, following the rest of their Division.

Gurko had by no means given up hope that he could win success. On quiet parts of his front he still had troops who hadn't fought in the latest breakthrough attempt. He brought up the I and XXX Corps. This movement wasn't concealed from the allies. Increased artillery fire and the resumption of sapping work from 12 October indicated that there would be new attacks, which deserters indicated were scheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup>.

## **2. New Russian assaults against the Armies of Böhm-Ermolli and Bothmer, 30 September to mid-October**

New actions embroiled Böhm-Ermolli's and Bothmer's Armies on 30 September.

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

After the failed attempts to break through at Zborow and Perepelniki, General Sakharov switched his main effort to the area south of the rail line from Brody. Early on the 30<sup>th</sup> he began a heavy attack on both sides of the Brody-Zloczow road with two corps: V Sib (6 Sib Rif Div, 50 and 84 ID) and XXXII (101 and 105 ID). This blow struck the northern wing of FML Ritt. von Goglia's V Corps and southern wing of FML Czibulka's XVIII Corps. In GM Etzel's Group of the latter Corps (German 2 CD, reinforced by Res Jaeger Bn 21, k.u.k. IR 19 and k.k. 106 Lst ID) the Russians penetrated the trenches of IR 19 next to the rail line; however, quick intervention by the local reserves recovered the lost area by early on 1 October.

North of Jasionow a group led by Col. Pfalz stoutly repulsed seven infantry assaults in the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>396</sup> On the other hand, north of Zarkow troops from V Sib Corps broke through the positions of 27 ID, which had been destroyed by drumfire, on a front of three kilometers. The Russians pushed IR 67 back south through Wolica. Here the Hungarians of IR 67 and 34, along with Res IR 226 which had stood ready to back up 27 ID, were able to bring the thrust to a halt.<sup>397</sup>

To restore the situation at Zarkow, GO Böhm-Ermolli sent to the point of penetration the reserves stationed behind the northern wing of Group Eben - the German IR 171 - plus one battalion each of the k.u.k. 14 ID and German 195 ID; he entrusted G.Lt Melior with command of the counterattack. When the German Eastern Command learned of the very dangerous situation of V Corps they shifted to Ozydow by rail a German Landwehr regiment from the reserves stationed at Lemberg; it would be followed by 8 German Cav Bde, coming from Brest-Litovsk by train.

Early on 1 October, General Sakharov wanted to exploit the success won the day before and to continue the offensive. Strong units of V Sib Corps in the woods north of Zarkow were ready to strike when Aus-Hung. and German regiments (k.u.k. IR 34, German IR 171 and Res IR 226) began their counterattack under G.Lt Melior. In bitter fighting that lasted until the morning of 2 October the old positions of 27 ID were recaptured. More than 2600 Russians were taken prisoner, and 13 machine guns seized.

After a short interruption, in the afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup> the commander of 11th Russian Army renewed his attack. He sought to break through the front of Böhm-Ermolli's front with the worn out XVII Corps between Manajow and Zwyzyn and with V Sib and XXXII Corps between Zarkow and the railroad from Brody. But the fire of the Aus-Hung. and German batteries upon the trenches of the Russian infantry kept Sakharov's attack from even starting.

Under IV Corps, the northern wing of 14 ID themselves went over to the offensive in the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup>; early on the 5<sup>th</sup> they took the forward Russian positions at Manajow. While this was

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396 Pfalz's Group consisted of IR 85, Cav Rif Bns I and II/4, four squadrons of V Corps' divisional cavalry, and parts of BH IR 3.

397 In these actions Lt.i.d.R. Arthur Cumin of IR 67 won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

going on, the Russian VII and XVII Corps again thrust against Group Eben. All the enemy's efforts were shattered by the defenders' artillery barrage. Only at Batkow did the Russians gain a limited success, which was soon canceled by counter-attacks from 33 ID.

On 5 October the V Sib Corps launched a violent new blow. After an abundant bombardment by gas grenades, at noon the brown masses stormed forward against Zarkow and Jasionow. At the same time, troops from the XXXII Russian Corps tried to break through along the rail line. GO Böhm-Ermolli had meanwhile assigned to V Corps the reserves placed at his disposal by the German Eastern Command, but these units didn't have to intervene. The Hungarian troops of 27 and 31 ID already fighting in the front line, along with the Upper Alsatian IR 171 and Res IR 226 from the Mark of Brandenburg, held up without bending; five Russian attacks at Jasinow collapsed with bloody losses in front of the barricades. On both sides of the railroad from Brody Col. Pfalz's group and the southern wing of GM Etzel's Group easily repulsed some weaker thrusts. Thousands of dead or wounded Russians were lying in front of Böhm-Ermolli's battle lines. The Russian divisions, discouraged by heavy casualties, refrained from any further attempts on 6 October. The latest attempt by Sakharov's Army to break through at Zloczow had collapsed.

#### South Army

Meanwhile a mighty new storm had also been unleashed against Bothmer's Army. General Shcherbachev attacked on 30 September with his 7<sup>th</sup> Army; once again he directed his main blow between the Narajowka and Zlota Lipa toward Rohatyn, even though the Stavka had advised him to give priority to the area south of the Dniester so that he could rip apart the flank of South Army through Kalusz. Shcherbachev hadn't agreed with the Stavka that there was any chance of success on his left wing, apparently because the forces there weren't sufficient to carry out a decisive stroke against the positions occupied by German troops. Therefore on 30 September he only opened diversionary fire on the lines of the German X and XXIV Res Corps, while seeking to soften up the positions of Turkish XV Corps and Corps Hofmann with drumfire.

At 2:00 PM Shcherbachev sent III Cauc Corps forward from the area south of Potutory, seeking to break through past Mieczyszczow. At the same time, six regiments of XVI Corps thrust ahead north of the road between Litiatyn and Brzezany.

The Turks repulsed the Russian onslaught in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. The enemy attacking Corps Hofmann managed to penetrate the first line of 55 ID north of the road from Litiatyn. Since counterattacks by the local reserves failed, the defenders sealed off the penetration by holding the second position. When GdI Bothmer learned about this setback to 55 ID, he sent the German IR 54 of 36 Res ID, which had just arrived at Bukaczowce, to Brzezany and made it available to FML Hofmann for his counterattack.

Early on 1 October the III Cauc Corps resumed fighting, along with 26 ID of II Russian Corps. Although their attacks were shattered along the front of XV Turkish Corps, the latter suffered substantial casualties and had to be reinforced by parts of 216 and 119 ID, as well as by the Leib Hussar Brigade which had been in reserve at Nadworozniow.

North of Potutory the XVI Russian Corps attempted on 1 October to exploit the success they'd won the day before, but all their efforts were in vain. The enemy were able to gain some ground north of Potutory, but on the Lysonia Heights they encountered the German IR 54 which put an end to their advance. In the evening the 55 ID, along with the German reinforcements, tried to recover their old positions at the mouth of the Ceniowka, but were unable to advance at all. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> the Russian XVI Corps captured the Lysonia Heights, but the German IR 54 immediately retook this strong point.

On 3 October there was a pause in the fighting for both XV Turkish Corps and Corps Hofmann. But Shcherbachev had not yet given up on his offensive. He pushed III Cauc Corps, the right wing of II Corps, and the left of XVI Corps still tighter together to seek a massive breakthrough with seven divisions - 26, 108, 21, 52, 47, 23 and 113 ID - between the Popielichna Heights and Szybalin. While preparations were being made for this new assault, diversionary thrusts were carried out by VI Russian Corps at Zborow and by XXII (Finnish) Corps on the Narajowka. The weak Russian thrusts at Zborow didn't get through the outposts of the IX k.u.k. Corps. On the Narajowka the Finns were driven out of no-man's land in small-scale operations by the German X and XXIV Res Corps.

In the afternoon of 4 October the Russian divisions worked their way forward again toward the positions of XV Turkish Corps and Corps Hofmann. In the evening the fire of the Russian artillery increased and in the next morning (5 October) reached the level of drumfire. At 10:00 AM a powerful assault was unleashed

against Mieczyszców and Brzezany. The Honved of 55 ID and the Turks, supported by units of 36 Res ID and by parts of 54 ID, stood fast and shattered the mass of attackers. The Russians were able to penetrate their opponents' lines only at Posuchów and on the Lysonia Heights. Hon IR 309 counterattacked at Posuchów and threw the enemy back over the Złota Lipa<sup>398</sup>; German IR 54 cleared the intruders out of the trenches on the Lysonia Heights. At noon the attacking waves of Russians flowed forward again against the inner wings of XV Turkish Corps and of Corps Hofmann. This attack was also repulsed.

But the Russians still didn't give up their attempts to open the way to Rohatyn and Brzezany. Their batteries began to fire again at dawn on 6 October, especially against the Lysonia Heights; the bombardment extended to the sector of 216 German ID at Lipnica dolna. New assaults were expected between the Narajówka and Złota Lipa, but the Russian infantry had been bled white and could be rallied for an attack only at Potutory. Thus the enemy struck the inner wings of XV Turkish Corps and Corps Hofmann, but suffered the same fate as before. In the evening there was quiet in the Turkish sector and that of Corps Hofmann. Exhaustion and enormous casualties forced the Russians to refrain from further breakthrough attempts. Only around a few parts of the trenches on the Lysonia Heights did some fighting continue on 7 and 8 October.

During these two days the Russians maintained lively artillery fire along the Narajówka. At many points they bridged the river and sought to expand toward the south the bridgehead they'd won on the western bank at Swistelniki in mid-September. But the Finns of XXII Corps were able to gain a footing on the west bank only with some weak forces at Herbutów. On 9 October storm troops from 3 Gd ID drove into this village and pushed the enemy back over the river. Thus the way to Rohatyn remained closed to Shcherbachev's Army on the Narajówka, just as on the Złota Lipa.

While the battles at Brzezany and Złoczów were still heavily raging, on 4 October an order from GO Conrad led to a new organization of the chain of command. As of 5 October, Bothmer's Army was assigned to the German Eastern Command of GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria, and this Army along with 2<sup>nd</sup> Army constituted an Army Group under GO Böhm-Ermolli. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army received IX Corps (19 and 32 ID), which was placed under GdI

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398 Here Major Jakob Wiblinger of IR 26, commanding Hon IR 309, was especially distinguished; for this deed he won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria-Theresia Order.

Eben's Group. 38 Hon ID was assigned to Corps Hofmann.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> the Eastern Command ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to give up part of the German reinforcements they'd recently received. On the 7<sup>th</sup> the German 8 Cav Bde moved by rail from Ozydow to Lemberg. Three days later they were followed by Res IR 226, which like the other troops of 49 Res ID were being sent to Rohatyn to join South Army. In turn GdI Bothmer pulled 208 ID out of the front so it could move to the Western Front.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

At the end of September Russian activity became very lively opposite the northern wing of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. GO Kövess held half of 21 LW ID ready in the area east of Kalusz as the Army's reserve. On 30 September, and again in the following night, the outposts of Corps Csicseric were attacked at Bohordczany. At the same time Russian artillery bombarded the battle lines of Group Hadfy. Troops of XLI Corps dug forward at Stanislau toward the positions of 21 LW ID. Because of this uncertain situation Abele's 2 CD, which was deployed on the northern wing of Group Hadfy, was relieved by German Landsturm in the night of 3-4 October and held behind the front as a light mobile reserve. On the 7<sup>th</sup> there was lively skirmishing on the upper Bystrzyca Solotwinska between scouting detachments of VIII Corps and the foremost troops of XII Russian Corps. On the next day the 21 LW ID had to withstand an attack by hand grenades southwest of Stanislau. However, it was soon apparent that these Russian actions were designed only to divert attention from the Narajowka and to pin down the units of Kövess' Army. The k.u.k. high command had meanwhile ordered that 15 ID, the remnants of whose troops had been absorbed within 36 ID in September, should be rebuilt.

### **3. The Russian offensive in the Forest Carpathians stagnates, from the end of September to mid-October**

The strong pressure from the Romanians which was noticeable on the upper Kl. Kokel and in the Maros valley in the last days of September compelled the k.u.k. high command on 1 October to order the HQ of Army Group Archduke Charles to have units ready to intervene in 1<sup>st</sup> Army's battle. Consistent with this order, on 2 October the Army Group HQ instructed GdK Kirchbach to thrust ahead with the right wing of Habermann's Corps, which meanwhile had been reinforced by Honved Infantry Regiments 306 and 18. GdK Kirchbach was also ordered to send several

companies from the two battalions of 10 Bav ID attached to XI Corps into the Kelemen Mountains, where the appearance of German helmets might deceive the enemy about the defenders' strength.

Presan's Army had meanwhile discontinued their attack toward Szasz Regen. Since 2 October the Romanian group which had been advancing out of the Maros valley against the flank of XI Corps had also been completely inactive, as was the Bistrita Detachment at the Three Countries' Corner. On 4 October it was observed that the enemy was moving to the rear on 1<sup>st</sup> Army's front, so scouting parties from XI Corps thrust ahead on the main ridge of the Kelemen Mountains toward the south and east. It was soon apparent that the Romanians were still holding their positions in the area of the Petrosul and at the Three Countries' Corner. Heavy snowfall and fog forced the right wing of XI Corps to refrain from action in the next few days. Meanwhile Presan's troops retreated from 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 6 October. There was now hope that the Romanians would also abandon their positions in the Kelemen Mountains and at the Three Countries' Corner. As mentioned earlier, in order to ensure that the right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army worked together with 1<sup>st</sup> Army the k.u.k. high command placed XI Corps under GdI Arz effective 7 October.

Prior to 28 September Letschitzky's attack against the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army was already growing weaker, but it continued. At the start of October, his Army restricted their activity to artillery fire and small-scale operations. Because of the precarious situation of the Romanians' North Army, their high command did demand that the Russians should continue to attack at Dorna Watra. However, Letschitzky could no longer expect fresh sacrifices from his III Cavalry Corps, which was spread out along a broad front, to relieve the Romanians. The troops of 103 ID were already noticeably reluctant to fight. On 3 October General Brussilov reported to the Stavka concerning the situation in the Forest Carpathians. Letschitzky's Army was struggling with serious logistical problems. Their over-tired divisions had to use a large part of their infantry just to bring up ammunition and bring back the wounded; for this reason they were much weakened. Also there were insufficient forces available to the Army's left wing for a decisive attack toward Bistritz. Letschitzky therefore had to await the arrival of XXVI Corps by train.

FZM Scheuchenstuel, commanding the k.u.k. I Corps, took advantage of the Russians' inactivity; on 1 October he wrested an advanced position east of Kirlibaba from the enemy with a short thrust by 59 ID. This, however, didn't ease the difficult situation of I Corps. Fire from Russian batteries dominated the

only lateral line of communication, the major road in the valley of the Golden Bistritz. It was urgent to recover the old positions on the Dedul Ridge and the Tatarca Heights. As ordered by the high command, FZM Scheuchenstuel was preparing a larger operation for 14 October. He filled the ranks of 59 ID with replacement troops and the men from Frater's Detachment (Bn IV/50 and half of I/6), who arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> from the Pantyr Pass. Moreover, GdK Kirchbach intended to switch the Jaeger battalions of 30 ID, which were assembling at Ol. Szt. György to back up XI Corps, to I Corps. Army Group HQ ordered Honved Infantry Regiments 13 and 307 to be given up to XI Corps. FML Habermann in turn would send the two battalions of 10 Bav ID to the Carpathian Corps, enabling them to extend their right wing and take over some of I Corps' line.

The situation of the Carpathian Corps *vis a vis* the Russians was also not very favorable. Russian artillery fire made it almost impossible to use the supply line running north from the Prislop Ridge. It was especially disadvantageous that the enemy possessed the Baba Ludowa Heights and Smotrec, from which they looked down upon the positions of the Carpathian Corps. G.Lt Conta was trying to improve his current front, so that he could establish a favorable permanent position before the full onset of winter. At the start of October he reinforced 200 ID, which had been greatly reduced, with the recently-arrived 2 German Bicycle Brigade; however, he had to give up the German Lst IR 37 - which thus became available - to Falkenhayn's Army. After bitter hand-to-hand fighting, on 8 October German Jaeger wrested from the enemy the ridge that stretches southwest from the Baba Ludowa. The Russians tried in vain on the 9<sup>th</sup> to recapture their lost trenches. At the same time the enemy became more active again at the Pantyr Pass. Here FML Brudermann's new group (created on 5 October from 3 CD and 12 ID) repulsed weak thrusts by the Russian 59 ID. At Kirlibaba the enemy carried out operations on the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> against 40 Hon ID, but had no success. On the southern slope of the Dedul Ridge and on the Botosul the defenders (59 k.u.k. ID and 8 CD) used strong fire from trench mortars to prevent the Russians from coming closer. In general, however, at the start of October there was no indication that the Russians were resuming their great offensive in the Forest Carpathians.

On this point, the high command expressed their opinions (in a telegram sent to Army Group HQ on 7 October) as follows: "The latest reports and the general situation make it seem possible that the Russian offensive in the Carpathians is coming to a halt, and that we might anticipate the transfer of Russian units

from this front. It is necessary to free up forces as soon as possible for the decisive fighting on the Romanian front." Therefore GO Conrad asked whether - and when - it would be possible for 7<sup>th</sup> Army to relieve a German division. In an answering telegram, Army Group HQ agreed with the AOK's assessment; they believed that they could give up 10 Bav ID, but not until the planned operation at Kirlibaba was carried out.

Meanwhile the staff at Teschen received an intercepted Russian wireless message, in which the Stavka instructed their 9<sup>th</sup> Army "to operate in the area of Kirlibaba and Dorna Watra together with the Romanians." Now the k.u.k. high command once more had to believe that 7<sup>th</sup> Army's right wing would be the target of a new Russian onslaught; on 8 October they ordered Archduke Charles' Army Group HQ to take measures to defend against the enemy. Already on the 9<sup>th</sup> the evidence was increasing that a new attack on the Dorna Watra - Kirlibaba front was imminent. By intercepting another Russian wireless message it was learned that the HQ of their XXVI Corps had arrived at Moldova Sulitza. In the next few days, aviators reported that troops were arriving behind the Russian front in Bukovina. But as of 12 October no fresh Russian units had been identified in front of 7<sup>th</sup> Army's right wing - just units whose presence was already known. Therefore FZM Scheuchenstuel reported that now he no longer expected a Russian attack on Kirlibaba.

Before the middle of October Brussilov's general offensive, which had opened at the start of the month with wide-ranging goals, had been shattered. It had degenerated into isolated attacks which at most pinned down opposing units, but still couldn't prevent blow after blow from descending on the Romanians.

## **VI. The Conquest of Wallachia**

### ***A. Breakthrough actions in the mountains and on the Constanta Railroad, mid-October to early November***

#### **1. The situation and command decisions in mid-October 1916**

##### The overall situation

The extraordinarily great tension which afflicted the Central Powers in the summer and early fall of 1916 was noticeably reduced by mid-October. On the Western front the situation was still quite serious, but the danger of a catastrophe had been overcome thanks to the strenuous efforts of the German armies fighting there. As will be related later, on the Isonzo the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army had repulsed two new Italian onslaughts after the fall of Görz. In Macedonia fighting continued at the bend in the Cerna; its length and outcome could not yet be foretold. On the Russian front, however, the offensive capability of the Tsar's armies was noticeably diminishing after heavy combat which had lasted for months. Therefore the high commands at Teschen and Pless were even contemplating the transfer of further units to Transylvania, not only from the area north of the Pripyat but also from the Carpathian front. The Romanians had already been severely defeated in Transylvania and in southern Dobruja. The quadruple alliance had regained the initiative and were resolved to take advantage of it.

In mid-October Mackensen's Army Group stood ready for a further advance past the Cernavoda-Constanta railroad. In Transylvania the divisions of Generals Falkenhayn and Arz had reached the border after decisive victories. Reinforcements now arriving by rail would make it possible to invade Wallachia. It was urgently necessary for the Central Powers to quickly capitalize on this opportunity. Wallachia could yield a rich supply of foodstuffs, raw materials and especially oil, all of which were already in short supply for the allies. Holding the province would also make it possible to establish a short front line between the southeastern corner of Transylvania and the Black Sea, so that divisions could be made available for use elsewhere.

##### Plans of the quadruple alliance

Naturally the high commands of the Central Powers went over the plans for continuing the war with Romania in great detail. Ludendorff felt the most advantageous approach would be to have the armies in Transylvania and Mackensen's Army Group advance with their inner wings, in the shortest direction toward Galatz, until they reached the Sereth and the lower Danube. But strong resistance in the mountains on the Transylvania border made it necessary to alter this plan. Mackensen would still strike the enemy in Dobruja, but then would pursue them with just part of his forces; he'd lead the main body of his units over the Danube south of Bucharest. The German 9<sup>th</sup> Army would penetrate Wallachia from the Transylvanian Alps. Once both armies were in Wallachia they would defeat the enemy and seek to unite.<sup>399</sup>

The operation out of Transylvania would now be led by the Army Group of the Archduke-Successor, Charles Franz Joseph. After a short leave he arrived in Grosswardein on 13 October.<sup>400</sup> At this point the new chain of command decreed on the 4<sup>th</sup> (as described earlier) came into effect. The k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was no longer under Falkenhayn's orders.

When the Archduke came to his new HQ, he received an order issued from Teschen in coordination with the German OHL. He was to "force a crossing over the mountains with the main body of 9<sup>th</sup> Army and continue to advance in the direction of Bucharest, while the other parts of the Army Group protect the rear of the advancing 9<sup>th</sup> Army and the borders of Hungary and Transylvania." In particular it was stated that if enemy units thrust from the line Piatra-Ocna they should be repulsed on Romanian soil; the railroad and telegraph lines in Moldavia would be destroyed. It was suggested that Army Group HQ should transfer troops from the Carpathians to ensure that the thrust into Romania was carried out with the strongest possible forces.

This final suggestion originated with Ludendorff. He wanted to free up German units for Transylvania from the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army - if possible 117 ID or 10 Bav ID - because he had the impression that the Russian advance in the Forest Carpathians would soon come to a complete halt.

The mission of the Archduke-Successor was now to render the Romanians harmless, by finally destroying their Army or large parts of it, before their allies could come to help. The task

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399 Ludendorff, p. 227

400 Werkmann, p. 51

was assigned mainly to 9<sup>th</sup> Army, which was given the necessary orders for its fulfillment. The staff at Grosswardein believed that, in addition to the Romanian units which had fallen back into Moldavia and those which directly confronted 9<sup>th</sup> Army, the enemy had deployed large forces by Bucharest. They would be the target of Falkenhayn's principal effort. His right wing, the reinforced Alpenkorps, would advance through Curtea d'Arges with a covering force in the Alt valley. The troops in the Mehadia and Petroseny sectors should take advantage of any opportunity to advance toward Craiova. The direction of Falkenhayn's main assault - whether through Campulung, Targovistea or Ploesti - would depend on where he broke through the fortifications on the border. There was a strong cavalry force coming by rail; Falkenhayn would deploy them where they could not only guard the eastern flank of the attack on Bucharest, but could also drive into the lower Sereth valley, completely separating the various parts of the enemy Army.

Meanwhile Falkenhayn had already modified his plan of operations because of the Romanians' stubborn resistance in the border passes south of Kronstadt. He wanted the breakthrough attack to take place not only in the Alt valley and on the roads from Kronstadt to Ploesti, but also south of Petroseny. In the latter sector the enemy was apparently weak, the width of the mountains was relatively small, and the reinforcements could be deployed most quickly. (The rail lines leading farther east had far less capacity and at the moment could only be used as far as Reps and Fogaras.) This operation at Petroseny would now involve 301 ID (already stationed there) plus 11 Bav ID, 6 German CD, and German Bicycle Battalions # 4 and 5. After breaking through the Vulkan Mountains these units would unbar the routes into Wallachia for the other attacking groups. The other German reinforcements which had been selected (7 CD, 8 Bav Res ID, 12 Bav ID), and later the 10 Bav ID, would upon arrival at first be assigned to the Army's reserves; then they would be deployed where the prospects of breaking through were the best or where attacks had revealed a weak spot in the enemy lines.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> the German and Aus-Hung. high commands expressed their agreement with this plan of GdI Falkenhayn. GO Conrad also took this opportunity to stress that the main effort from Kronstadt to Ploesti shouldn't be weakened in favor of attacks in the Szurduk and Red Tower Passes.

#### Russia plans to assist Romania

The Entente had hoped that after they were joined by Romania

they would bring the Central Powers to their knees by the end of 1916. The total failure of the Romanian Army therefore was a completely unexpected and very painful disappointment. Instead of tipping the scales in favor of the Entente, the Romanians were now themselves urgently demanding support. Russia, Sarrail's Entente Army and - as will be related later - also Italy had already undertaken operations to help Romania, but hadn't provided relief in either Dobruja or Transylvania. Since Romania's distress meanwhile continued to increase, only direct support by troop transfers could now make a difference. Naturally such support could come only from Russia.

The Romanian ambassador to St Petersburg, Diamandi, forcefully requested two - and then three - corps on and after 7 October. Alexeiev did decide to send three corps: XXVI (which had already arrived under 9<sup>th</sup> Army), XXXVI (from West Front) and IV Sib (from the Special Army); this would allow 9<sup>th</sup> Army to relieve the Romanians as far as the line Brosceni (on the Golden Bistritz) - Marosheviz - Szasz Regen. But the Romanians had just gotten this concession when their military plenipotentiary General Coanda made a new request on 10 October; because of the assembly of strong opposing forces at Szasz Regen he asked the Russians to relieve Presan's entire Army. Alexeiev didn't agree to this request.<sup>401</sup>

Meanwhile GdI Letschitzky, commanding 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, prepared to attack the Carpathian sector Körösmezö-Bistritz; he planned to shift XXVI and IV Sib Corps to reinforce the pressure from his southern wing. 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies would be attacking together. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies retained their earlier assignments. In Volhynia the Special Army would again strike toward Vladimir-Volynsky.

But before the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies could begin their operation, the Romanian North Army retreated as described earlier. Thus the left wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army was left uncovered; only the Romanian Bistrita Detachment remained in touch with the Russians, and was placed under General Letschitzky. Now, with the Stavka's consent, he refrained from attacking Dorna Watra and would just send XVIII and XXVI Corps against Kirlibaba. III Cavalry Corps and XXXVI Corps (when it arrived) would relieve the Romanians as far as the line Dorna Watra - Marosheviz. IV Sib Corps would assemble in reserve at Piatra.

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401 Zayonchkovsky, p. 95

This gradual extension of the line toward the south was not to Alexeiev's liking. He would have preferred that all the corps he was shifting to Transylvania's eastern front enter the fighting at once. He also began to worry that a further thrust by his opponents into Moldavia could threaten the provinces of southern Russia. Therefore on 15 October he instructed the North and West Fronts to each send a corps to the Bacau-Piatra area, and the Dobruja Army to send a division there. The units chosen for this purpose were the IV and XXIV Corps plus 3 Rif Div. Brussilov had moreover sent two cavalry divisions from Volhynia to 9<sup>th</sup> Army, and after the end of the fighting on the Stokhod he sent a corps to follow them. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army was also reinforced by troops from the 8<sup>th</sup>. Partially altering the orders he'd received, Brussilov next selected II Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army to transfer to Letschitzky. This Corps, along with 14 Romanian ID, placed under the Russians, would close the gap which had developed between them and Presan's Army. When the other corps arrived later, they would be assembled so as to oppose the Aus-Hung. troops who were appearing between Dorna Watra and Ocna.<sup>402</sup>

#### Russian instructions for the Romanians

In mid-October Alexeiev felt obliged to give his Romanian colleague General Iliescu some guidelines for the next phase of the war. He began by comparing the opposing forces. According to Russian evidence, their opponents in Transylvania had 120 battalions and 26 squadrons; in Dobruja and on the Danube they had 131 battalions and 44 squadrons, for a total of 251 and 70. The Romanians had 331 and the Russians 52 battalions, for a total of 383. Therefore the Central Powers didn't have superior strength, although Alexeiev did concede that they had better technical equipment and greater wartime experience. He stated that the primary goal of the next phase of the war would be "the preservation of the Romanian Army, regardless of the cost"; afterwards they could recover the territory they had lost.

As the next measure, Alexeiev suggested that northern Moldavia and Dobruja should be defended, based on the Pruth River. By pulling back the center of their forces the Romanians could shorten the front; but they should do so only when pressed by the enemy. First western Wallachia and then, if necessary, even Bucharest should be given up. The strategic reserves would be assembled in the Ploesti-Buzeu area, apparently so they could deliver a counterattack at an appropriate place.

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402 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 96 ff.

The Stavka Chief of Staff informed the Romanian high command that he was sending four Russian corps to the Piatra-Ocna-Bacau-Roman area; however, due to the poor capacity of the railroads only two corps could be expected in the next few days. Finally he advised that preparations should be initiated to evacuate factories and unnecessary supplies from the threatened portions of Romania and to move them to Russian territory.<sup>403</sup>

#### Organization of the Romanian forces

The defeats to date had substantially shaken the confidence of the Romanian high command. The leading politicians were already demanding the replacement of the Chief of the General Staff, but the King didn't want to lose General Iliescu. The government and population were equally depressed. The country's hospitals could no longer accommodate the many sick or wounded soldiers. Casualties for the first forty days of the war were estimated as 60,000 dead or wounded. It was completely obvious that the Army was insufficiently armed; there were too few machine guns and heavy artillery, and a lack of telephone equipment. Anxiety was heightened by German planes which repeatedly bombed Bucharest at night; by the start of October they had killed around a thousand people. Serious consideration was given to removing the high command and the government to another city.<sup>404</sup>

The operational goal of the high command for their three armies facing Transylvania had to be limited to defending the border. On 14 October the North and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies were placed under "Army Group North" under General Averescu, whose assignment was to coordinate the operations of both forces, especially on their inner wings.<sup>405</sup> Along the 700 km border with Transylvania there were in all eleven infantry divisions, two mixed brigades, a cavalry division and four Calarasi brigades at the front. Two infantry divisions (4 and 8) were in reserve; three more divisions (12, 16 and 15) were coming by rail from Dobruja and from the Danube. In Dobruja four Romanian and four Russian infantry divisions, plus a Russian cavalry division and one Calarasi brigade, held a line between the Danube and the sea; their job was to keep their opponents from thrusting toward the important Constanta railroad line. The only units guarding the northern bank of the Danube were 20 and 18 ID, the remnants of 17 ID, and the 1 CD. The Romanian high command no longer had any strategic reserves. They were also starting to lack

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403 Vasiliev, pp. 99 ff.

404 Marghiloman, Vol. II, p. 210

405 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 523

replacement troops to fill up their weakened units. Therefore Ambassador Diamandi at St Petersburg asked that the more than 100,000 Aus-Hung. soldiers of Romanian nationality then locked up in Russian prisoner-of-war camps should be turned over to the Romanian high command so that they could at least perform labor service. Alexeiev, however, turned down the request.<sup>406</sup>

On 16 October General Berthelot reached Romania as head of a French military mission. Previously he had carried out discussions with the Stavka at Mogilev. General Alexeiev had asked him to make the Romanians understand that they should defend their country on the Sereth rather than along the wall of the Carpathians.<sup>407</sup> Naturally the Romanian high command couldn't agree, as long as their armies were still in control of all the Carpathian passes. Such a strategy would have entailed voluntarily surrendering half of the Kingdom, along with rich natural resources, to their opponents. Berthelot stood by the Romanians in this matter; his prescription also was to "Hold onto the heights."

When Berthelot got off his train at Buftea, he was hailed by Minister President Bratianu as "Chief of the General Staff of the Romanian Armies." But Berthelot turned down this honor; for now he wanted to be just an adviser like his Russian colleague General Belaiev.

#### Prospects of the two warring coalitions

During this period Alexeiev also tried to breathe fresh life into the offensive of the Entente Army of the Orient, since he believed that the Balkans were now the principal theater of the war. He and Joffre agreed to demand that General Sarrail should immediately be sent reinforcements to conquer Bulgaria. France, England and Italy should each send two divisions to Salonika for this purpose. The agreement on the issue was concluded at Boulogne on 20 October, but was soon limited. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the President of the French Republic wrote to the Tsar that he was making one and a half divisions available. The Chief of England's Imperial General Staff, General Robertson, stated that he understood the need to reinforce the Orient Army, but also that in his opinion the Russians and Romanians would be better served by a continuation of the English offensive on the Somme. Cadorna asserted that he could only agree to reinforce the Italian contingent in Macedonia "if Alexeiev in fact has very

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406 Red Archives, Vol. XXIX, pp. 27 ff.

407 Pétain, "Le drama roumain" (Paris, 1932), p. 23

serious intentions of destroying Bulgaria's military potential."<sup>408</sup> Thus it remained to be seen how many reinforcements would really land at Salonika.

With the decisions just narrated, the stage was set for the next moves in the theater of operations in southeastern Europe. In summary, the Central Powers wanted merely to hold onto their long eastern front, but along the southern border of Transylvania they would break into Romania; Falkenhayn expected to win a great success by thrusting over the Vulkan Mountains. Mackensen's first task was to throw back his enemies in northern Dobruja.

The Entente forces, now forced onto the strategic defensive, intended to have Russian corps relieve the Romanian divisions stationed on the northern wing of their armies so the latter could strengthen the threatened parts of the front. On the Macedonian front the attacks by the allied Entente armies would continue. These thrusts were prompted by the Serbs' ambition to capture Monastir and with it a piece of their own territory<sup>409</sup>, and by the intention of Generals Joffre and Alexeiev to provide at least a little relief for the Romanians from the Salonika front.

## **2. The Russian front in the second half of October**

Consistent with Alexeiev's decision to provide the Romanians with direct assistance from Russian corps, the main Russian front had to give up troops to Moldavia and Dobruja in the second half of October. Therefore fighting diminished noticeably; in most cases it was undertaken only to improve local conditions along the front or to cover the removal of troops. Full-scale battle flared up once more only in Volhynia - between Luck and Vladimir-Volynsky - because here the Special Army under their energetic commander General Gurko were renewing the hitherto unsuccessful attack toward Kovel.<sup>410</sup> There was also

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408 Vasiliev, pp. 103 ff.

409 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The desire of the Serbs to recover "their" territory around Monastir, which is mentioned in so many contemporary sources, is of course bunk. There were (and are) hardly any Serbian-speakers in the area, which in fact had just been wrested from the Turks a couple years earlier. Subsequent history proves that the Serbs had as much right to Macedonia as they had to China.

410 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 99 ff.

bitter fighting on the Narajowka, but here it was the Germans rather than the Russians who stormed forward from their trenches. On the always-active Carpathian front there were only some local actions aiming at the possession of several important heights.

### **a. The last battle in Volhynia**

As in earlier attacks, the Special Army sought to take Kovel by first seizing Vladimir-Volynsky. General Gurko massed five corps (XXV, I, I Turkestan and I and II Guards) between Zubilno and Korytnica, aiming to first conquer his opponents' foremost position and then to advance toward Ozdiutyczy. The flanks of this attack group were guarded to the north by XXXIX and XXXIV Corps, and to the south by VIII, V Cavalry and V Corps. Behind the center of the Army the XL and XXX Corps plus the Guard cavalry were stationed in readiness. At Kovel the IV Sib Corps was entraining to move to Moldavia.

#### The actions on 13-18 October

As part of the Russian preparations for the attack, there was a substantial increase in artillery activity already on 13 October. On the next day the fire of the guns swelled mightily, and extended north as far as the German 20 ID. During the day and especially that night the Russians dug their way closer to our positions. There had been mining operations in front of the k.u.k. 11 ID; at one point the enemy blew up a wooded position and penetrated the Division's foremost trench, but were checked by a counterattack. Several sectors of 2 ID of the k.u.k. X Corps were also assaulted on the 14<sup>th</sup>. But these thrusts weren't carried out simultaneously, and the defenders were able to concentrate their artillery fire so as to check the attacks, one after the other. In the evening Beckmann's group also had to repulse two assaults. On the other hand, the expected Russian attack on 20 German ID didn't take place.

All these events gave GO Tersztyanszky's staff the impression that they were on the eve of a major new Russian offensive that would take place between Pustomity and Zubilno.

In fact there was an extraordinarily heavy cannonade on 15 October along the entire fronts of Group Litzmann and 4<sup>th</sup> Army, but infantry attacks were directed only against the latter. To interfere with the assembly of the Russian storm troops, even before dawn Corps Szurmay and 13 LW ID of X Corps hammered the

maze of enemy trenches with artillery and trench mortar fire. The 11 ID continued the counterattack they'd begun the day before, but still couldn't completely drive out the Russians. The German 20 ID engaged in very heavy fighting, in which their accurate defensive fire mowed down the attackers from XXV and I Turkestan Corps who were attempting to move forward in dense masses.

Despite their heavy casualties, on the 16<sup>th</sup> the Russians once again stormed forward in thick columns between Zubilno and Zaturcy. They repeated these assaults ten times. Their only success during the costly attempts was to penetrate a strong point at Zubilno. Farther north, in the sector of the k.u.k. 29 ID, German pioneers released gas against a manor house which the Russians were using as a defensive position on the western bank of the Stokhod; on the next day a German infantry regiment attached to FML Schön's Division stormed this strong point.<sup>411</sup>

The Russians fired gas grenades behind the k.u.k. X Corps, creating a wall of gas which was supposed to hold back the defenders' reserves; in the afternoon the Corps' 2 ID repulsed four attacks and 13 LW ID repulsed two. The 11 ID of Corps Szurmay, whose trenches were constantly under a heavy rain of shells, withstood the Russians, as did 108 ID of Group Beckmann, which in the late afternoon was able to repulse three assaults. And so the Russians were still denied any success. When the shadows of night sank over the blood-soaked battlefield, the allied troops of the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army had successfully withstood another day of major battle.

After the fruitless attacks the Russian infantry didn't venture out of their trenches again on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Only the artillery on both sides continued their destructive work. The sappers of 11 ID also were laboring. On the 18<sup>th</sup> the Russians were driven entirely out of the trench network of this Division. The Russian Guard Rifles tried in vain to recover the lost ground. On the same day the German 19 ID farther north undertook a gas attack, and established themselves firmly in part of the Russian main position.

#### The fighting dies out

The rapid ebbing of the Russian attacks, and their feeble response to sorties into their front, offered the allied high commands an opportunity to find new employment for the cavalry

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411 Schön, 29. ID, p. 71

divisions resting south of Vladimir-Volynsky. 4 CD, in which GM Berndt (hitherto 4<sup>th</sup> Army's Chief of Staff) once more became commander in place of FML Leonhardi<sup>412</sup>, was sent to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; they left behind their machine gun detachments and horse artillery batteries, which were still stationed along Group Beckmann's front. 7 CD - also with just its mounted and foot squadrons - was assigned to Armeegruppe Bernhardi, which now was designated the "reinforced LV Corps." The Division was deployed under Corps Fath, which from now on was called the XXII Corps. 10 CD was sent with all its components to Transylvania.

Fighting substantially slackened off in the next few days. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a special detachment of 11 ID carried out a successful raid, proving that the fighting spirit of this Division, which had suffered greatly during the prolonged battles, was now substantially improved. Six days later (on the 28<sup>th</sup>) the Russians attacked the inner wings of Szurmay's and Csanady's Corps, but so hesitantly that the defenders nipped the effort in the bud. On 1 November the German 121 ID, with effective artillery support from the k.u.k. 29 ID, cleared out the last emplacement the Russians were holding on the west bank of the Stokhod (directly south of Witoniez); the Germans took 22 officers and 1585 men prisoner and also seized 15 machine guns and 7 trench mortars.<sup>413</sup>

A reason for the decline in the Russians' eagerness to attack was provided by some very significant statements from prisoners; they revealed that after the failure of the latest assaults in Gurko's Army there had been instances of refusal to obey orders and even of outright mutiny. The trouble had started in the 4 Rif Div, which had earlier earned the title the "Iron Division", and spread to 20 ID and even to the Guards. The most noteworthy assertion of the prisoners was that there was no longer any talk about the necessity of breaking through the allied positions to immediately reach the Kovel - Vladimir-Volynsky railroad. These signs of deterioration in the Tsar's armies were the first omen of the collapse for which the Central Powers had been eagerly hoping since the Russian retreat in 1915.

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412 Berndt had previously led 4 CD until fall 1915. Now his successor at 4<sup>th</sup> Army's HQ was General Staff-Colonel Freih. von Salis-Samaden.

413 Bruchmüller, "Die deutsche Artillerie in den Durchbruch-Schlachten des Weltkrieges" (Berlin, 1921), pp. 43 ff. Schön, "29. ID", pp. 72 ff.

General Gurko now began to bring order to his units, which had become badly intermingled during the prolonged fighting. With Brussilov's approval, he still intended to resume the offensive in the last days of October with the goal of wearing down his opponents. But after the departure of IV Sib Corps for Romania Gurko was also ordered to send XL Corps, and therefore he gave up the idea of renewing the attacks. He initiated measures for spending the winter in a permanent position. Perhaps the breakdown in discipline mentioned above also played a part in his decision to finally stop the offensive.

Under 4<sup>th</sup> Army the regiments of 218 ID were pulled from their various parts of the front at the end of October and brought together in the area southeast of Vladimir-Volynsky.

The extraordinarily long and costly fighting in Volhynia, which had begun so promisingly for the Russians on 4 June 1916, had thus come to an end. The military historian General Zayonchkovsky later drew up a mournful summary of the Russians' successes, won at an enormous cost in casualties, and of the errors committed by their leadership. He wrote, "Brussilov's breakthrough in the spring, from which so much was expected and which had greatly lifted the spirit of Russia, had foundered against the stubborn barrier of Kovel. It had by no means improved the strategic situation on the Russian front. The traditional fate of the Russian people - to pull chestnuts out of the fire for other nations - was repeated in the summer campaign of 1916, from which their allies gained more advantage than did the Russians themselves."<sup>414</sup>

## **b. The end of the Brussilov Offensive in east Galicia**

### Developments north of the Dniester

In east Galicia on 15 October the two Russian armies stationed north of the Dniester, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, attacked again at Brussilov's order in the direction of Lemberg. GdK Sakharov, commanding 11<sup>th</sup> Army, had originally planned to first have V Sib Corps (supported by XXXII and XVII Corps) recapture the trenches which had been wrested from them by the k.u.k. V Corps. On 6 October he changed his mind and decided that on the 15<sup>th</sup> he would have both corps on his left wing (VII and VI) attack immediately toward Lemberg. Therefore the Russian regiments worked their way closer to their opponents, and the k.u.k. IX Corps (32 and

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414 Zayonchkovsky, p. 105

19 ID) of 2nd Army as well as 38 Hon ID of Bothmer's Army very soon felt the increasing pressure. Army Group HQ shifted the Leib Hussar Brigade, as a reserve, from South Army's sector to Dunajow; moreover they stationed six German battalions behind IX Corps. Under South Army two other German battalions took up positions behind 38 Hon ID.

GdI Shcherbachev, commanding 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, wanted to use his advanced position on the western bank of the Narajowka as a base for an advance through Rohatyn. Therefore he concentrated the XXII (Finnish), VII Sib and II Corps even closer together and reinforced this striking group with 41 ID of XXXIII Corps. He ordered the troops to attack simultaneously on 15 October.

These preparations didn't remain concealed from South Army; when 49 Res ID arrived by train from Lemberg, Army HQ sent the unit to the most likely target area on the right wing of XXIV Res Corps, where it entered the line in place of 208 ID (which left for the Western front on 13 October).

On 14 October the Russians directed more intense artillery fire and scouting thrusts against the sectors which they intended to attack. On the 15<sup>th</sup> they climbed forward from their trenches.

However, the attack on 2<sup>nd</sup> Army wasn't fully developed. The enemy restricted their activity to thrusts against XVIII Corps southwest of Brody, against 31 ID at Pieniaki and against 14 ID north of Perepelniki. Otherwise they held back. Surprisingly, the Russian VII and VI Corps didn't make any serious thrusts against 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's southern wing. Assaults against outposts of IX Corps, mostly undertaken at night, were the only efforts of the Russians stationed between Zborow and Koniuchy on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.

The situation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army made it possible to insert 4 CD into the front east of Olesko in the last days of October; the Division had arrived at Olesko from 4<sup>th</sup> Army on 23 October and completed its reorganization by incorporating Cav Rifle Bns I/4 and II/4, which had been in this area since July. The deployment of 4 CD made it possible to return a battalion of BH IR # 3 to 31 ID and the German LW IR # 5 to 218 ID. On 28 October the 14 ID left by rail to reinforce the Isonzo front. They were replaced by the Leib Hussar Brigade, which had been reinforced by two German infantry regiments.

During this period the situation was much livelier for South Army than it was for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. On 14 October strong Russian

artillery fire pounded the defenses of X Res Corps and of the southern part of XXIV Res Corps; this made the defenders certain that the main thrust of Shcherbachev's Army would be directed against the inner wings of these two corps. The bombardment of Corps Hofmann was correctly interpreted as a diversionary measure. The Turks enjoyed almost complete quiet. And so the battle which burst out on the 15<sup>th</sup> was strictly a fight between the Russians and Germans.

At noon on the 15<sup>th</sup> the hurricane of fire against the northern wing of 199 ID, 3 Gd ID and 49 Res ID increased to enormous intensity; then in the afternoon strong infantry forces undertook a series of assaults against the two latter divisions. They won no success. According to prisoners the attack involved XXII Corps, 41 ID and VII Sib Corps. Opposite the left wing of 49 Res ID and 36 Res ID the operation collapsed under defensive fire before it had a chance to develop.

Aviators scouting behind the forward Russian lines detected large troop concentrations in the area Chochoniow-Byblo-Bokow, including a strong force of cavalry. A mass of artillery was stationed at Konkolniki and farther north. Therefore the fighting was expected to continue.

On 1 October heavy artillery fire again was directed from early morning against 3 Gd ID and 49 Res ID; before noon it increased to great intensity and was interrupted only by repeated Russian infantry assaults. All the attacks however collapsed in front of the German positions. Then two regiments of 3 Gd ID pursued the fleeing Russians and took their foremost trenches at Swistelniki; several hundred prisoners remained in their hands. The defensive fire of X Res Corps also forced the attacking Russians to the ground. During the night the Prussian Guards hastily consolidated their hold on the captured trenches and increased their bag of prisoners to 36 officers and 1900 men.

This successful counterattack led to plans to drive the Russians completely from the western bank of the Narajowka. German regiments took several parts of the trenches on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. On the 21<sup>st</sup> a sharp combined attack by 3 Gd and 49 Res ID, supported by battalions from 119 and 208 ID, drove the enemy almost everywhere back over the river. The last Russian position on the western bank (at Podszumlance) was cleaned out on the next day. Thus the entire area which the Russians had occupied on the western bank since 16 September were now recaptured. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the enemy blew up all the bridges over the river, indicating that they were renouncing any further

attacks. The cancellation of the offensive was also due to Brussilov's order to Shcherbachev to send II Corps to the Romanian front; the unit was already boarding trains on 18 October.

On the days following the 22<sup>nd</sup>, activity was restricted by gusty rains. When the heavens cleared again on the 30<sup>th</sup>, the 49 Res ID wrested from the enemy a 1200 meter-long line of trenches on the opposite (eastern) bank of the Narajowka. Also the Turks captured part of a Russian position south of Mieczyszców, and repulsed counterattacks on the next day. The Russians were preparing a systematic operation to recapture the ground lost to 49 Res ID; they attacked on 2 November in masses of troops estimated by the defenders as 8000 to 10,000 strong. But the enemy gained only extraordinarily high casualties; on 3 November they suffered a similar defeat at the same point.

#### The new command structure in east Galicia

In the second half of October the Central Powers considered making further changes to the order of battle of the armies stationed in east Galicia. Already on 13 October, when the new organization of Archduke Charles' Army Group became effective, the Archduke-Successor suggested that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should be removed from his area of command and assigned to Army Group Böhm-Ermolli. He based his request on the fact that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army operated tactically in close cooperation with the South Army; the fighting in August and September had proven that both Armies should be ready to easily support each other. On the other hand, it was very time-consuming to transfer troops from Transylvania over the Carpathians and the poor communications made it difficult for one Army Group HQ to control both sides of the mountains.

The k.u.k. AOK agreed with this assessment and planned that after GO Böhm-Ermolli had three armies under his Army Group HQ he would relinquish command of his own 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to Archduke Joseph, currently leading VII Corps. GFM Hindenburg substantially concurred with the concept, but wanted to name German GdI Eben as commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. This was unacceptable to the AOK at Teschen. Finally it was decided that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would join South Army under GO Böhm-Ermolli, but that he would also continue to command 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Since the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, GO Kövess, had seniority over Böhm-Ermolli he exchanged places with GdK Kirchbach, the leader of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. This change occurred simultaneously with the assignment of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to GO Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group on 20 October. Four days later the HQ

of the Army Group (and of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army) was moved from Busk to Lemberg.

The quiet situation on the Narajowka in the last days of October allowed the allied high commands to withdraw German units that apparently were no longer needed by South Army. Thus on 27 October the 199 ID left by train for France; they were replaced by 75 Res ID, whose regiments hitherto had been split up under Army Group Linsingen. The 216 ID left for Transylvania on 1 November, and wasn't replaced.

#### Developments south of the Dniester

In the area stretching from the Dniester south to the Carpathian crest the situation was almost completely quiet in the second half of October. The only operations were:

- . An unsuccessful Russian thrust at Tacykow (southwest of Stanislau) on the 20<sup>th</sup>,
- . A successful storm troop raid by a detachment of XIII Corps later on the 20<sup>th</sup>,
- . A failed attempt by the Russians to establish a firm bridgehead on the western bank of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and
- . A similar attempt at Huta four days later.

The Russians were holding back mainly because of their relative weakness in the area. They had just four infantry and two cavalry divisions opposite the five infantry and two cavalry divisions of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The Russian divisions were under XLI Corps and II Cavalry Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, and under the adjacent XII Corps to the south; on the 20<sup>th</sup> the XII Corps was re-assigned to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Thus General Shcherbachev became responsible for the sector stretching from Brzezany to the area where the Bystrzyca Solotwinska has its source.

Because there was little chance that larger-scale fighting would develop on the southern bank of the Dniester, Army Group HQ decided it was safe to withdraw the k.u.k. 6 CD plus two Landsturm battalions; they would move to 7<sup>th</sup> Army to relieve parts of 10 Bav ID and the 2 Bicycle Brigade. Moreover the German Lst IR 36 was sent to 9<sup>th</sup> Army.

The fighting was heavier, but not any more significant, for the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army on the Carpathian crest. On the 14<sup>th</sup> troops of the German Carpathian Corps stormed Heights # 1896 and held them against recovery attempts by the Russians in the next few days. In similar fashion the 10 Bav ID improved their positions on the

D. Coman # 1726 between 15 and 17 October. After systematic preparation, the k.u.k. 59 ID attacked on 14 October to move their front to a better defensive position on the ridge east of Kirlibaba. With difficulty they worked their way forward on Heights # 1386. The see-saw fighting, in which the captured area was temporarily lost again, continued on the next day. However, the attack was halted on the 16<sup>th</sup> after new forces (65 and 78 ID) arrived on the enemy side; on the 17<sup>th</sup> the 59 ID even had to repulse Russian thrusts. A heavy snowfall during the same day prevented further fighting. When the weather cleared on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Russians attacked 200 ID on the Pnirie Heights, but were unsuccessful.

Since the Russians' eagerness to fight continued to decline, it was easy for 7<sup>th</sup> Army to withdraw units for the Romanian front. On 14 October the 3 CD was removed from the sector of 12 ID and on the 20<sup>th</sup> sent by rail toward Des, where they would undergo their reorganization.<sup>415</sup> At the same time, as suggested by Ludendorff, the 10 Bav ID was relieved by extending the lines of 1 and 200 ID; starting on the 20<sup>th</sup> the Bavarians climbed onto the trains waiting to take them into the Gyergyo (they left behind the battalions that had been detached to XI Corps). Finally the 2 Bicycle Brigade left for Group Szivo.

At the start of November the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army was opposed by the new Russian 8<sup>th</sup> Army (XI, XXIII and XVIII Corps) plus the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army (XXVI Corps and the newly-arrived II Corps). The southern wing of the latter Russian army (III Cavalry and XXXVI Corps) was opposite the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Consistent with the shift of strength toward the south, on 2 November Kaledin moved the HQ of 8<sup>th</sup> Army from Kolomea to Czernowitz. On the same day Letschitzky with the staff of 9<sup>th</sup> Army moved from Czernowitz to Suczawa. Thus the Russian offensive which had seemed so promising in the summer also came to an end south of the Dniester, where they had gained the largest amount of ground.

At the start of November the transfer of Russian units to support Romania was already very significant. The center and southern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army (II Corps, III Cavalry Corps and XXXVI Corps) was stationed south of the line which had originally been the border between the two forces (Dorna Watra-Bistritz) on the

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415 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reorganization of 3 CD was the same that affected other cavalry divisions in fall 1916. Each cavalry regiment was divided into a mounted battalion (of 3 or 4 squadrons) and a rifle battalion of the same strength.

eastern front of Transylvania. The IV Sib and IV Corps were joining XLVII Corps in Dobruja and on the Danube. XL and XXIV Corps were moving to Romania by rail and V Cavalry Corps was riding there. Thus the Russians already had 16 infantry and 7 cavalry divisions providing direct help to Romania.

### **3. Actions on Transylvania's eastern front, mid-October to the start of November**

While GdI Falkenhayn, who on 14 October moved his HQ to Kronstadt, was taking measures so that the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army could break through the southern front of Transylvania into Wallachia, fighting continued in the mountains on the province's eastern borders in connection with the pursuit of the enemy by the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. On 13 October this Army had been given the assignment of covering the rear of the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army while simultaneously defending the eastern side of Transylvania on Romanian soil. The front was to be advanced far enough east so that 1<sup>st</sup> Army was threatening Moldavia. Arz also was to try to destroy the railroad and telegraph connections running from north to south.

The same order for the destruction of the communications leading into the Trotusu valley was issued to Schmettow's Cavalry Corps of 9<sup>th</sup> Army; their assignment was expanded to include sending a strong mounted force into the upper Sereth valley, thus separating the groups of enemy armies. Thus the operations of Corps Schmettow were tied into the developments on Transylvania's eastern front, at least to the extent that a coordinated effort was possible in an area where fighting took place mostly in passes through the valleys and the adjacent heights.

1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ were well aware of the discrepancy between the scope of their many assignments and the size of the force at their disposal; the Army had just 42,000 infantry and 3800 cavalry. The difficulties were multiplied by the forested mountain terrain which would have to be crossed, where visibility was restricted and roads were few. There were also logistical problems, caused by the rapid advance and by the considerable and lasting damage that had been done to the rail lines in the upper Maros valley and through the Gyimes Pass. Nevertheless GdI Arz immediately began to carry out his assignment; first he wanted to take possession of the upper course of the Bistrita and the narrow outlets from the valleys at Piatra and Comanescie. Then he would seek to destroy the railroad in the

Sereth valley.

Thus on 14 October the Army commander ordered VI Corps into the Darmanesci-Comanesci area. XXI Corps was to reach the Bistrita between Bicazu and Bistriciora as soon as possible with a strong right wing while sending advanced troops ahead to Piatra. The left wing, deployed in echelon, would maintain contact with XI Corps. The latter corps would advance with their right wing along the Negrisora to Darmocsa; they would bring 73 Hon Inf Bde, which belonged to 37 Hon ID, to the right wing so that it would be adjacent to its parent division. VI and XXI Corps were given special orders for the destruction of the Romanian transportation lines, particularly the bridges at Bacau, Roman and Pascani, by detachments assembled and equipped for this purpose.

In the opposing Romanian North Army - which had 73 battalions, 23 squadrons and 55 batteries - the 14 ID had pulled back into the Tölgyes and Bekas Passes. Near Brosceni the 4 Mixed Brigade (attached to 14 ID) maintained the link with the Russians. 7 ID was guarding the valleys of the Trotusu, Uz and Daftena, while 15 ID guarded those of the Slanic and Ojtuzu Brooks. 2 CD had the same assignment in the Casinu valley, and was linked up with the 7 Mixed Bde of the adjacent 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (defending by Soveja). 8 ID was deployed at Piatra as North Army's reserve.

As General Presan told his divisions on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the task of North Army was to guard the territory of their homeland and to cover the assembly of units which would be assembling for a counterattack. The positions on the border would be held only by outposts. If any Austro-Hungarians broke over the border they would be hurled back by the reserves held in readiness.<sup>416</sup>

#### **a. Actions on the northern wing of Arz's Army, 14-24 October**

During the pursuit of the Romanians the inner wings of XI and XXI Corps, which had to advance over the steep and trackless Kelemen Mountains, had fallen somewhat behind. They had to be brought up into line with the other troops before the two corps could advance to the upper Bistrita as they'd been ordered.

In the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>, FML Habermann's XI Corps was deployed with Brigade Papp at the Mestecanesci Pass, IR 16 of 10 Bav ID

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416 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 523 and 527

at Dorna Watra, 5 and 11 Hon CD on the western bank of the Negrabach, and 202 Hon Inf Bde on the heights of Kelemen Izvoru and Ptr. Piscu. Thirty kilometers farther east, the half of 37 Hon ID under FML Lütgendorf's XXI Corps held the western edge of Hollo; only two Honved battalions at Belbor maintained a loose connection between the two corps. 72 ID was fighting with one group at Tölgyes and one at Bekas against the stubborn defenders of the Romanian 14 ID.

While the main body of XXI Corps was stalled in front of the two passes, on the left wing the half of 37 Hon ID captured the heights north of Belbor. With their support the 202 Hon Inf Bde fought forward by the 17<sup>th</sup> to the bend in the road north of Dragoiessa. Two days later the 11 Hon CD stormed Heights # 1546 east of Saru Dornei. Thus the shortest possible front had been established between Hollo and Dorna Watra.

Based on the fighting, aerial reconnaissance and intercepted wireless messages, HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army had meanwhile gotten the impression that strong elements of the Romanian troops hitherto stationed in this sector had been withdrawn; GdI Arz correctly guessed that this included the entire 8 ID. It was believed that Russian units would appear very soon, relieving the Romanians gradually from north to south. There was also a report that a Russian division from Dobruja was coming by train to Piatra. Therefore the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army and of the Army Group believed that every effort should be made to reach the upper Bistrita before the Russians intervened; this was because defense of the difficult wooded terrain without a continuous barrier in front of the line had little chance of success due to the Army's limited size. Therefore the XXI and XI Corps were urged to renew their attacks.

It was clear to FML Lütgendorf that a frontal assault without reinforcements couldn't succeed. Therefore he welcomed a suggestion from HQ of 72 ID to envelop the enemy on the southern wing (east of the Domuk valley). Lt Col. Sander's detachment (Inf Bn VII/73, a Gendarme bn and a mountain battery), which had arrived from XI Corps, was entrusted with this operation. On the 19<sup>th</sup> he was able to storm Heights # 1359, which rise east of the village of Domuk. But already on the next day the Romanians recovered this mountain, and inflicted substantial casualties on Sander's detachment.<sup>417</sup> Also in the Negrizora valley the enemy

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417 The Romanians alleged that they took 6 officers and 508 men prisoner and also seized 2 guns and 5 machine guns (Dabija, Vol. II, p. 528).

was already responding with counterattacks on the 19<sup>th</sup>; once more they pushed back the southern wing of XI Corps at Dragoiessa. These warning signs compelled the high command to halt any further offensive by the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which was seen to be pointless. On the 20<sup>th</sup> GdI Arz ordered the troops to stop attacking, but to hold onto the line they'd reached. XXI Corps would also guard the northern flank of VI Corps. To carry out this double assignment, FML Lütgendorf asked that his numerically weak Corps<sup>418</sup> should receive three battalions as a reserve, plus some extra replacement troops for several battalions that were particularly depleted. But his request couldn't be honored because the forces he wanted weren't available.

In the days of relative quiet which now followed, while the enemy were relieving their troops, both corps prepared for a prolonged defense. There was much work to complete before the long front, in many places running through forests, was provided with defensive positions. Also the supply lines had to be quickly organized and measures taken for the winter. Snow was already lying on the mountains since the 18<sup>th</sup>.

Based on an earlier order, the 73 Hon Inf Bde relieved the 202<sup>nd</sup>, so that the two brigades of 37 Hon ID were stationed next to each other. But they still belonged to different corps, and even to different armies. This was because on 25 October the XI Corps, as suggested by Army Group HQ, was re-assigned back to 7<sup>th</sup> Army; the plan which had originally led to the Corps joining 1<sup>st</sup> Army (for an envelopment maneuver in the upper Maros valley) no longer was in effect. If necessary, XI Corps could receive support only from 7<sup>th</sup> Army, since it was separated from 1<sup>st</sup> Army by the Kelemen Mountains; also the lines of communication to the rear from XI Corps and 7<sup>th</sup> Army ran together.

On 24 October the enemy undertook a thrust at the bend in the road east of Dragoiessa; perhaps it was intended only to cover the relief of the Romanians by the Russians, and in any event it had only local significance. Three days later FML Habermann had Bav IR 16 and Hon IR 306 attack at Dorna Watra. The operation was a complete success; the enemy lost a part of their positions that was 4 km wide. The 538 prisoners that were captured were all Russian. Farther south the Russians had also relieved the Romanians in the Tölgyes and Bekas Passes with XXXVI Corps (68 and 25 ID). On the 28<sup>th</sup> the Bavarian regiment was relieved by

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418 The 72 ID was covering 27 km of front with just 3700 riflemen.

the k.u.k. 6 CD, which on the 19<sup>th</sup> had transferred from the VIII Corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to XI Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>419</sup>

### **b. The VI k.u.k. Corps thrusts into the Trotusu and Uz valleys, 14-31 October**

#### 14-18 October

In the advance toward the Comanesci-Darmanesci area, FML Fabini's VI Corps in the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> reached the border town of Gyimes with 19 Lst Mtn Bde of 61 ID and the 1 Lst Huss Bde, and Gyimes Közeplak with 16 Lst Mtn Bde. 39 Hon ID was in the Uz valley - its main body had reached Aklos csarda while a side column in the Csobanyos valley and farther north was on Heights # 1387; a second, stronger side column had climbed to the top of the ridge between the two valleys. Ahead of them in the Uz valley, near the border, several squadrons of 1 CD were on patrol; until they were relieved by the Honved they would remain under VI Corps to insure unified command.

On 15 October the 39 Hon ID broke into the Uz valley and on the border occupied several positions on the heights on both sides of the valley (opposite 13 Inf Bde of the Romanian 7 ID). On the next day they built on this success. 61 ID advanced into the Brusturosa basin, but on the 16<sup>th</sup> they came up against a blocking position defended by 14 Romanian Inf Bde east of Agasu. To capture this position with an envelopment from two sides, on the 17<sup>th</sup> two battalions would proceed over the heights northeast of Agasu while battalions on the northern wing of 39 Hon ID would thrust northeast over Heights # 1387 into the Trotusu valley.

The extensive forests north of the Trotusu valley and the great distance from the southern wing of XXI Corps (advancing in the Bekas valley) made it necessary to have troops patrolling and guarding the side valleys north of the Trotusu. Moreover it was necessary to have reserves on hand, deployed in echelon in depth, and to keep part of the mobile artillery at Gyimes Közeplak. All of these measures were a result of the concern felt by VI Corps HQ for the security of their left wing. But 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ didn't share this concern and considered the precautions excessive. In the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> they ordered 61 ID to immediately resume the pursuit; they were supposed to quickly capture the Comanesci-Moinesci area, which was important for the

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419 Schramm-Schiessl, pp. 826 ff.

future advance toward Bacau. GdI Arz also hoped that he could hold this area with just one division until the time came for the thrust into the plains; he wanted to hold the Corps' second division as a reserve in case it was needed on the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, threatened by a Russian attack.

But the advance of 61 ID was hindered on the 17<sup>th</sup> by an unexpected development. The commander of the Romanian 14 Inf Bde believed he could best fulfill his defensive assignment with a local attack, and personally led three battalions north into the Assau valley; then, covered by the thick forests, they swung southwest toward Agasu. At noon this group fell upon part of 61 ID's artillery, which was stationed behind the infantry and completed unprotected, and captured many batteries. But the indecisive conduct of the Romanian units prevented them from further exploiting this success. Thanks to a stubborn defense by the troops of 19 Lst Mtn Bde in the immediate area and the quick intervention of the Division's reserve, the enemy was pushed back again into the forests. The guns were recovered and any Romanians who didn't seek safety in flight were encircled. Their brigadier, 14 other officers, and 327 men were captured.<sup>420</sup> Meanwhile 61 ID also repulsed the advance of the Romanian group in the valley and went over to the offensive themselves; however, they couldn't advance far before night was falling.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> the 39 Hon ID was able to capture Heights # 1653 in a snowstorm and to advance somewhat in the Uz valley. But the Romanians on the heights south of Loiossa opposed the Honved with the courage of desperation; also the 61 ID in the Trotusu valley couldn't advance past Loiossa. To ensure that the route in the valley was blocked, General Presan ordered two regiments from 8 ID (held back as his Army's reserve) to reinforce 7 ID.<sup>421</sup>

Because 1<sup>st</sup> Army had gained so little ground since the 15<sup>th</sup>, Army Group HQ ordered GdI Arz on the 18<sup>th</sup> to have XI and XXI Corps reach the upper Bistrita as soon as possible. Arz, however, didn't feel obliged to pass on this order; in his opinion a further advance on the northern wing was impossible without reinforcements. On the other hand, he spurred on VI Corps, whose commander was justifiably concerned about his northern flank since the surprise attack at Agasu, to energetically

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420 "Die Überfall von Agasu am 17. Oktober 1916" (Mil. wiss. Mitt., Vienna; 1924 edition, pp. 310 ff.). "Zum Überfall bei Agasu. Erwidern von rumänischer Seite" (Mil. wiss. Mitt., Vienna; 1924 edition, pp. 421 ff.)

421 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 536

continue the offensive in the Trotusu valley so that 39 Hon ID could emerge from the difficult forested terrain and reach Darmanesci. Arz believed that a thrust by 61 ID at Moinesci would dispel any danger to VI Corps from the north and also make it easier for 39 Hon ID to reach Darmanesci; he would only allow two battalions to be held back in the Corps' reserve at Gyimes.

#### 19-31 October

On 19 October the VI Corps continued to attack as ordered. But 39 Hon ID made no further progress, since the column they sent over the heights between the Uz and Csobanyos valley, which was supposed to win success by enveloping the Romanians, found that the terrain was more different than expected and encountered stubborn resistance. On the other hand, on the 20<sup>th</sup> the Division captured a strong blocking position in the Uz valley and brought their lines in the valley forward to Point # 479. The 61 ID advanced to Assau on the 19<sup>th</sup>, but on the next day were hit by a strong counterattack and had to pull back to Loiossa.

On the same day (the 20<sup>th</sup>) Sander's Detachment suffered the setback described earlier. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ, however, didn't regard the Romanian thrusts as part of a planned counter-offensive and ordered VI Corps to continue their attacks; 39 Hon ID would make the main effort. The XI and XXI Corps were only to hold the lines they'd reached; the latter would also eventually move forward their southern wing to prevent any advance by the Romanians on the Gyimes road. FML Lütgendorf objected to this latter assignment because of the weakness of his forces; he declared that it couldn't be accomplished.

On 21 October the enemy attacked the VI Corps along the whole front and made several thrusts in the Trotusu valley. Two days later the 39 Hon ID tried to capture Heights # 1342, but collided with a Romanian column making a simultaneous attack and had to abandon the operation. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the enemy once again anticipated an assault, this time by 61 ID; therefore the Division didn't win any ground in the direction of the mouth of the Csobanyos valley until the 25<sup>th</sup>. 39 Hon ID was trying in vain to take Heights # 1342; on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> the enemy mounted powerful thrusts, in part involving new troops. They inflicted substantial casualties on the Honved and pushed them back to a line between Point # 1653 and the border stone in the Uz valley.<sup>422</sup> The Romanian 14 Inf Bde wrested the town of

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422 According to Romanian reports the 39 Hon ID lost 4 officers and 875 men as prisoners (Dabija, Vol. II, p. 540).

Loiossa from the already exhausted Landsturm troops of 61 ID.

FML Fabini's main concern was still the front of 61 ID, with its badly-protected northern flank; because of the difficulty of linking up with the southern wing of XXI Corps west of the Domukbach, he continued to fear that he could be enveloped from the north. To at least partly address this problem and to shorten the front, on 31 October the 61 ID was pulled back systematically to a position that had meanwhile been created on the heights east and southeast of Agasu. This measure was undertaken without requesting permission from higher HQ, which however concurred afterwards when they were informed that it was impossible to provide artillery support to the Division in their old location. Also the withdrawal to a front that could be more easily defended was completely consistent with the defensive role that had meanwhile been allotted to 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

### **c. Fighting at Ojtoz Pass in second half of October**

G.Lt Schmettow's Cavalry Corps had been advancing through the Ojtoz pass toward Onesci; he intended to first have 71 ID, attached to his command, force open the outlet from the mountains. This Division had crossed the Romanian border at Sosmezö on 14 October. Then the mass of the cavalry would ride into the plains of Moldavia. Since Schmettow believed it was possible for the enemy to threaten him from the large belt of forests on the Berecke Mountains, on the 14<sup>th</sup> he moved the German 3 CD to Oszola, from which it advanced a regiment onto Heights # 1365, to the northeast.

Romanian resistance was already stronger along the border, where they had prepared field fortifications before the war. The enemy 15 ID had been reinforced by 15 Inf Bde (from the 8 ID, which consisted of three brigades). Despite the stubborn resistance, by the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> the 71 ID was able to take the northern edge of Harja and the heights on both sides of the town. Only weak outposts were available to protect the right flank against the enemy units reported to be coming forward in the Casinu valley and in the area south of Herestrau.

On 16 October Lt Col. Kopfstein's Infantry Regiment (which now was designated BH IR # 5), hitherto attached to 1 Lst Huss Bde, finally joined 71 ID. It was placed under 142 Inf Bde, which was advancing on the western slope of the valley and needed extra strength to overcome increasingly strong enemy resistance south of Baile Slanic. East of the Ojtoz valley, on this day the 141 Inf Bde was able to attack as far as the fork in the brook south of Herestrau; however, on the next day they were forced back by a strong counterattack to the heights east of Harja. 141 Bde only had the assignment of holding onto these heights on the 18<sup>th</sup>, while 142 Bde approached Heights # 781 north of Harja, which were stubbornly defended by the enemy. Since the units of 71 ID didn't seem sufficient for a thrust to Ocna, the rifle squadrons of three hussar regiments were brought up; numbering 1400 men, they belonged to 1 CD which had meanwhile come from the Kaszon basin to Berecz. Outposts in the Berecke Mountains, between the sources of the Putna and Casinu, were provided by 3 German 3 CD, reinforced by the remaining dismounted squadrons of 1 CD.

On 19 October Romanian counterattacks, growing always stronger and more intense, were fended off. On the next day parts of 142 Inf Bde stormed Heights # 781 despite a snowstorm that made

movement difficult. On the southern bank of the Ojtozbach the 141 Inf Bde were also able to advance their lines somewhat. In these actions prisoners were taken from a second brigade of 8 Romanian ID, which had been sent to 15 ID two days earlier. Moreover, these prisoners reported that reinforcements were expected from 2 Romanian CD (stationed in the Casinu valley). This compelled the commander of 71 ID, GM Goldbach, who foresaw a storm brewing in the Casinu valley, to demand reliable protection for his Division's long eastern flank. But no heed was paid to his warning. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Falkenhayn even ordered the transfer of 3 CD; this unit, which anyway had just three regiments, was designated the "German Transylvania Cavalry Brigade" and sent to Kronstadt (in reserve of Corps Staabs) as a response to a report that Russian troops were detraining in the area south of Kronstadt. This left 1 CD alone responsible for security in the Berecke Mountains. Therefore 141 Inf Bde was now restricted to a defensive role. 142 Inf Bde was still supposed to capture the heights by Baile Slanic so as to threaten the Slanic valley, but then would halt to concentrate on retaining their conquests. The 71 ID, with 13 battalions, 7 ½ mounted squadrons, 7 foot squadrons and 8 batteries, was fighting against an enemy force twice its size, and had little strength left for an offensive.

Even before 142 Inf Bde could thrust toward Baile Slanic, the enemy renewed their counterattack on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; they had been reinforced to 26 battalions, 25 squadrons and 15 batteries. The Romanians pushed 1 CD back and approached dangerously close to the village of Ojtoz and thus to the 71 ID's line of supply. This forced G.Lt Schmettow to quickly shift HR 2 from 71 ID to Ojtoz. Soon afterward the enemy fell upon 142 Inf Bde west of the Ojtoz road; the defenders had to fall back to the carriage road between Harja and Baile Slanic. In the afternoon the Romanians stormed from the east against the lightly defended summit of Point # 1108, just 4 km from Sosmezö where all of 71 ID's artillery was concentrated. If the enemy climbed down into the valley they'd be able to cut off the Division's line of retreat, or at least capture the artillery.

But the Romanians weren't daring; they stayed on the heights they'd captured and let slip a chance to win an easy success. 71 ID thus gained valuable time. During the night GM Goldbach pulled his Division back to the border and on the 24<sup>th</sup> he sent IR 82 south to attack toward Heights # 1108. The Regiment wasn't able to drive the enemy back, but at least pinned them down. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, however, the gallant Szekels stormed the entire height along the border, threw the Romanians back into the Casinu

valley and took 300 prisoners; the 82<sup>nd</sup> Regiment also reached out a hand farther south to an advancing battalion of 8 Bav Res ID, which along with other reinforcements had meanwhile arrived in Transylvania.<sup>423</sup> The 71 ID, reinforced by two Bavarian battalions, now established postilions on the southern edge of Sosmezö, on both sides of the steep ridge. The Romanians occupied their old positions on the border. There was temporary quiet in the Ojtoz Pass.

#### **d. Reinforcements for Arz's Army**

By reading enemy wireless messages, the staff at Teschen had already learned on 18 October that four Russian corps were being shifted to Romania. The first troops were arriving at Jassy, and it would take them ten days to deploy in Moldavia. Their assignment was to bring to an end the Central Powers' offensive against Romania; they would be attacking south of Dorna Watra and (according to a later report) in the direction of Csik Szereda. To be able to repulse this threatening assault, the k.u.k. high command ordered on the 18<sup>th</sup> that Army Group HQ should stop the offensive by XI and XXI Corps and hold one division in readiness in both the Gyergyo and the Csik. 10 Bav ID (released by 7<sup>th</sup> Army) and 8 Bav Res ID (arriving by train from France) would be used for this purpose.

#### The need for reinforcements is debated

Army Group HQ - and in particular the Chief of Staff GM Seeckt - however believed that it was more important to make Falkenhayn's Army as strong as possible; from 8 Bav Res ID they detached the staff of 15 Res Inf Bde, the Res IR 18 and the three batteries of II Bn/Res FAR 8, and sent them to Red Tower Pass. Moreover, Army Group HQ wasn't convinced that it was necessary to halt the offensive on the northern wing of Arz's Army; on the 18<sup>th</sup> they even ordered 1<sup>st</sup> Army to immediately advance to the upper Bistrita with XI and XXI Corps while VI Corps thrust to Bacau. GdI Arz still wasn't informed about the two Bavarian divisions supposed to join 1<sup>st</sup> Army. He was only assured that as 71 ID advanced toward Onesti their southern flank would be guarded by Schmettow's cavalry. From Grosswardein, GM Seeckt also left the k.u.k. high command in the dark about his opinions and about

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423 Kiszling, "Die Rückeroberung der Höhe Runcul mare am 24. and 25. Oktober 1916" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1926 edition, pp. 29 ff). Bajnoczy, p. 191. Dabija, Vol. II, p. 549. "History of IR 82", pp. 199 ff.

the orders issued to 1<sup>st</sup> Army that were contrary to Conrad's intentions. Army Group HQ waited as long as possible to send the new units to 1<sup>st</sup> Army in the hope that they could still be diverted to 9<sup>th</sup> German Army.

Meanwhile the actions of 1<sup>st</sup> Army narrated above demonstrated that it was impossible to advance into Moldavia. GdI Arz had already been compelled on the 20<sup>th</sup> to halt the attacks by his northern wing, and despite vigorous pressure neither VI Corps nor 71 ID had been able to reach their assigned goals. Thus Army Group HQ recognized that the necessity of sending the two Bavarian divisions to 1<sup>st</sup> Army couldn't be avoided. On the 20<sup>th</sup> they ordered 10 Bav ID to assemble in the area around Gyergyo Ditro and 8 Bav Res ID at Csik Szereda. But GdI Falkenhayn didn't believe there was much chance that an enemy offensive against 1<sup>st</sup> Army would succeed<sup>424</sup>; moreover, in his opinion the tactical conditions were more favorable for an advance in the Ojtoz valley than in the Uz valley. Therefore 8 Bav Res ID was shifted to Bereczk in the Haromszek. G.Lt Kühne, who along with the staff of LIV Corps HQ had been attached to Army Group HQ, was given command over 71 ID, 8 Bav Res ID and 1 CD. He took up his post on the 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>425</sup> G.Lt Schmettow left for Petroseny, where he would take over a larger cavalry corps.

Another reason for the deployment of 8 Bav Res ID at the Ojtoz Pass was the possibility that if 1<sup>st</sup> Army was forced to halt or even to withdraw, the 9<sup>th</sup> Army could use LIV Corps instead of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to guard their flank during the thrust to Bucharest, or to break open the door to Moldavia for the allied cavalry.

Army Group HQ was in a position to keep this cavalry force strong. Although 3 German CD had already been moved to the area south of Kronstadt, there were available, in addition to 1 CD, the k.u.k. 3 CD (which left 7<sup>th</sup> Army and entrained for Transylvania on 21 October) and 10 CD from 4<sup>th</sup> Army (which the k.u.k. AOK re-assigned on the 20<sup>th</sup>). The two latter divisions made up a cavalry corps under FML Brudermann. Since the railroads were being used to transport 10 Bav ID, this cavalry corps still hadn't reached southeast Transylvania; instead they deployed at Des (3 CD) and Szamos Ujvar (10 CD) where they were specially equipped for a wide-ranging operation in the plains of Romania.

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424 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 34

425 Kühne, "Erinnerungen an den Feldzug in Rumänien 1916-17" (in Nachrichtenblatt der 76. RD, Detmold, 1929, Issue III)

The fighting that meanwhile developed for VI Corps and 71 ID caused Army Group HQ (which early on the 24<sup>th</sup> moved to Klausenburg) to send 10 Bav ID on the 26<sup>th</sup> to Csik Szereda; from here they could intervene to help either VI or XXI Corps. On the next day, after the enemy had forced 71 ID to retreat, GdI Falkenhayn changed his mind about the feasibility of a thrust through the Ojtoz Pass. Now he wanted to support Goldbach's Division only enough to ensure that they could hold their ground; he planned to deploy the majority of 8 Bav Res ID south of Kronstadt. Army Group HQ, on the contrary, still wanted to thrust toward Ocna.

Clarification of the situation on Transylvania's eastern front

Meanwhile the German and Aus-Hung. high commands received further clarification regarding prospects on the eastern front of Transylvania. They both believed that the long awaited Russian relief offensive in the Romanian theater of operations was imminent. This was indicated by the departure of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army HQ and two corps from Luck, the breakup of the massive troop concentrations that had been attacking in Galicia and the Carpathians, and the appearance of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army in northern Moldavia. Here the HQ of the enemy III Cavalry and II Corps had already been identified in the upper Bistrita valley, and that of XXXVI Corps at Piatra. It was known that the Romanians stationed at the Tölgyes and Bekas Passes had been relieved by Russians, and the general situation made it likely that further Russian units would arrive. The conclusion was that the Russians would thrust toward the line Des-Klausenburg. No measures should be spared to mitigate the danger from this thrust (especially to 9<sup>th</sup> Army), despite Falkenhayn's opinion to the contrary. The eastern front of Transylvania had to be strong enough to preclude the possibility of a Russian-Romanian success.

The thrust toward Ocna was now canceled. The Ojtoz group was given a purely defensive mission, and on 29 October they were assigned to 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Their leader G.Lt Kühne left to take over other duties at the Szurduk Pass. His three former divisions were placed under the commander of 8 Bav Res ID, G.Lt Freih. von Stein. Finally the k.u.k. high command sent Brudermann's Cavalry Corps into the Gyergyó to reinforce the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The German 2 Bicycle Brigade had been relieved from the Carpathian Corps, where it was replaced by Landsturm battalions from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army; the Brigade originally was supposed to be attached to the cavalry for the Moldavian offensive, but now was sent instead to Group Szivo at Mehadia.

Thus on 2 November the 1st Army had available as reserves behind the lines the main body of 8 Bav Res ID at Ojtoz and 10 Bav ID in the upper Csik. Brudermann's Cavalry Corps had been moving into the Gyergyó since 29 October.

1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ, which moved to Szekely-Udvarhely on 28 October, now ordered their troops to avoid any offensive operations until the arrival of the XXIV March Battalions; thus they would be as ready as possible to repulse the enemy assault.

**4. Attempts to break through at the Kronstadt passes, 14**

**October-2 November**

After Falkenhayn's decisions of 12 October he was trying to break through into the Wallachian plains in the Vulkan Mountains and the Red Tower Pass. Nevertheless he also continued the attacks south of Kronstadt, partly because the k.u.k. high command considered this the most important sector.

The German 89 ID

The German 89 ID, now led by GM von Below, crossed the border at Kraszna and in the Tatarhavas Pass and on the next day advanced in the Buzeu valley to a point just in front of Gura Siriului, where the stubborn resistance of the Romanian 12 Inf Bde put a halt to the thrust. Falkenhayn now refrained from having this Division advance any further and instructed them to hold onto their positions on both sides of Buzeu valley and in the Tatarhavas Pass.

Averescu, however, considered the situation here more serious than it was and reinforced 12 Inf Bde with a brigade from 16 ID (then moving up by rail from the Danube). Also the horsemen of 3 Calarasi Bde were dismounted to join the fight, so that here a total of 17 battalions, 3 mounted and 4 foot squadrons, as well as 21 batteries, made up a reorganized 6 ID.<sup>426</sup> The enemy soon realized they were in superior strength and repeatedly mounted attacks. Although the 89 ID gave up units to the neighboring XXXIX Res Corps, through the start of November they were able to hold their positions in seesaw fighting against 6 Romanian ID (in the N. Baska valley just south of the border, and north of Gura Siriului) and against 3 Romanian ID (at the Tatarhavas Pass). The poor road leading to this Pass was improved for a future offensive.

The XXXIX Res Corps

The XXXIX Res Corps (187 German ID and 51 Hon ID) was instructed to advance over the Bratocea, Schanz and Predeal Passes. This was a difficult task because the 187 ID had at most just half of its authorized strength, and the combat strength of 51 Hon ID had sunk even further. One regiment of 187 ID was stationed in front of the Bratocea Pass, preparing to attack so that later they could cross into the Teleajna valley. A second regiment, that had taken the Schanz Pass from parts of 3 Romanian ID, was turning toward the west so as to assist 51 Hon ID (reinforced by

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426 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 516 ff.

the third regiment of 187 ID) in their attack against the lofty, strongly fortified Csaplya Heights # 1159, which blocked the crossing-point into the Praova valley.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> the Hon IR 302 of 51 Hon ID was able to storm Mt Susaiu # 1483, which lies southeast of the Csaplya and rises above it. Although they were now threatened also from the rear, the Romanian 21 ID still held fast to the Csaplya. Reinforced by a brigade of 4 ID, they even counterattacked on the 20<sup>th</sup> but were unsuccessful. Staabs' Corps was finally able to wrest the Csaplya from the enemy on the 22<sup>nd</sup> after systematic preparations; on the next day Predeal also fell into the victors' hands. 1250 prisoners were taken in these two days. The Romanian 21 ID had shrunk to 2400 men. But the size of the allied units was also shockingly small; thus Hon IR 302 had just 550 riflemen at the front on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

General Averescu decided to pull back the shaken II Corps (21 and 10 ID) to a position south of the Azuga Brook. Here they would keep their opponents from entering the Prahova valley, and protect Sinaia with its royal vacation palace. To cover the retreat to the new position rear guards temporarily held onto the heights north of the Azugabach. The burnt-out 21 ID was relieved by 4 ID from the Army's reserve.<sup>427</sup>

On 25 October the XXXIX Res Corps moved up to the Romanian position. Their attack began the next day; the two Honved brigades, each reinforced by a German regiment, attacked respectively east and west of the railroad. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, a clear and radiant autumn day, Hon IR 302 stormed Heights # 1523, whereupon the enemy also evacuated Heights # 1590 farther east. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the eastern wing of XXXIX Res Corps was in the valley of the Azugabach, but west of the Prahova the Romanians were holding fast to the strongly fortified Heights # 1375 and to their outpost at Point # 1361. Under cover of fog the Honved stormed Heights # 1375 on the 29<sup>th</sup>, which forced the enemy to pull back to another position a kilometer to the rear.

Now G.Lt Staabs directed his attention to the border heights at Point # 1361, which were stubbornly defended by 10 Romanian ID. On 1 November the allies were poised to attack with parts of 51 Hon ID (now temporarily led by Colonel von Farkas) and of 187 ID; however, they were anticipated by the enemy, who launched a strong counter-thrust on both sides of the Prahova. The Romanians' attack was defeated and cost them heavy casualties.

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427 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 492

In a counter-blow the Honved captured several more trenches. Dismounted German horsemen from the Transylvania Cavalry Brigade, which had been sent to guard the long lines of communication of I Res Corps, captured the ridge at the source of the G. Weidenbach.

The bloody game of attack and counterattack continued on 2 November; the bitter fighting, which continued on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, didn't alter the situation. Then finally an envelopment operation from the northwest decided the contest. The Romanians lost Point # 1361 on the border; they fell back to a position which ran from the granite summit of La Omu (# 2508), which was already covered with ice and snow, to Azuga. The very tired allies didn't make an effective pursuit. Thus Staabs' Corps was prepared for new offensive.

The enemy continued to hold their positions at the Schanz and Bratocea Passes. In the latter sector on 30 October Romanians from 3 ID overran Prussian detachments stationed on Heights # 1426, but on the next day this mountain was recovered from the enemy.

#### The I Res Corps

Under I Res Corps, the brilliant mountain-crossing by 8 Mtn Bde had opened the way through the Törzburg Pass for 76 Res ID, which reached Rucaru on 14 October. Since it seemed that a quick penetration through the mountain wall could be achieved here, GdI Falkenhayn ordered G.Lt. Huller's 12 Bav ID, which had arrived at Kronstadt, to join I Res Corps.<sup>428</sup> The opposing 22 Romanian ID, which had taken up a new position south of Rucaru, was ordered by General Averescu to fall back under overwhelming pressure toward Namaesti, where they could block the road leading south past Campulung. Six battalions and three batteries were sent to reinforce 22 ID.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> the 8 Mtn Bde - now under the orders of the commander of 76 Res ID, G.Lt. Elstermann - moved west to envelop the enemy while 76 Res ID advanced in the Dambovita valley and farther east. Thus pressed from two sides, the enemy saved themselves by retreating in the night of 15-16 October toward Namaesti. To keep the Romanian positions from being pierced, Averescu ordered 12 ID (coming by train from Dobruja) to Campulung where it would deploy to the right of 22 ID.<sup>429</sup>

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428 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 10

429 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 471

On the 16<sup>th</sup> the I Res Corps pursued the Romanians to the line Leresti-Dragoslavele while fighting light actions. On the 17<sup>th</sup> they thrust to the south with their main body between the Dambovita and the Argeselul, but were already encountering the 12 Romanian ID which had brought the enemy's strength in the fighting near Campulung up to 29 battalions and an equal number of batteries.

Averescu now planned to throw back Morgen's Corps with a double-envelopment attack in which 10 ID, stationed between Predeal and Bucegiul, would also take part. Therefore he asked for a brigade from the Russian 3 Rif Div, which was coming to Romania; until their arrival the Romanian divisions would stay in their positions.

Since G.Lt Morgen's attempt to break through the Romanian 12 ID by a direct thrust to the south had failed, he now intended to reach his goal with an envelopment movement toward the right. He had 12 Bav ID relieve Rath's 8 Mtn Bde, so that the latter could cross the deep Argeselul valley farther to the north. On the evening of the 20<sup>th</sup> the Brigade had completed an extraordinarily tiresome march between the Argeselul and the R. Targului, partly undertaken during night-time and in miserable weather; they were ready for a new envelopment of the Romanians.

The enemy's plan for a counterattack was abandoned because the Romanian units had sunk to just a quarter of their authorized strength and because the Russian 3 Rif Div, although it had reached the Army's area, was diverted into Dobruja. On the 21<sup>st</sup> the allies began their offensive. The thrust by 8 Mtn Bde, supported with a feint attack by the Bavarians, led to the capture of Heights # 1375 northeast of Leresti. 76 Res ID gained ground toward Slobodzia, but had to defend their conquest on the next day against Romanian counterattacks. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the center and western wing of I Res Corps gained new successes. They advanced to Leresti and with 8 Mtn Bde attacked over to the western bank of the R. Targului. The Brigade would advance on the 24<sup>th</sup> to Alesti while the two German divisions were ordered to continue their frontal assault.

These attacks, and the very effective Romanian defense, resulted in a series of heavy actions which were still undecided at the start of November. Morgen's Corps stood along the wreath of heights that surround Campulung to the northwest, north and east. But they lacked the strength to break the resistance of their gallant opponents.

## 5. Breakthrough fighting on both banks of the Alt, 16 October-2 November

Already on 9 October, when the Battle of Kronstadt was won and Falkenhayn still hoped to pursue the enemy over the passes toward Bucharest, he had ordered G.Lt Krafft to thrust ahead with the Alpenkorps plus 2 and 10 Mtn Bdes in the general direction of Pitesi; the first objective was Curtea d'Arges. This order remained in effect after 12 October, when Falkenhayn decided that the main effort would be shifted to the Szurduk and Vulkan Passes.

### The plan and the forces

G.Lt Krafft knew that the Red Tower Pass was fortified and had a strong garrison. Therefore he decided to open the road through the Pass by going around it through the Fogaras Mountains. The route he selected for this advance was a pack-animal trail which led through the Moscovul Gap at an elevation of 2277 meters; on the other side of the crest it reached the road from Caineni to Curtea d'Arges at Salatrucu d.s. Col. Panzenböck's 2 Mtn Bde would take this steep and narrow path above the forest line; they would be followed by most of the 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade from the Alpenkorps.<sup>430</sup> The latter Brigade was relieved from their positions west of the Alt on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> by Col. Korzer's 10 Mtn Bde, which had come from the Isonzo.<sup>431</sup> Korzer's Brigade, along with two German battalions from the Alpenkorps, was to make a strong thrust from Mt Robu toward the mouth of the Lotrubach so as to draw as many enemy units as possible toward them and thus open the valleys of the Alt and the Lotru.<sup>432</sup> This attack would start on 16 October; 2 Mtn Bde, which along with 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade now made up the Alpenkorps, would start off a day later.

This mountain operation by Krafft's Group was very daring considering the lateness of the season; it envisioned a double envelopment to take the narrow Red Tower Pass by threatening the

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430 The Alpenkorps Division was now commanded by the Bavarian GM Ritt. von Tutschek.

431 The order of battle of 10 Mtn Bde was: Inf Bns IV/20, I/21, I/90, III/BH 1; BH FJB 4; ¼ of 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 3 and 4 Can Batties of Mtn AR 16.

432 Based on a manuscript, as yet unpublished, which GM Korzer presented to the Military Archives.

valley behind it. The allies stationed on Mt Robu west of the Alt were already south of the main crest. East of the river, however, everything depended on the success of the initial attack on the Moscovul Gap, which hopefully was just weakly guarded. A perhaps more difficult problem would be bringing supplies up to the division-sized group attacking in the east. G.Lt Krafft wrote with concern in his diary, "We must have a lot of luck."<sup>433</sup>

G.Lt Krafft's 20 battalions and 21 batteries were opposed by the Romanian I Corps which had 22 battalions, 6 squadrons and 28 batteries. By incorporating the battalions of 20 ID (which had been dissolved), the Corps' size had been brought up to 70% of its authorized strength. 23 ID was stationed on the border crest from the Moscovul Gap to Heights # 1828, and then along the road leading to Caineni. West of the Alt River (between Caineni and Heights # 1719) the 13 ID guarded the paths leading toward the confluence of the Alt and Lotru. 1 Calarasi Bde (reduced to one combined regiment) was in reserve at Perisani.

#### 16-18 October

On 16 October the 10 Mtn Bde began to attack from Mt Robu along the thickly-wooded ridge stretching toward the southeast. After very hot fighting they established firm footholds on Heights # 1719 and # 1746. On the next day they planned to continue the thrust toward Golotreni by also taking the forested Heights # 1763. But while this operation was being prepared the 13 Romanian ID counterattacked. And in the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup> a storm broke out that initiated a sudden and substantial change in the weather pattern. The ground gained the day before had to be abandoned. Col. Korzer moved his battle groups back nearer to Mt Robu so they could better protect the jumping-off points of his operation and cope with the increasingly serious logistical difficulties. Despite the sudden fall in temperature (at night it was -15 degrees C.), Col. Korzer prepared as ordered by G.Lt Krafft for a new thrust, which would initially be directed against Heights # 1763. To the left of 10 Mtn Bde the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Jaeger Regiment was now also supposed to join the attack on both slopes of the valley of the Red Tower Pass.

Thanks to extensive security measures, the 2 Mtn Bde was able on the 16<sup>th</sup> to march to the glass works south of F Porumbak without being detected by the enemy. Early on the 17<sup>th</sup> they fell upon their completely surprised opponents in the Moscovul Gap, threw

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433 Heréus, manuscript

them back, and thrust ahead to the line Point # 2019 - Point # 1862. Despite snow storms, the Brigade drove forward as ordered to Mt Fruntu # 1506. Parts were already around Arefu and one battalion blocked the road at Salatrucu d.s. The defeated Romanians were trying just to gain time for counter-measures by reducing the impetus of their opponents, who despite the bad weather and terrain were advancing with such extraordinary speed. 1 Bav Jäger Brigade, following Panzenböck's troops, was able to send just a regiment through the Moscovul Gap on the 18<sup>th</sup> due to the snow storm; the second regiment was only able to reach the woods on the border north of the Gap. One battalion had wrested the Surul from the enemy on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

The dismayed HQ of I Romanian Corps now hurriedly sent four battalions, a Calarasi regiment and two batteries to assist the hard-pressed 23 ID; 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ brought up three battalions and two batteries from Targu Jiu.<sup>434</sup> The allied troops already on Romanian soil were to be hit with a concentric counterattack and thrown back over the border.

#### 19-23 October

Meanwhile all of Krafft's group was on the offensive on 19 October. 10 Mtn Bde stormed the Romanian position on Heights # 1763 and pushed ahead further, but after costly actions against a larger enemy force they were pushed back to their starting points. German Jaeger in the Alt valley worked their way up to Caineni, which compelled the Romanians to pull the troops stationed on the northern bank of the Caineni Brook back to the southern bank. East of the Alt, where the enemy had once more established themselves on the Surul and Heights # 2143 to the south, parts of 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade attacked the latter point to drive away the Romanians who here were dangerously close to the supply line of 2 Mtn Bde. The 2 Mtn Bde, fighting twenty kilometers farther south, was instructed to capture the ridge by Clocoticiu and then to move northwest toward Bumbuesti; thus they could open the road in cooperation with 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade. After Col. Panzenböck repulsed Romanian thrusts at Salatrucu on the 19<sup>th</sup>, one of his battalions did storm Clocoticiu on the 20<sup>th</sup> and thus also took two guns.

The wedge which 2 Mtn Bde had driven deep into the Romanian front, which was interrupting traffic on the road to Curtea d'Arges, as well as the strong pressure in the Alt valley and

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434 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 433

farther west, forced the Romanians to take decisive measures. The inner wings of the two divisions were pulled back on the 21<sup>st</sup> to the line Robesti - Stana Zanoaga. Moreover, from the reserves of I Corps, and then from troops which had come from 11 and 1 ID as well as from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, three groups were created. They were supposed to mount a concentric advance against 2 Mtn Bde from Summit # 1474 north of the Stana Zanoaga, from Perisani, and from the Salatrucu d.j. - Arefu area.<sup>435</sup>

The position of Tutschek's group, despite their gratifying feat of arms, was still very dangerous. Supplies couldn't be brought through the Moscovul Gap because of the snow storm, which had made the narrow mountain path impassable. The troops suffered from lack of food and ammunition, and it was impossible to evacuate wounded men through the valley. Cases of frost bite were increasing to a shocking extent because the troops lacked protection from the cold. Thus BH FJB # 8 of 2 Mtn Bde had lost almost half its men to the ravages of the weather. G.Lt Krafft was greatly concerned for his troops; to him there seemed just one way to overcome this crisis - a further advance south to lower ground that was free of snow, while opening the road at Gaujani for the passage of supplies. Therefore G.Lt Krafft ordered the attack to resume on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

But on this day a new snow storm east of the Alt, accompanied by rain and fog in the valley and in the Czibine Mountains, limited the fighting. At Clocoticiu the 2 Mtn Bde, with the help of a Bavarian Jaeger battalion which arrived in the nick of time, was able to drive back the attacking Romanians in a difficult action. Since the miserable weather precluded any hope that the logistical situation would improve quickly, GM Tutschek was concerned that 2 Mtn Bde might succumb to hunger, cold or an enemy onslaught. Therefore he ordered that in the evening twilight on the 21<sup>st</sup> the Brigade should fall back to Heights # 1385, leaving only outposts on Mt Fruntu. After protesting, Col. Panzenböck began to carry out this order. With a heavy heart he gave up the position which his magnificent troops had won along the road.

At this same time the center of Romanian I Corps was retreating as already described, and the allies noticed its movement despite the fog. When the retreat was reported to G.Lt Krafft in the afternoon, he ordered a sharp pursuit of the enemy. 10 Mtn Bde, which already occupied Heights # 1763 on the 21<sup>st</sup>, was to thrust toward Golotreni. The 2<sup>nd</sup> German Jaeger Regiment would

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435 *Ibid.*, pp. 437 ff.

advance from Caineni to Bumbesti and open up the road to supply Tutschek's group. Simultaneous with this thrust the 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade would attack from Point # 2019 south past Point # 1474. The 2 Mtn Bde were instructed just to hold their new positions.

G.Lt Krafft received a welcome addition to his strength on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The higher HQ detached Res IR 18 and three batteries from 8 Bav Res ID and Res IR 13 from 11 Bav ID and sent them to the Red Tower Pass. These troops, led by the commander of 15 Bav Res Inf Bde (GM Freih. von Pechmann) followed the group in the Alt valley. Moreover the newly-formed HQ of 73 k.u.k. ID (under FML Ludwig Goiginger) was assigned to Group Krafft; at noon on the 23<sup>rd</sup> they took control over the brigades of Korzer and Pechmann.<sup>436</sup> Finally the German Lst IR 36 came from the Carpathians into the Red Tower Pass.

10 Mtn Bde, suffering from logistical problems similar to those of 2 Mtn Bde, attacked southeast in three columns on the 22<sup>nd</sup>; in seesaw fighting in the forest, which continued into the 23<sup>rd</sup>, they were able only to permanently hang onto Heights # 1746. The valley group (2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Regiment) captured Grablesci on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and thrust ahead to Robesti. Even the intervention of 15 Bav Res Inf Bde on the 23<sup>rd</sup> wasn't sufficient to achieve the anxiously-awaited capture of Gaujani. The 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade stormed Heights # 1474 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and on the next day fought ahead with difficulty toward the Stana Zanoaga. When 2 Mtn Bde learned that the enemy was retreating to the Stana Zanoaga, they withdrew only to Mt Fruntu; although they had abandoned the road because of GM Tutschek's perhaps somewhat hasty decision, they still kept it under artillery fire.

#### 24 October to 2 November

When the sun finally appeared from behind the clouds on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Bavarians of Pechmann's Brigade and of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Jaeger Regiment<sup>437</sup> realized that they were standing in front of a new and well-constructed position which ran from Robesti over the Mormantul to the Stana Zanoaga. The western part of this position, as far as the road at Gaujani, was conquered in a

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436 Goiginger, "Siegreich vom Eisernen Tor bis an die Putna" (in the "Schweizerische Vier-teljahrschrift für Kriegswissenschaft", Berne; 1923 edition, pp. 237 ff.)

437 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: There is an error here; the battalions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Jaeger Regt were from Hanover and Mecklenburg, not Bavaria.

fresh onslaught on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Against the eastern part the Bavarians meanwhile conducted a methodical operation, carefully prepared with artillery; thus by the 26<sup>th</sup> the entire high ridge of the Mormantul was brought into their hands. The 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade had to keep postponing their attack on the Stana Zanoaga because they were still suffering from an acute shortage of supplies.

Meanwhile a new danger was arising on the eastern flank. Romanian reinforcements from the Predeal Pass, about a regiment strong, were taken over the light railway from Curtea d'Arges to Cumpana where on the 24<sup>th</sup> they threatened the supply line of Panzenböck's Brigade from the east. These enemy detachments were driven back by evening. But in order to permanently end this danger, on the next day GM Tutschek pulled 2 Mtn Bde back to the Stibeu Heights and attacked the Cumpana railroad station with 1<sup>st</sup> Bav Jaeger Regiment. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the station was wrested from the enemy, who thus lost a valuable strong point for their attacks against the eastern flank of Krafft's Group.

After Bavarian troops were thus sent into the upper Argesu valley, the battle lines of Group Krafft were already 40 km long; this compelled the general to request another division and several batteries.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> the Stana Zanoaga was to be captured in an attack by all the Bavarian battalions between the Alt and this mountain. Early on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Romanians attempted a mass assault, covered by rain and fog, but were repulsed; later in the day the Stana Zanoaga was finally conquered. The Romanians fell back in disorder to a new position between Copaceni and the Muglele Heights. This was the next target of the Bavarians. 1 Jaeger Brigade was supposed to thrust along the line of ridges from the Stana Zanoaga through Muglele toward Clocoticiu. 2 Mtn Bde would work their way forward from their current positions to the northern slope of Mt Fruntu.

The German 1st IR 36 in the Alt valley were instructed just to hold their own positions. 10 Mtn Bde, greatly weakened by their recent actions, were given the same assignment; they were responsible for guarding a sector that reached to the Stefleste Heights, 36 km from the Alt.<sup>438</sup> They prepared to attack the strongly occupied Summit # 1466, on which the enemy was barring the pack-animal road to Calinesti.

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438 In the first eight days of fighting the 10 Mtn Bde had lost 27 officers and 1188 men.

When the Romanians were forced out of their second primary defensive line between Robesti and the Stana Zanoaga, G.Lt Krafft's mission was to throw the enemy so far south that the Perisani-Salatrucu road and, once more, the road to Arefu could be used to supply the easternmost battle group. Therefore 73 ID (10 Mtn and 15 Bav Res Inf Bdes) would advance to Golotreni and to the heights southwest of Clocoticiu. The objectives of Lt Col. Epp's 1 Bav Jaeger Brigade (2<sup>nd</sup> German Jaeger and Bav Leib Infantry Regiments) were Salatrucu d.j. and Heights # 1041. Finally, farther east the Alpenkorps Division (2 Mtn Bde and 1<sup>st</sup> Bav Jaeger Regiment) would thrust to Buscenesti.

But in the area to be attacked the Romanians had built a third line of resistance; it ran from Lupi in the Argesu valley over Mt Fruntu and the Muglele to Copaceni. On the western bank of the Alt the enemy's advanced position still ran from Robesti through Heights # 1466, 1746 and 1719. The 13 Romanian ID could hold onto this exposed line because their eastern flank was protected by the Alt and because their opponents, 10 Mtn Bde, were restricting their own activities to holding their positions in the forest.

On the 30<sup>th</sup>, Pechmann's and Epp's Brigades worked their way forward toward the enemy. On the next day the former Brigade was temporarily in some difficulty at Copaceni, but on 1 November they were able to establish a firm footing on the ridge south of Titesti under a brilliant sky. Epp's Brigade stormed the Muglele on the last day of October; on the next day, however, they could pursue only as far as the foot of the heights lying to the south where they couldn't overcome the Romanians' resistance. Enemy resistance stiffened similarly on Mt Fruntu. On 2 November the Romanians even counterattacked, taking advantage of some fog whose effect was heightened by the fire of our own artillery.<sup>439</sup> After prolonged fighting this thrust was repulsed, but showed that the enemy's will to resist was still strong. Therefore G.Lt Krafft's troops fighting east of the Alt would carry out their operation against the third line of defense systematically.

## **6. The breakthrough in the Vulkan Mountains**

### **a. The allies prepare to attack, the Romanians to**

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439 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 450. Heréus, Manuscript

**defend**

On 12 October GdI Falkenhayn had decided to break through in the Vulkan Mountains with 301 ID and 11 Bav ID (the latter was arriving by train), which would be followed by 6 German CD, two German bicycle battalions and several batteries. Immediately the Bavarian troops, who originally were supposed to detrain at Reps, were instructed to stay on their trains as far as Piski and Deva. On the 15<sup>th</sup> all the units listed above were placed under the commander of 11 Bav ID, G.Lt Kneussl, upon his arrival at Deva. His mission was "to first capture the enemy position on the Szurduk and Vulkan Passes by surprise, to the extent possible, in an envelopment maneuver. Then without delay, pressing the enemy sharply, to secure the area at and east of Targu Jiu and thus open the way into the Romanian lowlands for 6 CD (and for 7 CD which will follow them)."<sup>440</sup>

G.Lt Kneussl planned to first capture the Vulkan Pass. For this purpose a group from Sigleul mc. would roll up the Romanian lines on the ridge toward the east; at the same time a second group, after taking the border heights rising directly east of the Szurduk Pass, would thrust southwest toward the Vulkan Pass. From here Kneussl wanted to turn to the south; supported by a secondary operation east of the Schyl, he would open the deep and narrow valley, 30 km long, that led to the Szurduk Pass from the south. Then he apparently intended to send the cavalry into the plains along the Szurduk Road. Since most of 11 Bav ID could be unloaded from the trains by the 20<sup>th</sup>, the attack was set to begin on 23 October.

Meanwhile the advance at the Red Tower Pass had awakened hope for Falkenhayn that he could perhaps break through the mountains more quickly in that sector. Therefore, as already narrated, he diverted Res IR 13 of 11 Bav ID to the Alpenkorps. To make up for this substantial weakening of his infantry, G.Lt Kneussl decided to employ 6 CD, which would be assembling on the 20<sup>th</sup> at Petrilla, on foot in the mountains.

The snow which fell on 18 October made it more difficult to prepare to attack. The German troops, unlike the k.u.k. 144 Inf Bde of 301 ID, had no mountain equipment at all. They lacked the proper shoes, warm underclothing, hay-boxes and pack-animals. To make up for this deficiency the German battalions were inserted among the soldiers of 144 Inf Bde stationed on the

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440 Kneussl, "Der Durchbruch durch das Vulkan-Gebirge Ende Oktober 1916" (Munich, 1926), p. 7.

border ridge, so that the units became intermingled.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> Kneussl issued orders for the attack. GM Busse with seven battalions would first take the chain of mountains between Sigleul mc. and the Vulkan Pass, and then advance to Schela. Col. Jakob Schulz, the commander of 21 Bav Inf Bde, would thrust forward with four battalions between the Vulkan Pass and the Schyl; after taking the Vulkan Pass he'd aim for the southern outlet of the Szurduk Pass. The bicyclists would be deployed on the valley road. East of the Schyl the Honved Colonel Sztavinsky attacked already on the 21<sup>st</sup> with four battalions to divert the Romanians. During the fighting he managed to climb the ridge-line stretching from the border stone in the Szurduk Pass toward the east; on the next day he held the ridge against attempts to recover it. The German 6 CD wouldn't be able to start climbing the Chimpulu niagu, brigade-by-brigade, until the 25<sup>th</sup>; however, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> they sent the k.k. Landsturm Infantry Battalion III/9 ahead through D. Arcanului. After crossing the mountains the cavalry were supposed to thrust east toward the Schyl to help the other troops to also leave the mountains and to prepare to cross the Schyl.

On 23 October G.Lt Kneussl had a total of 18 battalions, 27 squadrons and 24 batteries available; 8 battalions, 26 squadrons and 16 batteries were German.

On the Vulkan Mountains the opposing Romanian 11 ID was organized in three brigades (21, 22 and 31) with 23 battalions, 2 squadrons and 16 batteries. They were aware that German troops were assembling at Petroseny, but their reports to the Romanian high command weren't believed.<sup>441</sup> Because the situation continued to deteriorate at all parts of the front, the latter were trying to find a place from which they could draw troops into reserve. In this effort they were encouraged by French General Berthelot, who'd been able to quickly win a decisive influence over the Romanian planning for military operations. Berthelot wanted to create a strong strategic reserve, because he correctly saw that it wouldn't be possible to influence the course of the campaign without troops at his disposal.<sup>442</sup>

The Romanian high command now believed that they could take advantage of the early snowfall in the mountains. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> they ordered that just one brigade apiece should be left in the hitherto quiet sectors at Orsova and in the Vulkan Mountains,

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441 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 376

442 Pétain, p. 33

both under HQ of 1 ID. All the other troops would make up a newly-reorganized 11 ID, which would move to Pitesci at the disposal of the high command. Moreover the I Corps, even though they were engaged in heavy fighting, would pull back two brigades to serve (respectively) as the Corps' and Army's reserves. The troop movements were to start on the 24<sup>th</sup>. 11 ID, however, shifted troops to I Corps beforehand. Therefore on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, when the allies started to attack, 11 ID had just 17 battalions, 2 squadrons and 15 batteries.

**b. Breakthrough fighting from 23 October to 5 November**23-25 October

Because of thick morning fog the attack on the 23<sup>rd</sup> couldn't start until it was nearly noon. Then however the allied advance was crowned by success. All the summits between Sigleul mc. and the Schyl were captured, but the Vulkan Pass and the heights farther east remained in enemy hands. Therefore the advance to the goal that had been assigned for the 23<sup>rd</sup> - the southern edge of the broad forest zone, had to be postponed until the next day.

Favored by clear autumn weather, the main body of Busse's group (led by the commander of 144 Inf Bde, Col. Berger) did in fact drive the Romanians past the forested border on the 24<sup>th</sup>. But Col. Schulz's battalions, who were supposed to thrust into the Schyl ravine south of the Lainic Monastery, were still hung up on the steep and tree-covered cliff walls; on the next day they were also unable to find a way down. Later they were pulled back to the Vulkan Pass; then some of them were sent to Group Busse and others deployed on the eastern bank of the Schyl. The advance guard of 6 CD, Landsturm Battalion III/9, reached the forested Heights # 1240 north of Francesti without encountering opposition. Bicycle troops east of the Schyl climbed toward Heights # 1426.

The Romanian 11 ID, having suffered substantial losses in men and guns, fell back to the line Dobrita-Valari-Schela-Bumbesci and requested reinforcements. But I Corps, which should have been in the best position to offer help, were themselves engaged in such heavy fighting that the Army commander General Culcer suggested to the high command that the Corps should be excused from providing reserves as ordered. He wanted to comply with this order as it applied to 11 ID, but proposed that since he also considered "the situation of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to be very critical" he should carry out an orderly retreat now before he was forced to do so under enemy pressure.

The Romanian high command considered Culcer's proposals too wide-ranging. After his pessimistic warning he was removed from his post; Gen. Dragalina, the leader of 1 ID, was named commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The high command forbade him to talk about retreat; they criticized his force for not fighting successfully like North Army, and ordered him to counterattack his opponents - whom they believed to be equally worn-out.

Dragalina took over Army HQ in the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>, and immediately visited 11 ID. He wanted to first restore the situation here before creating reserves as ordered. For this purpose he intended to draw available troops from 1 ID (that were stationed by Baia de arama) and also to bring up some additional units; once these troops had come up, he planned to have them emerge from the forest to fall upon the allies' western flank (which he believed was at Dobrita) and rear. Early on the 25<sup>th</sup> he went to reconnoiter in the Szurduk Pass, but came too close to the front and was badly wounded. A few days later he died of his injuries in a Bucharest hospital.<sup>443</sup>

On the allied side, Group Busse, which was supposed to advance toward the Schyl sector Vadeni-Sambotiu-Porceni, encountered ever weaker resistance as they came up to the line Schela-Alexieni-Dobrita. They had already brought up their mobile artillery. Landsturm Battalion III/9, followed by the lead brigade of 6 CD (which had great difficulty moving forward), came out of the forest north of Francesti, where they were stopped by enemy infantry. Group Schulz was supposed to hold onto the heights on the western bank of the Schyl while advancing over the accompanying heights on the eastern bank toward Bumbesci; they captured Summit # 1426 with bicycle troops, and in the valley approached the Monastery. Sztavinsky's battalions, which were supposed to assist Schulz's operation, were able to advance only slowly in the difficult mountain terrain.

Despite the success to date, G.Lt Kneussl had concerns about continuing the operation because his troops, who anyway were few in number, were beginning to tire. Also rations and ammunition were in short supply because it was difficult to bring them forward on the wretched, high-elevation route through the Vulkan Pass. Therefore he wanted to open the road through the Szurduk Pass as soon as possible; it would be used by 7 CD which was arriving. Busse's and Schulz's Groups were urged to thrust forward with strength on the 26<sup>th</sup> toward the southern outlet of the Szurduk Pass.

During the 25<sup>th</sup> the Romanian 11 ID had fallen back to the line Rasova-Turcinesci-Bumbesci. The troops, disorganized and exhausted, were barely able to occupy the prepared entrenchments. Therefore the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army contemplated a retreat. The Army's Chief of Staff ordered 1 ID

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443 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 391

to prepare to fall back toward Turnu Severin - Craiova. 11 ID would continue to resist their opponents until evening, but then would withdraw with one column from Bumbesci to Novaci streini and with another from Targu Jiu to Copacioasa. Eventually the retreat would continue to the Alt. Moreover, by the 26<sup>th</sup> the I Corps would send three battalions plus artillery to support 11 ID.<sup>444</sup>

But the Romanian high command still didn't agree with these plans; they ordered emphatically that two or three battalions should attack their opponents' flank.

#### 26-28 October

The beautiful weather continued on the 26<sup>th</sup>. This encouraged Busse's battalions as they advanced to the Schyl at Porceni, Sambotin and Turcinesci. They saw that the eastern bank was held by the enemy. In contrast to the easy advance on the western bank, Group Schulz had only been able to take the high, wooded peaks in the area around Points # 1367 and 1473; both of their bicycle battalions had to be deployed in the mountains. The individual regiments of 6 CD were spread over a wide area because the poor carriage-road they were taking was also choked with many vehicles. They had brought just one gun up to the front; the others had been stuck or damaged on the road. Therefore the attack on Francesti made no progress.

The extent of territory gained to date was encouraging, as was the large number of prisoners taken since the 23<sup>rd</sup> (28 officers and 2234 men) and the seizure of 28 guns and 9 machine guns; however, because of the overall situation it was necessary to win a final decision as soon as possible. Therefore on the 27<sup>th</sup> G.Lt Kneussl wanted 6 CD to break through to Cornesti aided by the right wing of Busse's Group. The troops on the Schyl would mostly stand their ground, but were to capture Bumbesci in order to threaten the northern flank of the defenders on the river's eastern bank.<sup>445</sup>

The weather turned bad in the night of 26-27 October. When the allies began to attack they were surrounded by thick fog which soon turned into streams of rain. And everywhere they were checked by the Romanians, who were starting their counterattack.

In accordance with Dragalina's plan the commander of 11 Romanian

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444 *Ibid.*, p. 395

445 Kneussl, "Durchbruch", p. 37

ID deployed the four battalions and two batteries he'd received from 1 ID against his opponents' right flank. The main body of 11<sup>th</sup> Division conducted a frontal advance over the Schyl between Vadeni and Bumbesci. On the right the eastern wing of 21 Bde would hold onto the heights north of Bumbesci, keeping the Szurduk Pass closed.<sup>446</sup> The three battalions and four batteries coming up from Filiasu made up the reserve.

The detachment of 1 ID from Baia de arama left some men at Francesti to guard the flank toward the north; this prevented 6 CD, which still hadn't all assembled at the front, from breaking through. The detachment's main body thrust forward to Rasova, where they struck a Bavarian battalion from three sides and completely smashed it. Thus the pack-animal trail back to the border heights at Muncelul lay open to the Romanians.

Meanwhile the main body of the Romanian 11 ID also won a complete success. One by one the widely separated battalions of Group Busse were halted, enveloped, and pushed back to Valari and Schela after hot fighting. The enemy also captured two Bavarian batteries. Because of this substantial setback it was of little use that Group Schulz on the eastern bank was able to advance as far as the heights north of Bumbesci. The main force, Group Busse, was totally exhausted, poorly fed, and short of ammunition. The streaming rain, that in the higher elevations had already turned to snow, gnawed away at the troops' last strength. In the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> G.Lt Kneussl decided to give up the attack and to lead Group Busse back to the edge of the forests. If this position couldn't be held, the retreat would continue to the border ridge. A brigade from 7 CD would occupy the Muncelul. Col. Schulz would give up any battalions he could spare to Busse and to the 6 CD. The primary goal was to select defensive positions from which it would be possible later to resume the offensive.

On the 28<sup>th</sup>, during which the rain paused only in the daylight hours, the Romanians continued their attack. The detachment from 1 ID struck toward Dobrita and Valari; the main body of 11 ID thrust toward Schela and Porceni and drove their opponents back past the edge of the forests. 6 CD noticed that pressure from the enemy was reduced, but could no longer advance themselves. They were instructed to stay in place, while sending back their horses (with which they'd hoped to resume their mounted role) up the valley. The leading brigade of 7 CD was supposed to occupy the Muncelul while the other two entered

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446 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 402 ff.

the Vulkan Pass, but none of them reached their goals because of the miserable weather. A bicycle battalion of Group Schulz was sent to the Prislop, but lost their way and finally wound up in the Vulkan Pass.

During 28 October three Aus-Hung. mountain batteries and the Württemberg Mountain Battalions arrived at Petroseny as reinforcements. GdI Falkenhayn let G.Lt Kneussl know that further German reinforcements, now coming to Transylvania by train, would be sent into the Schyl valley; under the command of G.Lt Kühne, who was called from the Ojtoz Pass, they would complete the breakthrough into Wallachia. This strengthened G.Lt Kneussl's determination to hold onto his positions until the new divisions could intervene. He was further encouraged by the fact that the Romanians were no longer attacking strongly; like their opponents they had reached the limits of their strength due to the fighting and the weather.

#### 29 October to 5 November

The cold weather, rain and fog continued on 29 October, and Group Busse suffered yet another misfortune. A detachment of two Bavarian battalions and two Aus-Hung. mountain batteries had been stationed in the forest near Point # 1191 (north of Valari); insufficiently prepared, around 2:00 PM they were surprised by the enemy and dispersed. Some of the guns were taken by the Romanians and others pushed into the Susita ravine, where they remained. The rest of the detachment pulled back to the Prislop border heights, then - to finally get some rest - they descended into the valley at Lupeny. Thus a second path to the border lay open to the enemy, creating the danger that 6 CD might be cut off. Therefore this Division was ordered back to the D. Arcanului.

Their withdrawal, which took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> in a snow storm, was extremely difficult. Not a single vehicle made it back. Three guns were damaged, five had to be destroyed. The exhausted cavalry finally crossed the border to Chimpulu niagu, except for 50 dismounted men who stayed on the D. Arcanului. The Muncelul Heights were finally occupied by other dismounted troops from 7 CD. However, it wasn't possible to occupy the Prislop. To the southeast of this mountain Group Busse - from which all the Bavarian battalions had been pulled back into the valley - held a thin arc from a point west of Puliga to Point # 1040; on their left Group Schulz held the heights northwest and northeast of Bumbesci. The exhausted enemy didn't push forward, and had to give up some units to I Corps.

On 31 October the first battalions of 41 German ID arrived at Petroseny. They were placed in the front along with the Württemberg Mountain Battalion to relieve troops who especially needed rehabilitation. On 1 November, as G.Lt Kühne was taking command of the Vulkan sector, the sun broke through the clouds. This led to increased fighting, which was especially lively east of Point # 1040. The Romanians who'd penetrated the positions here were finally driven away, and on 5 November the foremost allied line was gain moved ahead to the edge of the woods north of Schela.

Thus Kneussl's Group had broken through the Vulkan Mountains but hadn't been able, as planned, to open the way into the Wallachian plains for the two cavalry divisions. The unsatisfactory outcome of the operation was caused by insufficient troop strength and a lack of equipment for mountain fighting. The bad weather had also played a part, but it affected both sides in equal measure.

The crossing of the Vulkan Mountains reinforced a lesson that had already been learned in the Winter Battle in the Carpathians in 1915 and more recently in the actions in the Trotusu and Ojtoz valleys; the attackers' problems increased after they crossed the watershed. Long supply lines, difficult conditions for moving artillery forward and insufficient road networks in high mountains are serious obstacles, which in particular inhibit the use of cavalry. The defenders stationed on the descending slopes of the mountains, on the other hand, have shorter and less difficult supply lines; they can utilize relatively flatter terrain and a better road network that enables them to quickly move reserves to the most important points.

This was the lesson which Kneussl's Group also had to learn. Relatively weak Romanian units, deployed in the most effective directions, had inflicted a very costly setback on the allies.<sup>447</sup> But fortunately both of the sortie points out of the Petroseny

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447 Allied casualties totaled 518 dead, 1175 wounded and 1971 missing plus 27 guns. Figures on the number of dead and wounded Romanians aren't available; they lost 36 officers and 2178 men as prisoners and left 6 guns and 4 machine guns in their opponents' hands. A larger number of cannon and machine guns had been taken, but were later recovered by the Romanians (Kneussl, "Durchbruch", p. 79). See also Dabija, Vol. II, p. 426

basin were still firmly in the allies' hands. Comforted by this fact, and willing to apply the lessons learned in the recent fighting, the troops prepared to renew the attempt to break through into the plains as quickly as possible, because winter was threateningly at hand.

### **c. Actions by Orsova in the second half of October**

The activities of Group Szivo were related, although only indirectly, to the breakthrough attempt by Group Kneussl. Since 16 October the Group was once more directly under the command of 9<sup>th</sup> Army HQ.

After the encouraging initial successes in the Vulkan Mountains, GdI Falkenhayn asked Col. Szivo to report on the feasibility of an attack aimed at the capture of Turnu Severin. The latter reported that he could leave his left wing a minimal amount of troops in a purely defensive role, while having all the rest of his units, supported by Bulgarian artillery and the Danube flotilla, advance over the lower Cerna.

On 27 October an offensive was opened as proposed in the report to Falkenhayn described above. But very little ground was gained because - as had already been indicated during feint attacks carried out on the 23<sup>rd</sup> - the enemy force at Orsova had by no means been weakened. When troops who made reconnaissance thrusts on the 28<sup>th</sup> reported that the situation was unchanged, the attack was abandoned. The units which had gained new positions on the western bank of the Cerna were told to dig in; Col. Szivo took all necessary measures to prepare his defenses because he was now concerned that the Romanians themselves would launch diversionary attacks.

## **7. The capture of Constanta and Cernavoda**

Even before Falkenhayn could begin the attempted breakthrough south of Petroseny, Mackensen delivered a new blow in Dobruja. The General-Feldmarschall's objective was still to advance to the narrowest point between the Danube and the sea. Then he could make units available for a thrust over the Danube at a point where he could cooperate with 9<sup>th</sup> German Army.

The allied forces which started to attack on 19 October were divided by Mackensen into two groups. The main effort was made by the eastern group of Gen. Kantardiev; his Bulgarian Combined

ID (a brigade of 6 ID plus the Varna garrison troops) and 1 Cav Div were joined by the German 217 ID, Brigade Bode and a large force of German and Aus-Hung. heavy artillery. The western group under Gen. Toshev (1 and 4 Bulgarian ID, VI Turkish Corps) also attacked in order to pin down the enemy.

After four days of stubborn fighting the allies were able to enter Constanta and to throw the enemy back past the eastern stretch of the railroad. In these actions the Russians, who fought mainly in the center of the Dobruja army, offered just feeble resistance.<sup>448</sup> The front of Zayonchkovsky's army almost seemed about to collapse. In Constanta the allies captured some large granaries, full of wheat, and oil tanks. The Russian fleet, which took almost no part in the fighting, steamed out of the harbor without destroying these valuable supplies.<sup>449</sup>

Two days after the capture of Constanta, on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the enemy abandoned their bridgehead at Cernavoda (fortified before the war) to Toshev's group which had pivoted to the west.<sup>450</sup> Shortly before, the Romanians had blown up the great bridge over the Danube.

In a further advance the allies reached their goal, a line between Lake Tasaul and Topal. The enemy, who pulled even farther back, were pursued just by Bulgarian cavalry. Only the Bulgarians' 4 ID and (newly-reorganized) Combined ID, plus the VI Ottoman Corps, were left to defend the new position; under Gen. Toshev, they once more made up the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Mackensen pulled back the other troops, including all the heavy artillery; some of the long-range guns were deployed at Constanta to defend against enemy warships.

A few days after creating the new defensive position, the

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448 Dabija, Vol. I, pp. 433, 435 and 438.

449 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - There is a discrepancy in the description of Russian naval activity between the German and Austrian official histories. According to the Germans the Russian ships in fact were quite active, though unsuccessful, in providing fire support during the Constanta fighting. Moreover, they returned to bombard the city on 4 November when they destroyed a third of the captured oil supplies. See the Reichs-Kriegs-Ministerium's, "Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1938), Vol. XI, pp. 213 and 215.

450 Between 1 September and 25 October the allies in Dobruja had taken 37,600 prisoners plus 170 guns and a roughly equal number of machine guns.

General-Feldmarschall decided to try to occupy all of Dobruja. The Bulgarian infantry divisions therefore moved forward, and felt their way toward the entrenchments the enemy had prepared in the area of Pestemal. Meanwhile the IV Sib Corps (9 and 10 Sib Rif Divs) and 30 ID of Russian IV Corps were coming to Dobruja to reinforce these trenches. The main body of the latter Corps (40 ID and 8 CD) dug in along the left bank of the Danube between Calarasi and the mouth of the Jalomita in case the allies tried to cross here. The 2 and 5 Romanian ID also shifted to the left bank of the Danube. Thus the only Romanian units left on the right bank were the 9 and 19 ID (which merged into one combined division because of their heavy losses) plus 5 Calarasi Brigade. All the units just listed, on both banks of the Danube, made up the Russian "Army of the Danube." Their new commander was Gen. Sakharov, who hitherto had led 11<sup>th</sup> Army and now replaced Zayonchkovsky.

The allies' efficient intelligence service had provided timely warning of the arrival of the Russian reinforcements. To save Toshev's divisions, which had advanced as far as the Russo-Romanian front, Mackensen ordered the Bulgarians to withdraw to the entrenchments which meanwhile had been completed between Lake Tasaul and Topal. They began to pull back on 3 November and occupied the prepared position, in which the Turkish corps held the center. When the Russians found that the Bulgarians had withdrawn, they followed them on 6 November, and dug themselves in opposite their opponents' fortifications.

### **8. The allied commanders prepare to invade Wallachia**

At the start of November the attacking groups of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army, which were supposed to force their way into Wallachia, were all still stuck in the mountains. Thus the operation had come to a complete halt. The allied high commands had foreseen that this might happen and therefore were already making timely efforts to bring up reinforcements. The complete inactivity of the Russians in the theater north of Pinsk had already made it possible around 20 October to relieve two German divisions (41 and 109 ID) and send them to Transylvania.

At first there were differences of opinion regarding the deployment of these units. The German OHL was considering whether to send at least one division to Orsova. Although it seemed likely that a tactical success could be won here, Army Group HQ and the k.u.k. AOK both felt that Orsova was too far from the decisive area, which in their opinion was around Bucharest. The staff of the Archduke-Successor believed on the

26<sup>th</sup> that the situation in the Red Tower Pass and at Campulung was generally favorable. Therefore they wanted to bring both divisions here, so that the main Romanian force - which they hoped to encounter at and north of Bucharest - "could be attacked in an envelopment and separated from their 1<sup>st</sup> Army."

Meanwhile Group Kneussl suffered the setback on 27 October that has already been narrated. Nevertheless, Falkenhayn clung to the idea of breaking through in the Vulkan Mountains, by applying the lessons learned to date, because this area was the nearest to the plains. Therefore he wanted to use both divisions in the Schyl valley. He was opposed by both Army Group HQ at Klausenburg and the AOK at Teschen. But the k.u.k. high command, which was concerned about a possible Russo-Romanian onslaught against 1<sup>st</sup> Army, had to admit that if the enemy did win a success in the Gyergyo it wouldn't have any negative influence on a thrust through Targu Jiu. At most it would force the allies to give up the area they'd conquered south of Kronstadt. And to be as safe as possible against such a development, the high command was strengthening 1<sup>st</sup> Army (as already mentioned) with two Bavarian divisions and Brudermann's Cavalry Corps.

Because the season was late, it was desirable to win a decisive success as soon as possible. Therefore on the 29<sup>th</sup> the German OHL finally decided, with the concurrence of the other high-level HQ at Teschen and Klausenburg, to use 41 and 109 ID in the Szurduk Pass, which they could reach the quickest by rail at the closest point to the plains. But it was also possible to honor Krafft's request for reinforcements; the German 216 ID, no longer needed in the Dniester area, was sent to the Red Tower Pass.

The plan of the Central Powers was thus to defend the eastern front of Transylvania while the groups of Kühne and Krafft, each roughly four divisions strong, carried out the thrust into the Wallachian plains. The former group would be followed by Schmettow's Cavalry Corps (formed from 6 and 7 CD), which would exploit any success. But the enemy in the Kronstadt passes would also be kept under pressure to pin down their units. The addition of 2 Bicycle Brigade, which had just 1000 riflemen, wouldn't appreciably make a difference to the Orsova group. Therefore Falkenhayn agreed that they could be utilized better by Schmettow's Cavalry Corps.<sup>451</sup> The HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group learned that Mackensen's Army Group now intended to

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451 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", p. 37

concentrate at Biela (on the railroad 50 km southwest of Rustchuk) and to cross the Danube around 7 November.

But before the allies could open their decisive attack into the Wallachian plains, the southern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army initiated serious fighting on the eastern front of Transylvania.

### 9. Outline order of battle at the start of November 1916

Covers the units of the allied Central Powers fighting in the Romanian theater of operations and on the Russian theater of operations south of the Pripyat. Reich-German units and commanders are italicized.

#### A. Army Group Mackensen

[under the German OHL]

Commander = *GFM von Mackensen*

C/Staff = *GM Tappen*

- . Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (in Dobruja) (*G.Lt Toshev*) = Bulgarian 1, 4 and Combined ID, 1 CD; Turkish VI Corps (15, 25 ID), 217 ID
- . *LII Corps* (Danube security) (*GdI Kosch*) = Bulgarian 12 ID; German and Bulgarian Landsturm; several German squadrons; GM Gaugl's Aus-Hung. Pioneer Group; Aus-Hung. Danube Flotilla

#### B. Army Group Archduke Charles

[under the k.u.k. AOK; technically a "Front"]

Commander = GO Archduke Charles Franz Joseph

Chief of Staff = *GM von Seeckt*

- . 9<sup>th</sup> Army (*GdI Erich von Falkenhayn*; C/Staff *Col. Hesse*)
  - . Group Szivo (*Col. Ritter von Szivo*) = 145 Inf Bde (*Col. Fiebich-Ripke*), Danube Group (*Col. Knechtel*)
  - . *LIV Corps* (*G.Lt Kühne*; C/Staff *Col. Hassenstein*)
    - . 11 Bav ID (*Bav G.Lt Ritter von Kneussl*)
    - . HQ of 301 ID (*GM von Busse*) with just the Aus-Hung. 144 Inf Bde (*Col. Andreas Berger*) as infantry
  - . Cavalry Corps *Schmettow* (*G.Lt Graf von Schmettow*; C/Staff = *Major Brandt*)
    - . 6 CD (*GM Saenger*)
    - . 7 CD (*GM von Mutius*)
  - . Arriving by train
    - . 41 ID (*G.Lt Schmidt von Knobelsdorf*)
    - . 109 ID (*G.Lt Ritter und Edler von Oetinger*)
  - . Group *Krafft* (*Bav G.Lt Krafft von Delmensingen*; C/Staff = *Major Freih. von Willisen*)
    - . 73 ID (*FML Ludwig Goiginger*) = 10 Mtn Bde (*Col. Korzer*), 15 Bav Res Inf Bde (*Bav GM Freiherr von Pechmann*)

- . *Alpenkorps Div (Bav GM Ritter von Tutschek)* with the attached Aus-Hung. 2 Mtn Bde (Col. Panzenböck)
- . Arriving from South Army was 216 ID (GM Vett)
- . *I Reserve Corps (G.Lt von Morgen; C/Staff = Major von Hahnke)*
  - . 8 Mtn Bde (Col. Paul Rath)
  - . 12 Bav ID (Bav G.Lt Huller)
  - . 76 Res ID (G.Lt von Elstermann)
  - . *Transylvania Cav Bde (Col. von Preinitzer)*
- . *XXIX Reserve Corps (G.Lt von Staabs; C/Staff = Lt Col. Merkel)*
  - . 51 Hon ID (GM Tanarky) = 200 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Farkas), 201 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Eölbey-Thyll)
  - . 187 ID (G.Lt Sunkel)
  - . 89 ID (GM Melms, acting)
- . 1<sup>st</sup> Army (GdI von Arz; C/Staff = Col. Joseph Huber)
  - . *Group Stein (HQ of 8 Bav Res ID, led by Bav G.Lt Freiherr von Stein; C/Staff = Lt Col. Hoffmann von Waldau)*
    - . 1 CD (FML Chev. de Ruiz) = 6 Cav Bde (Col. von Pongracz), 7 Cav Bde (Col. Edler von Pollet)
    - . 71 ID (GM Goldbach) = 141 Inf Bde (Col. Lähne), 142 Inf Bde (GM Anton Klein), 71 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Falbrecht)
    - . 8 Bav Res ID (Bav G.Lt Freiherr von Stein) [minus HQ of 15 Res Inf Bde with 3 bns and 3 batties, which was detached to 9<sup>th</sup> Army]
  - . VI Corps (FML von Fabini; C/Staff = Col. Balassa)
    - . 39 Hon ID (Col. Daubner, acting) = 77 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Lengerer), 78 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Jankovich), 39 Hon FA Bde (Col. Riedl)
    - . 61 Hon ID (GM von Grallert) = k.u. 16 Lst Mtn Bde (Col. Bernatsky), k.u. 19 Lst Mtn Bde (Lt Col. Mergl, acting), 61 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. von Dobner)
    - . 1 Lst Hussar Bde (Col. Csecsi-Nagy)
  - . XXI Corps (FML Freiherr von Lütgendorff; C/Staff = Lt Col. Höger)
    - . 72 ID (FML Bandian) = 143 Inf Bde (Col. Edl. von Barwik), Col. von Szabo's Brigade, 72 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Köchert)
    - . 37 Hon ID (GM Haber) = 74 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Pogany), 37 Hon FA Bde (Col. Seh)
- . 7<sup>th</sup> Army (GO von Kövess; C/Staff = Col. Alfred Freiherr von Waldstätten)
  - . XI Corps (FML Edler von Habermann; C/Staff = Lt Col. Otto von Redlich)
    - . 73 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Hodula)
    - . 11 Hon CD (GM von Jony, acting) = 22 Hon Cav Bde (GM

- von Zech), 24 Hon Cav Bde (Col. Hegedüs)
    - . 5 Hon CD (FML Freiherr von Apor) = 23 Hon Cav Bde (GM Graf Lubienski), 12 FA Bde (Col. Andersch)
    - . 202 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Savoly)
    - . 6 CD (GM Edler von Schwer) = 5 Cav Bde (Col. von Vetsey), 14 Cav Bde (Col. van der Sloot); attached was Col. Papp's (Inf) Brigade
  - . I Corps (FZM von Scheuchenstuel; C/Staff = Col. Sündermann)
    - . 8 CD (GM Freiherr von Schnehen) = 13 Cav Bde (Col. Radey, acting), 15 Cav Bde (GM Edler von Dokonal)
    - . 59 ID (GM Kroupa) = 6 Mtn Bde (Col. Gustav von Hellebronth), 18 Mtn Bde (Col. Kimmel), 59 FA Bde (Col. Baumann)
    - . 16 Inf Bde [from 30 ID] (GM Sallagar)
    - . 40 Hon ID (GM von Mouillard, acting) = 79 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Kobek), 80 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Alexander Förster, acting), 40 Hon FA Bde (GM Anton von Hellebronth)
  - . *Carpathian Corps* (G.Lt von Conta; C/Staff = Major von Unruh)
    - . 1 ID (GM Paschen)
    - . 2 Bicycle Bde (Col. Freiherr Quadt-Wykradt-Hüchtenbruch) [leaving by train for 9<sup>th</sup> Army]
    - . 200 ID (GM Boëss)
  - . *XXV Reserve Corps* (G.Lt Surén; C/Staff = Lt Col. Freiherr Schäffer von Bernstein)
    - . 117 ID (GM Seydel)
    - . 30 ID (FML Jesser) = 215 Inf Bde (Col. Zajicek), 30 FA Bde (COL. Stepanescu)
    - . 34 ID (GM Skvor) = 67 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Luxardo), 68 Inf Bde (Col. Greger), 34 FA Bde (GM Edler von Zwiedinek)
    - . 12 ID (FML Edler von Hinke) = 23 Inf Bde (Col. Latinik), 24 Inf Bde (Col. Johann Schubert)
  - . Cavalry Corps Brudermann (in Army Group reserves) (FML Ritter von Brudermann; C/Staff = Col. Freiherr von Gyuritz)
    - . 3 CD (Col. Edler von Kirsch, acting) = 17 Cav Bde (Col. Edler von Kirsch)
    - . 10 CD (GM Viktor von Bauer) = 4 Cav Bde (Col. von Horthy)
  - . 10 Bav ID (Bav G.Lt von Burkhardt (also in Army Group reserve)
- C. Southern part of the German Eastern command*  
 Commander = GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria  
 C/Staff = Prussian Col. Hoffmann

Army Group Böhme-Ermolli

Commander = GO von Böhm-Ermolli

C/Staff = GM Dr. Bardolff

. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (GO Karl Freiherr von Kirchbach; C/Staff = GM Konopicky)

. VIII Corps (FZM Ritter von Benigni; C/Staff = Lt Col. Max Freiherr von Pitreich)

. 5 ID (GM von Felix) = 9 Inf Bde (Col. Trimmel), 10 Inf Bde (GM Adalbert von Kaltenborn), 5 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Senkowski)

. 2 CD (GM Freiherr von Abele) = 3 Cav Bde (Col. Freiherr von Spiegelfeld), 16 Cav Bde (GM Edler von Karapancza)

. XIII Corps (FML von Csicseric; C/Staff = Col. Csoban)

. 42 Hon ID (FML Snjaric) = 83 Hon Inf Bde (GM von Bekic), 84 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Novakovic), 42 Hon FA Bde (Col. Scholz)

. 36 ID (GM Nöhring) = 13 Inf Bde (included the remnants of the infantry of 15 ID; Col. Edler von Löw), 36 FA Bde (Col. Freiherr von Bibra)

. Group Hadfy (FML von Hadfy; C/Staff = Lt Col. Stromfeld)

. 21 LW ID (GM Podhajsky) = 41 LW Inf Bde (Col. Schwanda), 42 LW Inf Bde (Col. Grossmann), 21 FA Bde (GM Franz Edler von Portenschlag)

. 48 Res ID (G.Lt von Oppeln-Bronikowski)

*South Army (Bav GdI Graf von Bothmer; C/Staff = Bav Lt Col. Ritter von Hemmer)*

. X Reserve Corps (GdI von Eberhardt; C/Staff = Major von Westhoven)

. 119 ID (GM Grünert)

. 75 Res ID (GM von Eisenhart-Rothe) [arriving by train from Army Group Linsingen]

. 199 ID (G.Lt von Puttkammer) [leaving by train for France]

. 15 FA Bde (Col. Primavesi)

. XXIV Reserve Corps (Württemberg GdI von Gerok; C/Staff = Württemberg Major Klewitz)

. 3 Prussian Gd ID (GM von Lindequist)

. 49 Res ID (Bav GM Zoellner)

. 36 Res ID (G.Lt Krüge)

. XV TURKISH Corps (GM Shevki Pasha; C/Staff = Major Shefik Bey)

. 19 TURKISH ID (Lt Col. Sedad Bey)

. 20 TURKISH ID (Lt Col. Jasyn Hilmi Bey)

. Corps Hofmann (FML Hofmann; C/Staff = Col. Pawlowski)

. 55 ID (GM Ritter von Unschuld) = 129 Inf Bde (Col. Baukovac), 130 Inf Bde (Col. Stanoilovic), 55 FA Bde (Col. Kubesch)

- . 54 ID (GM Edler von Severus) = 131 Inf Bde (GM Blum), 132 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Bolzano), 54 FA Bde (Col. Hubischta)
- . 38 Hon ID (GM von Molnar) [directly under Army] = 75 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Freiherr von Than), 76 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Karleusa), 38 Hon FA Bde (GM Werz)
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (GO von Böhm-Ermolli; C/Staff = GM Dr. Bardolff) (Under Army HQ, the IX and IV Corps plus two *German ID* made up *Group Eben* under the HQ of *I German Corps*; led by *GdI von Eben*; C/Staff = *Major Klette*)
  - . IX Corps (FML Kletter; C/Staff = Col. Edler von Ruzicic)
    - . 19 ID (FML Böltz) = 37 Inf Bde (Col. Augustin), 38 Inf Bde (GM Steiger), 19 FA Bde (GM Regnier)
    - . 32 ID (FML Ritter von Willerding) = 63 Inf Bde (Col. Brunader), 64 Inf Bde (Col. Gaksch), 32 FA Bde (Col. Moc)
  - . Directly under *Group Eben*:
    - . 197 ID (GM *Wilhelmi*)
    - . 195 ID (GM *von Hofmann*)
  - . IV Corps (FML von Hordt; C/Staff = Col. Edler von Merizzi)
    - . *Prussian Leib Hussar Brigade* (Col. *Freiherr von Lebedur*)
    - . 33 ID (GM *Iwanski*) = 65 Inf Bde (GM *von Loefen*), 66 Inf Bde (Col. *von Magerl*), 33 FA Bde (GM *Kaufmann*)
  - . V Corps (FZM Ritter von Goglia; C/Staff = Col. Freiherr von Catinelli)
    - . 31 ID (GM *Liebe*) = 61 Inf Bde (GM *Gärtner*), 62 Inf Bde (Col. *Rehwald*), 31 FA Bde (Col. *Schirza*)
    - . 27 ID (FML *Kosak*) = 53 Inf Bde (Col. *Lederer*), 54 Inf Bde (Col. *Doblitzky*), 27 FA Bde (Col. *Seewald*)
    - . 4 CD (GM *Berndt*) = 21 Cav Bde (Col. *Graf Spannoch*)
  - . XVIII Corps (FML *Czibulka*; C/Staff = Col. *von Benes*)
    - . 2 CD (GM *von Etzel*)
    - . 106 Lst ID (GM *Kratky*) = 110 Lst Inf Bde (GM *Haas*), 111 Lst Inf Bde (Col. *Strohuber*), 106 FA Bde (Col. *Meckel*)
    - . 1 k.k. Lst Inf Bde (GM *Ritter von Soretic*)
    - . 25 ID (GM *von Boog*) = 49 Inf Bde (Col. *Küttner*), 50 Inf Bde (Col. *von Wolf*), 25 FA Bde (Col. *August Edler von Filz*)

*Army Group Linsingen*

*Commander* = *GdI* (with rank of a *GO*) *von Linsingen*

*C/Staff* = Col. *Hell*

. *Armeegruppe Litzmann* (HQ of *XL Reserve Corps*) (*GdI Litzmann*; *C/Staff* = *Major Freiherr von Rotberg*)

- . *Group Dieffenbach (HQ of 22 ID) (G.Lt Dieffenbach; C/Staff = Württemberg Capt. Wolfgang Muff)*
  - . 46 LW ID (GM von Urbanski) = 91 LW Inf Bde (GM Frauenberger), 92 LW Inf Bde (Col. Kandler), 46 FA Bde (Col. Exner)
  - . 48 ID (GM Prince Schwarzenberg) = 11 Mtn Bde (Col. Hugo Fisher von See), 12 Mtn Bde (Lt Col. Khayll), 9 FA Bde (Col. Alfred Edler von Filz)
  - . 22 ID (G.Lt Dieffenbach)
- . *Corps Falkenhayn (HQ of XXII Reserve Corps) (GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn; C/Staff = Württemberg Lt Col. Wöllwarth)*
  - . 7 ID (GM Baumgartner) = 14 Inf Bde (Col. von Falkhausen), 71 Inf Bde (Col. von Lesic), 7 FA Bde (Col. Scheucher)
  - . 43 Res ID (G.Lt von Runckel)
- . 4<sup>th</sup> Army (GO von Tersztyanszky; C/Staff = Col. Freiherr von Salis-Samaden)
  - (Under Army HQ, Group Marwitz [HQ of VI Corps] led Group Beckmann, Corps Szurmay and X Corps; led by GdK von der Marwitz; C/Staff = Lt Col. von Lettow-Vorbeck)
    - . *Group Beckmann (HQ of 108 ID) (G.Lt Beckmann; C/Staff = Capt. von Jagow)*
      - . 108 ID (G.Lt Beckmann)
      - . Prussian 2 Gd Cav Bde (Col. von Arnim)
      - . 115 ID (GM von Kleist)
    - . Corps Szurmay (FML Szurmay; C/Staff = Lt Col Röder)
      - . 11 ID (GM Ritter von Metz) = 4 Inf Bde (Col. Prey), 22 Inf Bde (Col. Hauser), 11 FA Bde (Col. Steinhardt)
      - . 10 LW ID (G.Lt von Stocken) with attached 70 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Skotak)
    - . X Corps (GdI von Csanady; C/Staff = Col. Rasky)
      - . 13 LW ID (FML Edler von Kalser) = 25 LW Inf Bde (Col. Wurja), 13 FA Bde (Col. Schulhof)
      - . 2 ID (GM Ritter von Jemrich) = 19 Inf Bde (Col. Schmidbacher), 2 FA Bde (GM Edler von Rosenzweig)
      - . 172 LW Inf Bde (Col. Hüger)
    - . Reinforced X Corps (G.Lt Konstantin Schmidt von Knobelsdorf; C/Staff = Lt Col. Drechsel)
      - . 20 ID (GM Wellmann)
      - . 19 ID (GM von Hülsen)
      - . 121 ID (GM von Ditfurth)
      - . 29 ID (FML Schön) = 58 Inf Bde (Col. Rudolf Klein), 29 FA Bde (Col. Mazza)
  - . Directly under 4<sup>th</sup> Army (being formed from German troops who'd been assigned to the Army):
    - . 215 ID (GM Gronau)
    - . 218 ID (GM Gentner)

- . *Armeegruppe Bernhardi (reinforced LV Corps) (GdK von Bernhardi; C/Staff = Prussian Major Brinckmann)*
  - . *Directly under Bernhardi:*
    - . *92 ID (GM Rusche)*
    - . *107 ID (G.Lt Hahndorff)*
  - . *II Corps (FML Kaiser; C/Staff = Col. Purtscher)*
    - . *4 ID (FML Pfeffer) = 7 Inf Bde (Col. Ritter von Steinitz), 8 Inf Bde (Col. Hospodarz), 4 FA Bde (Col. Edler von Antony)*
    - . *41 Hon ID (GM Schamschula) = 40 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Freiherr von Benz-Albkron), 82 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Ritter von Sypniewski), 41 Hon FA Bde (Col. Capp)*
  - . *(Groups Wernitz and Clausius, which follow, were both under the XXII Corps: FML Rudolf Krauss; C/Staff = Col. Ludvig)*
    - . *Group Wernitz (HQ of 86 ID)*
      - . *26 LW ID (GM Edler von Wieden) = 51 LW Inf Bde (Col. Rustler), 52 LW Inf Bde (Col. Otto Richter), 26 FA Bde (Col. Reichenauer)*
      - . *45 LW ID (GM von Stöhr) = 89 LW Inf Bde (GM von Habermann), 90 LW Inf Bde (Col. Alfred Förster), 45 FA Bde (Col. Wolff)*
      - . *86 ID (G.Lt von Wernitz)*
    - . *Group Clausius (HQ of 91 ID)*
      - . *7 CD (GM Graf Marenzi) = 11 Cav Bde (GM Edler von Mold), 20 Cav Bde (Col. Freiherr Regner von Bleyleben)*
      - . *53 ID (FML von Pongracz) = k.u. 127 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Jahek), 128 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Karpellus), 53 FA Bde (Col. Adler)*
      - . *91 ID (G.Lt Clausius)*
    - . *Cavalry Corps Hauer (GdK Freiherr von Hauer; C/Staff = Lt Col. Ritter Fischer von Ledenice)*
      - . *9 CD (GM Ritter von Le Gay) = 1 Cav Bde (Col. von Weisz) 9 Cav Bde (GM Freiherr von Sessler)*
      - . *1 LW ID (GdI von Jacobi)*
      - . *Bav CD (Bav G.Lt von Hellingrath)*

D. Aus-Hung. units on the *German Eastern front north of the Pripyat*

Under Army Group Woyrsch...

- . *XII Corps (GdI Ritter von Henriquez; C/Staff = Lt Col. Freiherr von Abele)*
  - . *35 ID (FML von Podhoranszky) = 69 Inf Bde (GM von Baitz), 70 Inf Bde (Col. Funk), 35 FA Bde (GM Gröschl)*
  - . *German units (details not listed)*
- . *Other Aus-Hung. units...*

. 26 LW Inf Bde (from 13 LW ID) (Col. Ritter von Zygadlowicz)

. Polish Legion (GM von Puchalski)

Under Army Group Eichhorn...

. 24 ID (FML Urbarz) = 47 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Wieden),  
48 Inf Bde (Col. Göttlicher), 24 FA Bde (Col. Uherek)

## ***B. Guarding the eastern flank of Transylvania***

### **1. Arz's Army defends the Gyergyo basin, 3-18 November**

#### The opposing plans

Since mid-October the Russian leadership had planned to have Brussilov's lengthened and reinforced southern wing attack toward Transylvania to provide relief to the Romanians. On 19 October GdI Letschitzky proposed to the Stavka that he should strike the flank of his opponents' main body, which apparently was preparing to invade Wallachia from the Kronstadt area in the direction of Bucharest, with all available strength including the Romanian North Army. His plan envisioned hitting the Austro-German group that was guarding the crest that made up the eastern border of Transylvania, throwing them back into the mountains west of the upper Maros, and thus threatening the lines of communication of the enemy's group that was attacking toward the south.<sup>452</sup> But before this plan could be implemented the allies attacked in Dobruja; the first two corps which were supposed to reinforce Gen. Letschitzky (IV and IV Sib) had to be diverted to the Russian Army of the Danube. No one knew how long it would take the next units (XXIV and XL Corps) to arrive by rail. The capacity of the Romanian rail lines was very limited<sup>453</sup>, and the Russian V Cavalry Corps had to make its way by road from the area south of Luck to Romania.

Nevertheless on 28 October Brussilov asked 9<sup>th</sup> Army to attack by 7 November, at the latest, because the Romanians would only be able to hold their positions for another ten days at best. Gen. Letschitzky replied that for the moment he could only send the newly deployed XXXVI Corps against Marosheviz, and he didn't believe that this thrust could have much impact. Therefore plans of attack were put on hold, but preparations continued. On 3 November the Army commander presented HQ of Southwest Front

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452 Zayonchkovsky, pp. 114 ff.

453 Knox, Vol. II, p. 497

with a proposal for a powerful offensive by all his units, including all the reinforcements when they arrived, in conjunction with the Romanian North Army. It would start on 14 November, and the target would be the front between Dorna Watra and Kezdivasarhely. If Brussilov approved, Kaledin would have his 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army join Letschitzky's advance, initially with the southern wing.

Meanwhile, however, the Russians were already attacking toward the Gyergyo and the sector farther north in early November. The post-war literature doesn't make it clear whether Letschitzky had finally given in to Brussilov's wishes by opening an offensive with limited goals or whether his lower-level commanders were trying to gain more favorable positions for the main offensive which was to follow.

The HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group had taken measures against the threat to the Transylvanian eastern front; Cavalry Corps Brudermann stood ready in the Gyergyo basin and 10 Bav ID in the Csik. The allies would also be able to quickly shift the latter Division, as well as the parts of 8 Bav Res ID not deployed under Group Stein, by rail to the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The lack of enemy activity opposite 7<sup>th</sup> Army, plus the relief of Russian troops from the front and 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army HQ's shift back to Czernowitz, meant in the opinion of Front HQ that the enemy had no plans to attack here. Therefore 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was asked on 2 November whether they could return to Arz the units they had borrowed (73 Hon Inf Bde and two Bavarian battalions). GO Kövess responded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> that the enemy opposite his right wing had been reinforced by XXVI Corps; as previously, he would have to keep the entire front of his Army relatively strong. He was concentrating more heavily under I Corps so that he could undertake an operation here on the 5<sup>th</sup> to improve the defensive line. Afterwards he would spread his force out more evenly so that he could make the requested troops available. 12 ID was gradually being sent from the extreme northern wing to XI Corps, and 16 Inf Bde had again been placed under its parent 30 ID.

### 3-4 November

On 3 November the Russians began to feel their way forward with strong scouting detachments against the entire front of FML Lütgendorff's XXI Corps and the adjacent southern wing of FML Habermann's XI Corps; they pushed back the weak opposing outposts. Strong artillery fire was directed against the Putna sector held by FML Bandian's 72 ID and the positions of GM Haber's 37 Hon ID at Hollo.

These events gave the leaders of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army the impression that a larger, systematic offensive was imminent; FML Lütgendorff, who knew he was opposed by the fresh XXXVI Russian Corps and that both of his divisions were under strength<sup>454</sup>, asked for reinforcements. GdI Arz had just one battalion of Hon IR 14 in reserve, and felt it was necessary to keep it for the Belbor area, but he had the Army Group assign the rifle brigade of 3 CD (about 1700 men) to XXI Corps. On the next day the brigade was split into halves which were sent, respectively, into the Tölgyes and Putna valleys. The Corps commander reckoned that these cavalry riflemen would be sufficient to fill gaps in the line but not to hold off a serious attack. Corps HQ again informed 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ that it was already necessary to deploy a Bavarian division here to neutralize the enemy's planned attack with a counter-thrust.<sup>455</sup>

The Russian XXXVI Corps began to attack early on 4 November, aiming to break through past Lake Gyilko as well as down the Putna and Borszek roads toward the Gyergyó. Parts of III Cavalry Corps would try to help this attack group with a simultaneous advance through Belbor. Climbing out of the Zsedanpatak valley, the Russian 25 ID attacked the thin lines of 72 ID between the Bekas and Putna valleys and drove them from the Zsedanyhegy (1481 meters high), thus threatening to separate the inner wings of Lt Col. Szabo's Group and of Col. Barwik's 143 Inf Bde. 37 Hon ID was the target of an envelopment attack by the Russian 68 ID, and had to give up the Bitca Arsurilor Heights (1385 m), the lynchpin of the position north of Gyergyó-Hollo. To support the wavering front, FML Lütgendorff sent the riflemen of 3 CD to both divisions.<sup>456</sup>

The strong enemy pressure now forced the higher-level HQ to provide more extensive help. For starters, 1<sup>st</sup> Army received Brudermann's entire Cavalry Corps, from which the remainder of 3 CD was assigned to XXI Corps while 10 CD was sent to Gyergyó

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454 XXI Corps had 9200 riflemen to hold a 74 km front, and thus the strength of just one division. 37 Hon ID commanded only 74 Hon Inf Bde.

455 This is based on an unpublished study which FML Freih. von Lütgendorff gave the military archives, "The salvation of the Gyergyó from Russian invasion by the k.u.k. XXI Corps in fall 1916." Also consulted was an unpublished work by Kiszling, "The actions of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army on the Transylvanian eastern front from mid-October 1916 to the end of the year."

456 Sacken, pp. 448 ff.

Szt. Miklos in the Army's reserve. In the evening, Army Group HQ decided to also immediately send 10 Bav ID to Gyergyo Ditro and Gyergyo Remete, but retained the authority to deploy 10 CD.

#### 5-6 November

On 5 November the 37 Hon ID tried and failed to recapture the commanding terrain north of Hollo; however, the troops on the front line dug in upon some high ground farther west and here offered determined resistance to their Russian pursuers. On the right of 72 ID, the northern wing of 143 Inf Bde - whose flank had become exposed - was bent back during the night. The enemy pushed forward impetuously against the Division's weakening center. In the morning they pounded the right wing of Group Szabo, inflicting severe losses on Battalions V/95 and VIII/63. The cavalry sent by Corps HQ provided only some makeshift assistance. During the day all of Col. Szabo's battle group, fighting on both sides of the Putna valley, fell back to an unsatisfactory intermediate position; with the permission of the Corps commander, in the night of 5-6 November they were taken back further to the Somlyosarok (1329 m) and the Piciorul cu Paltinul (1189 m).

It was expected that the enemy wouldn't be satisfied with the successes won thus far. Archduke Charles could no longer refuse to listen to Arz's urgent request to give him 10 Bav ID so he could lead a powerful counterattack before the Russians completed their deployment. Front HQ, which on this day moved to Schässburg, just ordered that this fresh unit should be kept together for a concentrated thrust; then the recovered positions should be immediately placed in condition for defense, since it wasn't intended to leave the Bavarians in the Army's front for long.

The Bavarian troops already on the scene, led by G.Lt Burckhardt, entered the Putna valley and deployed behind the inner wings of the two Aus-Hung. divisions as ordered by FML Lütgendorff. But the enemy in front of XXI Corps also weren't idle. The Russians didn't attack the sectors where reinforcements were arriving, but found the weak points in the defenses. Thus on the right wing of 72 ID they pushed back Battalion I/48 of Barwik's Brigade; however the neighboring V Bn of IR Deutschmeister # 4 held onto the Batca Neagra (1243 m).<sup>457</sup> 37 Hon ID had to give up two heights south of Hollo. On the

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457 Hoen, Waldstätten-Zipperer and Seifert, "Die Deutschmeister" (Vienna, 1928), p. 685

other hand, north and west of the Bistríciora valley the Honved Infantry Regiments "Nyitra" # 14 and "Trencsen" # 15, in exemplary cooperation with the artillery, inflicted a bloody defeat on the Russians of 68 ID as they stormed ahead in thick masses. Meanwhile the Russian cavalry units east of Belbor were exerting greater pressure. It was becoming ever clearer that it would be difficult for XXI Corps to hold out until the Bavarians intervened. Therefore Army Group HQ also attached 10 CD to 1<sup>st</sup> Army, sending the dismounted rifle brigade to support 72 ID by Lake Gyilko while still holding the mounted brigade in reserve at Gyergyo Szt. Miklos. Since the two cavalry divisions had been separated and sent to different sectors, the Corps HQ was dissolved.

In these days both sides also engaged in lively fighting in the sector of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Under the Carpathian Corps the 200 ID gained some ground from the Russians on the Smotrec ridge in the Ludowa sector. Under FZM von Scheuchenstuel's I Corps the k.u.k. 59 ID also attacked on 5 November; a thrust by Battalions I/6 and IV/42 plus FJB 18 captured several strong points and brought in about 100 prisoners from 64 Russian ID. On the next day, however, fortune turned against the attackers, who lost the ground they'd gained to a vigorous counter-thrust. In the afternoon the southern wing of XI Corps had to repulse Russian attacks at the same time when the neighboring XXI Corps was defending the Belbor area. GO Kövess reported to Schässburg that strong units (six divisions) opposed I and XI Corps. The enemy would be able to push back 8 CD or Group Papp. Loss of ground here would have a very adverse effect on the overall situation because the southern part of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, after giving up troops earlier and now sending Bav IR 16 to rejoin 10 ID in 1<sup>st</sup> Army, would have no reserves available. The leading regiment of 12 ID couldn't reach XI Corps until 11 November, and the main body not until the 21<sup>st</sup>. The Carpathian Corps, in which one division held 20 kilometers of front and the other 50 kilometers, couldn't be stretched any further. The Army commander therefore requested that he be allowed to keep the Bavarians near Dorna Watra. Army Group HQ responded that although the still-planned advance of the position west of Botosul in I Corps' sector would be useful in obtaining clarification of the enemy's situation, because of the problems of 1<sup>st</sup> Army it was necessary to have the Bavarian regiment move from Dragoiessa to Belbor on 8 November as already ordered.

#### 7 November

On 7 November the enemy continued to attack Lütgendorff's corps

between the Bekas and Putna valleys with two regiments; they pushed back the foot squadrons from 3 CD which here had been inserted into the lines of 72 ID, and made it necessary to bring the rifle brigade of 10 CD up to help. The 37 Hon ID had no better luck; their right wing was hurled back in a powerful onslaught by 68 Russian ID on both sides of the Gyergyo valley as far as the D. Corbului Heights (1173 m), the western slope of the Bistriciora valley and to the Czifra sarok (1314 m). The situation was even more dangerous at Belbor, where the weak northern group of the Honved Division (eight companies and one battery spread over a wide area) were routed by regiments from III Russian Cavalry Corps and forced to retreat to the heights west of the town.

Possession of the Belbor basin made it possible for the enemy to fall upon the flank of XXI Corps. Therefore the main body of 37 Hon ID found themselves forced in the evening to abandon the Czifrasarok, to turn their left wing from its original eastern orientation toward the north, and to use parts of 3 CD in an effort to link up with the northern group which had fallen back past Belbor. And in Kövess' neighboring Army the group under GM von Jony (the commander of 11 Hon CD)<sup>458</sup> had to bend their right wing back from Mt Vamanul to the west.

The situation of XXI Corps, which was deteriorating from day to day, could only be improved by counterattacking with fresh troops. Army Group HQ didn't want to send the parts of 8 Bav Res ID which meanwhile had assembled at Kronstadt (five battalions and most of the artillery) to Gyergyo Salamas and Marosheviz because this measure would adversely affect other plans. Since any troops would have to be diverted from Arz's southern wing or Falkenhayn's eastern wing, Army Group HQ - as wished by the German OHL - created a new reserve at Kezdivasarhely from individual regiments and batteries from 9<sup>th</sup> German Army.

Because of the crisis of XXI Corps, there had already been several instances when the commitment of at least some of the available Bavarian troops would have been desirable. But the Corps commander didn't want to throw the reserves into the fight piecemeal as they arrived, even though on 7 November his Army commander had ordered that he should halt the withdrawal of the front by employing fresh troops. FML Lütgendorff remained determined to carry out a systematic counterattack with the

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458 GM von Jony's Group consisted of 73 Hon Inf Bde and 11 Hon CD.

entire strength of G.Lt Burckhardt's 10 Bav ID; the operation would take place west of the Putna valley in the direction of the Batca rotunda (1314 m) and the narrow points of the Tölgyes valley. To the Bavarians' left, 37 Hon ID with parts of 3 CD would advance over the D. Corbului. Group Szabo (reinforced by Bavarian companies) was placed under G.Lt Burckhardt's orders and would cover the right flank of the attack group on both sides of the Putna valley. XI Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army was asked to help, and they promised to use 73 Hon Inf Bde and 11 Hon CD to pin down the enemy in the Mt Vamanul area. Bav IR 16, reinforced by Aus-Hung. machine guns and a mountain battery, would thrust to Belbor. Army Group HQ instructed specifically that operations here at the junction of the two Armies should be conducted harmoniously.

To secure the success of the counter-thrust on all sides, 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ also pressed FML Fabini's VI Corps to provide reserves. This was possible, because in front of Fabini as well as Stein's Group the Romanian North Army restricted their activity to building positions and occasional skirmishing by forward troops. Some Russians from XXXVI Corps were also starting to appear opposite 61 Hon ID.<sup>459</sup> Nevertheless GdI Arz pulled two battalions and two batteries from this Division back to Nagypatak in the Tatros valley; also placed in the Army's reserve were a brigade HQ, three battalions and a battery from 39 Hon ID stationed in the Lower Csik. Moreover, on the left wing of VI Corps east of the Domuk Brook, 1 Lst Huss Bde (four mounted and two foot squadrons) plus a battalion of 61 Hon ID advanced north toward the Kerekhavas (1441 m) to deceive the enemy and thus assist the principal attacking group of Lütgendorff's Corps. Finally, Lütgendorff could count on the mounted brigade of 10 CD, which on 8 November was stationed in readiness east of Gyergyó Ditro. The combat strength of 72 ID and 37 Hon ID was increased by incorporating replacement troops (about 3400 riflemen).

#### 8-9 November

8 November was a clear, cold winter day. 10 Bav ID under G.Lt Burckhardt struck the 68 Russian ID, which was widely split up, and won a brilliant success. The Batca rotunda was already captured around 11:00 AM, and the heights south of Hollo taken in the afternoon. But neither of the neighboring units kept in

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459 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - From this point the original always refers to 61<sup>st</sup> ID as the 61<sup>st</sup> Honved ID. There was no change in its composition.

step. Group Szabo in the Putna valley didn't get past Reczefalva. 37 Hon ID was also able to gain only a little ground. West of the bend in the Bistriciora they were hit by a furious Russian attack, although they were able to repulse the enemy with the help of the regiments of 3 CD. Farther to the north, two battalions of Bav IR 16 cleared most of the Russians (parts of 10 CD and of 1 Don Coss Div) out of Belbor by evening in hard fighting.<sup>460</sup> The northern group of 37 Hon ID, reduced to 250 riflemen, reached the narrow-gauge railroad south of the town.

FML Lütgendorff, who had received only some unclear reports about the situation at Belbor, believed that effective protection of his left flank was urgently necessary, especially because of the Bavarian division's successful advance. Therefore he asked to be given parts of 8 Bav Res ID, which had already arrived. That night the Army Group placed at his disposal several units of the Division, led by the commander of 16 Res Inf Bde (GM Jehlin).<sup>461</sup> Two of the battalions were to move to Belbor the next day to link up with IR 16, and three battalions went to Borszek in the Corps' reserve.

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460 Brennfleck, "Das Königlich Bayrische 16. Infanterie-Regiment 'Gross Herzog Ferdinand von Toscana' im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Munich, 1931), pp. 222 ff.

461 G.Lt Freih. von Stein, who'd been leading the group at the Ojtoz Pass, was supposed to take over 8 Res ID at Borszek and be replaced by FML Brudermann. Since the latter was ill, however, Stein kept the group command in the Ojtoz sector until the arrival of GdI von Gerok with the HQ of the German XXIV Reserve Corps.

The accompanying operation by Kövess' neighboring Army was anticipated by the enemy. They kept XI Corps under strong fire and heavily attacked the entire front of 73 Hon Inf Bde; at Gura Glodului they broke into an advanced position blocking the road. By evening a carefully-prepared counter-thrust by Group Jony drove the Russian intruders out of this stretch of trenches.

For 9 November the HQ of XXI Corps planned to thrust east over the Putna valley with most of 10 Bav ID and Szabo's attached Group, so as to envelop from the rear the enemy stationed on the Paltinis t. Heights (1339 m) in front of 72 ID. The smaller northern part of the Bavarian Division would stay on the defensive. But Army Group HQ wanted this group to advance at least far enough to gain complete control of the Gyergyo valley so that the enemy couldn't make a surprise attack here in the future. The other groups of XXI and VI Corps retained their original assignments - the operation of Col. Csecsi-Nagy's Group (the reinforced 1st Huss Bde) still hadn't developed. The watchword everywhere was "Where the enemy falls back, follow them!"

Over night the Russians did withdraw opposite the inner wings of Haber's and Burckhardt's Divisions. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Tölgyes was occupied without any fighting. The reinforced 37 Hon ID was not only able to mop up the southern bank of the Gyergyo valley, but also to send advanced guards over to the northern bank. Both XXI and XI Corps were able during the day to restore lines linking them with the allied troops fighting in the Belbor area. 10 Bav ID with Group Szabo continued their attack and gained ground east of the Putna valley up to the Paltinis t. Heights and Point # 1150 west of the Hegyes summit (1504 m). But an attempt in the evening to storm the top of the mountain itself was a failure.

Under VI Corps, Col. Csecsi-Nagy's Group was only able to make slight progress with their one Landsturm battalion; the thrust against the southern flank of the 25 Russian ID on the Kerekhavas, reinforced by the two battalions of 61 Hon ID stationed at Nagypatak, was more effective. The Army reserve units taken from 39 Hon ID were shifted to Gyimes Közeplak.

#### 10 November

On 10 November FML Lütgendorff intended to advance with the Bavarian Division north of Zsedan p. and east against the right flank of 25 Russian ID. The mounted brigade of 10 CD had relieved the Bavarian regiment guarding the Putna and Tölgyes

valleys so that they could follow their Division. On the left of the Bavarians the 37 Hon ID was supposed to reach the line of ridges north of Baraszo, the Bitca Arsurilor, the Muncelul (1691 m) and the Vrf. Harlagii (1581 m).

Now the time had already arrived to set a terminal point for the counterattack. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ wanted to occupy the border heights from Kerekhavas through the Bekas and Tölgyes Passes as far as the Piciorul Luparii (north of Belbor). But the part of this line east of the Domuk valley and north of the Zsedanpatak valley could only be reached if the Bavarian units remained for a long time. This was contrary to the intentions of both the k.u.k. high command and Army Group HQ, which believed it was necessary to assemble 8 Bav Res ID in the Csik as soon as possible. Moreover the HQ at Schässsburg still hadn't given up hope that Brudermann's Cavalry Corps could be employed in Wallachia. Therefore 1<sup>st</sup> Army could count on just 10 Bav ID staying to support the entire front of VI and XXI Corps, and the goal of the attack would have to be limited. The plan was restricted to the capture of the border heights on both sides of the Bekas Pass. The Tölgyes Pass - as well as the Ptr. Sesul la Comarnic Heights (1612 m), the Muncelul and Mt Vamanul - wouldn't be part of the permanent position. Therefore Army Group HQ left under XXI Corps only the two battalions of 8 Bav Res ID which had been sent to Belbor, and resumed direct control over the Division's other units. VI Corps would shift further units toward their northern wing only if they were sure that no setback would occur if the Romanians attacked 39 Hon ID.

With these restrictions, the attack continued on 10 November. Again on this day Burckhardt's Division didn't have the strength to wrest the Hegyes Heights from the stubborn Russian defenders. The right wing of the Honved Division was able to capture the ridges stretching from the Bitca Arsurilor to the south and east, but the dominating summit stayed in enemy hands. The left wing of Haber's Division was now commanded by the Bavarian GM Jehlin; with two battalions of his brigade, the Bav IR 16, several Honved detachments and the half of 3 CD he took the Czifra sarok and advanced northeast of Belbor to a point in front of the Vrf. Harlagii and toward Mt Vamanul. On the adjacent wing of XI Corps the 73 Hon Inf Bde had also worked their way toward this massif. The group from VI Corps sent north to help XXI Corps advanced to the Hosszuhavas (1555 m) and into the village of Domukpatak.

In the evening HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army forwarded to the Army Group a request from FML Lütgendorff to have the last regiment of 8 Bav

Res ID (Res IR 23) sent to 37 Hon ID, because the enemy was offering stubborn resistance along the Division's entire front. A successful advance by the southern Honved group would be the best way to aid the next operations of 10 Bav ID. GdI Arz added that the faster the goals of the offensive were achieved, the faster it would be possible to release 8 Bav Res ID. Army Group HQ approved the use of the regiment.

11-18 November

On 11 November Burckhardt's Division shifted somewhat to the east; cavalry was deployed on the left wing so that 37 Hon ID could deploy along with most of Bav Res IR 23 for the assault on the Bitca Arsurilor massif. A smaller part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment joined Brigade Jehlin, which was engaged in prolonged combat - along with XI Corps' right wing - around Mt Vamanul.<sup>462</sup>

The Archduke-Successor came forward to the HQ of XXI Corps; on the Putna ridge he was briefed about the course of the fighting. This was the last day which Archduke Charles Franz Joseph spent on the battlefield with his troops in his capacity as Army Group commander. On the next day he was summoned to Schönbrunn and to the sickbed of his great-uncle the aged Emperor Franz Joseph I. GO Kövess took over the Army Group on a temporary basis.

Under VI Corps the leading battalion of the northern group, deployed against the Kerekhavas, was pushed back in the morning; the enemy thrust south toward the Tonyak Heights # 1464. Since GM von Breit had taken command over 39 Hon ID, FML Fabini entrusted the Division's former leader Col. Daubner with renewing the attack. However, Army Group HQ pointed out to GdI Arz that the commitment of further forces against the Kerekhavas was contrary to his instructions to use his troops sparingly. Above all 1<sup>st</sup> Army was supposed to be able to hold their assigned defensive line. Moreover the Russians were now starting to fall upon Group Stein (as will be narrated below). GdI Arz did release to VI Corps the Army reserves stationed at Gyimes Közeplak, but forbade their use to continue the attack. Daubner's group, which meanwhile had established themselves firmly on the Tonyak Ridge, were therefore ordered late in the evening to fortify their current positions with an arc of strong points opposite the Kerekhavas as far as the Domuk valley; they were also to establish an effective link with 72 ID of XXI Corps.

10 Bav ID was still engaged around Hegyes Mountain; on 12 November they enveloped the peak from the south, but all their attempts to capture it remained in vain. But GM Haber's 37 Hon ID, despite all the adversities of the wintry mountain terrain, won a brilliant success. First parts of Bavarian Res IR 23 captured the Paltin sarok (1223 m), a subsidiary summit northwest of the Bitca Arsurilor; then an assault by Honved Battalion III/15 wrested the principal peak itself from the

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462 Brennfleck, pp. 225 ff.

defenders.<sup>463</sup>

On 13 November the Russians surprisingly pulled back in front of Brigade Jehlin, from the heights around Belbor to the northeast in the direction of the border. Upon learning this, Front HQ ordered that the enemy here should be followed so as to deceive them into thinking the offensive would continue. However, because of difficult terrain and a desire to pull 8 Bav Res ID and the horsemen of 3 and 10 CD out of the fighting soon, the goal of the operation was restricted to the line Bitca Arsurilor - Vrf. Harlagii - Mt Vamanul, and didn't include the Muncelul. The desired line was reached on the 14<sup>th</sup> with almost no fighting; parts of 73 Hon Inf Bde from Habermann's neighboring Corps occupied Mt Vamanul (1409 m).

Until 18 November XXI Corps continued to fight to gain isolated chunks of ground so as to create an easily-defended line of resistance for the winter. A strong snowfall and the exhaustion of both sides finally extinguished the combat activity.

## **2. The Romanians attack the Ojtoz sector, 10-16 November**

General Presan's Romanian North Army was reorganized in the first week of November. After 8 ID was relieved on the northern wing by the Russians, they strengthened the front in the Ocna area. The Army's left wing was extended south at the expense of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. First the 7 Mixed Brigade was taken over, then on 7 November so was 6 ID so that the Army's sector also extended southwest as far as the Bodza Pass (inclusive).<sup>464</sup> During this period the only actions involving Group Stein in the Ojtoz sector were collisions between strong patrols or individual companies; both sides were trying to take favorable terrain features for their advanced positions.

On 9 November the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars of FML Ruiz's k.u.k. 1 CD had established themselves on the Lipse terö (1390 m). A day later the Romanians advanced against the thin outpost line of the cavalry division and took back the mountain. On the same day parts of Bav Res IR 19, which was attached to GM Goldbach's 71 ID, took the D. Lespedii (998 m) in a systematic operation and added these border heights 3 km northwest of Sosmezö to the

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463 Roth, "Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 23" (Munich, 1927), pp. 91 ff.

464 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 554 ff.

defensive line.<sup>465</sup> The enemy responded with strong counterattacks, which however were thwarted by the firm resistance of the Bavarians.

Thus wild fighting flared up around the Ojtoz Pass; it lasted almost a week, and was very costly for both sides. General Presan sent his troops forward to attack on 11 November; he wanted to drive his opponents from the border back onto their own territory. It cannot be determined from the Romanian accounts of the campaign whether this offensive was a counter-measure to the thrust of the k.u.k. XXI Corps which had started on 8 November.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> the enemy hit Group Stein with three assault columns along a broad front. The Romanians recoiled from the reinforced 71 ID, but at that Division's junction with 1 CD they pushed back the cavalry riflemen from their outpost on Point 1169 (8 km east of Ojtoz). This was a danger to 71 ID's supply line, the road through the pass. To remove this menace, GM Goldbach had the heights recovered by a battalion of the Szekel IR # 82; from the sparse reserves of this Regiment he also shifted a battalion to Klarak, behind 1 CD.<sup>466</sup> Some Romanians who had worked their way onto the Tömlö hordo (1364 m) also withdrew from this point. Then on the 12<sup>th</sup> the Bavarians had to defend the border heights they'd just taken against eight assaults, in which the enemy drove forward impetuously with their bands playing.

On 8 November the German OHL had suggested to Teschen "that 9<sup>th</sup> Army should again be responsible for covering its own rear." In other words, the Ojtoz sector should be placed in Falkenhayn's Army, and G.Lt Stein would be replaced by GdI Gerok, who'd arrived with the HQ of XXIV Res Corps. Therefore Conrad instructed the Army Group on 12 November to place Group Stein under 9<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>467</sup> At the same time the reserves which had been assembled at Kezdivasarhely (four German battalions and five batteries) were released to reinforce the defenders of Ojtoz.

13 November was a day of hot combat for 71 ID, under pressure from 15 Romanian ID. In the morning the Romanians stormed

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465 The regiment was detached from 8 Bav Res ID. See Jaud and Weech, "Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 19" (Munich, 1933), pp. 113 ff.

466 "History of IR 82", pp. 205 ff.

467 This solved another potential problem, because GdI Gerok otherwise would have been placed under GdI Arz who was, although commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, his junior in rank.

against the border ridge northwest of Sosmezö, but gained nothing but bloody losses. Meanwhile their batteries delivered a destructive hail of shells on the Runcul mare # 1108. The garrison from IR 82, which had already been under very annoying fire from the flank for days, suffered substantial casualties. When the enemy infantry attacked in the afternoon, they managed to capture in quick succession the summit and then the outpost farther south on Point # 1169. Now that they held the crest the Romanians again threatened the flank and rear of 71 ID. Counterattacks attempted that same evening remained unsuccessful; the defenders were able only to seal off the area of penetration.

Meanwhile two battalions of Bav Res IR 19 had been relieved and sent into the Ojtoz valley. The Army Group had been trying for a long time to first place this Regiment in reserve and then send it back to 8 Bav Res ID. Now, however, GM Goldbach was forced to call upon both battalions. One of them had to immediately climb from Ojtoz village to the east. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, along with a Szekel battalion, they cleared the enemy out of the Point # 1169 outpost at the angle in the border in a surprise assault; they drove the Romanians back north toward the Runcul mare. Meanwhile GM Goldbach gave the other Bavarian battalion the assignment of recovering the main summit after careful preparation.

Thus the danger east of the Ojtoz valley was removed. Meanwhile the D. Lespedii (northwest of Sosmezö), now defended by BH IR 5, changed hands three times during the day. Early on the 15<sup>th</sup> the Bosniaks once more stood upon the bloodily-contested heights, but finally had to give way to the enemy. A counterattack undertaken on the 16<sup>th</sup> didn't succeed; the Romanians retained the peak.

However, the allies won a more useful success on the Runcul mare. At dawn the Bavarians overran the enemy who'd dug in on one of the forward heights; then they also seized the rocky summit in a *coup de main*. 71 Hon ID was relieved of any concern for the flank.

Since 15 November GdI Gerok had functioned as Corps commander over the Ojtoz sector. From his reserves, he'd meanwhile sent the German Landsturm IR 36 up the road in the Pass to 71 ID; because of the defenders' heavy casualties, however, he forbade any further attempts to counterattack. Thus no effort was made to recover the D. Lespedii, which dominates the western side of the low ground leading from Harja to Baile Slanic.

Then rain and snow obliged both friend and foe to restrict themselves to holding their positions. At Outpost # 1169 there was even a brief local armistice on 18 November; the Romanians had requested it so they could bury their dead.

### **3. Preparations for defense against a new Russian onslaught, through 27 November**

While the fighting raged on Transylvania's eastern front, the allied high commands were always trying to keep the advance in Wallachia going by providing fresh forces, and to ensure reliable protection for the flank of the offensive against the east as far as Bukovina. Thus Army Group HQ had already been instructed on 8 November that XXI Corps must settle upon a defensive line that was suitable for prolonged resistance, and that 8 Bav Res ID should be deployed in the Csik to back up Fabini's and Gerok's sectors. The 115 German ID was brought from Volhynia to join 9<sup>th</sup> Army; the k.u.k. 24 ID transferred from the area of Eichhorn's Army Group to Kronstadt, from where it could be sent either south or east. Because of the mass of units which were known to have been shifted behind the Russian Southwest front to the Romanian theater of operations, it was easy to conclude that the latest enemy thrust against the Gyergyó was just the introduction to a much stronger blow which Brusilov was preparing to relieve the Romanians.

During the counterattack by Lütgendorff's Corps, the radio station of V Russian Cavalry Corps had already been identified behind the southern wing of Letschitzky's Army; first it was heard from Secueni (south of Roman), then on 11 November from Piatra. It was surmised that this cavalry corps would extend the front to the south next to XXXVI Corps. However, the allies didn't only have to anticipate the enemy being reinforced in front of 1<sup>st</sup> Army; by 13 November the 7<sup>th</sup> Army had confirmed that the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had inserted 3 Turkestan Rif Div between II and XXVI Corps, opposite Habermann's Corps.

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

The Chiefs of Staff of the Army Group and of 7<sup>th</sup> Army (GM Seeckt and Col. Waldstätten) discussed the situation by phone and agreed that after the enemy completed their re-grouping they would probably attack I and XI Corps in the area of Dorna Watra and Mestecanesci, and on the Capul. 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was instructed to prepare for the most-threatened point a reserve of two or

three German battalions drawn from the Carpathian Corps. Therefore two grenadier battalions from 1 ID stood ready at Dorna Watra on the 16<sup>th</sup>; one of them, however, was returned to Corps Conta four days later.

Except for XI Corps' assistance in the recovery of the Belbor basin, actions through mid-month were restricted to damaging enemy outposts. The operation which Scheuchenstuel's Corps had planned (to improve their defensive line) was canceled due to a lack of troops. It was more important that the ongoing troop transfers shouldn't be interrupted. GM Schnehen's 8 CD was combined with Papp's Brigade as a group which was placed under XI Corps on 11 November. On the 21<sup>st</sup> the 24 Brigade of 12 ID took over 11 Hon CD's sector; GM Jony in turn took over the sector of 16 Inf Bde in I Corps, where he was to be followed by his Honved Hussars. The HQ of 16 Inf Bde relieved 12 ID HQ on the Army's northern wing; the Brigade's battalions would follow as soon as they had been replaced by 11 Hon CD.

Intense snowfall meanwhile had brought quiet to the front, but thawing began on 22 November. The enemy was soon noticeably more active; they began to probe our defensive positions with strong scouting groups and opened powerful artillery fire on certain sectors. In the Jedul-Tatarca sector of I Corps the Russians dug trenches forward on 27 November and removed the barriers from in front of their lines. Troop concentrations were observed behind XVIII Corps in the Moldawa valley, which allied intelligence associated with the arrival of a fresh Russian unit (84 ID). Also at some points the enemy came within 150 paces of XI Corps' 8 CD. 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ didn't anticipate any serious assault against the two German corps, but figured that at most the enemy here would make diversionary thrusts; therefore the reserves were concentrated on the right half of the Army. The reserves behind I Corps were one German and one Aus-Hung. battalion; behind XI Corps were IR 20 of 12 ID and Hon HR 5 of 11 Hon CD.

The reorganization of the troops at the front wasn't complete until the 27<sup>th</sup>. The Army's 73 Hon Inf Bde remained on the southern wing of XI Corps; just two of their battalions were reassigned to the neighboring XXI Corps, so that the border with 1<sup>st</sup> Army now lay north of Mt Vamanul. 24 Inf Bde of 12 ID was stationed to the left of the Honved Brigade, while the Division's staff with 23 Inf Bde were still being shifted. In the center of Corps Habermann, GM Edl. von Schwer of 6 CD also commanded 202 Hon Inf Bde and 5 Hon CD; Group Schnehen made up the Corps' left wing. In the adjacent I Corps the 11 Hon CD was

reinforced by one battalion which had been left by 16 Inf Bde, as well as by LW UR 6 and Landsturm.<sup>468</sup> For some time the two divisions of the Carpathian Corps had been helped in holding their extended defensive sector by Aus-Hung. and German Landsturm battalions. The German XXV Res Corps received a new commander (G.Lt Freih. von Richthofen) on 24 November.

The relief offensive by 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies of Southwest Front, with which Brussilov planned to help the Romanians, didn't start on 14 November because only one of the two corps sent by rail to Letschitzky's Army (XXIV and XL) was ready to strike by that time. Therefore the start of the offensive was postponed until 28 November.<sup>469</sup>

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468 LW UR 6 had four squadrons which had been divisional cavalry and then attached to 6 Cav Div before reinforcing 11 Hon CD.

469 Zayonchkovsky, p. 117

Preparations of 7<sup>th</sup> Army

The longer the impending storm held back along Transylvania's eastern front, the better was the opportunity for the allied commanders to thwart the enemy plans by carrying out counter-measures. The German OHL was particularly concerned to prevent any setback on the eastern flank that could disrupt the invasion of Wallachia. Therefore GdI Ludendorff, who expected the arrival of Russian units in front of VI Corps and Group Stein, had already advised GM Seeckt on 14 November to terminate the counterattack by Lütgendorff's Corps, to again make 8 Bav Res ID available, and to firmly anchor the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Stein's (later Gerok's) Group, and also the 89 German ID of 9<sup>th</sup> Army in permanent positions.

On 17 November the fighting on the northern wing of Arz's Army neared its end and at the same time a definite report indicated that XXIV Russian Corps was arriving in the Bacau area. The main body of 8 Bav Res ID (two infantry regiments plus artillery) was pulled from XXI Corps and into Army Group reserve. From the 21<sup>st</sup> the 10 CD was also assembled in the Gyergyó; the 3 CD stayed at the front because it lacked horses.

The task of building winter positions for the reinforced XXI Corps, over a wide stretch of mountain terrain where visibility was limited, would be quite difficult as would the enhancement of the combat value of the Corps, which had just been put together from a variety of units. The Army Group believed that the chore was too much for one corps HQ. Therefore, with the permission of both high commands, they placed German GdI Litzmann (who hitherto had led an Armeegruppe on Linsingen's front in Volhynia) in charge of the sector. On 24 November Litzmann was given a group command under 1<sup>st</sup> Army; it contained XXI Corps (now with 37 Hon ID, 10 Bav Res ID, and the troops from 3 CD split up under them) plus 72 ID which was directly under group HQ.<sup>470</sup>

On 20 November the German OHL warned GM Seeckt again that until the troops in Wallachia reached the Bucharest area a strong enemy attack was to be expected against Arz and Gerok. Ludendorff ordered that when the 24 k.u.k. ID arrived it should relieve 187 German ID (in 9<sup>th</sup> Army) and that a regiment of 8 Bav Res ID should be shifted closer to 61 Hon ID. The Army Group

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470 Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 135 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Of course, Litzmann also would ensure a larger measure of German control over this part of the front.

deployed the available parts of the Bavarian Division, which once more was commanded by G.Lt Stein, into the Csik behind VI Corps; they also assigned a regiment to 1<sup>st</sup> Army to back up 61 Hon ID. Res IR 23 moved to Gyimes Középlak on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

In the sector of Gerok's Corps, the first troop trains of 24 ID had already arrived at Bereczk on 19 November; according to an earlier arrangement, the Division was supposed to take over the sector from Runcul mare to the Tömlö hordo # 1365. This would have permitted 71 ID, which for five weeks had kept all of its components at the front in continuous combat, to bring reserves behind the line to recuperate. However, under the altered circumstances the 24 ID was sent on to Kronstadt. Bav Res IR 19, which Gerok had meanwhile relieved at the front using the other German troops he'd received, was held back in the Lemheny area in the Corps' reserve.

#### The last days before the Russian offensive

In the last third of the month it was already no secret that the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army intended to attack. The fact that General Letschitzky moved his HQ from Suczawa to Roman (opposite the center of Arz's Army) was in itself an unmistakable indicator. East of Belbor the III Russian Cavalry Corps moved to the rear and assembled around Gurahumora, while II Russian Corps extended their line to a point opposite 37 Hon ID of Group Litzmann. At the same time Letschitzky's Army stretched their left wing far to the south. Besides V Cavalry Corps, which was stationed to the left of XXVI Corps, the XXIV and XL Corps came up to the front through Tetcani and Ocna (respectively); they relieved the troops of the Romanian North Army in the Trotusu and Uz valleys. Since General Presan now took over 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, he was succeeded by General Cristescu as commander of North Army, which still had 15 ID, the 16 Inf Bde from 8 ID, 7 Mixed Brigade, and 6 ID. The 7 ID had been relieved and was ordered to Wallachia where it would be in the high command's reserve at Bucharest.<sup>471</sup>

Because of the enemy's threatening preparations, the German OHL intended on the 24<sup>th</sup> to further temporarily reinforce the Army Group with the 49 German Res ID; originally destined for the Western front, this Division was sent from South Army to Transylvania. The troops would detrain in either the Gyergyo or Csik basins.

In these days the Army Group HQ was alertly monitoring enemy

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471 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 557

troop movements with aerial reconnaissance. Consistent with Ludendorff's instructions, they created a combined-arms brigade of German troops from 187 ID and the Transylvania Cavalry Brigade who'd been relieved south of Kronstadt by the k.u.k. 24 ID; the force was concentrated as a reserve at the railroad junction of Sepsi Szt. Görgey. Since the Bavarian Res IR 19 had joined its parent division in the Csik, and the German OHL wanted to provide a reserve behind the k.u.k. 71 ID, a regiment of 187 ID was sent to Lemheny.

On 26 November Russian artillery began to bombard the center and right wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army; on the next day they extended their fire to the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army as far as the Csobanyos valley. This was followed by weak infantry thrusts. The Army Group now made 8 Bav Res ID available to 1<sup>st</sup> Army to support VI Corps; GdI Arz ordered the Bavarians to deploy by 61 Hon ID, with one battalion by 39 Hon ID. Two battalions stayed in the Army's reserves. Within Fabini's Corps G.Lt Stein would lead the left sector, which included the group of Col. Daubner (HQ of 78 Hon Inf Bde) and the 61 Hon ID.

The eve of the great Russian relief offensive, which had been expected for so long by the allies, had arrived.

### ***C. The Invasion of Little Wallachia***

#### **1. Fighting at the exits from the Vulkan Mountains, 11-14 November**

On 29 October, when Falkenhayn stuck to his decision to break through into the plains by continuing to attack in the Vulkan Mountains, he issued the necessary orders to G.Lt Kühne, the commander of LIV Corps. The latter had assembled near Petroseny the 11 Bav ID, the 41, 109 and 301 German ID (the latter was mainly the k.u.k. 144 Inf Bde), and the 6 and 7 CD. They would "advance on both sides of the Szurduk Road and open the exit from the mountains near Targu Jiu; then they would keep the exit open so that Schmettow's Cavalry Corps could drive downhill and south into Romania." It was intended that "the reinforced LIV Army Corps would continue their advance generally to the southeast, while the Cavalry Corps did the same along the southern flank."<sup>472</sup> After reaching the Alt, Kühne's Group would

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472 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 35

cross the river at Dragasani and Slatina, so that they could unbar the way into the plains for the groups fighting in the mountains farther east (starting with Group Krafft). The Cavalry Corps would hasten ahead of the infantry and make contact with Mackensen's Army Group which was to cross the Danube and take Bucharest.<sup>473</sup>

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473 Kühne, "Erinnerungen" (Newsletter of the 76 Res ID, Issue III for 1929)

The preparations

Very lively activity now developed in the Vulkan Mountains to ensure the success of the offensive by careful preparation. The Army commander himself took part in some of the reconnaissance and issued instruction right on the spot. But he kept his headquarters in Kronstadt and strove by repeated official appearances in that city and by visits to the front farther south to divert the Romanians' attention from the Szurduk Pass. The other groups of 9<sup>th</sup> Army were ordered to simultaneously display great activity, even though it was clear to Falkenhayn that there was little possibility of success in their areas. Only in the Red Tower Pass, where 216 ID was being sent, did the Army commander hope to significantly push back the Romanian front.

The thrust which the Russians had directed against the Gyergyo since 3 November didn't have any effect on the operation in the Vulkan Pass. It involved 9<sup>th</sup> Army only insofar as the main body of 8 Bav Res ID, which had moved from Bereczk to Kronstadt on the 4<sup>th</sup>, was ordered into the Gyergyo on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Preparations for the attack, initially planned for 6 November, were extended until the 10<sup>th</sup>. Fighting stayed at the usual level. The liveliest actions were still on the Moldovisul, where a battalion of the Hungarian 1st IR # 1 heroically resisted assaults by much larger enemy forces on 5 and 7 November. As a prelude to the breakthrough attack scheduled to start on the 11<sup>th</sup>, troops from Col. Berger's 144 k.u.k. Inf Bde and from 109 German ID captured the ridge extending from the Moldovisul toward the Postaia Heights on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

G.Lt Kühne had 40 battalions, 52 squadrons and 188 guns available for the decisive thrust. He deployed 41 ID and the Württemberg Mountain Battalion west of the road in the valley, and 109 ID to the east. 11 Bav ID would follow them down the road. After the Pass was crossed the 301 ID, parts of which were still stationed in the Parengu Mountains, would deploy in echelon behind the left wing of 109 ID. Schmettow's squadrons were still in their quarters north of the Vulkan Pass. The first objective set by Kühne was creation of a bridgehead on the line Valari-Rugi-Sambotin-Tetila-Musetesti, where all the troops could deploy while the cavalry crossed the mountains.

On 10 November Falkenhayn issued an Army order in which he called upon all the other groups, in addition to Group Kühne, to

"again open a general offensive" on the 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>474</sup>

It appears that the Romanians did fail to observe their opponents' preparations to attack from the Petroseny area. Their only response was to create a new 1 ID (of 18 ½ battalions and 16 batteries) from parts of 11 ID and the reinforcements that had arrived thus far.<sup>475</sup> The troops from the original 1 ID that had stayed at Orsova (three infantry regiments and four batteries) were designated the "Cerna Detachment." The main body of 11 ID was pulled back to Pitesci as a reserve of the high command.

#### The attack

Kühne's attack opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> in good weather; although the Romanians fought with notable courage, it was possible to drive them back so far that the German troops of the two foremost divisions were all able to leave the forest. In the evening the Württembergers and 41 ID were on the line Heights # 1191 - Schela - Porceni. The 109 ID was still engaged during the night, and early on the 12<sup>th</sup> captured the town and railroad station of Bumbesci. Their left wing, reinforced by parts of the k.u.k. 144 Inf Bde, was still on the Postaia Heights. As required by the plan described above, the 11 Bav ID and most of 301 ID had entered the long, narrow Szurduk Pass.

Responding to a call for help from 1 Romanian ID, the new commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Army (General Vasilescu) instructed them to continue to offer stubborn resistance for two to three days "since by then the situation on the Alt will be clarified." Plainly he could do no more, since his Cerna Detachment had also been attacked by the enemy and he had no Army reserves available.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Kühne's troops, under the eyes of their Army commander, drove their enemies back farther despite brave resistance; in the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> they were on the line Valari-Sambotin-Musetesti. The 11 Bav ID reached Porceni. 301 ID assembled at Stancesti; here they were joined by the German UR # 4, which was ordered to destroy the railroad east of Targu Jiu. Thus Kühne had achieved the bridgehead he was seeking, enabling the cavalry to move through the Pass on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

In their distress, the 1 Romanian ID once more asked General

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474 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 41

475 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 13

Vasilescu for instructions. Apparently he in turn appealed to the Romanian high command; the latter HQ, although they were fully aware of the critical situation, ordered that 1 ID should delay their opponents' advance for the next four to five days. In areas which the allies had weakened they were to be thrown back over the border and reserves pulled back from the line.<sup>476</sup> Therefore General Vasilescu instructed the Division to hold out at all costs, because they would receive support in two or three days.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, Kühne's two leading divisions continued their advance; their goals were Stanesti, Turcinesti, and the wooded plateau south of Tetila. The Romanians no longer offered prolonged resistance. Supply columns moving from Rasovita to Targu Jiu and railroad trains steaming toward the east indicated that the enemy was in retreat. In the evening the foremost divisions of LIV Corps were on the line Stanesti-Curtisoara-Musetesti. The 11 Bav ID was grouped behind the right wing of 41 ID, and 301 ID at Stancesti was ready to advance to the east. UR # 4 had already reached Glodeni.<sup>477</sup> The Cavalry Corps, which had crossed the 24-km long Pass at one bound, were camped in the evening at Porceni and Bumbesci.

Thus all the troops of Group Kühne were south of the Vulkan Mountains. The breakthrough into the hilly terrain of "Little Wallachia" (the area west of the Alt) was complete.

Col Szivo began to attack on the same day when Group Kühne's offensive started in the Vulkan Mountains; he had reinforced the Danube Group with 2 Bicycle Brigade plus two Bosnian battalions (VI/1 and V/3) from 145 Inf Bde. The Romanians at Orsova were driven over the Cerna. Fighting continued on the 12<sup>th</sup> to mop up the northern part of Orsova. The Romanians attacked north of the town in the night of 12-13 November but were thrown back by a counter-thrust; during the day the allies drove the enemy completely from the western bank of the Cerna.

But Szivo lacked artillery (especially heavy pieces) that would be needed to continue the offensive against the strong Romanian entrenchments on the eastern bank. The Colonel asked Falkenhayn for more guns, but was told that the withdrawal of the enemy in front of LIV Corps would presumably cause the Romanians to also evacuate the eastern bank of the Cerna.

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476 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 22

477 Martens and Zipfel, "Geschichte des Ulanen-Regiments von Schmidt (1. Pommersches) Nr. 4" (Berlin, 1929), p. 227

## 2. Progress of Group Krafft in the first half of November

Unaffected by the events in the Vulkan Mountains, G.Lt Krafft continued to attack as planned on both sides of the Alt in the direction of Curtea d'Arges. Thus he had a direct impact on the breakthrough attack by Group Kühne.

At the start of November Krafft's troops were still confronted by the third Romanian position. East of the Alt it ran over the heights on the northern bank of the Baiesti Brook, through Perisani, Mt Sate # 1377 and Mt Fruntu # 1506 to the ruins in the Argesu valley. West of the Alt the Romanians were still holding entrenchments much farther north; they ran from Robesti through the Riglaul # 1466, then over the wooded summits # 1746 and 1719. Thus the enemy had a position from which they could threaten the flank of G.Lt Krafft's main attacking group, forcing the group to detach troops to guard the Alt between Robesti and Copaceni.

### Actions through 9 November

After reconnaissance on 3 November, GM Pechmann's 15 Bav Res Inf Bde opened their attack on the 4<sup>th</sup> to widen the penetration they'd already achieved (on the 1<sup>st</sup>) in the Romanian position north of the Baiestibach. At the same time Epp's Brigade stormed Mt Sate. On the next day Pechmann's Brigade made progress along the road to Perisani. Col. Panzenböck's k.u.k. 2 Mtn Bde mopped up the ridge that reaches from Point # 1385 down into the Argesu valley.

To speed up the systematic offensive against the enemy who were still holding a number of isolated positions north of the Baiestibach, G.Lt Krafft had Epp's Brigade strike them in the flank. This was decisive. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the Romanians pulled back to the southern bank of the brook, leaving behind 1000 prisoners from eleven different regiments. Thus the third Romanian position had fallen.

On 7 November, while the Aus-Hung. commander-in-chief FM Archduke Frederick and GdI Falkenhayn were visiting the Red Tower Pass, German troops were scouting over the Baiestibach toward the south. Here they saw the last bastion before the plains, the mighty keel-shaped Mt Cozia (# 1675); smoke from camp fires showed that it was still garrisoned by the enemy. Farther east the Romanian position extended to the road west of

Clocoticiu and ended at Mt Fruntu.

Krafft was still trying to keep moving forward so as to fight his way out of the mountains. It was fortunate that the 216 German ID was starting to arrive, because Krafft's troops were spread out on a 75 kilometer front between the Steffleste Heights and the Argesu and many units had sunk to half of their authorized strengths. Moreover, Army Group HQ had taken German Lst IR 36 away so it could be used at the Ojtoz Pass. The Landsturm had been with the k.u.k. 73 ID in the Alt valley; they were now replaced by the first troops of 216 ID to arrive (IR 354). The main body of 216 ID was sent to the front on the road to Clocoticiu, between the brigades of Pechmann and Epp.

As the offensive continued the 10 Mtn Bde was to thrust from the north over the Riglaul, while Pechmann's Brigade fell upon the flank of the enemy stationed west of the Alt through Racovita. All other units - most of 216 ID, Epp's Brigade and the Alpenkorps Division (the latter had 2 Mtn Bde and the 1<sup>st</sup> Bav Jäger Regiment) - would attack south. Mt Cozia, so difficult to climb, was to be avoided; G.Lt Krafft hoped that he could cause the mountain to be evacuated by attacking on both sides of it. But FML Ludwig Goiginger had a different idea. Since the enemy was reported to be retreating everywhere, he ordered Pechmann's brigade, despite their exhaustion, to quickly occupy the important Mt Cozia, at least with their advanced troops, before the Romanians could bring up reinforcements.<sup>478</sup>

The start of 10 Mtn Bde's attack was hampered by delays in the preparation and by fog; it was postponed until 9 November. During the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> a battalion from Pechmann's brigade had already climbed onto Mt Cozia; undetected by the enemy, the leading troops even occupied the summit during the night. They got there before a Romanian battalion which was climbing from the south.

Farther to the east the allies were also successful on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Epp's Brigade captured high ground directly north of Clocoticiu. The 2 Mtn Bde stormed Mt Fruntu, and thus reached the point from which they had been recalled on 21 October.

On the other hand, 10 Mtn Bde's attack against Mt Riglaul on 9 November had no effect because the artillery preparation wasn't sufficient to overcome the Romanian positions in the forest. The attempt was repeated the next day, this time with all

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478 Goiginger, p. 245

available artillery of Group Krafft; once again the Brigade gained nothing but heavy casualties, and even had to repulse strong counterattacks. A German armored train was also engaged in this fighting in the Alt valley, but "created more smoke than damage."<sup>479</sup>

Meanwhile Pechmann's Brigade stood ready on Mt Cozia. Their thrust onto the western bank of the Alt was canceled. They were only supposed to secure the ridge that ran from the mountain summit northwest to the Alt, where the Romanians were still dug in, and then were to advance south. Farther east the 216 ID entered the front on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Epp's Brigade repelled Romanian counter-thrusts on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, while 2 Mtn Bde was able to hold onto Mt Fruntu in see-saw fighting.

#### 10-14 November

On the 10<sup>th</sup> G.Lt Krafft received the order from GdI Falkenhayn, described above, for a general offensive. All his preparations were already under way; the order would first be carried out west of the Alt where the newly-deployed IR 354 would attack the Riglaul on its eastern flank. The main effort of Group Krafft was shifting to their right wing, which was consistent with Falkenhayn's desire to soon have them link up with Group Kühne.

The flank attack by IR 354 on the 11<sup>th</sup> was rewarded with complete success. More than 1000 prisoners and 7 guns remained in the Germans' hands. Therefore when 10 Mtn Bde, which hitherto had been pinned down the enemy, opened their own attack they found that the 13 Romanian ID was already in retreat.<sup>480</sup> On the two following days Korzer's Brigade and IR 354 captured the ridge which led down to the mouth of the Lotru, where the enemy had temporarily held Heights # 1155 and 963 with rear guards before pulling back to the southern bank of the Lotru. On the 13<sup>th</sup> the 10 Mtn Bde, which for a month had fought a usually-larger force in mountains covered by primeval forest in the most difficult conditions, finally entered the valley at Golotreni. IR 354 returned to their own 216 ID.

On the eastern bank of the Alt the 14 Romanian ID, which had been relieved in Moldavia by the Russians and then briefly served as a strategic reserve at Bucharest, joined I Corps and relieved the burnt-out 23 ID.<sup>481</sup>

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479 Diary entry by G.Lt Krafft (in Heréus' manuscript)

480 Korzer's manuscript

481 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 454

Meanwhile Pechmann's Brigade mopped up the western slope of Mt Cozia and on the 13<sup>th</sup> linked up with 10 Mtn Bde at the mouth of the Lotru. The railroad bridge and tunnel here had earlier been blown up by the Romanians. After careful preparation the 216 ID attacked on the 13<sup>th</sup>, captured the Stanisoare cloister as well as the edge of the woods northwest of Dangesti; together with the right wing of Epp's Brigade they drove down the road into the Romanian main position, which had been constructed especially strongly here. In their pursuit of the fleeing enemy they reached Heights # 1024 the next day. Thus the fourth Romanian position had also been broken at Clocoticiu. Only on the southern slope of Mt Cozia were the enemy still holding their trenches.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> the 14 Romanian ID launched a strong counterattack between the Topolog and Argesu valleys, but couldn't alter the situation; with brilliantly effective support from the Aus-Hung. mountain batteries, Panzenböck's and Epp's Brigades as well as the Bavarians engaged in the Argesu valley repulsed the oncoming enemy at all points. Fighting was especially hot for the right wing of 2 Mtn Bde; here the enemy ran forward four times with cheers and trumpet blasts, but each time were hurled back in furious hand-to-hand combat.

In the morning of 14 November the allies were stationed in the Lotru valley, on Mt Cozia, on the road north of Salatrucu d.j., and by the ruins in the valley of the upper Argesu. Krafft's Group were preparing for new attacks; they still hadn't worked their way out of the mountains although they were much closer to Curtea d'Arges, their operational goal. Also their sharp offensive had pinned down the enemy; both divisions of I Romanian Corps (13 and 23 ID) had been fully occupied, and 14 ID had been drawn into Krafft's sector. Thus substantial help had been rendered to the advance of Group Kühne. Krafft's troops had also taken a significant number of prisoners, totaling 72 officers and 5780 men. They had also brought in 12 cannon and 19 machine guns.

### **3. The Battle of Targu Jiu (15-17 November)**

#### The plans

On 14 November Kühne's divisions had emerged from the mountains by the Szurduk Pass, and Krafft's troops had reached the line Lotrubach - Mt Cozia. Now Army Group HQ asked GdI Falkenhayn to

report where he thought the German 115 ID, relieved from Volhynia and coming to Transylvania by train, could be used most effectively. Unlike GM Seeckt, who felt that it would be "most necessary and most successful" to employ the Division by Red Tower Pass, Falkenhayn wanted to send it through the Szurduk Pass to join Group Kühne. He hoped that it would exert enough additional pressure "so that not only the lines of communication to the south in the Jiu valley would fall into our hands, but also the Orsova-Craiova rail line. Thus we will create a base which will enable us to roll up the other Romanian positions in the Transylvanian Alps from the west."<sup>482</sup>

Falkenhayn's suggestion was adopted. With the agreement of the German OHL, and taking into account the fact that three divisions of Mackensen's Army Group planned to cross the Danube on 20 November, GO Conrad issued guidelines on the 15<sup>th</sup> for the continuing operations of the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army. The right wing of the Army's LIV Corps should link up with Group Szivo, help the latter move forward, and make its main effort in the direction of Craiova-Slatina. Later the LIV Corps would also assist the offensive of Group Krafft. It was left to Falkenhayn and Kühne to decide whether this would be accomplished "indirectly with an advance to Slatina" or "by direct cooperation in the direction of Rimnik Valcea." Group Krafft would thrust with their western wing on the eastern bank of the Alt along the railroad toward Slatina and as far south as possible; the eastern wing would advance toward Curtea d'Arges to help I Res Corps, stuck fast in front of Campulung, reach the outlets to the plains. XXXIX Res Corps would press to the south at the Predeal Pass and farther east. GO Conrad said it was essential that 1<sup>st</sup> Army, and especially Group Gerok, held their positions; but he was considering whether to transfer some of this Army's available troops to Group Krafft.

Meanwhile on the 14<sup>th</sup> Falkenhayn had already ordered Group Kühne to reach the line Petresci d.s. - Calugareasa with a strong right wing deployed in deep echelon. A side column would advance along the foot of the mountains to Milostea. The objective of the Cavalry Corps, which now was placed directly under Army HQ, was Filiasu; they would pursue, overtake and cut off the enemy troops retreating from LIV Corps. If the Romanians offered resistance, Schmettow would envelop them.

The Romanian high command had a clear picture of the mounting dangers in the Schyl and Alt valleys. But they were still

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482 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 46

counting on the counter-offensive by the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> and Romanian North Armies to change the military situation. This operation was being delayed because the Russians' XL and XXIV Corps, as well as the V Cavalry Corps, were entering Moldavia so slowly. Until the counterattack could become effective, the Romanian high command - advised by Berthelot - was trying to hold their opponents in the mountains. They had already reinforced I Corps with 14 ID. They now sent 17 ID to join the hard-pressed 1 ID. The 17<sup>th</sup> Division had been almost completely destroyed at Turtukai when the war started but had been rebuilt with troops from other divisions (especially the 14<sup>th</sup>). It was supposed to strike the allied eastern flank by Targu Jiu with concentrated strength. The high command was considering whether to send other units to 1<sup>st</sup> Army after 17 ID; they had available the 2, 5, 9 and 19 ID which had been pulled out of Dobruja and had now been reorganized as two combined units (2/5 and 9/19 ID).<sup>483</sup>

Therefore HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army ordered the commander of 1 ID "to accomplish the impossible"; his badly-diminished units would take up a position south of Targu Jiu on the edge of the heights between Carbesti and Copacioasa; meanwhile 17 ID, which had detrained at Petresci d.s. on the 15<sup>th</sup>, would thrust through Albeni and Musetesti against the allies' eastern flank.

#### The action

In general there was no fighting on 15 November, because the Romanians were pulling back faster and farther than Kühne's divisions could advance on the poor and rain-soaked roads. 41 ID reached Targu Jiu and 109 ID Glodeni. The German UR # 4 were able to break up the railroad at Pojogeni even though they had to cross swords with the first battalions of 17 Romanian ID. 11 Bav ID was inserted between 41 and 109 ID and moved past Copacioasa. 301 ID, covering the eastern flank, was sent toward Novaci streini but couldn't get past Anisiu through broken terrain that was crossed by deep streams.

6 CD of Schmettow's Cavalry Corps reached a point an hour's march past Targu Jiu; 7 CD reached Ciauru. The Corps skirmished with 1 Romanian ID, which was dug in on the northern edge of the D.lui Bran and at Somanesti. The cavalry made a frontal thrust against the enemy, contrary to Falkenhayn's intentions.

When 6 CD shifted south on 16 November in order to link up with 7 CD, they still came upon enemy units. Now they were relieved

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483 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 25. Pétain, p. 45

by 41 ID and rode through Targu Jiu to Calnicu. 7 CD tried in vain to cross the Tismana Brook south of Somanesti. G.Lt Schmettow was again ordered to go around the enemy.<sup>484</sup>

41 ID, as well as 109 ID which was moving south behind the Bavarians, were only able to make a little progress toward the line of ridges that make up the D. lui Bran because the ground was soaked after a snowfall. 11 Bav ID collided with 17 Romanian ID which was now entering the battle in echelon. After heavy fighting they pushed the Romanians back and in the evening captured Petresci d.s.; therefore the remaining parts of 17 ID, as they arrived, had to detrain at Barbatesti. In the evening, after driving away a weaker enemy force, the 301 ID reached the Novaci streini area.

Falkenhayn now intended to have Kühne's and Krafft's Groups operate together as soon as possible. Therefore the objective of Group Krafft, which at first would continue to advance down the Alt, was the city of Pitesci. Kühne was supposed to shift sharply toward the southeast. But since all the usable roads from Targu Jiu led to Craiova, the latter would be the first objective of the right wing. Only after it was taken could the troops pivot toward Slatina and Dragasani. Security of the right flank would be the responsibility of the Cavalry Corps, which should make a deep advance through Filiasu and Craiova. On the left flank Falkenhayn felt he could get by with smaller detachments probing toward the Alt.

In the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> the Romanian army commander General Vasilescu commanded that both 1 and 17 ID should counterattack on the next day. He seems to have envisioned a maneuver similar to that which had succeeded on 27 October. A mixed task force from the Cerna Detachment would again advance from Baia de arama toward Bumbesti to cut off his opponents' retreat; another force thrusting from the east through Novaci streini would check the allied advance toward the Alt.<sup>485</sup>

17 November was a decisive day. On the right wing the 6 CD, pushing back weak enemy units, thrust forward along the road through Rosiuta to Brosteni on the R. Motrul. A side column diverted from Rosiuta to the east broke the enemy resistance in front of 7 CD, which thus was able to reach Pesteană d.j.

Under LIV Corps the inner wings of 41 and 109 ID pushed from

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484 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 47

485 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 35 and 58

Dragoeni toward Floresci and broke through the widely-dispersed 1 Romanian ID. Large parts of the enemy western wing were cut off, so that the Germans captured 2500 men and 2 guns. The reinforced 11 Bav ID at first had a rough time against the gallantly attacking 17 Romanian ID. But the German artillery brought the enemy infantry to a halt, and finally the Bavarians drove forward through Petresci d.s. to Boia and Carbunesti. The Aus-Hung. battalions of 301 ID threw back the Romanian side detachment which had been sent against them, and reached Cernadia. The Romanian column advancing from Baia de arama reached Pestisani (20 km west of Targu Jiu) after a forced march.

In the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> the badly-damaged 1 Romanian ID was stationed on the line Negomiru - Pesteana d.s. - Socu - Versani; 17 ID was retreating to the south and, as ordered by Vasilescu, had sent one mixed detachment to Filiasu and another into the Amaradia valley. When the Romanian high command learned of the situation of the group by Targu Jiu and their alarming condition, they ordered that both divisions should be taken back to a position north of Filiasu. The side column advancing through Baia de arama should cover the southern flank of 1 ID south of the Turnu Severin - Craiova railroad. The main body of the Cerna Detachment would first withdraw from Orsova to Hinova; then they would seek to join the units stationed by Filiasu and in a further retreat through Caracalu would reach the Alt. Finally they would guard the Alt at Stoenesci along with 1 CD, which was being sent there from Alexandria.

Then the influence of the representatives of the Entente armies with the Romanian HQ became a factor. They asserted that the Danube shouldn't be left open to the German and Aus-Hung. troops; therefore the Cerna detachment was ordered to stay in place "and to fight until the last man falls."<sup>486</sup> The disastrous results of this measure would soon be apparent.

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486 Dabija, Vol. III, p .38

#### 4. The pursuit to Craiova (18-21 November)

##### 18-19 November

Both Romanian divisions which had been defeated in the hills south of Targu Jiu pulled back farther to the south in the night of 17-18 November. In the morning the 1 ID took up positions at Garbovu and Aninosa, the 17 ID at Barbatesti and farther east.

Under the LIV German Corps the 41 ID advanced into the Schyl valley, 109 ID into the Gilort valley and 11 Bav ID into the Amaradia valley in the general direction of Craiova. 301 ID was to move through the Oltetu valley, with Dragasani as a goal.

Despite thawing weather and snow squalls, the troops advanced gallantly on the 18<sup>th</sup>. 41 ID, after pushing back 1 Romanian ID (which already was putting up very little resistance), reached Valeni; 109 ID reached Dalcesti. 11 Bav ID repulsed new envelopment attacks of 17 Romanian ID and advanced to Frumusei. 301 ID once more drove back the opposing Romanian detachment at Baia de Fier, left two battalions and a battery in place to guard the flank, and shifted with their main body to climb down into the Oltetu valley. In Corps Schmettow the 6 CD rode through the Motru valley to Strehaia, and 7 CD captured Jonesci and Turceni d.j. on the western bank of the Schyl. In the rear of the Corps the Romanians' western side column came upon the supply train of 7 German CD in the area around Copaceni and caused some confusion. Then these Romanians moved on to Rosia; they hoped to escape to the south, west of the Schyl valley.

On the 19<sup>th</sup>, in warm and humid weather the divisions of Kühne and Schmettow continued their hasty advance on the muddy roads. 41 ID took the important railroad junction at Filiasu and moved their advance guard forward another six kilometers toward Craiova. 109 ID entered Floresci after a brief pursuit action. 11 Bav ID reached Peteni, 301 ID Coltesci. The parts of 115 ID that had already detrained advanced to the southern outlet of the Szurduk Pass, where they relieved the detachments of Corps Kühne which had been left there as guards.

The Cavalry Corps crossed the lower reaches of the Motru and camped for the night on the southern bank. Since G.Lt Schmettow had learned about the Romanian detachment was raiding in his rear he sent a brigade from 7 CD and several squadrons from 6 CD to hunt down this enemy. Also a battalion from 41 ID and half a battery were diverted from Filiasu to Turnu Severin so as to cut

off the retreat of the Romanian Cerna Detachment, still stationed at Orsova.

The extraordinarily rapid allied advance toward the Alt compelled the Romanian high command to make a sweeping decision. Already on the 18<sup>th</sup> they had informed 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ that they intended to fight a battle in Little Wallachia; on the 19<sup>th</sup> they asserted that their objective was "to destroy our opponents and drive them from the land."<sup>487</sup> Therefore 1<sup>st</sup> Army, along with 1 CD, was to carry out delaying actions in the valleys of the Alt, the Schyl and the Cerna - as well as on the Danube - to slow the allies down until a group could be assembled west of Pitesci for a counterattack. This group would consist of Divisions 2/5 and 9/19, the 8 ID (which had earlier been earmarked for I Corps) and 21 ID from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The Cerna Detachment was ordered to resist to the last man even though they were in danger of being surrounded. The detachment which had advanced from Baia de arama was to annoy the enemy rear and organize partisan warfare. On the 18<sup>th</sup> the Romanian high command had still hoped that they could carry on their battle west of the Alt. But the 1 and 17 ID together had just 3800 men left and lacked the strength needed to resist Falkenhayn's victoriously advancing soldiers for the ten days which were needed to assemble the counterattacking group. Therefore it seemed that a way would soon have to be devised to seek a decision east of the Alt against the enemy as they came out of Little Wallachia.

#### 20 and 21 November

For the 20<sup>th</sup>, Falkenhayn had ordered both corps to continue their pursuit toward Craiova with a strong right wing. But the Cavalry Corps was kept from carrying out the order by the Romanians threatening their rear. The horsemen turned to the north and west to bring these Romanians to battle. Finally the enemy broke through to the west and spent the night at Severinesci. Thus Schmettow's cavalry were left behind Kühne's infantry divisions.

Under Corps Kühne, the leading troops of 41 ID reached Isalnita; 109 ID moved over to the Amaradia valley and spent the night in the Malaesti-Negoesti area. Behind them the Bavarians reached Mierea and Stoina. The Aus-Hung. troops of 301 ID, now making great progress, came up to Zatreni. 115 ID, in the Army's reserve, concentrated their troops between Targu Jiu and Sambotin.

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487 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 45

The remnants of the Romanian Schyl Group (1 and 17 ID) fell back to the city of Craiova while their strength constantly declined. General Vasilescu himself already doubted, as he reported to the high command, that it would be possible to hold off his opponents until the group could be assembled for the counterattack. To support the Schyl group he threw forward a brigade of 1 CD (which was hurrying up from Alexandria) to Craiova along with several armored cars. The other brigade of 1 CD would drive away the German cavalry detachments which had appeared in the Oltetu valley, thus preserving the bridges at Balsua and Slatina from destruction.<sup>488</sup> The Romanian leaders couldn't bring themselves to make the only correct decision, which was to quickly pull all their troops back behind the Alt; this would have been the only way to save them from the destructive effects of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army' continuing pursuit.

In the evening G.Lt Schmettow received the order that after reaching Craiova he was to cross the Alt downstream from Slatina; therefore he limited the pursuit of the Romanians' side detachment. Only five squadrons with several guns kept after this enemy.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> the 6 CD rode into Craiova from the west and 41 ID pushed into the city from the north. The enemy abandoned the capital of "Little Wallachia" to the victors, along with a rich store of food supplies, especially flour. The latter was a great satisfaction to the pursuers, whose own supplies had been unable to keep up with the rapid advance. 7 CD reached Tintaru (west of Filiasu). As for the other infantry divisions, the 109<sup>th</sup> came to Isvorul, the 11<sup>th</sup> Bavarian to Baloia, and the 301<sup>st</sup> to Oltetelisu. 115 ID entered Targu Jiu. G.Lt Kühne's troops were tired from fighting and the wide-ranging pursuit; to give them a chance to refresh themselves, he declared that the 22<sup>nd</sup> would be a rest day.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> the German OHL demanded that Falkenhayn should quickly open the Danube route by Orsova, where the Cerna Detachment was still stationed at the strict order of the Romanian high command. Group Szivo carried out reconnaissance thrusts on the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>, and found that the Romanian trenches were still occupied even though the enemy had already blown up the road at Varciorova on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Col. Szivo ordered on the 19<sup>th</sup> that the planned attack should begin on the 21<sup>st</sup>, but it had to be postponed until the following day because of the

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488 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 48

high waters in the Cerna. Falkenhayn anyway believed that he would achieve more by opening the narrow stretch of the Danube from the east. The battalion which 41 ID sent in this direction was already reaching Strehaia on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The Romanian detachment which had spent the night in Severinesci had meanwhile temporarily shaken off the pursuit by the swarming German squadrons and reached Malovatu (11 km northeast of Turnu Severin). Thus they were becoming caught up in the same threat that loomed over the Romanian Cerna Detachment. Also the remnants of 20 ID which were guarding the Danube between Turnu Severin and the mouth of the Alt (4 battalions and 2 batteries) were ordered to stay in place.<sup>489</sup> Thus they lost their last opportunity to escape the net that was hanging over the Romanian troops still in the western corner of Little Wallachia.

### **5. Group Krafft in the third week of November**

During the extraordinarily quick advance of Kühne's and Schmettow's Corps from Targu Jiu to Craiova, Group Krafft continued their systematic fight to get out of the mountains. Their next task was to overcome the fifth Romanian position, which ran from the bend in the Alt west of Mt Cozia through the southern slope of this massif, then past the towns of Danesti and Bocanita to the Goisu Heights # 1041 and farther east to the pass on the road from Poenari to Bradetu. G.Lt Krafft intended to use the Caineni-Clocoticiu road as his supply line while he concentrated his forces in the center to thrust past the Romanian front on both sides of the Topolog valley.

FML Goiginger, commanding the k.u.k. 73 ID, therefore ordered the main bodies of 10 Mtn Bde and of Pechmann's Brigade to advance on the eastern bank of the Alt as far as the side valley which reaches the Alt at Calimanesci. Moreover, he considered possession of the Naurutu Heights # 1499, which rise south of the lower Lotrubach, to be so important that he detached the right wing of 10 Mtn Bde to secure this mountain.

#### 15-18 November

15 November was used to prepare the attack. In the afternoon the weather deteriorated, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> high snow lay on the mountains. Nevertheless several companies of Korzer's Brigade stormed a Romanian strong point south of the town of Golotreni

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489 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 65

and on the 17<sup>th</sup> they climbed the summit of the Naurutu. A small force guarded the northern bank of the Lotru as far as Voineasca. On the eastern bank of the Alt the main body of 10 Mtn Bde advanced to the bend in the river west of Mt Cozia. The railroad tunnel was blown up, and therefore the Austrians concluded that the enemy were evacuating their position. After suffering some casualties, however, they realized they were mistaken. Also Pechmann's Brigade, though they took several rear guard positions from the 13 Romanian ID, reached Serbanesti in the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> only with great difficulty.

216 ID was told to deliver the main thrust on the western bank of the Topolu and then pivot to the west; in hard fighting on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> they reached the road between Scaueni and Suici. Enemy counterattacks were unsuccessful. Epp's Brigade approached the Goisu Heights on the 16<sup>th</sup>; on the next day they occupied this mountain, which the enemy abandoned voluntarily.

GM Tutschek's Alpenkorps Division was ordered to thrust with their right wing to Corbeni and then bend to the east. The Division's 2 Mtn Bde pushed the enemy back sharply and on 16 November reached Arefu; on the next day they felt their way forwards toward the main Romanian position. The Bavarian battalions on their left were already turning their front toward the east.

In the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> G.Lt Krafft assigned new goals - 73 ID would take Rimnik Valcea and 216 ID Tigveni. Tutschek's Division, which Epp's Brigade had rejoined, was to attack toward the line Rudeni - Oestii-Pamanteni - Bradetu. Although the weather was miserable, these goals were far behind the Romanian front because based on the large numbers of prisoners taken every day it was believed that enemy resistance was weakening.<sup>490</sup> G.Lt Krafft wanted to take advantage of the apparent weakness of the Romanians to avoid hard fighting in the future.<sup>491</sup>

On 18 November, as the weather cleared up, the allied troops renewed their attack. South of Malaia a company of 10 Mtn Bde captured Heights # 964, covered with deep snow. In the Alt valley Bosniaks drove through the destroyed tunnel to its southern end, and Pechmann's Brigade stormed the high ground south of Serbanesti. 216 ID repulsed two new Romanian counter-attacks, then took the village of Rudeni where the road to

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490 On 16 November 10 officers and 1900 men were captured, and on the 17<sup>th</sup> another 19 officers and 2000 men.

491 Heréus, manuscript

Curtea d'Arges turns to the southeast. Under the Alpenkorps Division, Epp's Brigade established themselves on the ridge between the Topolog and Argesu valleys. 2 Mtn Bde encountered strong resistance at Oestii-Pamanteni. The Bavarians on their left advanced to the southern slope of the Ghizu (# 1629), which was still firmly held by Romanian detachments.

#### 19-21 November

The enemy could no longer withstand the heavy pressure. On the 19<sup>th</sup> they evacuated their blocking position in the Alt valley, whereupon Korzer's Brigade was able, after a brief action against rear guards, to advance from the village of Cozia to a point 2 km from Calimanesci. On the next day the enemy abandoned this town to 10 Mtn Bde. GM Pechmann's Bavarians advanced on the 20<sup>th</sup> into Jiblea veche. 216 ID overran the enemy on the road by Robaia and by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> came to Pamanteni. The Alpenkorps Division, whose main task now was to guard the eastern flank, extended their sector with 2 Mtn Bde onto the eastern bank of the Argesu at Oestii-Pamanteni.

The constant fighting in the mountains had fully worn down the troops of I Romanian Corps both physically and psychologically; they had expended almost all of their strength. When officers sharply urged their soldiers to hold out, they either encountered resistance or caused large numbers of men to go over to their opponents. The Army commander was informed of these incidents, and reported to the high command that the situation of I Corps was desperate. He feared there would be a rapid and disorganized retreat, which would endanger the groups on the Schyl and at Orsova. Now the 8 ID, which had been brought forward from Bucharest to the area Cotmeana-Poenari, was placed at the disposal of I Corps even though this would weaken the counter-attacking group which the Division had been supposed to join.<sup>492</sup>

The divisions of I Corps took up new positions in the night of 20-21 November. 13 ID dug in upon the heights southwest of Calimanesci and south of Babuesti. 8 ID, which came to the front to replace 23 ID, blocked the Topolog valley by holding the line Runcu-Barsesti-Blaju. 14 ID was entrusted with the defense of the Argesu valley on the heights by the road junction 3 km north of Curtea d'Arges. The burn-out 23 ID pulled back in reserve to Pitesci.

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492 Dabija, Vol. II, p. 460 ff.

On 21 November Krafft's Corps began to attack this new, sixth Romanian position. FML Goiginger ordered 10 Mtn Bde to capture the heights southwest of Calimanesci; a side column descending from the Naurutu would add punch to the operation. Korzer's Brigade only initiated some preliminary fighting on the 21<sup>st</sup>; similarly Pechmann's Brigade at Babuesti engaged in just isolated skirmishing with the enemy, who stood ready in their defenses. 216 ID came upon Romanian trenches south of Surpati and at Barsesti. The Alpenkorps division, stationed by Albesti, Oestii-Pamanteni and Bradetu, had turned their front toward the east.

Thus in the third week of November Group Krafft had taken a further step forward in the fighting at the outlets from the mountains. But on the 21<sup>st</sup>, the day when G.Lt Kühne entered Craiova, they stood in front of a new position where the enemy, reinforced by a fresh division, was apparently willing to offer prolonged resistance.

## **6. Fighting in the Kronstadt passes from 3 to 21 November**

In the mountains south of Kronstadt, riven by deep valleys and passes, the following units of the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army were stationed at the start of November: I Res Corps, Transylvania Cavalry Brigade, XXXIX Res Corps, and 89 ID. Along their front between the heights north of the town of Campulung and the N. Baszka valley they were confronted by 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army. The allied units were trying to take Campulung and advance past Sinaia. General Averescu's Army, on the contrary, were trying to at least contain their opponents in this sector - so dangerously close to Bucharest - in their current positions, but if possible to push them back to the watershed of the border mountains.

As narrated above, the attack of G.Lt Staabs' XXXIX Res Corps came to a halt on 4 November along the line La Omu # 2508 - Azuga. Further advance was delayed by the difficulty of bringing artillery forward through the mountainous terrain.

Farther east, Heights # 1426 southwest of the Bratocea Pass were lost to the enemy on 3 November. On the next day the eastern wing of 187 ID, reinforced by detachments from 89 ID, were able to recapture these heights. On the other hand, the enemy penetrated the front of 89 ID between the Tatarhavas Pass and Mt Siriu.

On 4 November Army Group HQ shifted the main body of 8 Bav Res

ID from Bereczk to Kronstadt; they hoped that the Division could be employed in an effective direction during the upcoming offensive by 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Although it wasn't intended to use the Bavarians in the passes southeast of Kronstadt, since the Army's attacking front wasn't to be extended, one battalion was attached to 89 ID to help them on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> to throw the enemy out of all the positions they'd penetrated. A hussar detachment from the k.u.k. 1 CD in the N. Baszka valley also took part in this operation. To reinforce 187 ID the Transylvania Cavalry Brigade was moved from the upper Weidenbach valley through Kronstadt, where after a brief rest period they were sent into the Schanz valley.

But 8 Bav Res ID remained at Kronstadt for just two days. Because the Russians were threatening the Gygergyo, the Division was ordered on the 6<sup>th</sup> to join the k.u.k. XXI Corps. Their place was taken by the German 1st IR 36 from Group Krafft, by Res Jaeger Bn 20 and by five batteries.

Meanwhile fighting flared up again between La Omu and the Predeal road. Heavy but unsuccessful Romanian thrusts were followed on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> by powerful attacks from 51 Hon ID and the main body of 178 ID, in which several parallel lines of enemy trenches were captured. New fighting on the 12<sup>th</sup> didn't alter the situation.

On 10 November the units engaged south of Kronstadt received Falkenhayn's order, described above, for the invasion of Wallachia. I Res Corps was supposed to capture the Campulung basin, XXXIX Corps to continue their attacks on both sides of the Predeal road, and 89 ID to pin down the enemy with local thrusts.

G.Lt Morgen, commanding I Res Corps, opened an envelopment attack on the 11<sup>th</sup> with 8 Mtn Bde, stationed on the right wing and reinforced by parts of 12 Bav ID. The Brigade took Candesti on the 12<sup>th</sup>. 12 Bavarian ID in the Corps' center thrust south on both sides of Leresti; 76 Res ID, which made up the eastern wing, also attacked (in the direction of Namaesti). On the 13<sup>th</sup> Albesti and the northern part of Voinesti were wrested from the stubborn Romanian 22 ID. On 14 November the inner wings of the two German divisions gained ground north of the town of Namaesti.

Now Averescu called upon 12 and 22 ID, reinforced by the 2 and 3 Calarasi Brigades, to counterattack. The Romanians prevented 8 Mtn Bde from advancing any further, and captured several strong

points from the Germans near Namaesti. Heavy fighting continued on the 16<sup>th</sup>, and during the 17<sup>th</sup> the Romanians attacked along the entire front of I Res Corps. The actions were so intense that G.Lt Morgen felt it would be most expedient to pull back the troops fighting west of the Törzburg road; supplying them had become very difficult because of a new stretch of bad weather. Morgen intended to withdraw to the road and then employ 12 Bav ID elsewhere. Thus the troops were taken back to their starting points as of 11 November.

Falkenhayn, however, ordered that the Bavarians should stay at the front and keep the enemy under pressure, since it would take 14 days to shift the Division into either the Alt or Schyl valley. If the enemy weren't pressed, they could use their better transportation network to shift available units to threatened sectors with much greater speed than the Germans.<sup>493</sup> Anyhow, on the 13<sup>th</sup> the Romanians brought 16 ID to II Corps to replace 10 ID, which left Sinaia by rail for the front south of Bucharest as a strategic reserve. A few days later the 21 ID, which hitherto had been in reserve at Baicoiu (18 km northwest of Ploesti) also left 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; it was now supposed to take part in the planned counterattack on the Alt.<sup>494</sup> A thrust by Corps Staabs on the 16<sup>th</sup> broke through the Romanian positions southwest of Azauga, but couldn't prevent the departure of these two Romanian divisions. By weakening 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, Averescu made it easier to prepare for the planned general offensive; moreover, on the 7<sup>th</sup> the sectors of 7 Mixed Brigade and of 6 ID had already been re-assigned to North Army. Therefore between 19 and 21 November the Romanians made only local thrusts, which were completely unsuccessful.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army had only 12 and 22 ID (plus 2 and 3 Calarasi Bdes) engaged by Campulung, and the II Corps (16 and 4 ID) and III Corps (just 3 ID) guarding the area between the Prahova and N. Baszka valleys.

The two allied high commands drew some correct conclusions from the activities of the Russians and Romanians. They believed that strong new attacks against Arz's and Kövess' Armies were possible, but a serious operation in the direction of Predeal was improbable. After 21 November, when the k.u.k. 24 ID arrived, Falkenhayn's Army were able to make German units available (a mixed brigade from 187 ID and the Transylvania Cavalry Bde) as desired by Army Group HQ. The hitherto

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493 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 52

494 Dabija, Vol. II, pp. 504 ff.

independent 89 ID was placed under G.Lt Staabs.

#### **D. From Craiova to Bucharest**

##### **1. The allies cross the Alt and the Danube**

###### **a. Activities of 9<sup>th</sup> Army on 22 and 23 November**

Around 9:00 PM on 21 November, the 86-year old Emperor Franz Joseph passed away at Schönbrunn. His grand-nephew the Archduke-Successor Charles Franz Joseph took over the government as Emperor Charles I of Austria and King Charles IV of Hungary. This momentous event will be discussed at the end of the present Volume.

The young Emperor's successor as commander of his Army Group was GO Archduke Joseph, who hitherto had led VII Corps and was especially popular in Hungary. The Archduke arrived at the HQ in Schässburg on 2 December.<sup>495</sup> GO Kövess, who'd led the front temporarily, returned to his post as commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

The Aus-Hung. troops took the oath of allegiance to their new Emperor and King. Otherwise for now there were no changes in the high command or in the objectives to the operations already in progress.

GdI Falkenhayn, who'd moved his HQ from Kronstadt to Hermannstadt on 18 November, issued orders for the continuation of the offensive after he learned that his troops had entered Craiova.<sup>496</sup> Working together, the groups of Schmettow, Kühne and Krafft would first cross the line of the Alt, the last great natural barrier lying in front of Bucharest.

Cavalry Corps Schmettow was instructed to reach the Alt with advanced detachments on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and with stronger units on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; they would seize the bridges at Caracalu and Slatina and quickly break up the Pitesci - Rosi de Vede railroad. The 6 German CD were in the lead; on the 22<sup>nd</sup> they came to Leul mare and on the next day to Caracalu; their leading troops took the slightly damaged bridge at Stoenesci and held it against

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495 Archduke Joseph, Vol. IV, p. 1

496 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 59

recovery attempts by 1 Romanian Cavalry Division. 7 German CD, which had camped on the 22<sup>nd</sup> still 13 km from Craiova, caught up with 6 CD on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Advanced elements of G.Lt Kühne's LIV Corps were supposed to cross the Alt between Slatina and Dragasani on the 24<sup>th</sup>; the side column of 301 ID which had been left at Baia de Fier would rejoin their division. Because of the great exhaustion of the troops, G.Lt Kühne designated the 22<sup>nd</sup> as a rest day, but all divisions nevertheless sent mixed detachments forward toward the Alt on this day. Thus 41 ID tangled with the enemy on the Teslui. On the next day, supported by one of Schmettow's regiments which had driven toward Slatina, they drove the remnants of 1 and 17 Romanian ID over the Teslui; in the evening they came up to the destroyed bridges over the Oltetu at Balsu. 109 ID, sent ahead to support 41 ID, found that they were no longer needed when they arrived on the Teslui on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. 11 Bav ID spent the night of 22-23 November at Craiova; 301 ID was nearing Dragasani, and 115 ID reached Sardanesti in the Schyl valley.

Group Krafft was first supposed to reach the line Rimnik Valcea - Curtea d'Arges; then Falkenhayn wanted them to advance with a strong right wing and in deep echelon on the left toward the line Hintesti-Pitesci-Davidesci. FML Goiginger's 73 ID was finally able on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to wrest the heights southwest of Calimanesi from the stubborn enemy; the main body of 10 Mtn Bde was on the western bank of the Alt and GM Pechmann's 15 Bav Res Inf Bde east of the river. Korzer's 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade brought in 5 Romanian officers and 335 men as prisoners. East of the river the Bavarians and the 216 ID could only gain a little ground against active Romanian resistance. The Alpenkorps Division along with 2 Mtn Bde concentrated entirely on the eastern bank of the Argesu. Their attack wouldn't begin until the Romanians pulled back behind the Topolog. Then they would thrust into the enemy's right flank to make it impossible for them to hold onto this strong natural position.

Against I Res Corps, which was working to quickly repair the road over the Törzburg Pass, the enemy undertook an unsuccessful attack on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; they failed to penetrate the trenches of 8 Mtn Bde or of 12 Bav ID. Due to the arrival of the k.u.k. 24 ID south of Kronstadt the German troops whom they relieved began to leave the front to join the strategic reserves.

There was lively action to the rear of Schmettow's and Kühne's corps. At dawn on 22 November Group Szivo crossed the still-

swollen waters of the Cerna at four places and established themselves firmly on the eastern bank. Farther north, at Czernaheviz and on the Vrf. Cocosiului, the enemy repulsed them with counterattacks. Col. Szivo reckoned that the Romanians still weren't withdrawing. Meanwhile, however, the battalion from 41 ID<sup>497</sup>, after extraordinarily quick marching, drove into Turnu Severin. This forced the Romanian Cerna Detachment to retreat in the night of 22-23 November. The Romanian detachment at Malovetu made strong attacks on the German battalion. But the latter held on, supported by Bulgarian artillery fire from the south bank of the Danube, and forced both enemy groups (with a total of 9 battalions and 5 batteries) to detour north of the city.

Meanwhile Col. Szivo was advancing on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. When he got Falkenhayn's order that he should support the Germans encircled in Turnu Severin, Szivo was already on his way. 2 German Bicycle Brigade threw the enemy back at Varciorova. In the evening Szivo's battalions were here and at Ciresiu. The Romanian Danube Group (of 4 battalions and 8 batteries) had received a series of orders that were impossible to implement<sup>498</sup>; they stayed in place, and thus lost their chance of escaping over the Alt in time.

## **b. Command decisions by both sides**

On 22 November both GM Seeckt (the Army Group's Chief of Staff) and GdI Falkenhayn sent suggestions to the German OHL regarding the further course of the operation. Both generals reckoned that the enemy wouldn't offer prolonged resistance on the Alt. It was known that the Romanians were shifting strong units from Buzeu through Bucharest to Pitesci and therefore Falkenhayn expected that an early decisive action would take place between the Alt and Bucharest. Seeckt believed that on the contrary the enemy didn't intend to offer battle until they were back on the lower and middle reaches of the Argesu. In his scenario the enemy's right wing would run through Campulung or Targovistea. The fortress of Bucharest could serve them as an important back-up point; GM Seeckt felt it was possible he'd have to assault

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497 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The German unit in question was the I Bn of IR 148; for this operation, as "Picht's Detachment" it had attached a platoon of 4 Sqdn/DR 10 and a few guns from 1 Batty/FAR 79. See the German General Staff's "Schlachten und Gefechte", p. 552.

498 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 65

the fortress and noted that he lacked the heavy artillery needed for this task.

Meanwhile the German OHL informed the Army Group and 9<sup>th</sup> Army that parts of Mackensen's force would be crossing the Danube at Sistov on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. They also stated that 9<sup>th</sup> Army would be joined by the German 2 CD and, at a somewhat later date, by the k.u.k. 7 CD which was leaving Volhynia.

Based on the suggestions they'd received, the two high commands came to an agreement later on 22 November for continuing the offensive in Wallachia. The k.u.k. AOK issued the necessary orders to Archduke Joseph's Army Group the same evening. They also informed Army Group HQ that when Mackensen's troops crossed the Danube they would make Alexandria their first objective. Whether they would immediately march from there to Bucharest or first support 9<sup>th</sup> Army would be decided in the next few days. During the general advance on Bucharest, GFM Mackensen's Army of the Danube would be in the area south of the proposed Caracalu-Bucharest railroad, "while the right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army - after LIV Corps crosses the Alt - [will advance] north of this line in the general direction of Slatina toward Bucharest and Ploesti." During the operation the LIV Corps would also make it easier for Group Krafft to advance to Pitesci by sending some troops toward this town.

At this same time there was also a difference of opinion within the Romanian supreme command.

Since the situation in Little Wallachia had become hopeless, the Russian military plenipotentiary General Belaiev wanted to avoid a fight to the finish; a systematic retreat could save the Romanian Army for further campaigns. General Berthelot, the chief of the French military mission, opposed this maneuver "*à la russe*" with his own plan for a counterattack.<sup>499</sup> In his opinion the Romanians didn't have enough space to carry out a wide-ranging retreat; moreover, by doing so they would abandon an important source of foodstuffs and raw materials to their opponents. Finally the Romanian King approved Berthelot's plan.

It was true that only three fresh divisions (2/5, 9/19 and 21) were available for the counter-thrust. However, Berthelot believed they could win a great success if they struck south toward Draganesci (15 km northeast of Caracalu) with concentrated strength; their target would be the leading troops

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499 Pétain, pp. 54 ff.

of Kühne's divisions who'd broken through to the eastern bank of the Alt. At the least, Berthelot hoped to throw the allies back to Craiova. Then further divisions (probably 18, 23 and 10 ID) would be sent to help establish an effective defense along the Alt. This suggestion was a basic alteration of the original Romanian plan for a counterattack, in which divisions assembled at Pitesci would thrust west to force Group Kühne to retreat into the mountains.

Direction of the counter-offensive was entrusted to General Presan, hitherto commanding North Army; he was placed in charge of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to replace General Vasilescu. Accompanied by his advisor General Berthelot, in the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup> he had already arrived at Pitesci, where he would lead the operation. But in the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> he was completely surprised when a report arrived that his opponents had started to cross the Danube at Islas and at Zimnicea.

### **c. The Danube army crosses the river (23-25 November)**

#### Organization and plans

When Mackensen's Army Group took up a permanent defensive position north of the Constanta-Cernavoda railroad, the Field Marshal began to assemble an army farther west, which would at a certain time break out over the Danube. For this purpose the 217 ID came from Dobruja by rail and the 1 Bulgarian ID by foot; moreover, a combined division was assembled here from two Landsturm regiments (one German and one Bulgarian) under GM Graf von der Goltz. Mackensen placed these three divisions, along with GM Gaugl's Aus-Hung. pioneer group which was already in the Belene Canal and the Danube Flotilla, under GdI Kosch's LII German Corps HQ (which until now had led the Danube defenses between the mouth of the Timok and the Dobruja border). Finally some other units came to the area around Sistov:

- . 12 Bulgarian ID (hitherto guarding the Danube),
- . 26 Ottoman ID, which arrived from Turkey,
- . Four German cavalry regiments,
- . Several Bulgarian squadrons, and
- . The k.u.k. Border Jaeger Battalion # II and 5<sup>th</sup> Battery of FKR 34 (so that Aus-Hung. troops would also take part in the river-crossing).

For a while other towns - Nikopoli, Rustchuk, and Turtukai - were also under consideration as crossing-points. But Sistov possessed most of the purely geographical advantages, above all

proximity to the Belene Canal in which all of the shipping and the heavy bridging equipment were already stationed. Cinghinarelli Island, which dominated this canal in the east, had been garrisoned by the Romanians; however, on 7 and 8 October it was captured by an Aus-Hung. pioneer company and a German Landsturm company in cooperation with the Danube Flotilla.<sup>500</sup> The exit from the Canal was clear after the Romanian mines were removed. Other advantages were that the town of Sistov was the end point of a railroad that could bring up supplies, and that the southern bank here was substantially higher than the northern. Finally, a strong artillery force was already stationed by Sistov; it included a group of six heavy Aus-Hung. batteries (11 guns) commanded by Col. Artur Reutter. Because of all these factors, GFM Mackensen (who'd returned from Dobruja to Trnovo on 31 October) ordered GdI Kosch on 13 November to prepare to cross over at Sistov.

GdI Kosch intended that 217 ID, to which the Aus-Hung. border Jaeger were attached, should be shipped to the northern bank southwest of Zimnicea on pontoons and on barges towed by motor boats brought from the Belene Canal. The necessary technical work was the responsibility of three of the Aus-Hung. pioneer companies led by GM Gaugl. Goltz's Division, to be followed by 1 Bulgarian ID, would cross directly east of Sistov to the eastern tip of the island opposite the town. One Aus-Hung. and three Bulgarian pioneer companies under k.u.k. Pioneer Colonel Mjk were with Goltz. A strong artillery force of about 200 guns stationed in and on both sides of Sistov would support the operation if necessary. The flotilla was ordered to protect both flanks of the landing and to assist with their guns in overcoming the enemy. After landing, the three divisions would establish a bridgehead around Zimnicea to cover the construction of a heavy Herberth System military bridge. Then the cavalry, the 12 Bulgarian ID and Turkish 26 ID would cross the river on this bridge.

The German OHL left the selection of the day to cross the Danube to GFM Mackensen. He was supposed to ensure that he would be able to cooperate with the right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army. On 21 November the OHL let the General-Field Marshal know that in the current situation the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> would be favorable dates.

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500 Regele, "Die Tätigkeit der k.u.k. 2./5. Pionier-Feld-Kompagnie beim 'Kampf um die Donau' 1915-1916" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1921 edition, p. 61). Wulff, "Die österreich-ungarische Donauflotte im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1934), p. 94

Mackensen, however, decided to attack on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

To deceive the enemy, a German Landsturm battalion would cross the Danube at Samavit (opposite the mouth of the Alt). Downstream from Sistov the artillery of the Danube defense forces at Rustchuk, Turtukai and Silistria would fire to divert the Romanians' attention from the actual crossing-point.<sup>501</sup>

It was known that the enemy had infantry of about a division's strength between the mouth of the Alt and Giurgevo, with cavalry behind them; they were believed to have just two militia battalions and several batteries at Zimnicea. This was correct. The 18 Romanian ID was covering a sector 185 km long between the mouth of the Alt and Monastirea (70 km east of Bucharest) with 16 battalions and 15 batteries. 2 CD was stationed at Alexandra. The two divisions made up the "Danube Defensive Group."<sup>502</sup>

#### The operation

Heavy fog lay over the Danube early on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was so thick that shortly before 6:30 AM, when the crossing was supposed to begin, GdI Kosch ordered that it should be postponed for two hours. But this command didn't reach the first echelon of 217 ID, which had already embarked. Thus the operation didn't unfold completely as planned. Although a few pontoons had set out already, there were no negative consequences. For when the entire force began to cross the river at 8:30 AM, almost all elements landed on the Romanian bank without interference from the enemy. Weak resistance at Zimnicea was quickly overcome. In the thick fog, the artillery hardly fired a shot. One monitor was stationed directly off the pier at Zimnicea and took part in the fighting. By evening on the 23<sup>rd</sup> there were about 17 battalions with at least 80 machine guns and 3 batteries on Romanian soil.<sup>503</sup> There was no more fear of a setback; the crossing was now already considered a success.

The river-crossing resumed early on the 24<sup>th</sup>. At the same time the allies were enlarging the bridgehead. The enemy, including

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501 Bose, "Flussübergänge im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1934), pp. 48 ff.

502 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 80 ff.

503 In 1 Bulgarian ID some entire detachments of troops whose homes were in the mountains refused to board the pontoons because of their fear of the water. With some difficulty they were persuaded to at least climb onto the steamships.

the Romanian cavalry which arrived from Alexandria, couldn't be brought to a decisive action; they withdrew so quickly over the Vede River that the two sides lost contact. By evening almost all of 217 ID, Goltz's Division and 1 Bulgarian ID were standing on the northern bank.

The diversionary operation at Samavit, which was also hampered by the fog, wasn't completed until the 24<sup>th</sup> with the occupation of Islas. Nevertheless it had temporarily confused the Romanian leadership.<sup>504</sup>

Meanwhile the Aus-Hung. Bridging Battalion # 1 began to construct the heavy military bridge early on 24 November. After just 23 hours of work (including 12 at night) it was ready at 6:30 AM on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Then the remaining units crossed over, including the German and Bulgarian cavalry which along with Aus-Hung. Border Jaeger Bn II now made up a combined Cavalry Division under GM Goltz. The Landsturm troops of Goltz's original division were divided between the German 217 and Bulgarian 12 ID.

Already on the 25<sup>th</sup> the combined Cavalry Division began to advance toward Soimu; they were followed by 217 ID. The 12 Bulgarian ID was sent toward Bragadiru and 1 ID toward Bujoru; the leading troops of both divisions reached the Vede in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>. The 26 Turkish ID assembled at Zimnicea and would follow 217 ID.

Thus the allied troops, who now were called the "Danube Army", completed their river crossing. The operation had encountered almost no enemy opposition, but had contended with adverse weather. The smooth success was due to exemplary preparations that had gone into great detail, and to the brilliant work of the Aus-Hung. pioneers ably supported by the Danube Flotilla. But ultimately the crossing was possible only because the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff had the wise foresight to bring all of the shipping and the bridging equipment to the lower Danube before Romania declared war.

#### **d. Activities on the Alt on 24 and 25 November**

Falkenhayn intended that the corps of Kühne and Schmettow should advance on a broad front. Therefore they were on a line that was 65 km long between Stoenesci and Dragasani. Only at the

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504 Dabija, Vol. III., p. 91

former town were they able to seize a bridge with a rapid thrust. At Slatina and Dragasani, on the other hand, the enemy was stationed on the eastern bank of the Alt, apparently prepared to offer determined resistance. It appeared that time would be lost in crossing the river. In the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> GdI Falkenhayn, who'd traveled from Hermannstadt through the Szurduk Pass, arrived by auto at Craiova to personally issue new orders on the spot. G.Lt Kühne asked that 109 ID, which was east of Craiova, should be sent through Stoenesci, where the entire 6 CD had already crossed to the eastern bank; in this way the Romanian front on the Alt could be unhinged from the south.

Falkenhayn approved this request only reluctantly.<sup>505</sup> In an Army order issued that evening he was still urging Kühne to force a way over the river with 41 ID at Slatina and 301 ID at Dragasani, and to bring 11 Bav ID to Slatina. The Bavarians shouldn't be diverted further south unless they would thus speed up the river-crossing by an envelopment movement through Stoenesci.<sup>506</sup> The advance beyond the Alt would be directly to the east toward the rail line between Beuca and Ungheni.

When GdI Falkenhayn was preparing to return to Hermannstadt in the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup>, he was convinced that the crossing of the Alt was a success. By evening of this day the 6 CD reached Mihaesci and sent an advanced detachment to Rosi de Vede. 7 CD came up to Stoicanesci and Draganesci. Thus all of the Cavalry Corps was already on the eastern bank. 109 ID spent the night at Cosereni (16 km west of Caracalu). Since the attempts to cross the Alt at Slatina and Dragasani still hadn't succeeded, 11 Bav ID was ordered on the 26<sup>th</sup> to follow 109 ID through Stoenesci.

Meanwhile Group Krafft was also making good progress. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the 10 Mtn Bde of 73 ID, attacking on the western bank of the Alt, drove the enemy past the road that leads from Cheia to Bogdanesci. Pechmann's Brigade, reinforced by a Bosniak battalion, kept pace east of the river. Fog hindered 216 ID from carrying out their planned attack. East of the Argesu the 2 Mtn Bde won an outstanding success; they drove back 14 Romanian ID, despite stubborn resistance, to the Curtea d'Arges - Musatesci road. The German troops of GM Tutschek's Alpenkorps Division were meanwhile standing ready for a further advance.

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505 Kühne, "Erinnerungen" (Newsletter of the 76 Res ID, Year XI of Publication, Issue 2, p. 23)

506 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The translation of this sentence was very difficult, and may be incorrect.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> the allies harvested the fruits of their success on the previous day, in which the Romanians had lost about 930 men as prisoners. Under 73 ID the 10 Mtn Bde drove into Rimnik Valcea; Pechmann's Brigade reached the area farther east. 216 ID occupied Tigveni. The enemy was pulling back; only in front of 2 Mtn Bde were they still holding some heights northeast of Curtea d'Arges.

G.Lt Krafft now presumed that the way into a landscape of increasingly lower hills now lay open; he ordered 73 ID to advance to Hintesti, 216 ID to Pitesci, and the Alpenkorps Division to the village of Mioveni lying farther to the northeast. But already on the 26<sup>th</sup> it would be proven that the Romanian I Corps still wasn't willing to give up the outlets from the mountains.

## **2. The Battle of the Argesu**

### **a. Initial measures of the opposing generals**

#### The Romanians

Mackensen's crossing of the Danube had caused the difficult position of the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army to further deteriorate. Already threatened from the north and west, they were now confronted by a new opponent in the south. Regardless of whether Mackensen advanced east toward Bucharest or to the north, the Romanian high command couldn't be ready to attempt a decisive counter-measure before the 28<sup>th</sup>, since the divisions needed for the planned counterattack couldn't be in place any sooner. Therefore Russian General Belaiev again urged the Romanians to undertake a wide-ranging retreat. But despite the diminished chances of success the Romanian high command was determined to wage a battle to defend their capital, which was the center of their official life, of the government, and of the country's entire transportation system.

Apparently this battle was originally envisioned as a defensive struggle, since on the 24<sup>th</sup> the Romanian high command ordered a "general retreat to the line Argesu - Jez. Grecilor." From their strategic reserves, they ordered 21 ID to the road from Bucharest to Alexandria in the area between Argesu and Niaslov, and 9/19 ID to Titu and Gaesci. Presan himself had already placed 2/5 ID on the Alt between the mouth of the Topolog and

Cucueti to fill a gap in the front. To provide united leadership in the great battle that was developing between the Transylvania Alps and the Danube, General Presan was placed in charge of an army group that included 1<sup>st</sup> Army, the Danube Defense Group and the strategic reserves.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> the Romanian high command, which considerably underestimated the strength of the allied units in Little Wallachia and at Zimnicea, once again ordered General Presan "to prevent our opponents from advancing from the west and southwest."<sup>507</sup> Therefore 1<sup>st</sup> Army should pull back, pivoting on their right wing so that the left flank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army wouldn't be exposed. At the same time the available units of 1<sup>st</sup> Army and the Danube Defense Group would oppose the allies who were advancing on Bucharest and at least halt them on the Niaslov. I Corps would form the pivot and withdraw only slowly between the Argesu and the Bratia; they were not to abandon the road leading from Musatesci to Campulung. If the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was also compelled to retreat, they would take up a new position in front of the Prahova valley. It was intended that by the 27<sup>th</sup> the 21 ID at Mihalesci and 9/19 ID at Titu and Gaesci would have completed their concentration.

Although the two orders from the high command didn't explicitly refer to a counter-offensive, this was the solution which General Presan had in mind when he moved his HQ to Titu; General Berthelot certainly encouraged him to take this course. Presan intended to first strike Kosch's Danube Army and throw them back over the river, while 1<sup>st</sup> Army kept up a firm defense against the allies who were advancing out of Little Wallachia. Afterwards he wanted to turn northwest, push Kühne's and Krafft's groups behind the Alt, and thus establish a strong new defensive front on the Alt and Danube.

Presan released preliminary instructions in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> for the first act of this maneuver on interior lines. 1<sup>st</sup> Army, now led by General Stratilescu, would hold the line Curtea d'Arges - Dragasani - Slatina, preventing their opponents from advancing to Pitesci and Costesci. Their resistance was essential if the planned counter-offensive toward the south was to succeed. Presan demanded that the Danube Defense Group should delay Kosch's Army with continuous counterattacks. 21 ID and 9/19 ID were to be ready to strike by evening on the 27<sup>th</sup>; Presan wanted them, along with 2/5 ID (which was being shifted to Caldararu) and 1 CD, to strike their opponents in the south

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507 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 104. Pétain, p. 69

wherever they found them.

But meanwhile, as has already been narrated, I Corps with 8 and 13 ID had withdrawn behind the Topolog by evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Since 2/5 ID was moving to Caldararu, the defense of the Alt was left entirely to the remnants of 1 and 17 ID, now placed together in one combined division. In front of Corps Schmettow the 1 CD was pulling back to the northeast. The Danube Defense Group was split into several widely-separated detachments at Turnu Magurele, Putintei, Gogosari, Giurgevo and Monastirea. The Cerna Detachment and the units guarding the Danube west of the Alt (a total of 16 battalions, 2 squadrons and 13 batteries) were isolated and written off as lost.

### The Germans

On 25 and 26 November a lively exchange of views was also taking place between Falkenhayn and the German OHL regarding how to overcome the resistance on the Alt and how to carry out the advance after the river was finally crossed.<sup>508</sup> For the former project Falkenhayn had anyway already undertaken all necessary measures. Once east of the Alt, he intended to advance rapidly with a strong right wing. The Cavalry Corps would first aid Group Kühne by enveloping the enemy stationed by Slatina; as soon as this was accomplished, he intended that they should thrust toward the railroad between Bucharest and Targovistea. Kühne's divisions would advance through Beuca and Martalogi, and with a side detachment toward Pitesci. The next goal of Group Krafft would be the line Mosoia-Pitesci-Davidesci.

The HQ at Pless agreed with Falkenhayn in general, but wanted to have Kühne's left wing directed toward Costesci and Krafft's left wing enter the upper Dambovita valley southeast of Campulung. The HQ of Archduke Joseph's Army Group also supported this proposed envelopment, so that Kühne's left wing would remain strong for an advance to Pitesci, and furthermore wanted to see the entire 9<sup>th</sup> Army aim for Ploesti. Falkenhayn objected to weakening Krafft's main body by sending a detachment toward Campulung, but finally agreed to send a strong column toward Poenari. The k.u.k. AOK was ignored completely during these discussions.

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508 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, pp. 65 ff.

**b. Maneuvers in Wallachia between 26 and 29 November**26-27 November

Meanwhile the allies continued to advance in Wallachia. On the 26<sup>th</sup> the Danube Army crossed the lower course of the Vede. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the 1 Bulgarian ID, accompanied by a group of monitors on the Danube, entered Giurgevo; thereupon several Bulgarian battalions from Rustchuk were here shipped over to the northern bank. At the same time, the Aus-Hung. Bridging Battalion # 1 began to build a military bridge, over which traffic was able to cross the river starting on 4 December. The 12 Bulgarian ID reached Toporu, and German 217 ID Prunaru. The latter unit was covered in the west by the Combined CD. 26 Turkish ID followed as far as Alexandria.

Under 9<sup>th</sup> Army, on 26 November the 6 CD had to engage in heavy fighting at Rosi de Vede; 7 CD reached Valeni. 109 ID crossed the Alt at Stoenesci and set out on the roads leading to the north. They were followed by 11 Bav ID. On the next day the pressure exerted on the Romanians' southern flank began to have an effect. They gave up the crossing-point on the Alt at Slatina to 41 ID. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the 109 ID came to Greci, and 11 Bav ID to a point in front of Caracalu; 115 ID approached Craiova. But the Aus-Hung. troops of 301 ID were still pinned down at Dragasani. Under the Cavalry Corps, 6 CD from Rosi de Vede was able to make contact with the Combined CD of the Danube Army; 7 CD rode into Tampeni.

Under Group Krafft, on the 26<sup>th</sup> the 10 Mtn Bde crossed the Alt at Rimnik Valcea; on the next day they advanced south, while Pechmann's Brigade deployed on the western bank of the Topolog in front of Poenari. Parts of 216 ID broke through the front of 8 Romanian ID on the 26<sup>th</sup>. This enabled the Division to advance 7 km on the next day and thus to effectively threaten 13 Romanian ID, defending the lower Topolog sector, from the north. The Alpenkorps Division occupied Curtea d'Arges. Thus Group Krafft managed to fight their way out of the mountains by their own strength against a stubborn enemy who'd continually been reinforced. Both of the Au-Hung. mountain brigades had especially distinguished themselves. During this fighting Krafft's Group had taken a total of 100 officers and 14,350 men as prisoners, along with 14 guns and 37 machine guns.

When Falkenhayn received the news that the Danube Army had reached the line Giurgevo-Draganesci on the 27<sup>th</sup>, he issued

orders for the pursuit of the Romanians. He adhered to his plan of advancing due east with a strong right wing. The Cavalry Corps would ride to the Argesu north of the line Rosi de Vede - Bucharest and break up the railroads leading from the capital to Targovistea and to Ploesti. Kühne's Corps would reach the stretch of railroad between Rosi de Vede and Ungheni, while quickly sending a mobile detachment through Costesci toward the lines of communication from Pitesci to Bucharest. Group Krafft, deployed in deep echelon on their left, was to advance to the line Hintesti-Pitesci-Davidesci. I Res Corps was instructed to throw the enemy back soon and then pursue into the Dambovita valley. 8 Mtn Bde was to be shifted through the Leota mountain massif (# 2134) into the Jalomita valley. 115 ID would follow the right wing through Stoenesci.

Now an hour of great decision was approaching for Romania. To assist Presan's Army Group as much as possible, their high command - in cooperation with the Stavka - ordered the North and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies to join the attack which Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army was to open on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Also they expected that as Sarrail's Army of the Orient (which as will be related later had already won local successes at Monastir) continued their attacks they would draw opposing units from the Romanian front. The high command hoped that these measures, and especially Presan's counter-offensive, would at the last minute rip through the net that was threatening to trap the Romanian Army in Wallachia.

Meanwhile the Romanian position had further deteriorated when strong German forces crossed to the eastern bank of the Alt at Stoenesci. Therefore shortly before midnight on the 27<sup>th</sup> Presan found himself compelled to order 1<sup>st</sup> Army back to the line Colonesci-Grosi-Galasesci-Darmonesci. The retreat of I Corps on the right wing, however, exposed the left flank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which was supposed to attack on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, this withdrawal by 1<sup>st</sup> Army reduced the area of the counterattack by about 30 km, and enabled the allies to quickly establish a link between the inner wings of Falkenhayn's and Kosch's Armies.

The I Romanian Corps pulled back to the area around Pitesci on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The 1/17 ID, covered by 1 CD, retreated from the Alt to the line Colonesci-Grosi; on the way they crossed the line of march of 2/5 ID, which was moving to Jonesci (south of Costesci). The 9/19 ID marched ahead as far as Glogovenu. The northern part of the Danube Defense Group moved to Letcaveche; the southern part, after giving up Giurgevo almost without a fight, withdrew to Daita. Meanwhile 21 ID entered the front at Naipu.

In the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> General Presan, who seems to have made a rather accurate estimate of his opponents' situation, issued orders for the counter-maneuver. He reinforced 1<sup>st</sup> Army (14, 8, 13, 1/17 ID) with 2/5 ID and 1 CD, and assigned them a defensive role. Giving up Pitesci, they were to hold a position farther east, on the line Cornatelu-Costesci-Dradisesci. This further limited the room in which Presan's Army Group could maneuver; moreover, the gap between the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army and the left of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - which was still stationed at Albesci - was already about 50 km wide. General Iancovescu, commander of the Danube Defense Group, would direct the counterattack by 9/19, 21 and 18 ID plus 2 CD; starting on 29 November from the Blejesti-Copaceni area, it would be aimed at Alexandria and Zimnicea. The reserves of the attacking group would be 7 ID (brought by the high command from Moldavia) and the 9/19 Inf Bde (created from remnants of other units).<sup>509</sup>

#### 28-29 November

But when 1<sup>st</sup> Army remained unmolested by the allies on the 28<sup>th</sup>, Presan further reinforced the attacking group with 2/5 ID; they would advance toward Draganesci to envelop the allied flank and rear. The Danube Defense Group had attempted to advance, but on the 28<sup>th</sup> were assaulted by Kosch's Army and again pushed back to Naipu, Ciolanu and Daita. This development and a desire to await the arrival of 2/5 ID caused Presan to postpone the start of the offensive until the 30<sup>th</sup>. By then the 9/19 ID would move to Vida; the Danube Group, supported by parts of the strategic reserve as they arrived, was supposed to hold on at Naipu and Calugareni.

Presan now moved his HQ to Buftea, nearby the high command. But the high command and government seem to no longer have been very confident. The government had already moved to Jassy; they also ordered all men over 16 years old who were able to bear arms to move into Moldavia.<sup>510</sup>

On 29 November Kosch's Army established themselves on the eastern bank of the Glavaciocu; 217 ID fought hard against 21

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509 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Confusingly, the Romanians had both a combined 9/19 Inf Div and 9/19 Inf Bde. The Bde was created from extra infantry that weren't needed by the Div, and it didn't have any artillery. (German Official History, Vol. XI, p. 298)

510 Pétain, p. 80

Romanian ID during the operation. Kosch was supposed to continue his advance toward the Argesu on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Goltz's Combined CD had to pull back over the Glavaciocu in front of 9/19 ID, which was advancing southeast to Vida. However, Border Jaeger Battalion # II kept the Romanians from crossing the river.<sup>511</sup>

On the 28<sup>th</sup> the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army was able to deploy their right wing without interference on the eastern bank of the Alt River. The Cavalry Corps reached the area on both sides of the Teleorman. On the 29<sup>th</sup> the 6 CD already encountered the enemy north of Blejesti; 7 CD reached Ciolanesti din Deal. Under Kühne's Corps, which was coming up in forced marches, the 11 Bav ID reached Mihaesci; 109 and 41 ID crossed the Vede at Valeni and Floru. In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> these three divisions were on the Ros de Vede - Ungheni railroad. 301 ID, which had taken a detour through Slatina, came to Optasi. 115 ID crossed the Alt at Stoenesci.

When Group Krafft crossed the upper reaches of the Topolog on the 28<sup>th</sup>, they no longer found the enemy in front of them. Therefore the k.u.k. 73 ID moved widely forward and stopped for the night at Rachitelele and Draganu. 216 ID marched along the railroad to a point in front of Galasesci; the Alpenkorps Division reached Stroesci and Petrosani. Since the Romanian I Corps didn't intend to offer battle until east of Pitesci, Group Krafft was able on the 29<sup>th</sup> to reach Hintesti with 73 ID and Pitesci with 216 ID; under GM Tutschek the 2 Mtn Bde came to Mioveni and the Alpenkorps to Golesci and Godeni.

Because of this pressure on the flank, the II Romanian Corps abandoned their now-untenable positions by Campulung; with 3 Calarasi Bde and 22 and 12 ID they pulled back to the southeast. The 2 Calarasi Bde, which had been deployed on foot, were sent back to Targovistea so they could again mount their horses. In hot pursuit, on the 29<sup>th</sup> the 12 Bav ID drove into the hitherto stubbornly defended town of Campulung. 76 Res ID threw Romanian rear guards out of Stoienesci. 8 Mtn Bde shifted into the valley which leads from Stoienesci toward the Leota. For the continuing advance, G.Lt Morgen ordered the Bavarians into the Dambovita valley, and 76 Res ID into the Jalomita valley via Puceni; meanwhile the k.u.k. 8 Mtn Bde would advance over the southern slope of the Leota to Petrosita.

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511 Heréus, "Die Schlacht am Arges" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1934 edition, pp. 815 ff.)

Although 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army had been told to go over to the offensive, on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> their right wing made only some diversionary thrusts by small detachments. These attacks didn't interfere with the replacement of the last parts of the German 187 ID at the front by the k.u.k. 24 ID. Thus the entire 187 ID was standing ready in the Army Group's reserve.

In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> General Presan's Romanian Army Group was ready to begin the battle he had planned and upon which, as he reminded the troops, the fate of the country depended. But the general situation didn't correspond to his wishes. The attacking group wasn't all in place, since 2/5 ID was still 50 km from the chosen battlefield and 9/19 ID had yet to take the crossing-points over the Glavaciocu. The Danube Defense Group was already locked in close combat with their opponents, and threatened with envelopment at Comana.

The Romanian high command gave Presan a completely free hand. For the continuation of the battle the only strategic reserve they had available was 10 ID, plus the 11 and 23 ID which had been taken back to Ploesti to recuperate. Despite the lively intervention of General Berthelot and of the French General attached to the Stavka (Janin), the Russians had only promised to lend support with 40 ID and 8 CD from their IV Corps.<sup>512</sup> The Stavka's indifference to the catastrophe threatening the Romanian Army stood in stark contrast to the urgency of the situation. Romanian official opinion was therefore bitter against their selfish allies.

On 29 November the German and Aus-Hung. leadership came to an agreement about the chain of command in Wallachia. Since Falkenhayn's and Kosch's Armies would have to fight in close cooperation, as of the evening of 30 November the 9<sup>th</sup> Army (without Group Gerok) were placed under GFM Mackensen. Archduke Joseph's Army Group thereafter would consist of Group Gerok, 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies, and the existing Front reserves. They gave up to 9<sup>th</sup> Army the Transylvania Cavalry Brigade and several smaller units.

Thus upper-level command of the allies in Wallachia was fully in German hands. Further events in the Wallachian plains will be described only in summary and insofar as is necessary to follow the fighting of the Aus-Hung. divisions and brigades there.

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512 Pétain, p. 85

**c. The Romanians counterattack against Kosch's Army**

Early on 30 November General Presan unleashed his *masse de manoeuvre*, which was finally assembled, to attack the Danube Army. He ordered the right wing (2/5, 9/19 and 21 ID) to make a concentric advance toward Draganesci. The left wing under General Iancovescu (18 ID and 9/19 Inf Bde) served as the pivot for the advance, but at the same time was supposed to attack toward Giurgevo. 1<sup>st</sup> Army, opposite Group Krafft, was to cover the offensive toward the west. But Presan left the area between the two parts of the Romanian force unprotected, and Kühne's Corps - which was no more than 60 km from the left wing of the Danube Army - was advancing into this gap. Moreover the three German cavalry divisions (6, 7 and Goltz's) were covering the area, and had already substantially delayed the advance of 2/5 and 9/19 ID.

Therefore Presan didn't have much time for his sortie against Kosch's Army. Falkenhayn's right wing could appear at the decisive point in three days at most. The victory must be won by then. Presan also had to take into account the battered condition of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which didn't have much strength left to defend themselves. Moreover the II Corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was also already falling back to the east, with Corps Morgen in pursuit on their heels.

Despite everything, Presan risked the attack. So that he'd be closer to the decisive point, he established himself in the Bragadir fortification on Bucharest's southwest front.

Since Kosch's and Falkenhayn's Armies continued to advance, on the 30<sup>th</sup> a battle of maneuver on the grand style, rich in dramatic turns of fortune, unfolded at the gates of the Romanian capital.

Contrary to Presan's expectations, the first day brought success to Kosch's Army, which was able to throw the 21 Romanian ID and Group Iancovescu over the Niaslov. Meanwhile the enveloping wing of the attacking group was advancing. The 9/19 ID and 2 CD finally forced their way over the Glavaciocu at Vida; the 2/5 ID, after pushing Schmettow's opposing squadrons to the side, reached Babaita and Flamanda.

Apparently Presan was not troubled by the fact that the maneuver by 2/5 and 9/19 ID had caused a 60 km-wide gap to develop between themselves and 1<sup>st</sup> Army, or that Kühne's Corps and Schmettow's cavalry were entering the gap unchecked. He let the

last possibility for an orderly retreat pass by, and ordered both divisions to swing fully to the east on 1 December; meanwhile 21 ID would attack over the Argesu, but Group Iancovescu would stay in place and repulse all eventual assaults by the allies.

In fact Iancovescu was able to hold his ground on 1 December. 21 ID, however, was thrown back over the Argesu by 217 German ID at Mihalesci; the Germans couldn't pursue, because the Romanians' enveloping right wing had now arrived upon the flank and rear of the isolated Danube Army. The 9/19 ID forced their way through some weak forces, including Border Jaeger Battalion II and two Aus-Hung. pioneer companies attached to 217 ID; the Romanian unit reached Bulbucata and Balaria, threatening the outnumbered German division. Parts of 2/5 ID allowed themselves to be drawn into action with the Turks who were coming up from Draganessci, and therefore this Division only came as far as Letcaveche.

As already mentioned, under 9<sup>th</sup> German Army Schmettow's Cavalry Corps had fallen back to the Teleorman at Olteni and Zlotesci on the 30<sup>th</sup>. But LIV Corps was advancing over this river. As part of the operation, the Aus-Hung. battalions of 301 ID attacked the enemy at Costesci. Group Krafft's k.u.k. 73 ID and German 216 ID pushed the Romanian 1<sup>st</sup> Army back several kilometers. The Alpenkorps Division, with 2 Mtn Bde, advanced on miserable roads through the hills north of the Pitesci-Titu highway; they cooperated with I Res Corps, which had reached the southeast corner of the Campulung basin. 8 Mtn Bde had occupied Mt Leota.

Since Falkenhayn still didn't want to believe that the Romanians would offer prolonged resistance in front of Bucharest, and since he'd received reports of the success won by the Danube Army on the Niaslov, he decided to continue his pursuit in the same direction. Thus Schmettow and Kühne would advance toward the Argesu between Malu spart and Fundu perului, and Krafft toward the railroad between Titu and Targovistea (exclusive of the latter). I Res Corps' objective was the sector Targovistea - Valea lunga. 115 ID would move up to Rosi de vede and 2 CD, which was arriving in the theater, to Rimnik Valcea.

Mackensen similarly didn't expect the enemy to prolong resistance in front of their capital and planned to seize the fortress in a *coup de main*. Since he didn't think Turks or Bulgarians were suited for this type of operation, he intended to use three German divisions from 9<sup>th</sup> Army along with 217 ID. The 11 Bav ID and (behind them) 115 ID were to advance through

Blejesti to Mihalesci and 109 ID toward the northern and western sides of Bucharest. Falkenhayn however, still didn't feel compelled to alter the marching orders he'd already issued.<sup>513</sup>

On 1 December the right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army, mostly without fighting, moved behind the Romanian attacking group; with 11 Bav ID, the Cavalry Corps and 109 ID they reached the line Blejesti - Crevedia mare. 41 ID came to Fundu perului and thus were already nearing the line of retreat of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army. 301 ID, which had stormed Costesci in the night of 30 November, pushed forward toward the east another 10 km on the next day until they were halted by the 1/17 Romanian ID.

Group Krafft broke through the front of I Romanian Corps with 73 and 216 ID up to Stanislavesti and Lordeni. 2 Mtn Bde advanced toward Telesci and the Alpenkorps Division strove farther north to enter the Dambovita valley, where G.Lt Morgen's two German divisions - in pursuit of II Romanian Corps - reached Gemenu. After a very difficult march the 8 Mtn Bde entered Petrosita. The Transylvania Cavalry Brigade, following I Res Corps, spent the night at Rucaru.

The enemy were still occupying their positions in front of XXXIX Res Corps. In the Prahova valley they even launched attacks, which however were easily repulsed by GM Mouillard's 51 Hon ID and FML Urbarz's 24 ID. On 30 November the Romanians penetrated the lines of 89 German ID at several points; a counterattack began the next day and was assisted by dismounted horsemen from the k.u.k. 1 Cavalry Division. The 24 ID had detached 47 Inf Bde as a strategic reserve at Tartlau.

#### **d. The decisive intervention by Falkenhayn's Army**

In the afternoon of 1 December Falkenhayn, who'd moved his HQ to Rimnik Valcea, received from Group Krafft a captured order of the commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army. The order had been in the possession of two Romanian General Staff officers, who had wandered by mistake into the lines of Brigade Pechmann and were taken prisoner. Presan's entire plan for the counter-offensive was revealed by this order. With one stroke it dispelled the darkness which had until now hidden the Romanians' intentions.<sup>514</sup> Two calls for help, in which Mackensen urgently asked Falkenhayn for support against the Romanians who were attacking from the

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513 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 76

514 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 79

north and northwest, proved that the enemy's thrust on the flank was already becoming effective.

Falkenhayn immediately decided to take maximum advantage of the separation of the two Romanian battle groups; Kühne's and Schmettow's corps by now had already entered the area between the groups without fighting and could envelop both of the enemy's inner wings. Falkenhayn ordered 11 Bav ID and 109 ID to swerve to the southeast on 2 December, so as to cut off the line of retreat to Bucharest for the enemy who were assaulting the Danube Army. Kühne's attack would be covered on the eastern side by the Cavalry Corps. Based on a later order from Mackensen the 109 ID would also continue to march toward the east. 41 ID switched toward the northeast to cut off the retreat of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, which was being pursued by Group Krafft (the latter now reinforced by 301 ID). Morgen's and Staabs' Corps would continue to exert pressure to the south. 115 ID (in the Army's reserve) and 2 Bicycle Brigade (re-assigned from Group Szivo) would move forward to the Teleorman.

Falkenhayn expected these orders issued on the 2<sup>nd</sup> to lead to a great success. The enemy were adding to the dangers threatening them by persistently continuing their attacks against Kosch's Army and stubbornly defending in front of Group Krafft.

Meanwhile the actions of the Danube Army were reaching a critical point. Assaulted from the east, north and west, the 217 ID was enveloped along three-quarters of a circle between the Argesu and Niaslov; against overwhelming Romanian attacks the Germans defended their hedgehog position with the courage of desperation. The Bulgarians fighting farther south were also heavily assaulted.<sup>515</sup>

GdI Kosch meanwhile was naturally preparing to relieve the almost-encircled 217 ID with his advancing detachments. Now the Bavarians were also coming forward with great haste; in the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> they entered Rusi lui Asan and made contact with Turkish troops south of the town.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Presan had many times urged his attacking group to advance energetically. He was determined that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> he would win the victory that seemed so close. The 21 and 9/19 ID would pursue southeast to Calugareni, while Iancovescu pinned down the Bulgarians along his front. But now the 2/5 ID and 2

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515 Heréus, "Arges" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1934 edition, pp. 869 ff.)

CD were instructed to face west so they could check the relieving German troops who were coming near. North of the highway between the Niaslov and Argesu the 7 ID would occupy a defensive position. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was reinforced by 10 ID and ordered to give ground only slowly. General Stratilescu would have to provide his own protection for his open southern flank.

In the event the 7 and 10 Romanian ID were able on 2 December to still prevent 109 ID, Schmettow's Corps and 41 ID from crossing the Argesu. But the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was once more thrown back by Group Krafft, and evacuated Gaesci. By evening almost all parts of this Army were north of the Argesu. The weakened 13 and 14 ID came together as a combined unit. 1 CD was still on guard south of the Argesu.

Under Krafft's Corps the 301 ID (now part of his command) spent the night in Mozaceni; 73 ID was south of the railroad leading to Gaesci, and 216 ID was north of this line. The Alpenkorps Division climbed down into the Dambovita valley, where they met I Res Corps. 8 Mtn Bde was resting in Pietrosita [Petrosita] and preparing to advance over the mountains to Campina. In front of Morgen's Corps the II Romanian Corps withdrew to a position west and north of Targovistea so as to protect this city. The two Calarasi Brigades were supposed to cover this retreat and establish a link with 1<sup>st</sup> Army.<sup>516</sup>

It seemed that the Romanians were finally going to get support from the Russians. The leading brigade of 40 ID of IV Corps arrived in the area where the Sabaru River flows into the Argesu, but their commander delayed his attack because the Division wasn't fully assembled. General Sakharov, the leader of the Dobruja Army, had come by invitation to the Romanian HQ; because of the critical situation of his allies he called 30 ID to come from Dobruja. Finally the VIII Corps, stationed in Moldavia as a strategic reserve, was moving to Bucharest.

But before this help could become effective the Battle of the Argesu was decided.

In the morning of 3 December the 217 ID repulsed all enemy assaults by exerting their last strength; the Bavarians, Turks, Prussians and Bulgarians who'd hurried to the scene enveloped and overran the Romanians, inflicting a destructive defeat. In complete disorder the remnants of 2/5 and 9/19 ID fled through Mihalesci toward Bragadir. West and south of the breakthrough

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516 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 384

point the other Romanian divisions were still holding the bridges over the Argesu. A weak Russian thrust against 1 Bulgarian ID brought the Romanians no relief, and was decisively checked.

At the same time when the allies were victorious on the lower course of the Argesu, they were also winning a significant success on the middle stretch of the River. 41 ID thrust ahead with power, pushed the 10 Romanian ID back toward the east, and advanced as far as Titu. Thus they threatened the flank of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, which withdrew behind the Dambovita. Group Krafft followed the enemy - 301 ID reached Fundu perului, 73 ID Greci and Gaesci, 216 ID Matasaru, and the Alpenkorps Division the area south of Targovistea. The latter city was occupied by Morgen's Corps from the north, after actions with 22 Romanian ID. The 12 Romanian ID at Serbanesci continued to guard, as it had the day before, the route through the valley to Valea lunga. Thus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army already had bent back their line at a right angle. Their situation was untenable.

In the evening of 3 December General Presan, along with the Romanian high command, had to bury their high hopes of a victory against the Danube Army, which would have turned the tide of the campaign. Their very bold attack, which however lacked the necessary security toward the west, was possible only because of the isolation of Kosch's Army. This isolation was a result of the uncoordinated advances by the 9<sup>th</sup> and Danube Armies when there was no overall control over the two forces in the first days after the Danube was crossed at Sistov. But Falkenhayn's lightning-quick evaluation of the situation in the evening of 1 December and the resolute and rapid response thereafter had clinched the allies' victory.

### **3. The capture of Bucharest and Ploesti**

#### The Romanians try to defend a new line

Later on 3 December, after the double defeat on the Argesu, General Presan issued orders to his subordinates for the next operation. 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which he reinforced with 11 ID, was to quickly dis-engage from their opponents and prepare to offer new resistance on the 4<sup>th</sup> along the line Dobra-Ciocanesci. All the Romanian divisions farther south were placed under command of the leader of 7 ID, General Istrate; he was ordered to hold a defensive position east of the Sabaru, therefore directly in front of the southeast front of the Bucharest forts. The completely broken 2/5 and 9/19 ID were taken back to Bucharest.

The 1 and 2 Cavalry Divisions were to provide a link between 1<sup>st</sup> Army and Istrate's Army Detachment. The only remaining reserve was 23 ID at Ploesti. Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the III Corps was still holding the border passes, but II Corps had already retreated to Serbanesci and behind Targovistea. Although 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had thus been completely split in half, the high command still didn't feel compelled to remedy this dangerous disadvantage.

On the Central Powers' side the Danube Army (to which 11 Bav ID was now assigned) was instructed to capture Bucharest. 9<sup>th</sup> Army would pursue the enemy farther north; their cavalry were sent toward the Bucharest-Fetesti [Fetesci] railroad and their left wing through the mountains toward Buzeu.

The Danube Army now crossed the Argesu and on the 5<sup>th</sup> came up to the Romanian positions. On their right wing the 1 Bulgarian ID, which had been reinforced by the garrison from Rustchuk, meanwhile had to repulse IV Russian Corps, which advanced cautiously on both sides of the lower Argesu.

Falkenhayn wanted his Army to advance in echelon east toward Bucharest. Therefore the objective of the Cavalry Corps was Tiganesci (on the Jalomita); LIV Corps (115, 109 and 41 ID) would wheel past the line Malu spart - Fundata, and Group Krafft would reach the line Titu - Baleni Serbi. The main body of I Res Corps was to advance to Darmanesci (on the highway to Ploesti); a side column would head for Valea lunga and 8 Mtn Bde was to reach Campina as soon as possible. Thus the escape routes of the Romanians still stationed in the mountain valleys would be cut.

Kühne's and Krafft's Corps, fighting skirmishes with rear guards of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, reached most of their objectives for the day. I Res Corps was engaged in hotter fighting; after a sharp action they threw 22 Romanian ID back to Darmanesci and 12 ID to Colibasi. 8 Mtn Bde came to a point in the mountain valley 10 km east of Petrosita. The Cavalry Corps couldn't find a gap to exploit in the enemy front, and spent the night between the Dambovita and the Argesu.

In the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Averescu finally allowed his two divisions in the Prahova valley to retreat. After a forced march the 16 ID reached Campina in the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Here the great drilling towers of the oil fields were set on fire with the help of two high-ranking English officers. Thereafter thick clouds of black smoke filled a wide area around the fields. The 4 ID marched on difficult mountain paths through

Tesila to Telega. The 51 Hon ID and 24 ID of XXXIX Res Corps first became aware of the enemy's departure early on the 5<sup>th</sup>. The 51 Hon ID followed them down the Prahova valley and entered Sinaia toward evening. The western wing of 24 ID climbed the mountains west of Busteni so they could then descend into the Doftana valley. Farther east the front was still unchanged.

To the south, events unfolded rapidly. On the 5<sup>th</sup> the 8 Mtn Bde reached the heights west of Campina. This compelled the 16 Romanian ID to move on to Baicoiu in a second night-time march that same evening. 76 Res ID reached Calinesci. 12 Bav ID threw the Romanian 22 ID over the Prahova and then established themselves firmly on the eastern bank. South of the highway the Alpenkorps and 2 Mtn Bde were approaching this river; both units were now placed under the HQ of the k.u.k. 73 ID (FML Goiginger). 216 ID reached Dobra. Immediately to the south were the 15 Bav Res Inf Bde, 10 Mtn Bde and k.u.k. 144 Inf Bde, which were now all placed under GM Busse's 301 ID HQ. In front of Group Krafft the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was briefly making a stand on both sides of the Jalomita. Kühne's Corps, sent toward Saftica, captured Lucianca and Buftea. Schmettow's squadrons were directly opposite the northwestern front of the ring of fortresses. The Danube Army was preparing to advance through the swampy valley of the Sabaru.

Since various signs indicated that Bucharest wouldn't be defended, in the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> GFM Mackensen (who'd arrived at Alexandria) sent a German General Staff captain under a flag of truce to the fortress commander. The captain demanded that the defenses should be surrendered without offering resistance, but he was referred to another HQ far to the east of Bucharest.

#### The Romanians retreat

Meanwhile the Romanian high command, now at Buzeu, made some important decisions in response to the rapid decline in their divisions' power of resistance.

All troops fighting between the Bodza Mountains and the Danube were to retreat in stages to a position along the line Romnicu-Sarat - Vizirul. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would first withdraw to the heights east of the Teleajna. Presan's Army Group (1<sup>st</sup> Army and Army Detachment Istrate) would pull back east into the Prahova and Jalomita valleys, to occupy the line Netoti-Urziceni. South of Urziceni the III Russian Cavalry Corps would maintain a link with a group led by Russian General Aliev, consisting of his own IV Corps plus the Romanian troops hitherto south of Bucharest;

the group would take up a position east of the low ground around Lake Mostisci. The 2 Russian ID was also approaching this area by rail. 15 Russian ID had come to Mizil as a strategic reserve.

But if their opponents allowed enough time for sufficient Russian troops to occupy this intermediate position, prolonged resistance would actually be offered here. It was planned to pull the broken Romanian divisions back to Moldavia to be rebuilt. Supplementary orders from the high command regulated the retreat of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies, so that the intermediate position could be occupied on 8 December. As General Presan informed his divisional commanders, he believed that the retreat could be conducted so as to cause the pursuers a lengthy delay, and that it might take them about three weeks to appear before the intermediate position.<sup>517</sup>

The capital, however, would have to be abandoned to their opponents. Since the guns in the forts had already been taken away before the war to provide heavy artillery for the field forces, prolonged defense was impossible. The German emissary was informed that Bucharest was an open city and sent back to his lines.

When the captain reached the German outposts in the morning of 6 December, the black-white-red standards were already flying over the works on Bucharest's northeastern front; detachments of 6 CD had entered the undefended fortifications at Mogosoie around midnight. Thereafter Kühne's and Schmettow's troops occupied the entire northwest front. At noon the first units of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army entered the capital. The two German divisions of the Danube Army (11 Bav ID and 217 ID) now moved into the part of the city south of the Dambovita. The Turks and Bulgarians pushed forward between the city's southern front and the Danube; in front of them the Russians fell back behind the river barrier downstream from Tanganu. General Istrate's Army Detachment withdrew to the line Tunari-Cojesci.

On the same day when the allies captured Bucharest, their divisions also won a significant success farther north.

While Group Krafft's 301 and 216 ID advanced to Catunu and Pastarnac on the 6<sup>th</sup>, Goiginger's Division thrust ahead to Brazi with 2 Mtn Bde in the lead. Under Corps Morgen the 12 Bav ID stormed Ploesti and inflicted heavy casualties on 22 Romanian

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517 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 325 ff.

ID. 76 Res ID advanced through Baicoiu toward Plopeni. The II Romanian Corps and 16 ID of III Corps were still able to withdraw hastily over the Teleajna. But most of 4 ID, exhausted by marching through mountains, found their way over the river already blocked by German troops, who captured the Romanian Division's HQ. Their route back into the mountains was cut by 8 Mtn Bde, which had arrived at Campina. Thus the 4 Romanian ID were completely surrounded and their capitulation was inevitable.

On the mountain front the 3 Romanian ID now also began to withdraw, through Zlon and Isvorele. But they weren't pursued since 51 Hon ID - which had reached Comarnic - was ordered to move along the road from Predeal to Campina and to guard the royal castles in Sinaia. The k.u.k. 24 ID was pulled back to Kronstadt and re-assigned to Archduke Joseph's Army Group. Therefore the only units still by the Bodza Pass were 6 Romanian ID (now once more part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army) and the German 89 ID; the opposing sides held their old positions which they'd held since mid-October. But here also the Romanians were preparing to retreat soon.

#### Results of the allied victory

The capture of Bucharest and Ploesti sealed the defeat which the Romanians had suffered in the battle which they'd initiated and lost on the Argesu. After Brussels, Belgrade and Cetinje, Bucharest was the fourth capital of a small enemy state which had been conquered by the troops of the allied Central Powers. Large food supplies fell into the hands of the allies in the two rich cities of Bucharest and Ploesti, which made it easier to continue the campaign. Almost the entire Romanian Army had been drawn into the flames of battle. They initially sent 8½ infantry and 2 cavalry divisions into the fighting, but soon most of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (4 infantry divisions plus 2 Calarasi brigades which were united as a division) was also engaged. After the 3 divisions of the strategic reserve were committed, there were finally 15½ infantry and 3 cavalry divisions in the battle. All these units were in varying degrees greatly reduced in strength, although they were fighting a roughly equal number of allied units (14 infantry<sup>518</sup> and 3 cavalry divisions). Only the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - the 15 ID in the Ojtoz Pass and 7 Mixed Brigade at Soveja - plus 23 ID in the strategic reserve were still fully battle-worthy.

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518 Including one Aus-Hung. infantry division and three mountain brigades.

Romanian casualties were enormous. Falkenhayn's Army took 60,000 prisoners plus 85 guns and 115 machine guns from the battlefield. On 3 and 4 December alone the enemy left 5000 prisoners and 39 guns in the hands of the Danube Army.<sup>519</sup> There are no figures to show the substantial number of Romanians who were killed or wounded, or the casualties of the allies.

#### **4. The surrender of the Romanian Cerna Detachment**

While both of Mackensen's armies were winning decisive successes in front of Bucharest, the fate of the Romanian Cerna Detachment, left to their own device, was played out between the Danube and the Alt.

On 24 November parts of this Romanian force were surrounding Turnu Severin, which was gallantly defended by a German battalion from 41 ID. Another enemy group was trying to check the advance of Group Szivo on the heights northwest of the city. Nevertheless the 2 German Bicycle Brigade was able to reach Turnu Severin. Moreover, a Bulgarian company crossed the Danube to support the German battalions, and several squadrons from Schmettow's Cavalry Corps arrived from the east. After heavy fighting which lasted into the night, the enemy withdrew to the heights east of Turnu Severin.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> Group Szivo entered the harbor city on the Danube, where 28 Romanian officers and 1200 men gave up as prisoners. Besides three guns, the victors took 800 wagons equipped for military use, 4 steamers and 69 river tugboats.

At Turnu Severin Col. Szivo received an order from Falkenhayn to take his group (with which the German battalion plus two German squadrons and three guns would stay) toward the southeast so as to clear the enemy from the area and guard the rear of LIV Corps. The 2 Bicycle Brigade and three squadrons from 7 CD were sent to Craiova to join the Cavalry Corps.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> Szivo began to pursue the enemy, who were withdrawing in long marches toward the mouth of the Schyl. Finally on the 30<sup>th</sup> he was able to force them to fight a rear-guard action at Bailesci. On 1 December the Romanians crossed the Schyl at Zavalu, while Szivo's artillery firing upon the bridge caused confusion among them. On the next day Group Szivo crossed the

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519 Vogel, "Befreiung Siebenbürgens", p. 131

Schyl themselves; at Listeva they attacked the Cerna Detachment, now joined by the four battalions of the Romanian Danube defenses which had been cut off. The enemy offered stubborn resistance.

On 3 December the enemy continued their retreat toward the Alt in three columns; on the way they were bombarded at Bechet by the Aus-Hung. monitor "Sava." On the same day Szivo had his troops in close pursuit. He'd been instructed to hound the enemy until they were completely destroyed. To keep the Romanians from crossing the Alt near Turnu Magurele, Falkenhayn had asked GFM Mackensen to land some troops there from the Danube. But the Field Marshal didn't agree and instead called upon 115 ID, which was moving to join Kühne's Corps. But the assistance of more troops was unnecessary; the fate of the Romanian Cerna Detachment was already sealed.

On 4 December the enemy reached the railroad leading north from Corabia. In Corabia the Romanians drove away a small detachment sent ashore by the monitors "Sava" and "Maros." But the Romanians were worsted in an artillery duel. On the next day Aus-Hung. sailors again occupied the town, in which they found full granaries which were then used by Group Szivo.<sup>520</sup>

On 5 December the enemy offered battle between the Alt and Danube. But the fighting was hopeless and escape impossible, since the bridge west of Turnu Magurele was destroyed. The men couldn't ford the highly-swollen Alt, and the Aus-Hung. Danube Flotilla was lurking on the Danube.

The northern wing of Group Szivo attacked on the 5<sup>th</sup>, causing 26 Romanian officers and 1000 men to surrender at Cilieni. On 6 December, the day when Bucharest and Ploesti were captured, all the Aus-Hung. battalions advanced upon the enemy, who at first fought bravely. But in the evening the enemy recognized the futility of further resistance; ten battalions, one squadron and six batteries lay down their arms. Including the captives of the day before, a total of 8000 men and 26 guns fell into the hands of Szivo's Group.<sup>521</sup>

### ***E. Offensives to relieve the Romanians***

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520 Wulff, "Donau-Flotille 1914-1916", pp. 239 ff. Schmidtke, p. 96

521 Schwarte, "Der grosse Krieg 1914-1918", Vol. V (Leipzig, 1922), p. 276

## 1. The Russo-Romanian counter-offensive

Since the last third of November there was a new man in the office of the Chief of the General Staff in the Stavka; GdI Alexeiev was ill, and the Tsar had named the commander of the Special Army, GdK Gurko, as his temporary replacement.<sup>522</sup> The deployment of Russian units on the left wing of their Southwest Front was finished on 27 November. The Central Powers along with the Bulgarians and Turks were already enveloping the Romanian Kingdom with strangling force. Brussilov's counter-offensive was supposed to force his opponents to divert at the last minute the sharp sword which was poised for the decisive stroke against Romania.

In the Russian plans their 9<sup>th</sup> Army played the most important role. For the main blow, which would be delivered toward Csik Szereda, GdI Letschitzky concentrated XXIV and XL Corps tightly together. V Cavalry Corps would cover the right flank of the attacking group and maintain a link with XXXVI Corps. The latter force would advance toward Gyergyó Ditró. The Corps on the Army's right wing (II and XXVI) would capture the area around Dorna Watra, which XXVI Corps would envelop from the north. Besides a combined infantry division, the reserves included the arriving VIII Corps, which Brussilov had already in mid-November pulled from the Special Army and placed under his direct control. Letschitzky's staff was very confident about their chances of success in the thrust to Csik Szereda.<sup>523</sup> In contrast to the orders issued on 14 November (described above), GdK Kaledin's 8<sup>th</sup> Army was now instructed to attack along their entire front, with XVIII Corps making the main effort. To divert the allies General Shcherbachev's 7<sup>th</sup> Army would moreover thrust toward Halicz. But in the event nothing came of this planned diversionary attack.<sup>524</sup>

The Romanian high command decided that some of their units would take part in the Russian offensive, which would start on 28 November; necessary instructions were issued on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would prevent their opponents from withdrawing units from their front. The North Army would first secure the outlets of the passes leading into the Haromszek.<sup>525</sup> General Cristescu, commanding North Army, warned that his forces were far too weak for an offensive, but wasn't heeded by the high command.

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522 Gurko, pp. 136 ff.

523 Knox, Vol. II, p. 498

524 Zayonchkovsky, p. 118

525 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 128 ff.

Therefore he did instruct the reinforced 15 ID and the 7 Mixed Brigade to advance in the direction of Lemheny and 6 ID to move toward Zagon and through the Bodza Pass. The initial objectives in each sector would be the nearest heights. But Cristescu also ordered his subordinates to use only part of their troops. He was trying now only to pin down the enemy; a more serious attack would be initiated later.<sup>526</sup>

On 28 November a major battle burst out along the defensive positions of Archduke Joseph's Army Group along the wall of the Carpathians, between the Ojtoz and Tartar Passes.

### **a. The Russian 9<sup>th</sup> and Romanian North Armies attack the eastern borders of Transylvania (28 November to mid-December)**

#### 28-30 November

Group Gerok was engaged in a lively artillery duel with the Romanians on 28 November. As the high-level allied commanders had foreseen, the enemy attacks were directed mainly against FML Fabini's VI Corps of Arz's Army. XL Russian Corps worked their way forward against GM Breit's 39 Hon ID, with 4 Rif Div south of Uz valley and 2 Rif Div north of the valley; the advanced troops of the two sides repeatedly fought sharp actions. The I Bn of Bavarian Res IR 22 was sent into the Uz valley, while the majority of the Regiment stayed at Csik Bankfalva in the Army's reserve. The XXIV Russian Corps tried to push into the positions of GM Grallert's 61 Hon ID, with 49 ID on both sides of the Trotusu valley and 48 ID advancing to envelop the defenders farther north. The 48 ID gained ground in the upper Agasu valley. To support the front, the next regiment of 8 Bav Res ID (Res IR 23) was sent from Gyimes Közeplak to Brusturosa to join GM Grallert. Res IR 19 was still traveling to the designated assembly point of 8<sup>th</sup> Res Division at Csik Szereda. Opposite Group Litzmann the Russians wanted to overrun the blocking position on the road at Tölgyes with armored cars, and thrust forward on the Hegyes and against the northern wing of 37 Hon ID. Litzmann was apprehensive about this new attack and asked if it was possible to divert to him the leading battalions of 49 Res ID, which was arriving by rail. But Army Group HQ decided rather that when the first regiment arrived it would detrain at Gyergyóditró; moreover, the following regiment had to be sent to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. They merely permitted 1<sup>st</sup> Army to shift

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526 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 453 ff.

the mounted brigade of 10 CD to Belbor.

On 29 November the Romanians also joined the fray. Their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army however wasn't able to prevent Falkenhayn's Army from pulling the rest of 187 German ID from the front and placing them in readiness at Kronstadt. The Romanian North Army, on the other hand, pushed back the southern wing of the k.u.k. 1 CD somewhat in the Berecke Mountains. Thereupon a battalion of 187 ID, whose main body had meanwhile moved from Sepsi Szt. György to the area Kezdivasarhely - Kaszon Jakabfalva, was sent to back up FML Ruiz's men. The Romanian Army commander called upon his troops to attack on the next day.<sup>527</sup> The Romanians' reinforced 15 ID also fell upon all the positions on the heights covering the Ojtoz Pass, guarded by 71 ID, between the N. Sandor (# 1640) and the Runcul mare; however, they were everywhere repulsed. But this new fighting caused GdI Gerok to station two German battalions behind the left wing of Goldbach's Division, since he wanted to be sure that the connection with Fabini's neighboring Corps was secure.

Meanwhile the Russians hadn't given up their attempt to shatter VI Corps' front. On the 29<sup>th</sup> they wrested Mt Nemira (# 1653) from the southern wing of 39 Hon ID; the defenders pulled back to the west. The Army Group sent German IR 188 to this sector from Jakabfalva along with two batteries to recover the mountain. Mass attacks by the Russians on the same day against the Magyaros (# 1340) and Mt Carunta (# 1320) gained them almost nothing; only on the southern bank of the Trotusu were they able to capture a knoll from 61 Hon ID east of Sulta. Now the Bav Res IR 23 was deployed in the endangered sector on both sides of Agasu. They were able to drive back the enemy who'd advanced here from the northeast the day before.<sup>528</sup> Along the weak line of outposts which Col. Daubner had set up between 61 Hon ID and XXI Corps, however, the Balvanyos # 1534 was lost. Here the line of resistance was pulled back to the mountain and town of Hosszuhavas. Now the defenders in Grallert's and Daubner's sectors were placed under the overall command of Bavarian G.Lt Stein (as had been ordered on 26 November).

In Group Litzmann the defenders proved equal to the Russian efforts, and concerns for the northern part of 37 Hon ID seemed to be less justified. Therefore Army Group HQ sent the horsemen of 10 CD on to XI Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, which (as will be related below) was again engaged in incessant heavy combat.

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527 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 457

528 Roth, "Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 23", p. 23 and pp. 97 ff.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> the fighting in VI Corps' sector continued amid thick fog that hampered visibility. The Russians again assaulted GM Breit's Honved in the Uz area and stubbornly sought to wrest from 61 Hon ID the entry to the Gyimes Pass. They seized some hotly-contested heights on the northern slope of Mt Carunta (in front of Sulta). The counterattacks mounted by G.Lt Stein here and east of Brusturosa gained no lasting success. Enemy pressure, which was extended by parts of their V Cavalry Corps up to the center of Col. Daubner's Group, was continuous; thus it was necessary to deploy Bav Res IR 19.<sup>529</sup> Since Group Stein had used up all their reserves, Army HQ sent them the two battalions of that Regiment which had been held back; therefore the Army in turn had expended their last available troops.

The continuing danger that continued to hang over 39 Hon ID caused Army Group HQ to send 1<sup>st</sup> Army the HQ of 187 ID. The divisional commander, G.Lt Sunkel, would take over GM Breit's sector within VI Corps, including the German units that had been deployed there. Because of the tense situation of Fabini's and Gerok's Corps, the 187 ID had only spent two days in reserve of the Ojtoz sector. The rest of the Division (IR 189 and several batteries) were sent from Kronstadt to Csik Szereda.

But the German OHL wanted to keep a reserve behind Gerok, for which purpose they chose the main body of 49 Res ID (still arriving by train). The implementation order had already been issued at Schässburg. But in response to urgent cries for help from 7<sup>th</sup> Army, concerned about their northern wing where the Russians had penetrated the lines of XXV Res Corps, the last regiment of 49<sup>th</sup> Division (Res IR 228) was diverted to Körösmezö with the consent of both high commands. Thus the Army Group was only providing Res IR 225 (which had already arrived) and an artillery battalion for Transylvania. In the evening there were indications that VIII Russian Corps was deploying in front of Gerok, so the last regiment of 187 ID was sent to Bereczk. Army Group HQ hadn't wanted to be forced to thus scatter their scanty reserves; therefore they were glad when the German OHL sent them a new unit, the 218 German ID which had left Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group by train and now came to Klausenburg. After their arrival, all of 49 Res ID would be united under 7<sup>th</sup> Army; substantial parts of the latter Division were immediately diverted to Maramaros Sziget.

On the same day Group Gerok came under the direct control of the Army Group, while Falkenhayn's Army was placed under GFM

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529 Jaud and Weech, pp. 127 ff.

Mackensen .

1-2 December

Fighting continued to rage on 1 December. The southern wing of Ruiz's 1 Cavalry Division repulsed the Romanians at the Musa station of the railroad through the forest, and was also able to recover some heights that had been lost on 28 November. Meanwhile the 15 Romanian ID attacked four times between the Slanic and Ojtoz valleys; they were able only to gain a little ground on the slope west of Sosmezö, which was recovered the next day by Goldbach's 71<sup>st</sup> Division. But at the junction of Groups Gerok and Fabini Russian riflemen drove ever deeper into the area between the N. Sandor and Mt Nemira. Here only a well-planned counter-offensive could restore the situation. This was undertaken by the defenders on the 5<sup>th</sup> and succeeded with minimal casualties; thus the connection between the groups was restored along the crest.

Against VI Corps the Russians tried in vain on 1 December to gain ground to the west and north from Mt Nemira. Enemy pressure increased in front of the Gyimes Pass; 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ was all the more concerned for the security of this position because they learned from an intercepted wireless message that 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were shifting their reserves - two rifle regiments - to Assau, presumably to seek a breakthrough. But the Army Group could send only one battalion from Res IR 225 to Csik Szt. Simon in the Army's area as help for 39 Hon ID; the other two battalions went with three batteries to Group Gerok. And so GdI Arz had to provide support from his own resources. Litzmann, who was able to easily disperse the Russians who'd been probing forward east of Belbor, was ordered to provide a battalion from 10 Bav Res ID and the horse artillery batteries of 10 CD for VI Corps.

The Russian attack which FML Fabini expected broke loose with full fury on 2 December. Group Sunkel in the Uz and Csobanyos valleys withstood five enemy onslaughts, but the Russians threw 61 Hon ID and their Bavarian reinforcements back several kilometers on both sides of the Trotusu. The defenders now clung to a line which ran north of Keresztes # 1387 through Mt Faltueanu # 1244, crossed the valley behind Agasu and then climbed the slope toward the northeast. Fighting continued along the new position until deep into the night, but with artillery and machine gun fire it was possible to drive back the masses of Russians who advanced out of Agasu. The struggle was especially bitter around the Vrf. Popa # 1275 (east of Brusturosa) until the Bavarians finally gained the upper hand on 3 December and thereafter occupied the summit. Farther north

the dismounted horsemen and riflemen of V Cavalry Corps fell upon Group Daubner. Much of the fighting in the forested mountains, covered with deep snow, was man to man. Fortunately the enemy struck here with relatively little strength, or the three weak Honved battalions and two Bavarian battalions in their widely extended defensive sector would hardly have been able to block the way into the rear of 61 Hon ID. In case of need Daubner was given the Transylvania Volunteer Battalion (nicknamed the "Tiger Battalion"), which had been formed in fall and consisted mostly of inexperienced young soldiers.<sup>530</sup>

The question of how long the Russians could continue to attack the eastern front of Transylvania caused the allied high commands much concern. On 2 December GM Seeckt told the German OHL that the identification of VIII Russian Corps HQ in Ocna meant either that they were about to take over the Ojtoz sector from the Romanians or that they would reinforce XL Russian Corps. No units could be taken from Gerok, but VI Corps was much too weak; therefore the commitment of 218 ID here couldn't be avoided. The two battalions which had joined VI Corps (from 49 Res ID and from Litzmann) weren't sufficient to reliably strengthen the front. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ had already told Litzmann on 2 December to help his neighbor with a second battalion, which on the 3<sup>rd</sup> was followed by the machine gun detachments of 3 CD.

Ludendorff now released the k.u.k. 47 Inf Bde of 24 ID to the Army Group. This Brigade had been pulled back in reserve south of Kronstadt because the Romanians were withdrawing from Falkenhayn, and was now shifted through Csik Madefalva behind 61 Hon ID. As desired by the German OHL, 218 ID went to Gerok, but after their arrival he would place the two battalions from 49 Res ID under the k.u.k. VI Corps.

It was no longer easy for the Central Powers to find manpower as replacements, and the defensive fighting which 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies had now endured for days was wearing down their strength. Therefore the German OHL announced that counterattacks to recover lost positions should be undertaken only if the tactical situation made them necessary to hold the front. Attempts to recover isolated pieces of terrain with costly counter-thrusts at any price merely because they had once been in our hands were to be avoided; such actions were contrary to the need to use both German and Aus-Hung. troops economically.

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530 Windischgraetz, "Vom roten zum schwarzen Prinzen" (Berlin-Vienna, 1920), pp. 138 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The Tiger Bn had 6 companies of Magyar and Szekel volunteers.

3-8 December

On 3 December the 1 CD withstood a heavy thrust by 6 Romanian ID at Musa. Otherwise, however, the Romanians had exhausted their strength and General Cristescu restricted himself from now on to the defensive.<sup>531</sup> This was a relief to Group Gerok, but the Russians' aggressive dash was unabated opposite the southern half of Arz's army. Before the measures to strengthen VI Corps could become effective, there were more setbacks on this front. The misfortune of 61 Hon ID compelled the northern wing of 39 Hon ID to give up the summit of the Carunta and to seek a new junction with their northern neighbor through the Keresztes. G.Lt Sunkel was able, with help from German IR 188, to finally secure Mt Nemira on 4 December. But the counterattack between the Csobanyos and Sulta valleys toward Mt Carunta (# 1523) soon faltered against strong resistance. With undiminished vigor the Russians belabored Group Stein on both sides of the Trotusu. They established themselves firmly on the summit of the Faltueanu (# 1244) and on the 5<sup>th</sup> they drove into a position on the slope of the upper valley northeast of Agasu. The shaken defenders had to pull back about three kilometers to the ridge which stretches from Cotumba to Heights # 1275.<sup>532</sup>

To prevent the enemy from advancing further toward the Gyimes pass, the Army commander decided to assemble 47 Inf Bde and the German Res IR 225 for a coordinated counter-thrust toward Mounts Carunta and Faltueanu. 9 December was chosen as the date for the assault, since it wouldn't be possible to have the troops ready to strike any sooner.

In the next few days the VI Corps wasn't spared further local

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531 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 459

532 In the period from 28 November to 4 December the 61 Hon ID (including Group Daubner) lost 2300 men and 39 Hon ID lost 1200. Following a suggestion from 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ, on 15 December the AOK at Teschen reorganized the battalions of 61 Hon ID, which had just 2000 riflemen, into the 16 Lst Mtn Brigade. Already at an earlier date (the end of November) it had been ordered that the k.u. 1 Lst Huss Bde (attached to Group Daubner) should be reduced to a regiment since for a long time it had lacked the combat strength of a brigade; sufficient replacements would no longer be available in the future. The German troops had also suffered substantial casualties in these actions; thus the Bav Res IR 23 finally sank to a strength of 500 riflemen.

setbacks and unwelcome episodes. On 6 December small Russian detachments under cover of thick fog succeeded in slipping through the loose front in the Csobanyos valley and at the town of Cotumba and appearing suddenly behind the defenders. The enemy detachments in the Trotusu valley were driven back, but in the Csobanyos sector they dug in firmly northwest of Magyaros # 1340. Here the Russians were soon greatly reinforced and renewed their attack on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The northern wing of 39 Hon ID fell back to the west. The allies also could gain no success on the right wing of Group Sunkel, where IR 188 and parts of Hon IR 11 strove until 10 December to clear the enemy from the long crest stretching north of Mt Nemira.

Meanwhile the victorious progress of Mackensen's Army Group in Wallachia made it necessary for the high commands of the Central Powers to make some wide-ranging decisions. Already on 7 December the Romanians began to evacuate the Bodza Pass in front of Falkenhayn's left wing and their positions in front of the adjacent 1 CD. Gerok was told to determine how far to the north the withdrawal of Cristescu's Army was taking place in front of his sector. Patrols sent into the valleys of the N. Baszka and the Musa encountered enemy resistance after they'd advanced five kilometers. The HQ of VIII Russian Corps with some of their units were moving from Ocna to the south. Now seemed to be the moment to make the right wing of Archduke Joseph's Army Group as strong as possible so that they could break out from the mountains into the plains and work with Mackensen to throw the enemy back to the Sereth. The Army Group was given the German 225 ID<sup>533</sup> to reinforce 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Moreover, all parts of 49 Res ID were to be united under Gerok, and those of the k.u.k. 24 ID under VI Corps. It was decided to provide heavy batteries to overcome the blocking positions in the valleys.

On 8 December Archduke Joseph received the implementing orders from Teschen. To carry out effectively the planned offensive, by the 18<sup>th</sup> the Army Group was to have ready a strong attacking group in the area Lemheny-Kezdivasarhely; they would make a surprise attack against the sector Onesci - Ocna - Comanesci. In coordination with Mackensen's Army Group the Archduke would first thrust past the lines of 1 CD to support the advance of the northern wing of Falkenhayn's Army toward the sector Agiudu nuou - Cijuta. An attack by the Archduke's right wing at the right moment should defeat the enemy standing guard in front of the line between the Ojtoz and Gyimes Passes, unbolt the narrow

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533 The 225 ID was formed from regiments which hitherto had fought under Linsingen's and Böhm-Ermolli's Army Groups.

routes out of the mountains, and secure the heights stretching north of the Trotusu.

Preparation for this offensive was now the primary important task of the Army Group HQ. Although difficult actions still had to be fought by 7<sup>th</sup> Army against the furious Russian assaults along the Carpathian wall, it was hoped that the enemy wouldn't win a decisive success here. The most serious danger that the Russians could break through 1<sup>st</sup> Army had disappeared.

Operations after 8 December

Because of his new goals, GdI Arz canceled the operation in the Gyimes sector which had been planned for 9 December. He was content to hold onto the present line, behind which he could prepare a powerful assault.

Meanwhile the Russians launched almost daily thrusts against VI Corps at the places they'd struck previously. Here and there some heights or small parts of the positions temporarily changed owners. Thus on 14 December a German battalion lost the Solyomtar, which for the moment couldn't be recovered. Neither side wanted to carry on costly actions in an attempt to substantially alter the front line. The allied positions solidified as G.Lt Melior's 225 German ID relieved the worn-down regiments of 187 ID and as GM Urbarz's 24 Aus-Hung. ID filled the defenses in the Csonyas sector. The 187 ID, veterans of mountain fighting, recuperated and were united by Group Gerok.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, following their commander's instructions, fell back on 15 December into an active defensive role. Letschitzky hadn't achieved his objectives, and moreover during the heaviest fighting his forces were diminished by the departure of half of VIII Corps (15 ID). III Cavalry Corps had similarly been sent at the start of December from Gurahumora to Wallachia. Brussilov, who'd moved his HQ from Berdyczew to Kamienc-Podolski, now ordered that strong reserves should be assembled on the left wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army. If the Romanian main body and the Russian Danube Army carried out a wide retreat to the prepared position Onesci - Focsani - Braila, 9<sup>th</sup> Army's left would thus be able to pivot on Onesci. The Army's link with the units farther south had to be maintained.<sup>534</sup>

The last efforts which the Russians directed against the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army after the middle of the month didn't prevent the allies from readying their units on Transylvania's eastern border for the attack. It was envisioned that Group Gerok would have the main role; their lengthy southern sector under the command of FML Ruiz (k.u.k. 1 CD) was considerably reinforced by German troops. The adjacent "Ojtoz Group" was also to be part of the attacking force. The remaining HQ were the "Uz Group" under FML Fabini and the "Gyimes Group" under G.Lt Stein.

In this time of preparation GdI Gerok had long-range patrols vigorously probing the mountain valleys abandoned by the

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534 Zayonchkovsky, p. 119

Romanians between the N. Baszka and the Zabala, and he kept up the connection with the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army. The advanced detachments of 1 CD first encountered a screen of Russian horsemen along a line from Manesti through Lopatari toward Nereju. North of Nereju it appeared that only some weak Romanian militia troops stood guard; their 15 ID was defending the route through the mountains leading from the Casinu valley through the Ojtoz Pass.

On 21 December the leading troops of FML Ruiz initiated the Army Group's plan for the offensive. They reached their objectives for the day without opposition. Gerok, however, mentioned nothing about this in the official communique.

### **b. The Russians attack the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army (28 November to the end of December)**

Wild fighting broke out on 28 November along almost the entire front of Kövess' Army. The wings of two Russian Armies united in an effort to break through the defensive positions of 7<sup>th</sup> Army to Dorna Watra and Kirlibaba. They wanted to secure the only line of communication in this part of the front, which ran through the valley of the Golden Bistritz. Under Letschitzky's Army the XXVI Corps attacked Group Schnehen of the k.u.k. XI Corps, and the 3 Turkestan Rif Div stormed against the bend in the front northeast of Dorna Watra. Two divisions (78 and 65 ID) were sent on both sides of the Valeputna-Jakobeny road toward the much-contested Mestecanesci Pass and the homonymous mountain heights (# 1292). GdK Kaledin, commanding 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, deployed the 64 and 37 ID of his XVIII Corps between the Botosul and the Capul against the k.u.k. 59 ID and 40 Hon ID of Scheuchenstuel's I Corps, whose positions blocked the way to Kirlibaba. The main effort of XVIII Russian Corps was made by the tightly-massed 43 and 84 ID against the right wing of G.Lt Conta's Carpathian Corps. Conta's center was the target of XXIII Russian Corps (59, 82 and 79 ID), while his left wing was hit by XI Corps with their 32 ID. In the sector of XXV German Res Corps the 11 Russian ID attacked the Kukul and 12 ID the Tartar Pass. Cavalry units (7 CD and 6 Don Coss Div) stood in front of the Pantyr Pass.

#### 28-30 November

After the enemy's batteries fired against the allies' defensive installations (in some places until after noon), heavy infantry attacks followed. The southern wing of FML Habermann's XI Corps

repulsed a Russian thrust at Gura Glodului, and fire from Group Schwer prevented the enemy from advancing south of the Bistritz. On the other hand, in the Mestecanesti sector the Russians broke into the positions of Group Schnehen. East of Kirlibaba they also thrust through Battalion III/31 of GM Kroupa's 59 ID, then advanced almost as far as the road. Battalions IV/42 and I/60 plus a German battalion from the Army reserves sealed off the penetration.<sup>535</sup> Farther west the attackers received nothing from the k.u.k. 59 ID and 40 Hon ID except a bloody setback. After drumfire mixed with gas shells, the enemy attacked the 1 German ID of the Carpathian Corps and they broke onto the Gura Rucada # 1276; on the other hand, they were repulsed by 200 ID on the Smotrec Heights # 1896. G.Lt Richthofen's XXV Res Corps withstood the attacks; the Russians were able to penetrate just a small part of the trenches northwest of the Kukul # 1542. The allies everywhere launched counterattacks, that in general were able to prevent any further enemy advance but couldn't repair the dents made in the defensive line by the enemy.

Thus the reserves which 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was holding ready for XI and I Corps were committed. GO Kövess had no help available for the Carpathian Corps, where the enemy still held the trenches on the Gura Rucada on a front of 500 meters, and where any further advance threatened to interrupt traffic through the Prislop Pass. Therefore Army Group HQ diverted a regiment from 49 Res ID, which was traveling by train to Transylvania, to 7<sup>th</sup> Army; they figured that the Russian onslaught would continue.

The enemy increased their efforts on the next day. The two sides carried on an intensive artillery duel on both sides of Dorna Watra, but assaults by Russian infantry didn't develop past their beginning. At Mestecanesci Group Schnehen were furiously assaulted and finally compelled to pull back their line of resistance toward Czokanestie along a broad front of two kilometers. Fighting around several strong points continued into the hours of darkness. On the extreme left wing, however, 8 CD recovered the part of the position that had been lost the day before. North of Kirlibaba the Russians stormed forward in mass attacks that were shattered by the determined defending units (including Battalion I/60 and the Feld Jaeger Battalions 15 and 26) and by the effective barrage fire of well-directed batteries. Despite all efforts the enemy made no progress against the Carpathian Corps. On the contrary, the commander of

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535 Linke, "Regiments-Geschichte des Infanterie-Regimentes Nr. 42, 1674-1918" (Leitmeritz, 1933), pp. 821 ff. Gottberg, Vol. II, pp. 42 ff.

1 German ID (GM Paschen) was finally able with his own resources - including his last riflemen - to throw the Russian intruders off the Gura Rucada. Under XXV Res Corps, however, an attempt to recover the small area which had been penetrated was checked by an enemy counter-thrust; the operation was postponed. Until now the defenders of the Tartar and Pantyr Passes were bothered only by artillery fire; Russian infantry feeling their way forward were easily repulsed.

7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ reported to the Army Group that after receiving Res IR 226 of 49 Res ID they had deployed parts of the unit north of the Prislop Pass (behind Paschen's Division) and sent parts to Kirlibaba. Here I Corps would have to recover their original position because otherwise the enemy would control the road in the Bistritz valley. Habermann's northern wing continued to need support and thus were using up the units available to his Corps. Since he had denuded his center and southern wing of reserves, he asked to be given the horsemen of 10 CD which were stationed at Belbor in 1<sup>st</sup> Army's area. On the next day Army Group HQ had these troops sent to XI Corps.

On 30 November the enemy fell upon 7<sup>th</sup> Army along a broader front. After a very heavy storm of shells the XXVI Russian Corps made repeated assaults against the northern part of XI Corps, without regard for their own casualties. Especially distinguished in the defense were the Landsturm Gendarmerie Regiment and k.u. Lst IR 5 from Papp's Brigade, plus the dragoons and uhlans of 8 CD and Hon HR 8 of 5 Hon CD. The first echelon of 23 Inf Bde was arriving by train; they sent parts of IR 100 into the fight.

Already in the morning the attackers once more wrested part of the positions on the Gura Rucada from 1 ID of the Carpathian Corps. Farther to the northwest they also ran against the Ludowa Ridge, but here they suffered a bloody check at the hands of the 117 German ID and the attached k.k. Lst Inf Bn 17. XI Russian Corps launched a powerful attack against the center of XXV Res Corps and increased the area they'd penetrated northwest of the Kukul to a width of three kilometers. IR 33 of the k.u.k. 34 ID suffered heavy casualties. The Corps commander G.Lt Richthofen had no reserves, so he could only temporarily limit the enemy advance with hastily assembled forces, including men from the staffs and support services who'd just been issued rifles. 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ sent an urgent appeal to Schässburg, asking that reinforcements for XXV Res Corps should be sent to Körösmezö as soon as possible. Army Group HQ in turn asked for immediate assistance from the k.u.k. high command so that the

Tartar Pass wouldn't be lost, but the staff at Teschen could provide no support for 7<sup>th</sup> Army. The only way out for the Army Group was to divert to Kövess' Army the last regiment of 49 Res ID (Res IR 228), which had been supposed to join Group Gerok. The German OHL consented to this change.

#### Operations in December

On 1 December the Russians gained no further ground, only heavy new casualties. The southern wing of the Carpathian Corps, now joined by Res IR 226, recovered all their positions despite stubborn resistance and brought in more than 1000 prisoners.<sup>536</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was already regarding the situation with more confidence and declared that the Russian offensive - which apparently had as its goal the possession of the road from Borsa to Dorna Watra - had been defeated. Presumably the enemy would continue to attack, but could no longer do so in strength due to the casualties they'd suffered to date. Above all it was now important to throw the Russians back northwest of the Kukul; preparations were being made to strike on 4 December. Also the position east of Kirlibaba, where no Russian thrust was expected in the next few days, would be advanced to a better location and the Mestecanesci Heights, from which the enemy could observe the Bistritz valley, would be re-conquered. On the southern wing of XI Corps FML Hinke with the staff of 12 ID took command over his own 24 Inf Bde plus 73 Honved Brigade. The commander of 5 Hon CD, FML Freih. von Apor, from now on would lead the Corps' central sector.<sup>537</sup>

In the next few days enemy activity slackened off opposite XI and I Corps. In the contested area by Kirlibaba the Austrians were able to push their outposts a kilometer forward. The two German corps, on the other hand, had to repulse several strong attacks on 2 December. On the 4<sup>th</sup> the XXV Res Corps used Res IR 228 to fully restore the line northwest of the Kukul, despite stubborn Russian resistance. On the next day XI Corps was also able to advance their defensive line somewhat northwest of the Mestecanesci Pass, and thus to reduce its length.

Along the active parts of the front the enemy sought to revenge

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536 Gottberg, Vol. II, pp. 46 ff. Schillmann, "Grenadier-Regiment König Friedrich Wilhelm I (2. Ost-Preussisches) Nr. 3" (Berlin, 1924), p. 229

537 The casualties of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, including the German troops, had exceeded 4000 men by 1 December; of this total 1700 men had been lost by XI Corps.

themselves in the next few days mainly with sudden bursts of artillery fire. Also the Carpathian Corps wasn't spared heavy attacks in the Ludowa sector. 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was concerned that the Russians might renew their thrusts against the Bistritz valley and brought more battalions from 49 Res ID together in the area between the Prislop Pass and Kirlibaba. On the 6<sup>th</sup> the entire 23 Inf Bde (IR 56 and 100) became available as a back-up to XI Corps. Apparently the opposing Russian units in the area were also reinforced.

On 8 December the enemy once more attempted an envelopment attack against Habermann's Corps. Group Apor repulsed the Russians. Group Schnehen was assaulted along their entire front after a heavy artillery bombardment. The horsemen of 10 CD were brought up to support Schnehen's southern wing; however, in the Mestecanesci sector the 23 Inf Bde couldn't prevent the enemy from capturing several strong points, including the blocking position on the road through the Pass.

The bitter see-saw fighting on the Dorna Watra - Mestecanesci front still continued for several days, wearing down the strength of both sides. The new actions cost XI Corps more than 2000 men. The defenders weren't able to throw the Russians back once and for all, but the attackers also gained no significant successes. On 11 December the Russians drove out the garrison of the eastern outlet of the railroad tunnel which crossed the pass next to the road. Meanwhile on the Army's northern wing GM Skvor's k.u.k. 34 ID was engaged west of the Tartar Pass, where Russian concentrations had been observed for several days; they repulsed many attacks.

When the enemy finally ceased their exertions on 12 December because of exhaustion, HQ of 7<sup>th</sup> Army at first didn't believe that the Russians had given up their plans to break through for good. Moreover, GO Kövess wanted to recover easily-defensible positions for I and XI Corps with the help of 49 Res ID, which had been only temporarily assigned to him but whose infantry and batteries represented welcome additional strength. He asked Army Group HQ to let him keep these German troops until the 18<sup>th</sup>. But Archduke Joseph needed the units for the Christmas offensive in Transylvania, so he couldn't honor the wishes of the Army commander; after the middle of the month the Archduke sent 49 Res ID into the Haromszek.

Meanwhile, although winter was dominating the scene with heavy frost and deep snowfall, considerable fighting again erupted at the focal points along the front that had been the scenes of

earlier actions. On 19 December, which according to the Russian calendar was the Tsar's name-day, and also on the 20<sup>th</sup> there was heavy fighting in the tunnel sector by Mestecanesci. The enemy came forward in thick ranks and apparently wanted to win by brute force, but were shattered by the steady defenders. Shortly before the end of the year the Russians again became active here and dug saps forward. Activity also increased in front of I Corps, and then at the Tartar Pass. Based on prior experience the 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ felt that enemy thrusts, or at least surprise raids, were possible and took the necessary precautions.

Both sides took advantage of the relative quiet along the front after mid-month by initiating troop movements. Near Dorna Watra General Letschitzky replaced 3 Turkestan Rif Div with 84 ID (from 8<sup>th</sup> Army); probably as a response to the preparations by Archduke Joseph's Army Group, he re-deployed the Turkestan troops in front of the Ojtoz Pass. On the northern wing of Kaledin's Army, at the start of December the 7 CD had already been relieved by 3 Cauc Coss Div and pulled back to Delatyn.

Under the k.u.k. XI Corps GM Edler von Leiter, the newly-appointed commander of 8 CD, took over the sector hitherto led by Schnehen (23 Inf Bde with the horsemen of 10 CD, Papp's Brigade, and 8 CD). The Army Group assigned to 7<sup>th</sup> Army GM Mouillard's 51 Hon ID from Wallachia, where they had been made available by Falkenhayn's Army. The Division was sent to XI Corps, where at the end of the year they began to relieve 73 Hon Inf Bde on the southern wing; the Honved Brigade returned to their parent unit (37 Hon ID) in 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

## **2. The stationary Eastern Front (through the year's end)**

The severe defeats of the Romanian Army had placed the Stavka in a position where they were forced to turn their undivided attention increasingly to the Romanian theater of operations, where they were sending entire armies. At the end of October, after five months of extremely bloody battle, they also had to recognize that attacks by the Southwest Front in Volhynia and western Galicia had no chance of success. The last thrusts by Gurko's Army against Vladimir-Volynsky, and those by their neighbors, had failed to draw allied units away from the Romanians. The majority of Brussilov's Front now went over completely to the defensive, as the Western and Northern Fronts had already done since September.

Despite Brussilov's objections, the other two Fronts had never supported his offensives with accompanying diversionary attacks, although they had sent him many units as ordered by the Stavka. General Evert had again refused to carry out an attack which 10<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was supposed to begin on 28 September.<sup>538</sup> The Russian commanders were accustomed to over-estimating the number of units available to the allies. Thus even the Chief of Staff Alexeiev believed that the forces available north of the Pripyat were too weak to advance against the Germans with a chance of success. The Front commanders Evert and Ruzsky did go over the possibilities and plans for an offensive with the Stavka in late autumn, but their suggestions remained on paper and went no further. Finally at the end of December Ruzsky went so far as to turn the 12<sup>th</sup> Army of his North Front loose against Mitau. Here he had an advantage, with 184 battalions, 51 squadrons and 886 guns against the Germans' 66 battalions, 24 squadrons and 568 guns. The offensive started on 3 January 1917, but brought the Russians no gains; it ended on 11 January.

At the start of November, fighting on the long front between the Pripyat and the Pantyr Pass died down into cannonades and skirmishing by forward troops. The Aus-Hung. and German units on this extended defensive sector, like those north of the Pripyat, were under the overall command of GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria. Both sides worked on strong fortifications and on installations to help them withstand the coming winter. The Russians hardly ever interrupted this pause in the fighting on their own initiative; the quiet was more often broken by the allies with local thrusts to win more favorable terrain for their positions or to clear the Russians out of points which they'd occupied in earlier battles. Under Woyrsch's Army Group, on 9 November German troops deployed in the sector of the k.u.k. XII Corps since the July fighting won back the parts of the trenches which the Russians had retained since then. Poison gas, trench mortars and flamethrowers were used effectively in this well-prepared and successful operation. The enemy lost more than 3000 prisoners to the victors. At the end of November XII Corps was reinforced by the k.u.k. IR # 18, which came from south Tyrol where they'd been serving under 22 LW ID of the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

Under Linsingen's Army Group, Hauer's Cavalry Corps improved their position south of Tobol by moving forward on 19 December. The enemy responded with counter-thrusts, in which a Czecho-Slovakian unit also took part.

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538 Zayonchkovsky, p. 130

But above all the allies followed the example of their enemy, who were pulling corps after corps from the sectors where they had hitherto been attacking and transferring them to the south. Thus from the Special Army, which was commanded by General Baluiev after Gurko was temporarily named to fill in for Alexeiev, the VIII Corps left after XX Corps; in December I Corps (22 and 24 ID) also disappeared from the front. 11<sup>th</sup> Army placed XLV Corps and 7 ID of XVI Corps at the disposal of Brussilov, who also gained VII Cavalry Corps (coming from the West Front by train).

#### Allied troop movements

The German OHL now pulled worn-out divisions from the West and exchanged them with units from the East that were in somewhat better shape. By the end of the year the exchange of units and higher HQ to and from Linsingen's Army Group was especially lively. At the end of November GdK Bernhardi sent the k.u.k. 7 CD to the Romanian theater of operations.<sup>539</sup> In December the 41 Hon ID left for the Isonzo front; they were replaced in II Corps by GM Havenstein's 107 German ID. There were even more changes under Tersztyanszky's Army. At the start of November the creation of the 218 German ID freed up a division from X German Corps, which was ordered to the West.<sup>540</sup> GdI Riemann's VIII German Corps came from the West as a replacement, and by the end of November had taken over the entire sector of the reinforced X Corps. Therefore 218 ID could quickly move to Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. In December the 121 German ID left the reinforced VIII Corps for Eichhorn's Army Group. When these units left, neighboring divisions covered the front by extending their wings. The k.u.k. IR 42, which since summer had been attached to 46 LW ID, was sent to the upper Stokhod and finally rejoined their parent 29 ID (now commanded by GM Steiger).<sup>541</sup> Under Group

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539 The batteries and machine gun detachments of 7 CD had still been under Group Beckmann; they were sent by 4<sup>th</sup> Army to rejoin the Division in December. Similarly the elements of 4 CD still with 4<sup>th</sup> Army also returned to their parent Division; 4 CD got back two batteries in December; the other batteries and the machine guns didn't arrive until January 1917.

540 TRANSLATOR's NOTE - This passage is misleading. Actually both divisions of the pre-war X German Corps (19 and 20 ID) were sent to the West within a few days of each other, along with the Corps HQ. This left 121 German and 29 Aus-Hung. ID in the sector, where they came under VIII Corps HQ.

541 Linke, pp. 424 ff.

Beckmann, GM Rüstow's 224 ID arrived from the West in mid-November, freeing 115 ID to move to Romania.

In the same month Armeegruppe Litzmann received GM Gronau's 215 German ID from France in exchange for 43 Res ID. The Aus-Hung. 48 ID went (without their artillery) to the Isonzo front in exchange for half of 20 Hon ID (39 Hon Inf Bde). GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn succeeded GdI Litzmann as commander of this Armeegruppe.

On 8 December the German OHL assigned permanent geographical names to the various Group HQ, which hitherto had been known by the changing names of their commanders. Thus within Linsingen's Army Group GdK Bernhardt now had the Kovel Sector; 4<sup>th</sup> Army consisted of GdK von der Marwitz's Luga Sector (over the Aus-Hung. X and Szurmay's Corps plus Beckmann's Raczyn Sector, which had the German 108 ID, 224 ID and 2 Gd Cav Bde) and GdK Falkenhayn's Lipa Sector (over the Styr Sector with 46 LW, 20 Hon and 22 German ID plus the independent German 215 ID, which was reinforced by the k.u.k. 7 ID).

Finally, in mid-December GdK von der Marwitz was summoned to the Western front and handed over the Luga Sector (within 4<sup>th</sup> Army) to German GdI Riemann; thereupon G.Lt Dieffenbach took over the reinforced VIII Corps and GM von Leipzig the 22 German ID.

Under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group, Group Eben now became the Zloczow Sector and the southern half of XVIII Corps became the Brody Sector. Here the fighting faded away. Therefore in November the XVIII Corps first sent 1 k.k. Lst Inf Bde (minus Lst IR # 1 and artillery) to 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Isonzo, and then the 2 German CD to Transylvania. In the last third of the month the 225 German ID was assembled under G.Lt Melior, and in December it transferred to Archduke Joseph's Army Group.

Under GdI Bothmer's South Army, the trench fighting which the Russians were carrying out at the start of November against GM Zoellner's 49 Res ID continued in the first half of the month; it became more intense between 10 and 14 November. Similarly the XV Turkish Corps carried on lively outpost actions with the Russians until the start of December; this Corps was commanded from mid-December by GM Djevad Pasha. On 15 November the HQ of South Army moved from Rohatyn to Chodorow. GdI Gerok with the HQ of XXIV Res Corps was relieved by GdI von Ehrenthal with the HQ of XXVII Res Corps, and 3 Gd ID by G.Lt Leuthold's 53 Res ID. In the last week of the month the German OHL sent 49 Res ID south; their intended replacement, 218 ID, was also sent to

Transylvania.

The sector of GO Kirchbach's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was an especially quiet front. Therefore it was surprising when at the end of November the Russians deployed a new unit, the 74 ID, in front of the northern wing of Group Hadfy. The Army commander expected an attack along the line between Jezupol and Halicz, held by 48 Res ID; therefore he was holding in reserve 5½ battalions, 3 mounted regiments (from the k.u.k. 2 CD) and 7 batteries. The enemy did open powerful artillery fire against 48 Res ID on the 27<sup>th</sup>, but took no further action in what was merely a diversionary operation. In December GO Kirchbach pulled from the line the weak infantry cadres of the ruined 15 ID, which had been serving under 36 ID; behind the lines these regiments were rebuilt and 15 ID was reformed as an independent unit under GM Aust.

The latest operations of Linsingen's and Böhm-Ermolli's Army Groups featured some new tactics. The peculiar conditions of trench warfare had led to the development on the Western front of new concepts for conducting small-scale actions with limited goals; the concepts were introduced in the East in late fall 1916. The principle was to carefully coordinate the roles of the infantry and artillery while employing new weapons like hand grenades, poison gas, trench mortars and flamethrowers. For such special operations, divisions selected skilled men who were instructed in the new tactics and placed under "storm detachments" and "storm companies." By the end of 1916 these units had already passed their first tests on the battlefield.

### **3. The Macedonian front from mid-October to the end of 1916**

The French high command wasn't satisfied with the success (narrated earlier) which Sarrail's Army of the Orient gained by throwing the Bulgarians back to the line Florina-Cerna. There had been no effect on the Romanian campaign, which was the subject of increasing concern. Therefore at the end of September General Joffre was already urging the Orient Army to new activity and seeking reinforcement for them from the allied powers. But the course of the autumn battle in Macedonia wasn't influenced by the new contingents, totaling four brigades, which didn't begin to gradually arrive until the end of November. Meanwhile General Sarrail had given up his plan of seeking a decision by striking through Monastir in the plains; because of the urgent demands of the Serbs for support, he had to shift his main effort to the bend in the Cerna. Thus responsibility in the decisive sector passed to the Serbian high command. This development, which took place despite Sarrail's intentions, and

the reinforcement in gradual instalments of the new principal sector could lead only to at most a tactical victory that would push back the defenders but not to a breakthrough that would relieve the Romanian front.

The weakness of Sarrail's plan of attack wasn't hidden from the German OHL. The Germans indeed regarded the eventual loss of Monastir as of psychological rather than military significance; they didn't let the temporary bad temper of the Bulgarians or the often critical turns in the situation on the Cerna divert them from more important decisions. For the OHL, unlike Joffre, regarded Macedonia as a secondary theater of operations. German reinforcements were sent gradually in battalion installments; along with Bulgarian units which were relieved and sent to the Cerna as the first echelon of the XX Turkish Corps arrived, they were still able to prop up the shaky front for some time. The Bulgarians had limited the enemy penetration in the plains and on the Sokol (6½ km north of the Kajmakcalan), and exerted great energy to prevent the threatened loss of the capital of western Macedonia. However, the Serbs had the material and psychological advantage. In front of the door to their homeland the Serbian soldiers had only the choice of advancing or dying.

The battle was decided on 11 November. The eastern sector of the Bulgarians' Cerna position was overrun; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of their 10 ID, which was supposed to counterattack, was instead caught up in the retreat. The stand by some Aus-Hung.<sup>542</sup> and German batteries attached to the eastern sector, and the successful repulse of all attacks against the Germans' western sector, made it possible for GdI Below (the Army Group commander) to create one more line of resistance directly south of the city of Monastir; it was covered by German battalions and batteries which had just arrived. But downpours of rain and snow storms on 15 November made it difficult to prepare the position, and exhausted the defenders. The key point was Heights # 1212 (20 km east of Monastir), which dominated the entire Cerna sector; given up on 17 November by the Bulgarians, the Heights were recovered by a German battalion but finally lost to the French 2<sup>nd</sup> *bis* Zouave Regt. Then the the Serbs penetrated the Bulgarian eastern wing on a front of 8 km and pushed sharply to the north, and Monastir had to be given up.

On 27 November General Sarrail tried one more time, by committing all his units, to break through the front north of

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542 The Aus-Hung. units were the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Howitzer Batteries of Mtn Arty Regt # 10, which made up the Regt's Howitzer Bn.

Monastir and at the bend in the Cerna. But their efforts, as well as all the further attacks by Serbian, French, Russian and English regiments, shattered on the German-Bulgarian line of resistance.<sup>543</sup> On 11 December General Joffre finally canceled the offensive.

Neither Sarrail's offensive in late autumn nor Brussilov's relief attacks in conjunction with parts of the Romanian Army were able to avert the fateful collapse of the Kingdom of Romania. After capturing Bucharest the Central Powers would continue their victorious course into Moldavia.

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543 Strutz, "Schlachten des Weltkrieges", Book 5 (Oldenburg, 1925), p. 110. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This citation has been corrected, since the original text is in error here. The original also fails to note that Italian regiments (of the Cagliari Brigade) were engaged alongside the national contingents it does list.

***F. From Bucharest to the Sereth*****1. The pursuit toward Buzeu, 7-14 December**

After the capture of Bucharest the German OHL decided to continue the advance to a line running down the Trotusu, Sereth and Danube Rivers to the sea. On the way further damage would be done to the Romanians, and the Russians would be beaten as they arrived. The campaign would end along the river line, which was the shortest position between the Carpathians and the Black Sea. The economic situation also played a part in the decision to advance; the Germans wanted to control as much as possible of this country that was so rich in natural resources.

Mackensen's Army Group were now ordered to make their main effort in the direction of Buzeu and Focsani; if resistance was encountered in the plains it was to be overcome by envelopment out of the mountains. There would also be an advance north along both banks of the Danube. GO Conrad promised that at a future date (to be determined) the right wing of Archduke Joseph's Army Group would join the attacks toward the Trotusu.<sup>544</sup> To reinforce the latter, three German divisions (49 Res, 218 and 225 ID) began to travel to Transylvania by train at the start of December.

GFM Mackensen supplemented these orders by specifying that the escape route of the enemy units still fighting southeast of Bucharest was to be cut by an extended movement of Schmettow's Corps and Goltz's Combined CD through Fundulea and past Lake Mostisci in the lake district. Group Szivo would march through Bucharest to the Danube Army. The k.u.k. 7 CD, which was arriving at Orsova, would be shipped down the Danube to Giurgevo.

Falkenhayn, who'd moved his HQ forward to Pitesci on the 7<sup>th</sup>, gave his Army as their next goal the upper course of the Cricov and the line Albesci-Tiganesci-Stefanesci. The advance would be punctuated by many lively pursuit actions.

7-8 December

On the northern wing, on the 7<sup>th</sup> the 4 Romanian ID was surrounded by 76 Res ID, 8 Mtn Bde and a detachment from the Alpenkorps.

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544 Ludendorff, p. 237

The enemy made desperate attempts to break out, in which they suffered heavy casualties; recognizing that further resistance was hopeless, they laid down their arms. 130 officers and 11,000 men passed into captivity, of whom 60 officers and 3600 men surrendered to 8 Mtn Bde. 20 guns also fell into the victors' hands. As for the other divisions of III Romanian Corps, 6 ID hastily pulled back to a point in front of Cislau, and 3 ID to the heights farther southwest. 16 ID, which had been stationed by Podeni and felt very isolated by the destruction of 4 ID, soon pulled back behind the Cricov. This was all the more necessary since II Romanian Corps was being thrown back over the Cricov at Albesci by Corps Morgen.

The center and southern wing of Falkenhayn's Army fought their way forward to the line Romanesci-Tiganesci-Stefanesci; in this advance the 10 Mtn Bde, at the head of 301 ID, forced their way over the Jalomita at Tiganesci. The 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army pulled back to the lower course of the Teleajna and to the area south of the river's mouth. Their southern wing had been badly beaten. 10 and 11 ID were falling apart as they hurried backward; their remnants were placed under a combined unit. Istrate's Army Detachment were able to withdraw to Gradistea and Hagiesci without fighting.

IV Russian Corps reached the line of lakes on both sides of Obilesci and deployed 8 CD on their northern wing. In front of the Russians the Danube Army passed the eastern and southeastern fronts of the Bucharest fortifications as well as the road leading to Giurgevo.

On 8 December the 9<sup>th</sup> Army were given the urgently-needed day of rest which they had eagerly awaited for some time. The rapid advance and numerous actions had gone on for weeks, while rainy weather had made the troops very tired. Their clothing and footwear were badly worn-out. Almost all of the horses were about to collapse. In some instances discipline was breaking down. Romania's rich stores of food and wine tempted many soldiers to go foraging on their own.

But the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army and the cavalry stayed in motion on the 8<sup>th</sup>. North of Ploesti a corps under G.Lt Krafft was formed from the k.u.k. 73 ID (2 and 8 Mtn Bdes) and the Alpenkorps; they were to advance in the hilly country north of the Ploesti-Buzeu-Focsani railroad. Of the units hitherto under G.Lt Krafft, the 216 ID was assigned to I Res Corps and 301 ID once more to LIV Corps. Meanwhile it became clear on the 8<sup>th</sup> that Schmettow's Corps with their exhausted horses couldn't

overtake the quickly-retreating Russians. Therefore the Corps was diverted toward the northeast. The German 2 CD and Transylvania Cav Bde would ride along and south of the Ploesti-Buzeu road.

The situation of the Romanian Army had continued to deteriorate on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. A report by Presan to the high command (which had already pulled back to Birlat in Moldavia) was painted in the darkest colors. The heights on the eastern bank of the Teleajna by Ploesti, the northern bulwark of the intermediate position where Presan had wanted to offer resistance for three weeks, was already in the hands of the allies. Averescu tried and failed to gain a breathing space with a thrust toward Albesci. Therefore 1<sup>st</sup> Army also withdrew behind the Cricov on the 8<sup>th</sup>, while Istrate's Army Detachment retreated to Jilavele.

The Russians under General Aliev had apparently never intended to offer resistance on the line of lakes, since without being forced to do so they fell back with 8 CD and 30 ID to the Jalomita (east of Condeesci) and with 40 ID to Calarasi vechi. From this town to the mouth of the Jalomita the 124 ID, which had arrived from Riga, stood guard facing the Danube along with 3 CD. Following the Russians, Schmettow's Corps reached Hagiesci, and the Danube Army reached Fundulea, Tanganu and the lower Dambovita.

When GFM Mackensen became aware that the Russians were turning to the northeast he ordered GdI Kosch to keep the left wing of the Danube Army strong. Only a side column would advance along the northern bank of the Danube.

#### 9-11 December

On 9 December the southern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army also resumed their advance. In rainy weather which ruined roads and paths which were poor to begin with, Kühne's Corps reached Hagiesci and the Jalomita on both sides of the mouth of the Prahova; here their march halted because the bridges had been burnt. They couldn't move forward again until 11 December, after a difficult crossing of the highly-swollen Prahova River. The 10 Mtn and 144 Inf Bdes crossed this obstacle directly north of the mouth of the Prahova, partially at night.

Presan's Army Group fell back on the 9<sup>th</sup> in the area around Fulga and Salciile, and extended their eastern wing as far as Urziceni. Farther east the Russian IV Corps crossed the Jalomita and marched toward Faureii vechi; they left behind the

VI Cavalry Corps, formed from 8 and 3 CD, as a rear guard to delay their opponents' pursuit on the Jalomita. However, the 7 German and Combined CD - riding ahead of the Danube Army - were able on the 11<sup>th</sup> to force their way over the Jalomita at Axintele and Copuzul. Farther east the Russian 124 ID, which had been guarding toward the Danube, withdrew to the north. The III Russian Cavalry Corps (10 CD, 1 Don Coss Div and 1 Terek Coss Div) came from Buzeu through Costesci to support Presan.

This was already very necessary. For 1<sup>st</sup> Army had the strength of just a brigade, and General Istrate was also emphatically asking that his troops should be pulled back to recuperate. On 11 December Presan's Army Group, already covered by Russian horsemen, reached the line Urziceni-Boldesci-Vintilenca. They were pursued by Kühne's Corps, most of which came to the line Jilavele-Ciorani while the rapidly-moving 10 Mtn Bde reached a point in front of Boldesci. The German 2 CD maintained the link between Kühne's and Morgen's Corps. The latter threw back the II Romanian Corps on the 9<sup>th</sup> to Inotesci and Ceptura and on the next day to a hastily-prepared position in front of Mizil. On the 11<sup>th</sup> Morgen's Germans took this hamlet.

On the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army, as Krafft's Corps advanced they were joined by 89 German ID which had come up from the Bodza Pass. As the Romanians withdrew in the mountains, the Corps was supposed to push them into the basin around Ursoiea and cut off their escape route in the Buzeu valley. But it was difficult to coordinate the operation of the three divisions, which were separated by terrain that was very hard to traverse. The Romanians were able to avoid encirclement with stubborn rear-guard actions and skillful withdrawals. In the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> the 3 Romanian ID was at Tisau opposite the Alpenkorps Division. The 6 Romanian ID was still holding onto Cislau against Goiginger's Mountain Brigades, which were attacking from the west, and against 89 ID advancing toward the Buzeu valley.

On 11 December the Romanian high command issued orders that were supposed to provide security for the Russian units arriving to help as they assembled by Romnicu-Sarat. For this purpose the Romanian armies would hold their current lines if possible, but would avoid a battle against overwhelming odds. If pressed by the enemy, the units would try to offer new resistance on a front running from southwest of the city of Buzeu along the Calmatuiul to Vizirul. The plan was to make a prolonged stand in the position that was being prepared by Romnicu-Sarat. The line between the Danube and Romnicu-Sarat would be occupied by the Russians; between that city and Mt Furul (# 1417) it would

be held by the still battle-worthy Romanian divisions, which would make up 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. All other Romanian units would be pulled back into Moldavia.

#### 12-14 December

A powerful thrust by Krafft's Corps, which left Tutschek's Division holding Tisau and 73 ID holding Ursoiea, forced Averescu already on the 12<sup>th</sup> to pull back his Army to the line Ciuta-Dara, which was consistent with the guidelines described above. This was all the more necessary since the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had been exposed by the rapid withdrawal of 1<sup>st</sup> Army; moreover Averescu expected 15 Russian ID to intervene south of Dara. However, the Russians' deployment took time. It was only on the following day (the 13<sup>th</sup>), as 2<sup>nd</sup> Army retreated from a new attack by the northern wing of Falkenhayn's Army, that the advanced guard of 15 Russian ID was available to back up II Romanian Corps, which was withdrawing to Lipia.

Farther north the 3 Romanian ID pulled back from the Alpenkorps Division at Vernesci to the eastern bank of the Buzeu. Tutschek's Division followed sharply on their heels and reached the western bank on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The 6 Romanian ID moved behind the Slanicbach, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> gave up Ungureulu to 89 German ID, which had shifted into the center of Krafft's Corps. In turn, both of Goiginger's mountain brigades had left the Buzeu valley and returned to the heights which ran to its north. The main body of 51 Hon ID moved forward to Ploesti.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> Presan's Army Group was attacked by LIV Corps and 2 CD; their 1<sup>st</sup> Army pulled back to Marginenulu, while Istrate's Army Detachment withdrew to Garbovi and abandoned Urziceni to the right wing of LIV Corps. Again assaulted on the 13<sup>th</sup> by Kühne's German divisions and the two Aus-Hung. brigades of 301 ID, the remnants of Presan's divisions retreated to Pogoanele, Smeeni and Costesci. At the latter village two divisions of III Russian Cavalry Corps maintained a link with Averescu's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, while the Corps' Terek Cossacks supported the northern wing of the latter Army.

Parts of Schmettow's Cavalry Corps swarmed over the Jalomita to the northern bank; on the 13<sup>th</sup> the main body crossed the river near Axintele. Farther east the German divisions of the Danube Army also crossed over. The Bulgarians and Turks temporarily stopped on the southern bank because it was reported that strong Russian units were advancing over the lower Jalomita; the report later was proven to be completely false.

Meanwhile the Romanian high command was already issuing orders for the occupation of the position by Romnicu-Sarat. The 3, 6 and 12 ID were designated the "Romnicu-Sarat Group" under the command of General Vaitoianu; they would defend the trenches that had been prepared between Racoviteni and Mt Furul # 1417. Reports had arrived that German troops were being sent to the Haromszek, and therefore 7 ID would reinforce the 7 Mixed Brigade, which was guarding the Soveja basin; together these units would occupy the mountain front between Mounts Furul and Clabucul (# 1364). For the same reason the 1/17 ID was sent behind 15 ID, which was blocking the Casinu and Ojtoz valleys. The troops between Mt Furul and the Ojtoz valley came under the command of General Cristescu, the leader of the North Army. Both groups (Vaitoianu's and Cristescu's) made up General Averescu's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. All the other units would pull back to Moldavia to reorganize; the first to do so were 22 and 23 ID.

But it seems that the Russian generals never believed that this position could be held for a prolonged period. Already in October Russian engineers and labor units had started to build a position farther back on the line Onesci-Focsani-Braila, apparently in order to shield southern Russia from invasion by the Central Powers. Before the Chief of the General Staff, Alexeiev, had gone on sick leave he'd made Brussilov aware of this possible danger. Now the commander of Southwest Front gave Letschitzky's 9<sup>th</sup> Army precautionary orders, in case the Russian and Romanian units had to withdraw from the Wallachian plains to the line of the Sereth.<sup>545</sup>

Falkenhayn ordered Schmettow's Cavalry Corps to advance toward the Calmatuiul on the 14<sup>th</sup>, while the left wing raided Pogoanele. The infantry corps were to reach Meteleu, Smeeni and the Buzeu River north of Buzeu city. But new rain storms turned the entire area into a morass. As vehicles advanced they sank up to the axles into the mud. Moreover the highly-swollen brooks, broken bridges, and the roads which were still watched by the enemy all very considerably delayed the march. Thus Schmettow's Corps only reached Arcanu; LIV Corps, after unspeakable toil, was able to come to Meteleu and Smeeni. In front of Buzeu the Romanian II Corps, now joined at the front by 15 Russian ID, were still offering resistance. But in the night Morgen's Corps (12 Bav and 76 Res ID) pushed into the city. This ruined the Romanians' plan to delay their opponents' advance in a position south of Buzeu. The II Romanian Corps,

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545 Zayonchkovsky, Vol. VI, p. 119

covered by VIII Russian Corps (15 and 2 ID) which lingered somewhat longer, and 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army therefore pulled back that same night to the northern bank of the Buzeu. They left many supply trains behind them.<sup>546</sup>

North of Buzeu city the divisions of G.Lt Krafft succeeded in moving up to the Slanicbach, since the 3 and 6 Romanian ID had already left to occupy the position northwest of Romnicu-Sarat.

Under Kosch's Danube Army the two German divisions reached Grindu and Cocoru on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Bulgarians and Turks were still on the Jalomita. On this day Group Szivo entered Bucharest, where they were given a rest day on the 15<sup>th</sup>. When they did resume their march to join the Danube Army they were reviewed by GFM Mackensen, who'd established his HQ in the Romanian capital on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The k.u.k. 7 CD began to land at Giurgevo; their first duty would be on the lines of communication.

## **2. The Christmas Battles at Romnicu-Sarat and in the Berecke Mountains**

### **a. Preparations by both sides**

#### Operations of the Central Powers

During the fighting on the Buzeu, German airmen reconnoitered an enemy position - partially ready and already occupied, partly still under construction - which ran from the heights west of Romnicu-Sarat through Zoita toward Visani. Moreover, entrenchments were spotted which, surrounding Braila to the west and south, made the place like a bridgehead.

Now it seemed advisable to thrust quickly against the columns of enemy troops, some of whom were occupying these fortifications while others were still moving toward them. But the great exhaustion of the men and horses, as well as the necessity to wait for the arrival of supplies, especially ammunition, which were lagging in the rear, forced the Field Marshal to permit a few days' rest on the Calmatuiul and on the Buzeu. Falkenhayn wanted to at least put the Buzeu River behind him, and therefore had LIV Corps, 2 CD and I Res Corps push their outposts forward to the line Jarlau-Cochirleanca-Haimanale; the troops, some of

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546 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 529 ff.

whom saw action, reached this objective on 17 December. Otherwise most of the divisions spread out among the villages of the Buzeu valley. Corps Krafft was re-organized with only mountain troops. Thus 10 Mtn Bde was re-assigned there from 301 ID; in exchange, 89 ID went to Morgen's Corps. FML Goiginger now assembled all three Aus-Hung. mountain brigades under his command. The HQ of XXXIX Res Corps was placed under Group Gerok. 51 Hon ID marched back to Kronstadt, whence after several days of rest they were ordered on the 22<sup>nd</sup> to join 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

Corps Krafft received little rest. Their Alpenkorps Division, stationed north and south of Racoviteni, were already right in front of the Romanian position. 73 ID, with 8 and 2 Mtn Bdes on the road from Murgesci toward the west, were guarding the flank toward the north. Numerous skirmishes kept the troops busy, and a thrust by Russian troops on the ridge between the Slanic and Cilnaului Brooks led on the 19<sup>th</sup> to their penetrating the lines of Goiginger's Division. On the next day the newly-arrived 10 Mtn Bde threw the enemy back again. On the same day (the 20<sup>th</sup>) the Alpenkorps shifted to the area where the Slanicbach has its source, and thus were stationed to the left of 73 ID rather than to the right.

Schmettow's Cavalry Corps, which had reached Visani and Filipesci, also couldn't rest. They had to participate in an attack which the western wing of the Danube Army undertook on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, believing that the Russian position between Filipesci and Batogul was held only by rear guards. But the Germans and Bulgarians, after suffering casualties, realized that the enemy here were determined to offer prolonged resistance. The continuation of this operation was postponed until the arrival of the heavy artillery.

Meanwhile the front was in motion in Dobruja. Until now the Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (1 CD, 4 and Combined ID plus VI Turkish Corps) had stood opposite the Russians' IV Sib and XLVII Corps. But on 15 December these Russian units began to retreat so as to stay in line with the Russo-Romanian front which was falling back west of the Danube. Their preparations to retreat hadn't remained hidden from 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army, which followed closely on their heels. On the 19<sup>th</sup> the Bulgarians and Turks came up against the Russians' new entrenchments north of the line of ponds between Cerna and Babadag. Only the XLVII Corps had stayed to defend this position. IV Sib Corps was moving to the western bank of the Danube. The Serbian Volunteer Div had apparently already pulled back somewhat earlier to Odessa to

rebuild.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> a brigade-sized Bulgarian detachment of all arms crossed the Danube from Cernavoda to Fetesci; then they moved ahead to the mouth of the Jalomita, where they covered the construction of a bridge over the Danube. Later this detachment closed up with the right wing of the Danube Army.

#### Operations of the Romanians and Russians

After the loss of Buzeu the Romanians pulled back in one bound to the prepared position northwest of Romnicu-Sarat. To occupy this front, which extended from Mt Furul to Racoviteni, General Averescu assigned 3 and 6 ID; between them, contrary to his original plan, he also inserted the 1/17 ID (which was now re-designated 1 ID). 12 and 7 ID stood ready in reserve between Romnicu-Sarat and Plainesci. The Trans-Amur Cav Div was placed behind 3 ID, and also maintained a link with the 7 Romanian Mixed Brigade. 14 Russian ID was ready if necessary to help 15 Romanian ID, which was guarding the Ojtoz valley.

South of Averescu's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the Russians were holding the position stretching from Racoviteni through Visani and Vizirul to the Danube; they had on hand the VIII Corps (15 and 2 ID), IV Corps (30 and 40 ID) and IV Sib Corps (9 Sib Rif Div<sup>547</sup> and 124 ID). These forces made up 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army under General Ragosa, who'd come with his staff from the front on the Niemen. III Russian Cavalry Corps was stationed on the right wing of VIII (infantry) Corps. VI Cavalry Corps screened the front between the Buzeu and Danube Rivers. General Ragosa was holding back about two cavalry divisions in his reserves. At Romnicu-Sarat the 34 ID (from VII Corps, which had been relieved at Zborow) was also in the Army's reserve; 71 ID (of XXX Corps) was still coming by train from the Special Army. The Army of the Danube, now led by General Aliev and re-designated 6<sup>th</sup> Army, was guarding northern Dobruja with 61 and 115 ID, 3 Rif Div and 3 Don Coss Div plus (still) the 10 Sib Rif Div.

On 16 December, with the consent of the Russian high command, King Ferdinand of Romania assumed command of the "Romanian Front", which consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian and 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies. General Sakharov was assigned as his adviser and the real director of operations.<sup>548</sup> General Presan, whose Army Group was dissolved, became Chief of the Romanian General

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547 The 10 Sib Rif Div of IV Sib Corps was still in Dobruja.

548 Zayonchkovsky, p. 121

Staff. The remnants of the divisions not assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army left the field forces and were sent to the area around Jassy. Here General Berthelot, with 430 French officers and 1150 soldiers who'd come to Romania through Archangel, began the task of reorganizing the Romanian Army.<sup>549</sup>

### The plan of attack

Meanwhile the high commands at Teschen and Pless, along with the HQ of Archduke Joseph's and Mackensen's Army Groups, had come to an agreement about the next phase of the operations, which were to end along the line leading from the mouth of the Danube and along the Sereth and Trotusu.

GFM Mackensen intended to have the Danube Army conquer the Braila bridgehead. 9<sup>th</sup> Army would advance toward the Sereth. If strong enemy units held the stout fortifications at Braila, as was expected, then Falkenhayn's right wing divisions would secure the lower reaches of the Buzeu, facing southeast. If this weren't the case, 9<sup>th</sup> Army's right would pivot toward Namoloasa. The Army's strong left wing (Krafft's Corps) would advance through Dumitreste and Neculele and deep into the mountains; they would also be ready to shift toward Focsani, and finally make it easier for Group Gerok to get through the mountains on the border. It was planned that 9<sup>th</sup> Army's new offensive would begin on 22 December.

Archduke Joseph planned for Group Gerok and the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army to thrust forward to the Trotusu in coordination with Mackensen. For this purpose the right wing of Group Gerok (218 German ID and k.u.k. 1 CD) should advance through the Berecke Mountains. Working with Corps Krafft, their objective was to pass on 24 December through Points # 804 in the Zabala valley and # 560 west of Naruja, as well as the Putna railroad station; then they would move toward Naruja and Tulnici. This would help 9<sup>th</sup> Army's left wing go forward. If the latter took Focsani, then 218 ID could wheel toward the mouth of the Trotusu. The main effort of Group Gerok would be made by the Ojtoz Group (XXXIX Res Corps with the k.u.k. 71 ID, 187 German ID and 2/3 of 49 Res ID) in the direction of Onesci and Ocna; the Group would be ready on the 25<sup>th</sup>. At the same time the Uz Group (FML

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549 Pétain, p. 141. Bujac, p. 200. Among the French officers were 74 doctors, who would combat the epidemics which had broken out in the Romanian Army.

Fabini's VI Corps with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of 39 Hon ID and the German 225 ID), along with G.Lt Stein's Gyimes group (8 Bav Res ID, 24 k.u.k. ID and 61 Hon ID plus a regiment of 49 Res ID), would also be prepared to advance. The Archduke himself would provide overall command to the three groups, with a total of 54,000 riflemen and 487 guns.

Army Group HQ at Schässsburg estimated the strength of the opposing enemy units (15 Romanian ID and the Russian XL and XXIV Corps with parts of V Cavalry Corps) as 49,000 infantry and 6000 horsemen. This was roughly correct. Thus the attackers didn't have superiority of strength. Other unfavorable factors were the weather (winter was starting), the lack of roads in the forested terrain on the other side of the passes, and insufficient logistical support on the railroads - which had just recently been restored and were running very slowly. In fact the trains carrying 49 Res ID had to be stopped temporarily to allow sufficient supplies of ammunition and food to be assembled for the attacking troops. Moreover the three newly-arriving German divisions had to be issued mountain equipment, which they had lacked completely.

GM Seeckt, the Army Group's Chief of Staff, therefore felt that the thrust by Fabini's and Stein's Groups had little prospect of success. Falkenhayn, as he later asserted in his memoirs<sup>550</sup>, was "firmly convinced from the start" that the Archduke's operation "would have not had the slightest chance of success even under the most favorable circumstances because of the difficulty posed by the terrain and logistical conditions of the Carpathian winter." But this pessimistic prophecy was only partly correct.

On 12 December the Central Powers submitted a peace proposal to the Entente. This episode will be discussed further at the end of this volume. News about the step toward peace were already divulged to the troops during the preparations for the attack. The commanders were concerned, not without reason, that the news would have an unfavorable impact on their soldiers' elan. But doubts whether the enemy would go along with this offer, and the Entente's actual refusal (which soon became known) prevented the allied troops from losing the necessary will to carry out the last offensive operation of the year 1916.

## **b. The Battle of Romnicu-Sarat, 22-28 December**

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550 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 105

22-24 December

Based on orders which Falkenhayn had already issued on 19 December, the corps of his 9<sup>th</sup> Army began to attack on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. It was Falkenhayn's plan to first beat the enemy in the mountains with Krafft's Corps plus the 12 Bav and 76 Res ID of I Res Corps, and then push them into the swampy ground along the lower course of the Romnicu Brook. Here they would be battered further, for which purpose the very strong 41 ID, initially held in reserve, would enter the fight. 89 ID was held at Falkenhayn's disposal directly behind I Res Corps for the purpose of filling the gap which would inevitably open between the corps of Krafft and Morgen as their attacks brought them in different directions.

I Res Corps made the main effort. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> their 76 Res and 12 Bav ID wrested the entire position between Zoita and the foot of the mountains south of Racoviteni from 15 Russian ID. North of the Bavarians the 8 and 10 Mtn Bdes of 73 ID joined the attack. They were also able to establish a foothold in the enemy's foremost trenches. Then, however, the allies were confronted by a second position. The Alpenkorps Division advanced toward Dumitresti [Dumitreste] and Neculele, reaching the ridges north of the upper course of the Slanicbach.

Since the link between 12 Bav and 73 ID was already starting to break, Falkenhayn sent 89 ID to fill the gap. But the 89<sup>th</sup> still wasn't in place on the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and therefore Morgen's Corps didn't have the necessary strength to push forward on this day. On the other hand, LIV Corps - which on the 22<sup>nd</sup> had only pinned down the enemy - won a significant success the next day. They broke through the trenches of IV Russian Corps between Drogul and Balaceanul and took firm possession of both these places.

To the right of Kühne's Corps, Schmettow's horsemen were still in no shape to ride and stayed in their quarters. The 2 German CD left 9<sup>th</sup> Army and was ordered to Belgium. The Danube Army was ready to attack, but wouldn't start until the advance of 9<sup>th</sup> Army became effective.

Under Krafft's Corps on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the inner wings of Goiginger's and Tutschek's divisions gained some ground in the direction of Dumitresti. The left wing of the Alpenkorps were already in contact with the Trans-Amur CD south of Neculele.

Meanwhile the right wing of Group Gerok had also begun to

advance under the command of the leader of 1 CD, FML Ruiz. A detachment of 1 CD was sent ahead to make contact with the Alpenkorps Division, and linked up with them at Lopatari. A second detachment of the cavalry advanced into the upper Zabala valley, where they encountered the enemy at Nereju on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The 218 ID, to which the k.u.k. HR # 2 was attached, advanced with one battalion in the Naruja valley and the main body in the Putna valley; their progress was slow, not only because of very difficult terrain but also due to the stubborn resistance of 7 Romanian Mixed Brigade. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the German division was an hour's march from the Putna railroad station, while their detached battalion was at Point # 560 in the Naruja valley. The k.u.k. 6 Cav Bde, which commanded all the remaining dismounted detachments of 1 CD and the German Res Jaeger Bn 20, celebrated Christmas Eve in woods covered in deep snow about 5 km east of Clabucul, which the German Jaeger - supported by troops from 71 ID - had captured the day before.

This advance toward the Soveja basin took the Romanians by surprise. It also threatened the link between the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian and 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies. Therefore the enemy commanders were forced to reinforce 7 Mixed Brigade with several battalions from 15 Romanian ID and by 12 Russian CD; the latter would be followed by the Caucasian Native Horse Division.<sup>551</sup>

The 9<sup>th</sup> German Army again won significant success on 24 December. The left wing of Krafft's Corps were able to advance to within 4 km of Neculele, while the right was still engaged in see-saw fighting around the stubbornly-defended positions on the heights. Under I Res Corps the 12 Bav ID wrested Heights # 417 (southeast of Racoviteni) from the enemy; according to captured Russians this had been the key point of their second position. The adjacent 8 Mtn Bde played a role in this success. On account of the Bavarians' heavy casualties the 89 ID was placed in the front to their left.

On the Army's right wing the Russians wrested back the town of Drogul from the 115 German ID. This was possible because the enemy had switched units from the eastern bank of the Buzeu (opposite the inactive Danube Army) to the western bank. Falkenhayn requested his neighbor to the right to at least pin down the Russians, but was informed that the Danube Army couldn't advance until the attack by 9<sup>th</sup> Army removed the danger that they could be outflanked from the western bank of the

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551 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 558

Buzeu.<sup>552</sup>

25-28 December

But on 25 December the Danube Army did begin to attack. The 12 Bulgarian ID weren't able to push through the enemy entrenchments at Batogul. But 217 ID (reinforced by Szivo's Aus-Hung. Group) and 11 Bav ID won a substantial success. They stormed the Russian position between the railroad and the Buzeu; the Bavarians in particular had to fight hard around Filipesci. A few kilometers east the enemy rallied for new resistance along a strong position protected by barbed wire. On the 26<sup>th</sup> the Turks advanced up to Vizirul. On the same day the Bulgarians succeeded when they made another attack on Batogul, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> they captured Giurgeni; thus all their units were also on the northern bank of the Calmatuiul. Lack of ammunition forced the Danube Army to postpone continuing their promising attack until the 29<sup>th</sup>.

9<sup>th</sup> Army used the first night of Christmas mainly to make preparations. Kühne's Corps made ready for a new advance by bringing up 41 ID; Morgen's Corps waited for their ammunition columns to arrive. But Krafft's Corps did attack; they wrested all the heights west of the Cilnaului valley from the enemy, and their northern wing was already pivoting toward the east. Opposite this wing the Trans-Amur horsemen fell far to the rear, exposing the right flank of 3 Romanian ID. Apparently to close this gap, General Averescu shifted 7 ID from his reserves toward the north.

9<sup>th</sup> Army won a decisive success on the 26<sup>th</sup>. 89 ID pushed into the enemy position. The impetus of their attack spread to the right and to the left. By evening the entire Russian front west of the railroad collapsed. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Morgen's Corps thrust after the withdrawing enemy and their 76 Res ID drove into Romnicu-Sarat. Farther north the Bavarians and 89 ID crossed the Romnicu Brook. The k.u.k. 73 ID followed the Romanians who were retreating toward Buda. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the Alpenkorps Division fought directly in front of Dumitresti. The detachment from Group Ruiz that had linked up with Krafft advanced north past Mt Furul and reached the heights south of Nereju.

Kühne's Corps was unable to get past Balaceanu on the 26<sup>th</sup>, but made some progress on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Bavarian and Aus-Hung. battalions of 301 ID stormed the Russian trenches between Zoita

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552 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 110

and Balaceanu [Balaceanul] and took Salcioara. To their right the 109 and 41 ID spread out toward Slobozia Amara.

For the 28<sup>th</sup>, Falkenhayn ordered Krafft's Corps to continue to advance past Dumitresti toward the northeast. I Res Corps should reach the line Timboesti-Sihlele-Balesci, and LIV Corps the northern banks of the line of streams leading through Boldul to Balta Alba. The Cavalry Corps would mop up enemy troops still on the western bank of the Buzeu. Mackensen added to these orders by having a strong fore of horsemen and an infantry division shifted through Gradistea to the river's eastern bank, where they could help the Danube Army which would attack on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> Krafft's Corps captured Dumitresti, Buda and Babeni. I Res Corps was at first held up by Russian artillery fire. But when 301 ID of Kühne's Corps advanced toward the Romnicubach below Romnicu-Sarat they also enabled Morgen's divisions to move forward. The center of LVI Corps reached Boldul, but the right wing was still hanging back at Slobozia Amara.

The Danube Army was scheduled to attack on the 29<sup>th</sup>. But during the preceding night the opposing troops evacuated their positions; the enemy were also in full retreat between the Buzeu and the foot of the mountains. This was the result of the successes won by Morgen's and Krafft's corps in the mountains.

Beginning on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Group Ruiz sought to unbar the outlets from the valleys of the Zabalabach at Nereju, of the Narujabach at Point 560 and of the Putna at Paulesci; their widely-separated columns were trying to envelop the enemy in forested mountains with hardly any roads. Afterwards the 218 ID would assemble at Paulesci, while guarding toward the south and east, so that if necessary they could directly support 9<sup>th</sup> German Army by advancing east. But the two detachments on the right still weren't able by the 28<sup>th</sup> to reach more open country by Nereju and Point 560. The main body of GM Gentner's 218 ID had been able to throw back the 12 Russian CD, but on the 28<sup>th</sup> were halted west of Paulesci and on the ridge farther northwest, still some distance from the Soveja basin. The 6 Cav Bde of 1 CD reached the forested Heights # 1374. In front of them the 7 Romanian Mixed Brigade pulled back toward Soveja.

In Dobruja the 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, under pressure from the Bulgarians and Turks, evacuated the position on the Taitabach during the night of 21-22 December. 115 ID and 3 Rif Div withdrew to the northern bank of the Danube through Tulcea

[Tultscha] and Isaccea, respectively. 61 ID, 10 Sib Rif Div and 3 Don Coss Div created a bridgehead on the southern bank at Macin, which was blockaded by the three Bulgarian divisions (1 CD, 4 ID and Combined ID). The VI Turkish Corps, with the consent of the Ottoman high command, was directed through Hirsova to join the Danube Army.

### **c. XXXIX Reserve Corps attacks in the Ojtoz valley, 26 December 1916 to 5 January 1917**

#### Forces and plans

The attack of the three groups chosen by Archduke Joseph to thrust toward the Trotusu valley was envisioned as a concentric advance in the direction of the Ocna-Darmanesci-Comanesci sector. To coordinate the three groups for this difficult mountain offensive, the Archduke took direct command. He arrived with his immediate staff at Csik Szereda on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Preparations for the attack were undertaken vigorously, but received an unwelcome setback due to repeated thrusts by the Russians. In one of these assaults the enemy on 23 December captured the Magyaros Heights (# 1340) from 39 Hon ID; despite an attempt to recover them the next day, the Heights remained in Russian hands.

This defeat caused some very unfortunate alterations to the plan of attack which had already been completed. Now the offensive of VI Corps wouldn't start until it was made possible by the advance of both the Corps' neighbors. Until then Group Gerok would have to be responsible for defending their own northern flank, for which purpose Army Group HQ placed Res IR 217 (stationed on the right wing of 225 ID) under Gerok's command.

But the prospects of success were also slim for Group Stein; their 16,900 riflemen were faced by an enemy force which the HQ at Schässsburg estimated was larger by about 5000 men. Moreover only the 8 Bav Res ID was considered fully capable of attacking. The central Galician 24 ID was little suited for such a difficult assault. 61 Hon ID had shrunk to 2000 men, and couldn't count on getting sufficient replacements. Therefore its 19 Lst Mtn Bde was being dissolved and the troops merged into 16 Lst Mtn Bde. And so G.Lt Stein intended to limit his participation to merely the "protection of the northern flank of the overall offensive movement."

Thus the "overall offensive movement" would be limited to a

thrust by Group Gerok, in which G.Lt Staabs' XXXIX Res Corps would bear the main burden. But it was still hoped that Gerok would win a wide-reaching success. He had 26,700 riflemen and 256 guns, and it was believed he was facing just 17,000 men under 15 Romanian ID. He would soon reach Casinu and Grozesci, in terrain where it was easier to maneuver.

Staabs' Corps was schedule to start their attack on 26 December. They couldn't yet count on cooperation from the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army. But it was hoped that by thrusting into the Ojtoz and Casinu valleys they would help forward Group Ruiz (which on the 25<sup>th</sup> was still stuck in the forested mountains) and at least ease the task of Falkenhayn's Army which on this day was still heavily engaged at Romnicu-Sarat. Other factors spurring on a quick start were the probability that the enemy would become aware of the plans during a long wait, and concern that snow would soon fall.

Under Staabs' Corps, G.Lt Sunkel's 187 German ID would attack on the ridge between the Slanic and Ojtoz valleys while the main body of GM Goldbach's 71 k.u.k. ID did so in the Ojtoz valley and farther south. Col. Lähne's 141 Inf Bde of the latter Division was to advance from Ojtoz village over Heights # 1169 on the border, and into the Casinu valley.

### The actions

When the two divisions left their trenches on the 26<sup>th</sup>, they encountered the 14 Russian ID, which had relieved 15 Romanian ID the day before. The latter was supposed to be shifted to Romnicu-Sarat, but now was once more thrown into the fighting in the Ojtoz sector. Although the enemy was thus reinforced, and despite thick fog which prevented systematic preparatory fire by the artillery, Sunkel's and Goldbach's battalions thrust into the enemy front; in heavy fighting, they drove their foes back about two kilometers by evening on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

But the very weak 141 Inf Bde were unable to break the enemy's resistance at Heights # 1169. They were given two battalions from 49 Res ID (which was in reserve) and then drove their opponents from this border position on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

The main body of the German XXXIX Res Corps continued their attacks day after day; soon they also had to fight the 3 Turkestan Rif Div, which was arriving one regiment at a time from Dorna Watra. The Russians were very determined to block the outlet from the mountains in the Ojtoz valley and to keep

the planned defensive front on the lower Sereth from being rolled up from the north before it could be occupied by Averescu's and Ragosa's Armies. Therefore by New Year's Eve the 71 ID were only able to work forward, after great toil, to a point three kilometers from Herestrau. 187 ID fought their way to Heights # 781 and 1050 (east and north of Baile Slanic). To their left the Res IR 217 captured the line of ridges stretching from N. Sandor toward the Daftena valley, but then had to defend it against heavy Russian counterattacks.

This danger threatening Group Gerok from the north obliged Archduke Joseph to spur Groups Fabini and Stein to advance. The k.u.k. 24 ID, reinforced by a regiment from 49 Res ID, was then able on the 30<sup>th</sup> to conquer Heights # 1343 and 1244, which extend south and southwest of Agasu. But storm troops from VI Corps and Group Stein which attacked the next day encountered fully-occupied trenches and (since fog frustrated the artillery preparation) intact barricades; they fell back without accomplishing anything.

Since enemy resistance had meanwhile faltered in front of 141 Inf Bde, the unit was able to advance into the Casinu valley and on the 30<sup>th</sup> to capture Mgr. Casinului # 1167 with a battalion from IR 82; this mountain dominates the entire area.<sup>553</sup> On the next day Lähne's Brigade broke through three parallel Romanian positions in the Casinu valley and reached Point # 508. To give some relief to HQ of 71 ID, the HQ of GM Zoellner's 49 Res ID was given command over 141 Inf Bde, Res IR 226 and the German Lst IR 36.

The third regiment of 49 Res ID (Res IR 228) was sent to reinforce the main body of Staabs' Corps, fighting in the Ojtoz valley; Army Group HQ believed that this Corps, unlike Fabini's and Stein's Groups, was still capable of advancing far enough to threaten the Trotusu valley.

The 187 and 71 ID therefore attacked on New Year's Day in a heavy snow storm, but gained no substantial success. The operation was repeated on 3 January 1917, but had the same scanty result even though 49 Res ID also participated, attacking toward the north. It had become apparent that the striking power of XXXIX Res Corps was used up. The same was true of VI Corps, which tried and failed on 4 January to capture the Magyaros. And on the 5<sup>th</sup> Group Stein was able only to mop up several pockets of Russians on the ridge stretching north of

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553 "History of IR # 82", pp. 217 ff.

Heights # 1244 toward Agasu. The planned thrust to Comanesci and Darmanesci remained stuck in the snow.

Therefore on the 5<sup>th</sup> Archduke Joseph ordered Generals Fabini and Stein to cease their attacks; he himself returned on the 7<sup>th</sup> to his HQ at Schässburg. But despite all the difficult weather he told Group Gerok's XXXIX Res Corps to prepare for a new thrust, and Group Ruiz to continue to fight in connection with the advance by Falkenhayn's Army.

### 3. The capture of Braila and Focsani, 29 December 1916 to 8 January 1917

On the day when Romnicu-Sarat was captured (27 December) Falkenhayn asked the German OHL how far the advance would continue. He received a reply from Pless that he must try to capture Focsani. It remained questionable whether the operation would proceed beyond that point. There was no intention of advancing over the Sereth.<sup>554</sup>

On the opposing side, the Romanian high command let General Averescu know that the Russians stationed west of the Buzeu would withdraw in the night of 28-29 December to the line Sutesci-Cioresci-Sihlele-Timboesti. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army would hold an adjacent line farther north (Timboesti - D. Lung - Nereju - Herestrau - Clabucul Heights) and deny it to their opponents "regardless of cost." For this purpose strong reserves would make an active defense possible.<sup>555</sup>

#### 29-31 December

Therefore the units in the Soveja basin, led by the commander of 12 Russian CD (General Baron Mannerheim<sup>556</sup>), would be reinforced by 5 Calarasi Bde. Three more Russian cavalry divisions (Ussuri, Caucasian Native and Trans-Amur) were at Miera and Odobesci, ready to intervene. On the right wing of Ragosa's Army the entire VII Russian Corps (13 and 34 ID) was already at the front. Lively fighting now ensued on 29 and 30 December between the Groups of Ruiz and Mannerheim. 6 Cav Bde and 218 ID had to repulse strong thrusts, which the Romanians' 7 Mixed Bde (reinforced by part of their 15 ID) carried out from Soveja toward the west and south. The right wing of 218 ID was able to storm Tulnici on the 30<sup>th</sup>, and the Russian cavalry at Nereju were also obliged to give up their position blocking the way out of the valley.

Under 9<sup>th</sup> Army Krafft's Corps followed the slowly-retreating enemy, who fought many rear guard actions; on the 30<sup>th</sup> Krafft came up to the trenches which had been built north of D. Lung and on the western bank of the Rimna Brook. Morgen's Corps,

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554 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, p. 114

555 Dabija, Vol. III, p. 575

556 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - This was the same Baron Mannerheim who later commanded the Finnish armies in wars with the Soviet Union.

advancing on Krafft's right along the highway and railroad, on the 30<sup>th</sup> broke into the Russian trenches at Timboesti and Sihlele. On the same day Kühne's Corps, advancing on miserable roads and fighting several skirmishes at Ciroesci and east of Valcelele, likewise came up to a Russian force that were prepared to defend themselves. In front of the Danube Army the IV Sib Corps pulled back on the night of 28-29 December. By the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> GdI Kosch's pursuing divisions reached the Buzeu (southwest of Scortarul nou), Scortarul vechiu and Valea Canepei.

The penetration by the Germans at Timboesti and Sihlele had apparently compelled General Sakharov, the adviser of King Ferdinand, to pull the armies still further back. Therefore Averescu's Army had Group Mannerheim take up new positions on the high ridge between the upper courses of the Susita and the Putna. On their right they would establish at Grozesci their link with the 9th Russian Army, which now was also incorporated in the "Romanian Front." Group Vaitoianu was ordered to make a stand on the northern bank of the Rimnabach. 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, holding the adjacent line from Urechesci, was in positions that stretched through Bogza to the lower Rimnabach<sup>557</sup>. 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was now commanded by General Zurikov and once more included IV Sib Corps; the Army was supposed to establish a line running through Macsineni to the Braila bridgehead, where they would also occupy the defensive installations from Latinul through Romanul to Tichilesci.

After several days of better weather, streaming rain again set in at noon on 30 December, rendering the wretched roads and paths bottomless. Along these routes the German 9<sup>th</sup> and Danube Armies toiled forward on New Year's Eve. To the right of the Buzeu and in front of Rimna the allies collided at many points with new enemy positions. Group Ruiz also had some serious fights with Romanian rear guards. 6 Cav Bde established a link with 141 Inf Bde of 71 ID on the Casinu Brook.

On 31 December the German OHL issued guidelines for the final part of the operations in Romania. 9<sup>th</sup> Army should exert pressure toward Focsani and gain ground to the north so they could come closer to Group Gerok. The right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army and the Danube Army were to reach the Sereth, where they would

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557 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The reference to the "lower Rimnabach" may be a misprint. On the map (Beilage 28) it appears more likely that the position of 4<sup>th</sup> Army at this time ran through Bogza to the lower Rimnicu River.

construct good positions and shelters. In particular it was advised that all the operations should be concluded quickly, which was in the general interest. The OHL also designated specific units which would then be withdrawn.

Mackensen now sent the Danube Army to conquer Braila. This operation would be supported by 9<sup>th</sup> Army's right wing with an attack on Macsineni. Falkenhayn had another idea. He preferred that Braila should not be attacked, and that the Danube Army should send units to the left bank of the Buzeu to reinforce 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Mackensen, however, wouldn't agree. Therefore Falkenhayn told Schmettow's Cavalry Corps to advance between the Buzeu and the line Gulianca-Manoloasa. Kühne's Corps would capture the bridgehead surrounding Nanesti, and Morgen's Corps would take Focsani. Krafft's right wing, the k.u.k. 73 ID, should support the attack toward Focsani while his left wing thrust to Miera [Mera].

#### 1-5 January

But the HQ of the Romanian Front didn't allow a battle to develop on the Rimnabach. In the night of 31 December-1 January the Russian and Romanian troops resumed their retreat toward the Sereth. Group Vaitoianu of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army took up new positions on the northern bank of the Milcov, where they were supposed to resist to the limit against any advance by their opponents toward Onesci, Agiudu nuou and Marasesci. The Russians were told to defend the bridgeheads of Focsani, Nanesti and Braila, along with the links between them on the lower Putna and in the swamps stretching from Namoloasa to Macsineni. The bridgehead at the bend in the Danube by Macin was also supposed to be retained; it had already been under attack by the Bulgarians since 30 December.

Meanwhile considerable snow had fallen in the mountains. Nevertheless on 1 January 1917 the hussars of 1 CD were able to capture Heights # 1014, which rise 8 km south of the Mgr. Casinului. 218 ID had a difficult struggle, because Averescu attacked again toward Soveja with his northern wing, reinforced by the Caucasian Native Cavalry Division and Russian 12 CD. After defeating this thrust, 218 ID prepared to attack the line of heights crowned by Points # 895, 820 and 826. The right wing of the German Division, reinforced by the k.u.k. HR 2, was able to capture Naruja from the enemy on 3 January.

Farther south, after great toil and after fights with stubborn Russian and Romanian rear guards, the allies came up to the

bridgeheads, which had been well-constructed and ready for action for some time. Thus Krafft's Corps were able to break into Miera on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and to establish themselves on the eastern bank of the Milcov west of the town of Odobesci. On the other hand, Schmettow's Cavalry Corps - which had pushed ahead to Macsineni - suffered a major setback on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, so that 115 ID had to hasten to the scene to restore the situation.

The Danube Army and LIV Corps now wanted to start attacking on 4 January. I Res Corps, which had come up against particularly strong fortifications, would wait until 6 January.

Meanwhile the Bulgarians broke into the Macina bridgehead on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Their 4 ID pushed the enemy back along the road on the causeway toward Braila, so they could envelop that city from the east. The Combined ID followed the Russians who were withdrawing up the peninsula which juts forward in the swamps toward Galatz.

The left wing of the Danube Army won a complete victory on 4 January. 217 ID, with Col. Szivo's Group attached, broke through the Russian position northwest of Romanul. Farther to the left, 11 Bav ID captured the trenches as far as the mouth of the Buzeu. Thus the Braila bridgehead was endangered at a sensitive spot. During the following night the Russians therefore pulled back to the northern bank of the Sereth. Only by Vadeni did they cling fast to several islands in a broad swamp on the southern bank. Goltz's Combined CD entered the wealthy harbor city of Braila on the 5<sup>th</sup>, while the Bulgarian 4 ID crossed the Danube into the city from the east. Since the Bulgarian Combined ID meanwhile had also driven the enemy from the tongue of land southeast of Galatz, there were no longer any Russians in Dobruja.

Falkenhayn's Army won new victories west of the Buzeu. Protected by Schmettow's cavalry on the right and by 301 ID on the left flank, 41 and 109 ID of Kühne's Corps stormed the positions on both sides of Romniceni, despite strong barriers of barbed wire, then crossed the lower Romnicu and advanced toward Nanesti.

#### 6-8 January

When Kühne's Corps resumed their attack on the 6<sup>th</sup>, they encountered a large scale Russian counterattack which broke out along a 25 km wide front between Namoloasa and the Rimna Brook. At most points the Russians were repulsed, but the k.u.k. 144

Inf Bde stationed on the right wing of 310 ID fell back as far as Obilesci. The Russians poured through the resultant gap in the line up to the Romnicubach; they enveloped the left wing of 41 ID, thus temporarily capturing several German batteries. Quick and energetic counter-thrusts by parts of 41 and of 216 ID soon brought the enemy to a halt. Falkenhayn had planned a great counter-operation, which would be joined by parts of 115 ID (then attached to the Cavalry Corps) and of 12 Bav ID (which was attacking Focsani), but now this was unnecessary. Moreover, intercepted Russian wireless messages betrayed the fact that the enemy didn't intend to continue their attack.

I Res Corps began to attack toward Focsani on 6 January, and won a complete success the next day. Morgen's divisions broke through the position on the Milcov and then through a second line; by evening they crossed the road leading from Focsani to Gagesci, which compelled the enemy to evacuate Focsani during the night.<sup>558</sup> Shoulder to shoulder with the left wing of I Res Corps, Goiginger's Division stormed the village of Odobesci. In the evening they stood on the Putna in front of Gagesci along with the Alpenkorps, which on the 6<sup>th</sup> had captured the 1101 meter high Mgr. Odobesci from 12 Romanian ID (reinforced by Ussuri Cossacks).

On 8 January the allies reaped the fruits of the attacks they'd launched with their last strength. They stood upon the Putna and the Sereth everywhere between the bend in the Putna south of Iresci down to the outskirts of Nanesti (although the latter town wasn't taken from the Russians until 19 January). Opposite them the worn-down 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army plus the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies were holding prepared positions on the northern banks of these rivers; these made up the last bulwark protecting Moldavia. Downstream from Nanesti the allies didn't enter the bends in the Sereth by Namoloasa, Corbu and Vadeni, which were completely covered by marshes; they were content to occupy dry land that was at some distance from the river.

In the Soveja basin Group Ruiz advanced further despite a heavy fall of snow and a very difficult logistical situation. 6 Cav Bde moved ahead on the 4<sup>th</sup> toward Heights # 642 which rise 9 km southwest of the village of Casinu. On the same day 218 ID stormed Heights # 895 and 826; on the 6<sup>th</sup> they were holding Gura Vai, Vizania and Vidra. Near the last-named village they were opposed by 1 Romanian ID and the Caucasian Native Cavalry Division, which Averescu threw into the area because of his

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558 Morgen, p. 116

concern for the security of the Putna valley.

On 7 January the hussars of 6 Cav Bde drove the enemy from the heights 4 km northwest of Gura Vai; on the next day they expanded the area under their control east of Point # 392 in the valley. The main body of 218 ID was shifted in the Susita valley as far as the enemy-held villages of Marasti and Racoasa; on the 8<sup>th</sup> they stormed the former place. On the same day their northern wing was stationed north and south of Iresci. North of Group Ruiz the Aus-Hung. and German battalions of 49 Res ID followed the enemy into the Casinu valley up to Point # 392 and stormed an outlying knoll 4 km northeast of the summit of Mgr. Casinului.

Thus on 8 January the two sides were facing each other along a front that extended in an almost straight line from Casinu toward the southeast.

#### **4. The campaign ends**

From Christmas 1916 the Russians made only some very isolated attempts to relieve the Romanian Front by attacking at different points. The only such operation which caused temporary concern was a thrust by 65 Russian ID on 3 January 1917 against the heights northwest of the Mestecanesci Pass. Along a front five kilometers wide the enemy penetrated the lines of the k.u.k. 8 CD to a depth of about 2000 paces. The situation seemed threatening because there were no reserves on hand. But the enemy didn't build on this initial success. Since the new line to which 8 CD had been pushed back was also favorable for defense, a plan for recovering the old position was scrapped.

The Russians continued to shift units to the Romanian Front; thus at the start of December the 1 Rif Div (from XXIX Corps), hitherto stationed near Dvinsk, and 80 ID (from XXX Corps of the Special Army) both appeared on the Sereth. Apparently the Russians wanted to effectively guard the line between the foot of the mountains and the mouth of the Sereth, thus preventing an invasion of Moldavia and then southern Russia.

The German OHL, on the other hand, was pulling all available German units out of Romania. Already on the day after the capture of Braila the Danube Army received an order to send 11 Bav ID away. Among the Bulgarian units, after several changes the 4 and 12 ID were stationed in Dobruja and the Combined ID on the Sereth; 1 ID would eventually be sent to Macedonia. The

German mounted regiments of Goltz's Combined CD were assigned to guard the lines of communication, replacing the k.u.k. 7 CD which entered the line on the Sereth. The Danube Army was placed under the HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army.

To enable troops to quickly switch from one bank of the Danube to the other, equipment from the bridges that had been built at Sistov and Giurgevo was used in the first days of January to construct another military bridge at Hirsova. First, however, the Mine-Sweeping Detachment of the Danube Flotilla and several platoons of pioneers had to clear enemy mines out of the River. Then we built our own mine barrier to guard against enemy ships at Isaccea<sup>559</sup>; the barrier was guarded on the southern bank by the "Land Group" of the Danube Flotilla. Some of the fighting vessels of the Flotilla spent the winter at Turnu Severin, and the others at Budapest.

Under 9<sup>th</sup> German Army, the divisions of Schmettow's Cavalry Corps were pulled from the front and sent to other theaters of operation. Toward the end of January they were followed by 41 ID. Group Gerok was instructed to give up the HQ of XXXIX Res Corps and 49 Res ID in the middle of the month. The latter unit was replaced by 8 Mtn Bde, which had marched through Tulnici into the Haromszek. The 15 Bav Res Inf Bde (Res IR 18), which had been under 301 ID but belonged to 8 Bav Res ID, went to the Csik as an Army Group reserve. Starting on 20 January the 70 Hon ID<sup>560</sup>, which hitherto had been recuperating at Lugos, relieved 187 ID which was to go to the Western front.

Under 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Stein's Group command was dissolved. 16 Lst Mtn Bde (the former 61 Hon ID) and 8 Bav Res ID were placed under GdI Litzmann. Col. Daubner's Group (along with the Transylvania Volunteer Battalion) returned to 39 Hon ID. After 51 Hon ID deployed on the southern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army the 73 Hon Inf Bde returned to their parent unit (37 Hon ID) and 10 CD went to 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Finally the 10 Bav ID of 1<sup>st</sup> Army changed places with 31 ID of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

Meanwhile the military operations in Romania approached their conclusion.

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559 In this operation the commander of the river mine-sweeping detachment, Korvetten-Kapitän Georg Ritter von Zwierkowski, was so distinguished that he received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

560 70 Res FA Bde had stayed with 4<sup>th</sup> Army in Volhynia; at this time it rejoined 70 Div in Transylvania.

On 7 January the German OHL sent a teleprinter message to Teschen, stating their opinion "that the terrain and weather conditions no longer permit the advance of the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army and of Group Gerok (except for Group Ruiz)." Moreover, 9<sup>th</sup> Army's offensive hadn't progressed sufficiently past Focsani to enable them to help Gerok forward. Therefore the OHL asked GO Conrad to order an end to the attacks by 1<sup>st</sup> Army (which had already been done by Archduke Joseph) and by XXXIX Res Corps.

But the OHL still expected that 9<sup>th</sup> Army would advance their left wing up to the Susita. On the one hand this would enable artillery fire to keep the enemy from using the road and railroad from Marasesci to Tecuciu, and on the other hand secure for the allies use of the roads in the Putna valley for shifting their reserves. Group Ruiz was therefore ordered to join the attack of 9<sup>th</sup> Army's left wing, in the direction of Panciu. Although XXXIX Res Corps could no longer count on getting to the Trotusu, they could attack to improve their positions. Perhaps they would advance so far forward that they could at least dominate the Trotusu valley with artillery fire.

On 10 January the k.u.k. 71 and German 187 ID once more attacked, despite their reduced manpower and the fact that the men were worn down by the continuing actions. In two days of hard fighting the inner wings of both divisions worked their way forward about 2 km. But they didn't gain positions that would have enabled them to disrupt the lines of communication in the Trotusu valley.

Under Group Ruiz, on the 10<sup>th</sup> the 218 ID stormed the village of Maresti, and 6 Cav Bde took several forested heights east of the Casinu valley. The Group could gain nothing more due to increasingly stiff enemy resistance.

Falkenhayn regarded his assignment to capture the enemy's Putna position as impossible. To him it seemed much more important to immediately start building trenches and shelters, and on 10 January issued an order to take up permanent positions.<sup>561</sup> Now Group Ruiz, after linking up with Krafft's Corps south of Iresci, also ceased their attacks.

The hitherto mild weather deteriorated in mid-January. An icy northeast wind blew from the Russian steppes and made any military operation impossible. The great and constantly-

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561 Falkenhayn, "9. Armee", Vol. II, pp. 126 ff.

changing campaign in Romania had come to an end.

### ***G. Evaluation of the Campaign in Wallachia***

After the Romanians were expelled from Transylvania, both sides opposed each other once more along the border mountains in which the war had started on 27 August 1916. But now their roles were reversed. After the lost battles, the Romanians were forced onto the defensive and the allies had gained the initiative.

#### The allied offensive

The original plan to invade Wallachia south of Kronstadt was soon abandoned, and for good reasons. The fighting in the Kronstadt passes proved that it would be very difficult to break through the high and broad mountain wall here. Even if the operation succeeded, the invaders would then have collided with the Romanian strategic reserves assembled by Bucharest. When the allied troops, exhausted from the mountain fighting, entered the plains they presumably would have been vulnerable to the same type of flank attacks with which the Romanians foiled the first attempt at the end of October to push through the Vulkan Mountains with insufficient forces. Moreover it would have been very difficult to time a decisive advance south in the Prahova valley so that it would be coordinated with the Danube crossing by Mackensen's units.

The continuing pressure which the corps of Krafft, Morgen and Staabs exerted on the enemy completely diverted the latter's attention from the Vulkan and Szurduk Passes, where they even weakened the defenders. Falkenhayn's second attack in the Vulkan Mountains, conducted with greater strength and in consideration of the lessons learned in the first attempt, therefore achieved its goal with relative ease. When the Battle of Targu Jiu was won, Little Wallachia was also conquered. Since the Romanian high command refused to pull back the Cerna and Danube Groups in time, it's understandable that they also neglected to blow up the bridge at Caracalu. This gave Schmettow's and Morgen's Corps the opportunity to gain the eastern bank of the Alt and to easily maneuver the enemy away from this river, where they could have established a strong defensive front. Now the I Romanian Corps was also compelled to leave the route to the plains open for Krafft's Corps, which had been boring forward with continuous and systematic attacks from the Red Tower Pass to the southern edge of the mountains.

Now that Krafft's and Kühne's Corps were operating shoulder-to-shoulder, it seemed that the the further advance of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army could proceed with relatively little danger. As their left wing advanced along the foot of the mountains, they would unbar the way into the plain for I and then XXXIX Res Corps, which could intervene against the flank of the Romanian main body deployed in front of Bucharest. On the right Schmettow's cavalry would establish contact on the Danube with the Danube Army after the latter crossed the river at Sistov.

It was recommended that GFM Mackensen should cross over on 24 or 25 November. Apparently to be on the safe side, however, the Field Marshal had GdI Kosch's divisions advance over the Danube already on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The unexpected weakness of the enemy resistance then caused the Danube Army to push forward independently toward Bucharest before Falkenhayn's right wing was on the scene. Thus they gave the Romanian high command the opening which they'd been awaiting since the Battle of Targu Jiu; the enemy would thrust against the unprotected flank of the Danube Army with their strategic reserves.

#### The Romanian response

The plan for the Battle of the Argesu certainly was a bold concept by the Romanians. But the assembly of the striking group required a lot of time. And although the thrust was finally launched in an effective direction, it was evident that the Romanian troops still didn't have the hitting power to destroy the Danube Army in the limited time available. Meanwhile Falkenhayn had evaluated the situation with lightning speed and sent his Army against the open flank and rear of the Romanian attacking group, as well as against the southern flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army which was facing west to shield the operation. With these two blows, which gave the fighting on the Argesu the characteristics of a very fluid and tense battle of maneuver, the Romanians were decisively defeated. The shock was so great that the cohesion of the main body of their Army, which had already suffered heavy losses, continued to deteriorate. Its remnants were led back to Moldavia; the few units that were still capable of fighting stayed at the front as 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

It should be emphasized that when the Romanian troops were defending their home soil in mountain positions they fought gallantly for prolonged periods. In this situation their tactical leadership was of noteworthy quality, as demonstrated in numerous counterattacks. But their power of resistance broke down quickly in the plains. Just as previously, the Romanians

couldn't bear the fire of heavy artillery, and weren't equal to their opponents. The troops continued to lose confidence in their generals, especially after the unfortunate outcome of the Battle of the Argesu. This led to the symptoms of collapse which were described previously.

Another factor contributed considerably to the defeat of the Romanian Army. In the hope that the campaign would be short, the high command had placed all their trained soldiers in field formations and made no provision for replacing casualties. When significant losses did occur, first the troops on the lines of communication were combed in search of replacements. Then it was necessary to combine regiments within the divisions to ensure that the units were battle-worthy, and finally whole divisions were merged. The result was a confusing intermingling of units, which harmed the cohesion of the troops. For example, the 1/17 ID consisted of the remnants of 26 regiments. The other combined divisions were not in a much better situation.

At the end, after four and a half months of continuing campaigns, of the 23 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions just 6½ infantry divisions, with a strength of 90,000 men, were still at the front. 105,000 men were being reorganized in Moldavia. Since combat strength had been 505,000 men when the war started<sup>562</sup>, casualties must have been about 310,000. The Romanians estimated that they had lost 17,000 killed, 50,000 wounded, 147,000 taken prisoner and 90,000 missing. In addition the Romanians gave up 359 guns, 346 machine guns and 293,000 rifles.<sup>563</sup>

There are no figures available to show the casualties of the Russians, or of the allies, in the Romanian campaign.

#### The role of the Russians

Romania had caused its allies a sharp disappointment through the failure of its Army. The principal sufferers were the Russians. Against their will, they shifted corps after corps into Moldavia. These units arrived too slowly for the desperate and impatient Romanians. But the fault wasn't entirely Russia's. The railroads in Moldavia were incapable of transporting masses

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562 There was a total of 564,000 men in the field armies.

563 Dabija, Vol. III, pp. 642 ff. Kiritzesco's "La Roumanie dans la Guerre Mondiale 1916-1919" (Paris, 1934; p. 261) estimates Romanian casualties as 50,000 dead, 80,000 wounded and 110,000 prisoners.

of troops. To relieve the Moldavian rail lines the Russian cavalry traveled by road, but many of them had come from the trenches and therefore the horses weren't used to long rides. The result was that Russian units arrived on the scene in dribbles, making it easier for Mackensen's smaller armies to clinch the victory. Also the Russians in Romania didn't fight with much energy. They were engaged in a foreign cause. And the Russian high command was principally concerned only about the protection of their own southern flank.

At the end of the campaign there were three Russian armies with 25 infantry and 13 cavalry divisions stationed in the area south of the Three Countries' Corner. Thus, just as General Alexeiev had feared when he made a gloomy prediction, the Russians were forced to take over another 400 km of front down to the Black Sea. Direct Russian help hadn't protected the Romanians from a destructive defeat. Since 31 August Russia had also tried to provide relief by thrusts at numerous points along the fronts in Volhynia, Galicia and Transylvania, which in some cases were repulsed by the allies only when they committed their last units; however, the attacks hadn't influenced the course of the Romanian campaign.

#### Characteristics of the campaign

More perhaps than any other campaign of the World War, the Romanian battles featured every type of military activity. There were delaying actions, an offensive in the plains, attacks over wide mountains, envelopment maneuvers by large cavalry corps, river crossings, and supporting bombardments by river monitors. The result was a completely fluid war of movement. In this type of campaign the overall commanders had full control of operational planning, and the troops could display their tactical proficiency. The German divisions which bore the main burden in Wallachia proved to be far superior to the Romanians, but so also did the Aus-Hung. troops attached to the German units. The mountain brigades in particular performed brilliantly. Falkenhayn and Morgen asserted that without these brigades the breakthroughs in the Alt valley and the Törzburg Pass couldn't have been achieved.

The war against Romania made heavy new demands on the transportation network of the Danube Monarchy, which was already running at almost full capacity. The rail net in the area was limited, and in some places there was just one line of tracks. Another obstacle to coordinating movement was the fact that the four railroads leading from Hungary over the western border of

Transylvania came together in the area Des - Maros Ujvar - Piski - Hatszeg into one line, which split up again farther to the east. Before the outbreak of war with Romania some significant improvements had been made with the help of German construction crews, so that the Aus-Hung. and German units could deploy relatively quickly. The heaviest traffic during the initial deployment against Romania developed between 3 and 29 September with 583 trains (22 per day). Since at the same time there was a large movement of refugees, and some trains were used for other essential purposes, the rail capacity of Transylvania was utilized to its maximum capacity.

To further strengthen the allies fighting along the front between the Pripyat and the Carpathians, 1438 transport trains were needed in August and September 1916 (or 24 per day). In the following months through the end of the year there was even greater traffic, involving another 2500 trains to support the Russian front. Therefore in these five months the volume of troop traffic for fighting Russia was nearly as great as for the initial deployment of the Aus-Hung. Army in this theater in August 1914.

Another 2082 troop trains were sent to support the new front facing Romania by the end of the year. This was more than three times the total used in April 1915 for the breakthrough at Gorlice (although in the latter operation the daily traffic was five times greater in a short and sudden burst of activity).

The deployment against Romania had a lasting impact on the transportation network of the interior. Partly because the Hungarian railroads were under strict central control and ran together around Budapest, the months when traffic was concentrated toward Transylvania overtaxed the system in central Hungary.<sup>564</sup> To anticipate, the serious traffic crises along the interior railroads, which at first were temporary but later lasted for ever longer periods, would extend to the cis-Leithanian network and in the remaining years of the war could no longer be overcome.

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564 The first sign that the system was overtaxed was the appearance of periods of so-called "Staubrutto" [roughly, "massive slack-times"]. These were periods when tens of thousands of loaded boxcars couldn't reach their destinations and just stood still, either because of the traffic or operational problems (such as a shortage of locomotives or personnel, difficulties in the marshaling yards or loading facilities, etc.).

In broad terms, the objective of the Entente in the Romanian campaign of 1916 was to penetrate the open southern flank of the Austro-Hungarian-German Eastern front, which wasn't yet anchored on the Black Sea. This plan was advocated mainly by the French, to whom victory over the Germans seemed increasingly remote. Therefore the Romanians were directed toward Transylvania, in order to overthrow the Danube Monarchy. Then the Germans, having been robbed of their ally, could be forced to their knees.<sup>565</sup>

The Central Powers, on the other hand, were trying to decisively thrash the Romanian Army; thus they would establish the shortest possible line between the original flank of the Eastern front (in southern Bukovina) and the Black Sea. For this purpose they originally planned to have strong forces thrust toward Bucharest from Kronstadt and Sistov, which would have cut the Romanians deployed in Wallachia from their lines of communication to Moldavia and led to their encirclement. But the difficulties posed by this plan were greater than the will of the commanders. Therefore other methods were tried, and finally by taking a detour through Little Wallachia the allies were able to set up their front between the Three Countries' Corner and the mouths of the Danube. Therefore they were satisfied with the outcome of the Romanian campaign. Transylvania was liberated, Wallachia and Dobruja conquered.

## **VII. The Autumn Battles Against the Italians**

### ***A. The Seventh Battle of the Isonzo, 14-17 September***

#### **1. The new defensive front of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army**

At the end of the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, only on the upper and central parts of the river were the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army still

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565 Kiszling, "Feldzug gegen Rumänien", p. 328.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: It is true that the Romanians preferred to follow the course advocated by France (to invade Transylvania) rather than the advice of Alexeiev (to invade Dobruja). However, this was due in large measure to reasons of their own. Since their principal political objective was Transylvania, the Romanians wanted to ensure they were in control there when the Entente victory was won.

occupying the positions they'd stubbornly defended in actions since the start of the war. It is true that the area lost on the lower Isonzo, as measured by the length of the new front, wasn't large. However, the loss of the Görz bridgehead and the evacuation of the Karst plateau at Doberdo forced the Aus-Hung. commanders to tackle the difficult task of building completely new defenses.

Above all it was necessary to replenish the ranks of the units which had shrunk so much during the fighting, and to bring fresh units to 5<sup>th</sup> Army so that it would again be a fully effective force. For there was no doubt that the enemy would resume their thrust to the east after a pause, which they also needed to restore order to their armies, replace casualties, and move up their heavy guns and trench mortars. This pause in the fighting was prolonged by the hesitancy of the Italian commanders in choosing their next goal. The defenders took advantage of the extra time to prepare for a new and successful defensive battle.

By incorporating March formations and bringing up units as reinforcements, the strength of 5<sup>th</sup> Army was increased by the end of August to 148,000 riflemen. (This figure includes replacement troops in the Army's sector who were still being trained.) At this time the Italian units on the Isonzo front were estimated to have about 240,000 riflemen (not counting replacements).<sup>566</sup>

The 28 ID was arriving from Tyrol toward the end of the Sixth Isonzo Battle, and were all present by 18 August. 44 LW ID had come from Galicia, and were followed by 16 ID (also from the northeastern front).<sup>567</sup> Good Landsturm units which had no regular replacements were replenished with troops from some dissolved units; the k.u. 210 Lst Inf Bde, which had come to 5<sup>th</sup> Army from Albania, was also employed for this purpose.

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566 Anton Pitreich, manuscript

567 The order of battle of FML von Schariczer's 16 ID was - 31 Inf Bde (IR 2 [4]), 32 Inf Bde (IR 31 [4], IV Bn/IR 64). The 16 FA Bde (two field cannon and four field howitzer batties) went to XVI Corps.

Thus by mid-September the 5<sup>th</sup> Army consisted of:

- . XV Corps [Sector I] of 21 bns, 1¾ sqdns, 30 batties
  - . 50 ID - 15 and 3 Mtn Bdes
  - . 1 ID - 7 Mtn and 22 Lst Mtn Bdes
- . XVII Corps [Sector II.a] of 24 bns, 2 sqdns, 26 batties
  - . 62 ID - 205 Lst Inf and 121 Inf Bdes
  - . 57 ID - 2 Mtn & 18 Inf Bdes
- . XVI Corps [Sector II.b] of 32 bns, 1 sqdn, 55 batties
  - . 58 ID - 8, 4 & 5 Mtn Bdes
  - . 43 LW ID - 86 LW Inf Bde, 59 Inf Bde
- . VII Corps [Sector III.a]
  - . 17 ID - 34 & 33 Inf Bdes
  - . 28 ID - 55 & 56 Inf Bdes
- . Sector III.b of 18 bns, 1 sqdn, 29 batties
  - . 9 ID - 60 & 17 Inf Bdes
  - . 24 Lst Mtn Bde
- . Sectors IV and V had smaller units for coast defense
- . Army reserves were 16 ID, 20 Hon ID and 44 LW ID. Counting these units plus Sectors IV and V the 5<sup>th</sup> Army had 155 bns, 10 sqdns and 193 batties
- . Also in the Army sector was 10 Mtn Bde (in AOK reserve) with 6 bns

Efforts were also made to substantially increase the strength of the artillery on the Isonzo front. From 15 August to the end of the month 38 batteries arrived in the Army's sector.<sup>568</sup> At the same time the re-arming of the Aus-Hung. artillery with new guns and the provision of substantial ammunition supplies made rapid progress. While the defenders were thus improving their artillery situation, the Italians' superiority in trench mortars, which could no longer be countered, increased in importance. Since the end of 1915 the Italians had paid very great attention to trench mortars, based on the lessons of the Western front. Their new corps of "bombardieri", placed under the artillery and formed into batteries, soon was a very dangerous enemy.<sup>569</sup>

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568 Anton Pitreich, manuscript. The total included 7 mountain cannon, 10 field cannon, 13 field howitzer, two 10.4 cm cannon, two 15 cm howitzer, two 21 cm mortar and two 30.5 cm mortar batteries.

569 Here is some data about the different Italian trench mortars (Segato, Vol. I, p. 316).  
 . 5.8 cm caliber - These were the main weapon of the light batteries; they fired projectiles weighing 16 kg. Mark 58.A models had a range of 300 meters, 58.B models 500 meters. The light batteries also had Belgian V.D. and 58.W (Westinghouse)

Improvements to the layout and technical preparation of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's new battle positions lagged behind the increase in the Army's combat capabilities.

Construction of positions could proceed quickly in the hilly terrain east of Görz, where the ground was favorable for digging trenches and forest cover made it possible to work during the day. The garrisons on the Army's southern wing (in Sector III.b) could also count on half-way completed defensive installations; the troops were stationed behind barbed wire in trenches deep enough to protect their entire bodies, which had been part of the former third position.

But on the other hand the situation in Sector III.a (between the Wippach and Oppacchiasella) was quite unfavorable. Here part of the defenders' line had been set up during the see-saw actions at the end of the Sixth Battle as hastily-constructed positions of a temporary nature, similar to those used of necessity during the first fighting on the Isonzo. On the granite slopes of Nadlogem, a part of the front of great tactical importance on the northern edge of the Comen plateau, the hard ground and lack of cover against the nearby enemy trenches made it impossible to make any noteworthy progress in building a position.

Here at the start of September the defenders of the northern slope of the crest were stationed in trenches 50 to 60 cm deep covered by walls of stones; similar breastworks and sand bags protected the "positions" on the crest itself (which consisted just of shallow rifle pits), and on the southern slope. The inadequate barricades - mostly Spanish riders - were shot up

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weapons.

. **24** cm caliber - Fired projectiles weighing 67 to 71 kg. The range of the 240.C model ("C" = corte, or short barrel) was 1300 meters, increased to 2000 in 1917. The 240.L ("L" = lungo, or long barrel) had a 1300 meter range, increased to 2700 in 1917; this was the main weapon of the heavy batteries. The 240.CA ("A" = allungamento, or extended barrel) had a 1300 meter range. The 240.LA also had a 1300 meter range, increased to 4000 in 1917.

. **40** cm caliber - Fired projectiles weighing 265 kg for more than 4000 meters. The only model was the "400."

. The Italians also used the Stockes [Stokes?] **grenade throwers**, which could fire 6 kg projectiles up to 700 meters. Improvements by the end of the war increased the range to 1500 meters. The projectiles were the so-called "flying mines."

every day by the enemy and had to be rebuilt at night.

Such was the nature of the defenses on the part of the front whose retention was essential for successful resistance on the Karst plateau of Comen in fall 1916.

## **2. The Italians prepare to continue the offensive on the Karst**

The orders issued by the Italian high command on 17 August, which ended the general offensive by 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies, also contained guidelines for resuming their thrust.<sup>570</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would first solidify their control of Görz by capturing the heights east and north of the city; then 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would attack on the Karst. In Cadorna's opinion this advance in echelon was necessary because he lacked sufficient artillery. Moreover he believed that after reaching the Vallone sector 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had achieved a firm front, while 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was still insecure at the foot of the hills east of Görz.

Based on these instructions, the Italian preparations were in full swing when the high command altered their plans on 25 August. Reconnaissance in the direction of the intended objectives had meager success, because thick vegetation made it difficult to make out the defensive installations. Therefore Cadorna came to the conclusion that a longer and more systematic preparation would be needed here before he could attack with confidence in success. It seemed that it would be especially difficult to capture the Aus-Hung. positions on the S. Marco Heights with a frontal assault; farther south the swampy ground along the Vertojbica hindered all attempts to come nearer to the defenders.

Therefore Cadorna decided to first have 3<sup>rd</sup> Army thrust ahead on the Karst. The decisive role was assigned to the Army's northern wing, which would exploit the success won toward the end of the Sixth Battle by advancing along the crest bordering the Karst on the north, through the Fajti hrib to the Trstelj. After the latter heights were captured, it would be possible to help 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to move forward in the Görz basin with a flank thrust to the north, and also to cause the fall of the Karst defenses with a thrust south toward the Hermada.

So the main efforts of the Italians in the following battles

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570 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, p. 1

were directed toward capturing the rolling northern edge of the Comen plateau. A pre-requirement for the success of the attacking group here was to neutralize the opposing artillery in the Wippach valley; this was the task of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

According to orders issued to G.Lt Piacentini, the latter Army was to pin down their opponents in the Görz basin with continuous artillery fire; this would deceive the Austrians into thinking that attacks were imminent against particular parts of the front. VIII Corps on the lower Vertojica was to make the deception especially effective so that their opponents couldn't help the neighboring front on the northern slope of the plateau.

The infantry of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would actually attack only in local sectors where prospects seemed hopeful. Otherwise VIII Corps would be ready to thrust ahead strongly as soon as XI Corps had gained substantial ground south of the Wippach. Then VIII Corps would follow the XI<sup>th</sup> in echelon on the left. Thus in the following phase of the battle they could support the planned frontal attack of XXVI Corps toward S. Marco with a flanking thrust from the south.

The northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was preparing to attack toward the Rombon simultaneously with the resumption of the attack on the Karst.

Finally the Italian high command had misleading reports issued about an impending offensive in the Sugana valley. But in reality no attack was intended here; there would be strong but limited thrusts in other sectors - in the Pasubio area, on the Fassana crest and later also on the northern part of the Asiago plateau - to pin the Austrians down on the Tyrol front. Thus the enemy could also come nearer to the objectives for which they'd been striving since the end of June.

The main weakness of the Italian plans, as actually implemented in mid-September, was that despite all the attempts at deception it soon was clear that the attack was limited to the Karst plateau; this made it possible for the defender to deploy their limited reserves in the right place.

### **3. Analysis of the general situation at the start of September; the strength of the opposing sides**

In the critical overall situation of the Central Powers in the East and Southwest, the great loss of territory due to the

continuing attacks of the Russian Southwest Front and the fall of the city of Görz had compelled the high commands to repeatedly keep forces ready for the threatened sectors. Prospects improved somewhat in the second half of August. But then on 27 August Romania's declaration of war on Austria-Hungary caused a substantial though not unexpected aggravation of the situation; once more great demands were made on the other fronts and on the coolness of the leading generals.

The Aus-Hung. front against Italy was the only place that could provide troops for the new battlefield. A new Italian attempt to thrust toward Trieste was expected at the end of August, but for the time being didn't develop. Because of the enemy's careful concealment measures it wasn't possible to determine whether this was just a temporary postponement. The situation reports to the k.u.k. AOK from 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ and their subordinate sector commanders on 5 September didn't clarify this question. Therefore the high command wasn't in a position to weaken the Isonzo front to address the demands of the Romanian theater of operations. The overall situation seemed too much like that before the Sixth Isonzo Battle, when the apparent momentary inactivity of the Italians had led to the transfer of units.

Therefore at first the only plan was to hold in readiness one of the mountain brigades which had been sent from Tyrol to the Isonzo, so that it could go to Transylvania if possible; perhaps another brigade could also be pulled from one of the less endangered parts of the Isonzo front after the situation became somewhat clearer. GO Conrad firmly resisted pressure from the German OHL to make a decision. After the end of the bad weather which had set in at the start of September the intentions of the Italian high command would have to become apparent, thus making further decisions possible.

This cautious approach proved to be fully justified. On 10 September the Italians started attacks in the Pasubio sector; along with the continuing actions in the Fassana Alps, they pinned down the units of Archduke Eugene's Army Group - which had been weakened during August by giving up troops - and hindered any further substantial transfer of men from Tyrol to the Isonzo front. Therefore the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army would have to count only on the reserves already behind the Isonzo front to fend off the offensive which started on 14 September.

#### Deployment of the opposing forces

The Italian high command had mustered substantial forces for the

impending battle. Under G.Lt Aosta's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, on 14 September the XI Corps were stationed on the 5 km long front from the Wippach to the town of Oppacchiasella, with 23, 22 and 21 ID plus the 49 ID behind them as the Corps' reserve in the area of S. Martino del Carso and Sdraussina. XIII Corps was in the sector between Oppacchiasella and Lake Doberdo (3 km) with 19 and 31 ID plus 34 ID in reserve. VII Corps held the sector between Lake Doberdo and the sea with 16 and 14 ID plus the (dismounted) 1 CD. Behind these ten divisions, three more were held ready as the Army's reserve under XXIV Corps - 4 and 33 ID plus the Catania and 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Brigades. And behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army the XIV Corps was stationed at the disposal of the high command, with 45 and 47 ID plus the 28 ID which had just arrived from Tyrol.<sup>571</sup>

Aosta's Army had a strength of 150 battalions and 24 dismounted squadrons; behind them were 36 battalions in the high command's reserve. The Army's artillery totaled 504 light and 450 medium and heavy guns; there were 462 light and medium trench mortars plus 124 heavy pieces.<sup>572</sup>

Thus 186 battalions, 24 dismounted squadrons, 954 guns and 584 trench mortars opposed the southern wing of Boroevic's Army, which had 59 battalions, 195 light guns, 89 medium and heavy guns, 177 light and medium trench mortars and 78 heavy trench mortars. Between the mouth of the Vertojbica (where it flows into the Wippach) and the town of Nova Vas GdK Archduke Joseph's VII Corps held a front of 6 km. The Corps' 17 ID (GM Ströher) was on the northern wing as far as the crest of the heights on the northern edge of the plateau with 10 battalions. Farther south was 28 ID (FML Schneider-Manns-Au) with 13 battalions. Two battalions were in the Corps' reserve. To defend the 8 km front of Sector III.b, FML Schenk had available the 18 battalions of 9 ID and of 24 Lst Mtn Bde.

5<sup>th</sup> Army also had reserve units:

. Behind the southern wing were GM Lukachich's 20 Hon ID with 6 battalions and 31 Inf Bde (from 16 ID) with 4 battalions.

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571 "Le Grandi Unita." On 30<sup>th</sup> August the 1<sup>st</sup> Italian Army - which had a substantial superiority in units over their opponents - were ordered to hold a corps in readiness to move to the Isonzo front. Of this force, only 28 ID actually was shifted during September (Segato, Vol. I, p. 298).

572 "Le Medaglie d'oro, Vol. II, p. 177. Tosti, however, reckons there were 566 light and 430 medium and heavy guns plus 584 trench mortars (p. 181).

. Farther north was FML Nemecek's 44 LW ID with 12 battalions in the Ternova area (thus behind the Army's center).  
 . East of Görz and behind XVI Corps for the purpose of relieving its troops was 32 Inf Bde, which at this time had 5 battalions available for the Army.  
 Finally the 10 Mtn Bde, as a reserve of the high command, was stationed on the railroad at Dornberg.

Of the 186 Italian battalions, only 114 actually served at the front in the following battle and just 102 actually were engaged. Thus the Italians' numerical superiority in infantry over the defenders of the Isonzo was no more than it had been in the first battles; however, their three-fold superiority in artillery was very marked.

The infantry orders of battle<sup>573</sup>

ITALIAN

. XI Corps - 21 ID [Bdes Regina & Pisa], 22 ID [Bdes Brescia & Ferrara], 23 ID [Bdes Sardegna & Lombardia], 49 ID [Bdes Pinerolo & Napoli]  
 . XIII Corps - 19 ID [Bdes Marche & Ivrea], 31 ID [Bdes Salerno & Macerata], 34 ID [Bdes Chieti & Catanzaro]  
 . VII Corps - 14 ID [Bde Alessandria & 1 dismounted Cav Bde], 1 ID [Bdes Cremona & Lazio], 1 Cav Div [with just 2 dismounted Cav Bde]  
 . XXIV Corps - 4 ID [Bdes Spezia & Barletta], 33 ID [Bdes Modena & Padova]; independent Bde Catania & 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Bde  
 . XIV Corps - 28 ID [Bdes Bari & Arezzo], 45 ID [Bdes Toscana & Trapani], 47 ID [Bdes Sesia & Pescara]

AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN (as of 15 September; the strength figures reflect casualties already suffered in the first days of the battle, but only partly so for VII Corps)

. XVI Corps (Sector II.b - opposite 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, and not heavily engaged) - 31 bns, 45 heavy guns, 162 infantry guns; 28,850 riflemen

. 58<sup>th</sup> ID - 8 Mtn Bde [Bns IV/24, III/35, IV/58, III/85; BH FJB 5; k.k. Lst Bns 43, 43], 5 Mtn Bde [LW IR 29 (3), k.u. Lst IR 2 (3), 4 Mtn Bde [LW IW 37 (3); k.k. Lst Bns IV/39, 75]

. 43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID - 86 LW Bde [LW IR 20 (3), 22 (3)], 59 Inf Bde

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573 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Several Italian sources have been used for the orders of battle in the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battles. The organization of the k.u.k. infantry is shown in the original in Beilage 31.

- [IR 24 (3), 41 (4)]
- . VII Corps (Sector III.a) - 25 bns, 44 heavy guns, 118 infantry guns; 18,150 riflemen
  - . 17<sup>th</sup> ID - 34 Bde [IR 43 (3), 46 (3)], 33 Bde [IR 39 (3), 61 (3)]
  - . 28<sup>th</sup> ID - 55 Bde [IR 87 (3), 96 (4)], 56 Bde [Bns III/14, I/47; FJB 9 & 11; I & II Bns of Hon IR 1]
- . Sector III.b - 18 bns, 45 heavy guns, 77 infantry guns; 13,650 riflemen
  - . k.k. 24<sup>th</sup> Lst Mtn Bde [k.k. Lst IR 11 (3), 27 (3)]
  - . 9<sup>th</sup> ID - 60 Bde [IR 30 (3), 80 (3)], 17 Bde [IR 91 (3), 102 (3)]

(Total strength of the following reserves was 21 bns; 20,650 riflemen...)

- . Army reserves
  - . 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID - 39 Hon Bde [Hon IR 3 (2), 4 (2)], 81 Hon Bde [Hon IR 17 (2)]
  - . 16<sup>th</sup> ID - 31 Bde [IR 2 (4)], 32 Bde [IR 31 (4), IV Bn/64]
  - . (LW IR # 27, which had been under 44 LW ID in the Ternova area on the 14<sup>th</sup>, went into the Army's reserves on the 15<sup>th</sup>)
- . In AOK reserve - 10 Mtn Bde [Bns IV/20, I/21, I/62, III/79, I/90, III/BH 1]

#### **4. The battle on the Karst**

##### **a. Preliminary thrusts and the major attack of 14 and 15 September**

###### Developments through 13 September

The interruption of the Italian attacks on 17 August had closed the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, but by no means did the Isonzo front become quiet.

When conditions were favorable, both sides undertook small-scale operations, which became livelier as time went on. On 3 September the HQ of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army ordered that such operations should be used to finally obtain clarity about the enemy's intentions, since there seemed to be no reason for their prolonged hesitation.

The Italian infantry were systematically inching forward, which indicated they intended to resume the offensive. At the start of September the enemy used saps and walls of sandbags to come within storming distance. While the Italians' light artillery and trench mortars supported this advance, and substantially disrupted the defenders' construction of positions, their heavy artillery was almost entirely silent for the time being.

Bad weather in the first days of September heavily damaged the positions of both sides; especially along the Vertojbica mud and cave-ins made it torture to man the trenches. High water in the Isonzo had a severe impact on the Italian bridges, thus considerably delaying the approach of the attacking artillery and of ammunition supplies, and all the other enemy preparations.

Better weather on 7 September was accompanied by increased Italian artillery activity; in the following days the defenders came under fire from many new batteries. Combat activity took a more serious turn on 10 September; the front between Nad logem and the town of Nova Vas in particular was bombarded by light artillery and the advanced part of the position on the Nad logem slope was the target of many thrown explosives. The Italian heavy artillery began to pound the approach routes, assembly points and hamlets behind the defensive front. The enemy's customary bursts of sudden surprise fire were resumed. All these actions indicated to the experienced defenders of the

Karst that more significant developments were imminent.

In the afternoon of 13 September the lively Italian artillery fire, which was already striking far behind the front and forcing the higher command HQ to shift positions, became continuous. This brought the tormenting uncertainty to an end. We had come to the eve of the Seventh Battle.

#### 14 September

The battle opened with a raid by three squadrons of Caproni bombers against Trieste, which however didn't cause any noteworthy damage. At dawn on 14 September the preparatory fire by the artillery and trench mortars resumed with full weight on the defensive front between the Wippach and the sea. Under the massive bombardment the trenches and barriers at many points were almost completely destroyed. Therefore much of the fighting which followed took place on terrain that was constantly being churned up by the guns, and in which both sides could report successes such as the capture of position or victorious counter-attacks. The largest Italian guns, striking far behind the front, destroyed telephone installations and interrupted traffic to the forward line. The thick smoke and dust clouds covering the battlefield restricted visibility and hampered optical communications, so that it was difficult for the commanders to gain a picture of the situation along the front. It seemed that the principal objective of the impending attack was the Karst sector, but heavy fire was also directed against the Aus-Hung. trenches on the uppermost part of the Isonzo, at Plava, and near Görz. Therefore it wasn't impossible that attacks could take place in these locations, either simultaneously with the main thrust or afterward.

After nine hours of preparatory fire, in the afternoon the Duke of Aosta unleashed his Army for the infantry assault. On this day the Karst front witnessed a large-scale coordinated offensive in full fury, during which the enemy masses stormed forward with noteworthy precision.

The Italian attacks on the northern slope of the plateau failed to get off the ground; they were checked by flanking fire from our artillery in the Wippach valley, which the guns of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army tried in vain to suppress. Here, as in all sectors that were under attack, the defending artillery was well-handled and effective; they had conserved their strength during the Italians' preliminary bombardment, so that afterwards they could shatter the attacking infantry.

The southern wing of the k.u.k. 17 ID on the rocky slope of Nad logem was soon in extreme difficulty. The south Hungarian IR 61 had sunk to battalion strength under massive enemy fire, and was assaulted after 3:30 PM by the main body of 21 Italian ID (three regiments). This mighty thrust forced the defenders to withdraw from the foremost part of their trenches; only a few remnants joined the reserves who'd established a blocking position along the chord of the arc of the original line. But these reserves, helped by the northern wing of 28 ID, were able to prevent any further enemy advance. Shortly thereafter (just before 5:00 PM) a brigade from 21 Italian ID delivered a powerful thrust in the direction of Lokvica. Most of the Italians were checked by the rifle and artillery fire of 28 ID; some of them penetrated the sectors of several companies and had to be expelled with a counterattack.

In the Oppacchiasella area all the attacks of 22 ID collapsed, mostly under barrage fire from the defending artillery. Only on both sides of the road to Kostanjevica were the Italians able to overrun the sectors of three companies; here the defenders once more established a firm line 100 to 200 paces toward the east.

At Nova Vas the 19 Italian ID began to attack in deep formations around 3:15 PM. The waves of Italians pushed into two positions, but were thrown out in a sharp counter-thrust by FJB 11 and parts of IR 102. Farther south the same bloody game was played out between the town of Nova Vas and Heights # 208. Here troops from 31 Italian ID advanced in the afternoon, but in the evening were compelled under counterattacks by 24 Lst Mtn Bde to give up the contested areas; they also suffered heavy casualties.

After very powerful artillery preparation, around 6:00 PM the 16 Italian ID began to attack Heights # 144 with four columns from the Debeli vrh. The handful of battalions from the k.u.k. 60 Inf Bde, in their nearly demolished trenches, couldn't withstand this thrust by a vastly superior force. After bitter hand-to-hand combat they withdrew to a fall-back position on the ridge. On the other hand, a brigade of Italian 14 ID seeking to attack along the rail line north of the Lisert were stopped cold.

While heavy fighting thus continued into the late evening on the entire Karst plateau, the long-range Italian batteries at the mouth of the Sdobba [Isonzo] tried to destroy the Aurisina Works, the source of water for the city of Trieste. The damage was slight; under fire from Aus-Hung. marine batteries and

bombing attacks from six seaplanes the Sdobba batteries had to cease their fire against this target.

To keep the fight going the HQ of 5<sup>th</sup> k.u.k. Army shifted 39 Hon Inf Bde to the battlefield and placed them under Archduke Joseph; the HQ of 20 Hon ID with Hon IR 17 stood ready in the Comen area. Otherwise GO Boroevic still held back his reserves because he didn't know whether the substantial enemy units which thus far hadn't been committed would be employed on the Karst plateau or at another point along the Isonzo front.

Thus on the first day of the battle the Italians had suffered severe casualties and gained just local successes. The defenders had withstood odds of 2:1 thanks to the steadiness and self-sacrificing spirit of the infantry and the concentrated and effective fire of the artillery.

That night a thunderstorm broke out over the battlefield, followed by a heavy Bora. "The spectacular storm wore down the nerves of all the combatants and for the time being put an end to activity on both sides."<sup>574</sup>

#### 15 September

The battle flared out anew at dawn on 15 September. Again all parts of the defensive front from Rombon to the Wippach were pounded by heavy fire from guns and trench mortars. During the day the fire on the Karst plateau swelled to its greatest strength yet. In his memoirs Archduke Joseph declared that 15 September was one of the most difficult days of the entire war.<sup>575</sup>

Initially the VII k.u.k. Corps made good progress in counter-attacks to recover the parts of their position lost the day before. In the morning two battalions of 17 ID gained ground in an assault toward the Nad logem ridge, as did three battalions of 28 ID east of Oppacchiasella. At the latter point the Aus-Hung. troops regained all of the contested positions except for a short stretch of the trenches. But around noon the Italians renewed their destructive fire, and the barely restored front of VII Corps once again began to waver.

The k.u.k. 17 ID had little luck in the fighting on 15

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574 Anton Pitreich, manuscript

575 FM Archduke Joseph, "The World War as I Experienced It" (in Magyar; Budapest, 1928), Vol. III, p. 572

September. At 2:00 PM an Italian brigade unleashed a heavy thrust on Nad logem; although the attack was checked by defending artillery fire, the impetus of the Hungarians' own counter-thrust was completely spent before they had reached their goal. The operation was to be renewed with the support of two battalions from the Corps' reserves. GM Ströher intended to finish the job at dawn of the following day, but the actions which developed later in the afternoon frustrated his plan.

To continue the attack between the Wippach and Lokvica the HQ of XI Italian Corps had brought up parts of 49 ID. Thus after 4:00 PM three brigades stormed forward against this part of the front. On the northern slope of Nad logem the center of the k.u.k. 17 ID withstood three attacks, which collapsed under fire with very heavy enemy losses. But on both wings of this Division the enemy scored successes.

In the Wippach valley the heights by the church of S. Grado di Merna, as well as the position in the valley below them, were defended by just a battalion; they fell into the hands of the Sardinian Grenadiers. On the crest east of Nad logem the Italians drove into the new fall-back position, although late in the evening they were thrown out in a counter-thrust by the Karansebes IR 43.

The unfavorable situation in the Wippach valley was redeemed thanks to the quick intervention of XVI Corps. The HQ of VII Corps, like that of 17 ID, had long been unable to keep up with developments because communication with the front had been cut off completely, until they finally received a report from the HQ of 43 LW ID. GM Fernengel of the latter Division had immediately sent two battalions to the southern bank of the Wippach; together with two battalions from 17 ID they thrust against the enemy who'd penetrated our line. Once more the Italians failed to exploit their initial success; by the time they had finally organized a thrust past S. Grado di Merna, the counterattack was already taking place. The Aus-Hung. troops pushed forward to a line running from the western edge of Raccogliano to the hill east of S. Grado, where they were able to repulse all further Italian attempts to advance.

The bulge in the center of 17 ID on the northern slope of Nad logem had to be evacuated after darkness fell. On the other hand, a firm front had been established from the Wippach to the northern part of the Karst plateau.

In the afternoon of 15 September there was also bitter fighting

farther south. After 2:00 PM the Italian 19 ID, deployed in depth, attempted a massive thrust between Oppacchiasella and Nova Vas, but it fell apart under the defenders' fire. Some Italians penetrated the sectors of two companies, but were thrown out in a surprise counter-thrust by a company of FJB 11. New drumfire was followed after 6:00 PM by a powerful Italian attack between Lokvica and the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road, which forced a battalion northeast of Lokvica to fall back. Hastily-assembled reserves (about 2½ battalions strong) were able to recapture the original position except for a few parts of the trenches. Fighting in 28 ID's sector continued throughout the night; the stubborn defenders, despite their casualties, prevented the enemy from advancing.

In the southern part of the Karst front, Heights # 208 and # 144 were once again the focal points of the battle. After very heavy preparatory fire by artillery and trench mortars the 31 Italian ID attacked the front between the heights west of Nova Vas and Point 208; wherever the enemy penetrated the position they were thrown back by counter-thrusts. The Italians sent reinforced units<sup>576</sup> against Heights # 144, which had been so hotly-contested the day before, in an attempt to capture the summit. They were able to dig in along parts of the crest, but then a heavy counterattack forced them to halt their operation before they could finish occupying the summit.

Thus on the second day of the battle the Italians had again failed to win a breakthrough, but only some local successes on the northern slope of the plateau. The heavy fighting during the day had compelled the HQ of the k.u.k. VII Corps to attach 39 Hon Inf Bde to 28 ID; in turn the Corps received HQ of 20 Hon ID and the Hon IR 17 from the Army's reserves.

GO Borojevic felt that the situation still wasn't sufficiently clear to allow him to use his Army's other available reserves to relieve those troops at the front who were particularly exhausted. On 15 September the 32 Inf and 10 Mtn Bdes did move closer to the front; however, 31 Inf Bde remained with XVI Corps and 44 LW ID behind the Army's center. Therefore the defenders of the Karst still had to hold out in their shot-up and fully-demolished positions.

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576 One infantry brigade, one dismounted cavalry regiment, and two Bersaglieri bicycle battalions ("Brigate di fanteria", Vol. II, p. 31).

**b. The Italians continue to attack on 16 and 17 September**

The general, large-scale assault of the first two days of the first day of the battle had been followed on 15 September by strong thrusts which, however, were no longer carried out at the same time or coordinated between sectors. On the third day of the battle the Italian offensive became further fragmented, although the individual thrusts still had the same intensity and weight. Especially on the southern part of the plateau, where XIII Italian Corps renewed their attacks by committing all their units, the result was a major battle.

16 September

On the northern wing of the k.u.k. VII Corps, new attacks were undertaken at the points where the enemy had gained some ground the day before. But the Italians failed to drive past the church on the heights of S. Grado di Merna, and a regiment which tried to thrust along the crest after two hours of artillery preparation was also checked. South of the crest the Italians renewed their onslaught against 28 ID with undiminished fury. Very heavy and destructive fire against the positions between Lokvica and Nova Vas was followed around 9:00 AM by the thrust of an Italian infantry brigade east of Oppacchiasella, which captured the sectors of two companies after a furious action. This small success was the prelude to a massed assault by 22 Italian ID on a broad front. But the results of this breakthrough attempt were nil since the defenders (Hon IR 3 and a battalion of IR 87) were able to hold out; the fighting included some bitter hand-to-hand combat. To counteract this setback, the Italians followed with an attack by 21 ID north of Lokvica, but here also the defenders (the Croatian IR 96) won a complete victory. Another attempt by 21 ID in the evening suffered the same fate. Because of VII Corps' heavy casualties in this day of battle, 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was forced to part with more reserves, sending 32 Inf Bde to this sector; the Brigade was immediately inserted into the front.

Since they apparently couldn't expect any further success on the northern part of the plateau, Aosta's Army switched the main part of their effort to the area between Nova Vas and Heights # 144. The XIII Italian Corps, attacking between Oppacchiasella and Lake Doberdo, had brought up the fresh troops of 34 ID to relieve those parts of 31 ID which had suffered the most in the preceding attacks. Then the enemy resumed their offensive as stubbornly as before. The coordinated and enormous fire of the

Italian artillery, and the incessant explosions of their rain of projectiles, filled the area between Nova Vas and the Vallone Road with thick clouds of dust and smoke. Telephone lines had been cut since the day before, and visual communications also failed. Thus the garrisons of the positions were left on their own; the commanders could only send their scanty reserves toward the front, leaving it to the officers on the scene to ensure that they intervened at the right time.

Already in the morning of 16 September the Italians had driven onto Heights # 208 and gained ground west of Nova Vas. At both focal points the destructive fire of the defending artillery and immediate counterattacks restored the situation. In the afternoon the Italian fire reached unprecedented intensity; around 1:00 PM a furious infantry assault developed. The enemy once again occupied Heights # 208; contrary to their usual practice, here they advanced past the position they'd won and further toward the east. Thus the situation on the northern wing of Sector III.b was becoming critical, since the portions of the front next to the penetration were also heavily engaged in combat.

In this emergency the Bohemian k.k. Lst IR 11 opened a counter-attack with two battalions, which were joined by the remnants of the position's garrison. Well-supported by the sector's artillery and the guns of 28 ID, they won a complete success by 5:00 PM; by this time the Regiment had recovered all the positions. But the fighting didn't end, since the enemy unleashed another powerful thrust against this part of the front two hours later. There was bitter combat through the entire evening, until exhaustion on both sides caused them to lay down their weapons around 10:00 PM. Except for several points in the maze of trenches on Heights # 208 where the Italians couldn't be dislodged, all of the original defensive front stayed in the hands of the Austro-Hungarians.

On Heights # 144, which had been contested since the day before, both sides fought on stubbornly, committing fresh units. The upper part of the hill was won, then lost, and finally became neutral ground since it was impossible for either side to stay there under a rain of shells. The opponents remained locked closely together on the flanks of these blood-soaked Heights.

The costly fighting made it necessary to use fresh units in Sector III.b also. Two battalions of 31 Inf Bde, stationed behind the southern wing, had already been sent immediately to Heights # 208 to make up for some of the casualties there; now

GO Boroevic ordered the rest of the Brigade to enter the line so that the remnants of IR 102, which had been bled white in very stubborn defensive fighting, could pull back behind the front.

In the evening of the third day of the battle, the situation of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army had become rather serious. No end to the continuing action was yet in sight. Hopes that the enemy also needed a rest-pause due to their heavy casualties seemed premature, because many brigades whose presence on the Isonzo front had been confirmed still hadn't entered the foremost line. In fact the Duke of Aosta hadn't committed the 36 battalions in his Army's reserves, nor had the Italian high command thrown their own reserves (of equal strength) into the battle.

The HQ of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army therefore would be compelled to keep the fight going for several more days with their own reserves. Of these units, 16 ID was already fully committed; on the other hand, the time seemed opportune for 44 LW ID to leave their station behind the Army's center and to move south. (Mtn) LW IR 27 was the first unit of this Division to shift behind VII Corps; they were followed by (Mtn) LW IR 4. The high command was also taking measures to provide fresh men for the heavily-engaged Isonzo front. Until these troops arrived, GO Boroevic was given control over 10 Mtn Bde.

The necessary reserves could be found only on the Alpine front. Despite the fighting in the Fleims valley, Archduke Eugene's Army Group was therefore ordered to send a brigade to the Isonzo front.<sup>577</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> Army, which had repulsed the Italian attack in the Flitsch sector, would provide two battalions; finally GO Boroevic shifted the three battalions that had been in reserve of XV Corps to his southern wing.

Thus the soldiers on the Karst front would receive only limited help, which would arrive slowly during the next few days. Once more the steadiness of the troops would have to make up for the lack of manpower, which was becoming ever worse under the strain of multi-front warfare.

#### 17 September

The fighting on 17 September demonstrated that the Italians were

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577 For this purpose Army Group HQ chose Col. Freih. von Albori's 5 Inf Bde; it had IR 21 (3 bns) plus Bns I/IR 14, III/LW IR 36 and V/LW IR 37. But transporting the Brigade couldn't start until 18 September.

also starting to become exhausted, or that perhaps Cadorna couldn't decide to play his last cards. The enemy attempted massive thrusts in deep deployment only at isolated points along the front. Elsewhere they moved forward again cautiously, seeking to at least slightly improve the locations of their positions.

During the day the Italian fire in VII Corps' sector increased to a great strength. In the afternoon Italian battalions and regiments repeatedly attacked 17 ID along the northern slope of the plateau. These actions culminated in a massive assault at 4:00 PM. All thrusts were repulsed.

On 28 ID's front some Italian attacks toward Nova Vas and southeast of Oppacchiasella had failed before noon; at the latter point the enemy had attempted a surprise assault without artillery preparation. Thereafter the destructive fire resumed; it was followed by thrusts against the Division's northern wing and (around 2:30 PM) by an assault between Lokvica and Oppaccia-sella by an Italian brigade. Finally the enemy masses, pushing forward with one wave after another, succeeded in penetrating parts of the defensive line west of Lokvica; but by 4:00 PM they had been completely expelled by the south Styrian IR 87.

In FML Schenk's sector the badly-diminished garrison between Nova Vas and Heights # 208 had been relieved during the night by the fresh troops of 31 Inf Bde. New actions developed here at dawn when attempts were made to drive the Italians from the points where they'd dug in on the hill. In the morning a surprise Italian attack was shattered; afterwards the enemy resorted to powerful artillery and trench mortar fire. After 1:30 PM the Italians concentrated this bombardment on the short part of the front between Nova Vas and Heights # 208. The countless explosions blended into a constant, rumbling thunder; smoke and dust covered the positions. After this massive fire it seemed that all life must have been extinguished in the destroyed trenches. But when the Italian 31 ID began to attack after 2:00 PM the defenders' artillery opened a destructive barrage against the oncoming lines. The enemy infantry was still able to penetrate the position at some points, including # 208, but they were soon thrown back in coordinated counter-thrusts by the reserves. The infantry action ended after 4:00 PM, although Italian artillery fire continued to pound the blood-soaked battlefield.

As on the preceding days, neither side won a significant success

on Heights # 144 during 17 September. The southern wing of the Karst front at Bagni came under heavy fire from Italian artillery.

Because of the costly fighting in the southern sector of the plateau, GO Boroevic decided to assign 10 Mtn Bde to FML Schenk. Three of their battalions already arrived on the 17<sup>th</sup>, followed the next day by two more. This was a very welcome increase in strength, which could be used to clean up the situation at focal points along the sector's front.

The fourth day of the battle was at an end. Although it seemed that the Italian onslaught would continue, Cadorna in fact decided that evening to break off the offensive without using his un-committed reserves. He based his decision on the arrival of bad weather and the need to reinforce the positions that had been won. However, he was also forced to interrupt the battle because so much of his forces' strength had been consumed. "The exhausted condition of the fighting units of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army compelled me to halt the attacks on the Karst before the troops' material and psychological strength was endangered."<sup>578</sup>

## 5. Results of the Seventh Battle of the Isonzo

The battle died down only gradually over the next few days. For the time being the flame was kept going by constant efforts by both sides to improve their positions in minor operations, and to disrupt their opponents' work with lively artillery fire. And on the Italian side the worn-out brigades were relieved by fresh troops who were able to fight with undiminished strength.

On the Aus-Hung. side FML Schenk<sup>579</sup> sought to fully recover the important Heights # 144 and the parts of the trenches on Heights # 208 which were still in the enemy's hands. After initial success, however, this limited attack misfired due to the enemy's superior numbers.

Aosta's Army had gained hardly any advantage, despite their very careful preparation and their utilization of a large number of military methods. Only on the northern part of the battlefield was a limited amount of ground won; otherwise the only successes were the occupation of a few trenches and some slight

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578 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, pp. 10 ff.

579 The HQ of Sector III.b of the Isonzo front were re-designated on 19 September as "FML Schenk's Group HQ."

penetrations of the defenders' front.

The Italian commanders had undoubtedly shown dexterity in their deployment of large forces, but as previously their attempts to exploit initial successes never progressed beyond timid beginnings. Thus even an extensive penetration couldn't be turned into a breakthrough. Failure to succeed in battle was primarily due to defective leadership by the lower-ranking generals. Because of the stubbornness and willingness to sacrifice by the Karst defenders in the foremost line, the Aus-Hung. commanders were able to use their scarce reserves economically and committed them only where really serious danger threatened.

Cadorna blamed the lack of success above all on unfavorable weather, which had indeed made observation difficult and hindered the use of gas shells. This led the Italian high command in October to order that important operations in the future should be initiated only if visibility was sufficient to guarantee uninterrupted spotting for the artillery.<sup>580</sup> As for tactical errors, Cadorna noted that the gaps blown in the opposing barbed wire hadn't been wide enough, that the infantry had been slow to attack, and that the preparatory artillery fire was being diminished by targeting the rear lines before the foremost trenches had been sufficiently damaged to permit an assault.

Casualties on both sides were very significant. The Italians gave their losses as 706 officers and 16,864 men.<sup>581</sup> During the entire month the southern wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army had lost 320 officers and 20,000 men killed or wounded, so there may have been 15,000 such casualties in the battle alone.<sup>582</sup>

### ***B. The Eighth Battle of the Isonzo, 9-12 October***

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580 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, p. 10 ff.

581 "Le medaglie d'oro", Vol. II, p. 178. Per "Brigate di fanteria" the infantry lost 615 officers and 14,650 men - 291 and 7900 in XI Corps, 244 and 4950 in XIII Corps, and 80 officers and 1800 men in VII Corps.

582 Per Cadorna ("La guerra, Vol. II, p. 10) the number of Aus-Hung. prisoners taken by the Italians was 111 officers and 4000 men.

## 1. Preparations of both sides

### The Italians

The order which the Italian high command issued on 17 September for a halt to the full-scale offensive also regulated the future activity of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.<sup>583</sup> The gains at various parts of the front were to be consolidated, the troops placed under their proper units, equipment re-grouped, and "everything prepared which will be needed to resume the battle in the shortest possible time." Special attention was given to improving the still insufficient cooperation between infantry and artillery. Very careful preparation was to ensure that the opposing defensive installation were completely destroyed and the best possible opportunities for success were achieved.

Thus the weeks after the end of the Seventh Battle were hardly a pause in the fighting. On some days there was lively infantry and artillery activity, so that the soldiers never rested.

Cadorna spread a rumor that an attack east of Görz was imminent. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, after making the necessary improvements to their positions, would hold activity down to a minimal level while 2<sup>nd</sup> Army openly simulated preparations for an offensive in the Görz basin, including a systematic bombardment. But these deceptive measures had no impact on the defenders. The continuing actions in the Fleims valley were more effective in tying down Aus-Hung. units. Sustained new attacks in the Pasubio area prior to the next Isonzo battle were intended to further pin the reserves of the Tyrol Army Group in place. The Italians themselves took advantage of their numerical superiority on the Tyrol front to send more troops away despite these local attacks. Thus their 1<sup>st</sup> Army sent two brigades to the Isonzo front in September and one more in October.

The area to be attacked would be extended farther north in the impending battle. Between St Peter (by Görz) and the Wippach the VIII Italian Corps would now join the offensive. The main thrust would again be delivered on both sides of the line V. Hribach - Fajti hrib - Trstelj by XI Corps, with 5½ divisions on their sector of 4 km.<sup>584</sup> XIII Corps would pursue their old goals between the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road and the pond at

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583 Cadorna, "La guerra". Vol. II, p. 11

584 Italian authors have compared this massing of 46 battalions in a very narrow sector with Napoleon's attacking columns at Wagram (Segato, Vol. I, p. 305).

Jamiano, and VII Corps would join the attack along 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's southern wing. The largest possible number of guns and trench mortars would concentrate their fire against the principal sector to be assaulted.

This plan of attack was further expanded when Cadorna received reports that VIII Corps was opposed by just 13 battalions and XXVI Corps (their northern neighbor) by just 10. Six more Aus-Hung. battalions were believed to be stationed in reserve around Cernizza. Therefore the Italians hoped that when VIII Corps advanced over the lower Vertojbica they could throw back weak opposition. The Corps was ordered that if they broke through they should push their southern wing through Biglia to Ranziano while the northern wing pivoted toward the S. Marco Heights. This would help XXVI Corps to make a planned frontal assault.

#### The Austro-Hungarians

Borojevic's Army looked ahead to the new battle with great concern because their defensive positions were in such miserable condition.

After the Seventh Battle, the defenders of the Karst still had existing positions only in the southern sector between Nova Vas and the sea; even here the installations had been badly damaged in the fighting. Between Nova Vas and the Wippach the trenches, already defective prior to the opening of the last battle, had been completely destroyed; where these lines, often almost unrecognizable, were in enemy hands the Aus-Hung. troops had pulled back and taken shelter behind walls of sandbags or stones. There were no dug-outs, continuous lines of barriers, or protected approach routes. Therefore daily casualties were quite high even after the battle ended.

The AOK sent Edler von Brosch, a colonel from the engineering staff, to report on conditions along the Isonzo front. On 7 October he reported his impressions as follows:

"The current technical situation of the southern part of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's front - especially in Sectors II.b, III.a and III.b - is incomparably less favorable than at the start of the war. The troops hold positions that must be built up and completed while in immediate contact with the enemy. Our opponents, who were unskilled at the start of the war, have today learned many practical military lessons - some from their own experience, some from the French front. These lessons, along with the significant superiority of the enemy's trench mortars and artillery, have enabled them to

develop the most effective methods for overcoming even excellent positions which were constructed to be especially strong. But today the foremost lines of Sectors III.a and III.b can only be described from a technical standpoint as quite makeshift. The heroic defenders are really guarding the lines only with their bodies. Our fortification measures are insufficient because the extraordinarily difficult terrain demands the commitment of work forces that aren't available. Despite strenuous efforts by the troops to dig into the hard rock, only at a few points along the front line have trenches been completed. Since the enemy's heavy artillery consists of so many guns, and they have an enormous amount of ammunition at their disposal, they are able to dominate the entire Karst plateau as far as the area behind Comen and Gorjansko (13 to 14 km behind the front). Therefore all construction work within this zone has to be carried out while in constant danger of heavy shell fire. Compared to other fronts, casualties during the completion of rear-area installations are very high due to splintered stones."

Under these circumstances, consideration was given to preparing a new defensive position beyond the range of the enemy artillery, and then conducting the defense along this new line after it was complete. The main drawback to this radical solution was the proximity of the city of Trieste, whose retention was of decisive importance to the Central Powers. However, withdrawal to the east would also significantly lengthen the line and endanger the adjacent front farther north along the Isonzo. 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ therefore decided to forego the advantages which would be gained by constructing defenses beyond the range of enemy artillery; instead, they'd build a second position closer behind the current defensive sectors. Work started on lines which ran from the eastern summit of the Fajti hrib (Heights # 464) through Kostanjevica, the Str. Lokva Heights (east of Selo) and the Hermada to the sea at Duino. 3400 laborers were engaged on this project at the start of October.

Only minor improvements were initiated to the current foremost line as well as to a fall-back position (the so-called "1.c Line") which extended from Vrtoce along the western slopes of the V. Hribach and the Pecinka, through the towns of Hudilog and Lukatic, Heights # 235 (northeast of Jamiano) and the Flondar area to the mouth of the Timavo. The small force of laborers and the garrisons of the positions were fully occupied just in

repairing the daily damage from enemy fire.<sup>585</sup>

Some assistance based on the observations of Col. Brosch was initiated too late to have a serious impact. The Monarchy, engaged on enormous fronts, was suffering greatly from a lack of technical troops and boring equipment.

5<sup>th</sup> Army was therefore not in a position to carry out measures which had already been successfully implemented on other fronts. As previously, the proximity of the city of Trieste and the technical difficulties described above forced them to use the outmoded and costly tactic of holding onto badly-fortified lines. The questions for the commanders were how to preserve the troops' lives so that they could still hold their positions after overwhelming artillery preparation, and how the available reserves should be utilized. These matters especially concerned the generals of VII Corps, which had suffered the most massive casualties in every battle due to the condition of their positions. One solution seemed to be to keep just a small garrison in the foremost line during the artillery battle. Thus it was hoped that the troops would be preserved from excessive losses and would be ready to carry on the infantry battle with undiminished strength.

## **2. The general situation in the coastal lands at the start of October; the strength of the opposing sides**

The end of the battle on the Karst plateau on 18 September had only slightly eased the pressure on the Aus-Hung. high command caused by the tense overall position of the Central Powers.

The German OHL now urged their colleagues at Teschen to make units from the Italian theater available for the campaign against Romania. GFM Hindenburg made a demand to this effect on 20 September; Conrad had to respond that he was certain that the Italians would continue their offensives near Görz and increase the local attacks in other sectors of the front. Even the approach of winter in the mountains wouldn't make a difference, since large-scale operations in the coastal lands were possible at any season. Even in south Tyrol major fighting was

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585 At the start of October the following technical units were assigned to the southern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army - VII Corps had 9 technical companies with 961 men and 10 labor detachments with 624; Group Schenk had 6 companies with 1211 men and 14 detachments with 1547.

improbable only during the period of heavy snow (January to April). Nevertheless, he did plan to transfer several mountain brigades.

To implement this commitment, on 23 September the Aus-Hung. high command ordered Archduke Eugene's Army Group to give up 10<sup>th</sup> ID<sup>586</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, so that the latter in turn could free up two mountain brigades. 2 Mtn Bde, which for some time had been standing ready on the Isonzo front, left for Transylvania on 27 September; they were followed between 30 September and 5 October by the 8 and 10 Mtn Bdes. 10 ID, whose departure was delayed by bad weather, didn't reach 5<sup>th</sup> Army until 6 October.

GO Conrad had to turn down all further German requests because of the artillery battle which was flaring up on the Karst plateau and near Görz. The troop transfers mentioned above had caused great concern for GO Boroevic, and especially for the HQ of Archduke Eugene's Army Group. The fact that Conrad had carried out the changes despite the serious complaints of the latter HQ indicates his generous concern for the overall situation of the Central Powers.

The relative strengths of the opposing forces lining up for the next battle and the technical weaknesses of the defensive front (narrated previously) show that the concerns of the generals commanding on the Italian front were quite justified.

The southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, VIII Corps, was to attack over the lower Vertojbica; the Corps had 11 and 12 ID, reinforced by parts of 46 ID and by one brigade from the neighboring XXVI Corps to the north, for a total of 6 brigades (37 battalions). The Duke of Aosta's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was to advance between the Wippach and the sea. XI Corps would deliver the main blow between the Wippach and Oppacchiasella, with 49, 45, 21 and 22 ID at the front plus 4 ID and 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Brigade in reserve. This Corps had 66 battalions, with six men for every meter of the front, so that their thrust would have great impetus. XIII Corps (47, 34 and 33 ID) deployed between Oppacchiasella and Lake Doberdo with 41 battalions on a 10 km front, so there were almost four men for each meter. On the southern wing of the Karst battle-field VII Corps (16 and 14 ID plus 1 dismounted CD) would join in the attack with 23 battalions and 24 squadrons.

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586 FML Lischka's 10 ID had 20 Inf Bde [IR 98 (3)] and 21 Inf Bde [IR 15 (3), 55 (3)]. His 10 FA Bde was still in the northeastern theater.

The reserves were XIV Corps with five brigades (19 and 31 ID), plus 23 ID of XXIV Corps. Their total was 42 battalions, some of which still weren't fully combat-ready due to casualties suffered in the Seventh Battle. 28 ID, which had arrived from Tyrol, was in the reserves of the supreme command.

Therefore the total strength of the attackers was 221 battalions and 24 dismounted squadrons; 166 battalions would actually engage in the battle. The Italian artillery and trench mortars had been substantially reinforced, but their exact numbers are unknown.

On the Aus-Hung. side, 43 LW ID was stationed between S. Marco and the Wippach with 13 battalions. VII Corps on the northern part of the plateau had deployed all three of their divisions (17 and 28 ID, 20 Hon ID) in line; the battalions which had been worst damaged in the last battle had been replaced at the front by battalions from 44 LW ID, which thus had been completely broken up. The Corps had 29 battalions and 181 guns. Between the town of Nov Vas and the sea Group Schenk (9 and 16 ID, 24 Lst Mtn Bde) at first had 30 battalions and 155 guns; at the last moment they received substantial artillery assistance when 10 FA Bde, which had arrived from the northeastern front, was attached. After reinforcing the sectors of the southern wing, 5<sup>th</sup> Army had just 9 battalions still in reserve, which were stationed in the area east of Comen. When 10 ID arrived (hopefully on 11 October) GO Boroevic would have 18 battalions in reserve, including a complete unit. Thus at the outset 5<sup>th</sup> Army had 101 battalions available to face a thrust by an enemy force twice as large. As previously the attackers also had a crushing numerical superiority in guns and trench mortars.

#### The infantry orders of battle

##### ITALIAN

##### **Parts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army...**

. XXVI Corps - Was on the northern edge of the battlefield; although the Corps was involved in fire fights, only one bde of 48 ID (perhaps Bde Taranto) joined in VIII Corps' attack

. VIII Corps - 11 ID [Bdes Cuneo & Treviso], 12 ID [Bdes Casale & Pavia]; an unspecified detachment from 46 ID

##### **3<sup>rd</sup> Army...**

. XI Corps - 49 ID [Bdes Pinerolo & Napoli], 45 ID [Bdes Toscana & Trapani], 21 ID [Bdes Regina & Pisa], 22 ID [Bdes Brescia & Ferrara]; initially in reserve were 4 ID [Bdes Spezia & Barletta] and 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Bde (the latter was attached to 22

ID)

- . XIII Corps - 47 ID [Bdes Sesia & Pescara], 34 ID [Bdes Salerno & Catanzaro, 33 ID [Bdes Modena & Padova]
- . VII Corps - 16 ID [Bdes Bari & Catania], 14 ID [Bde Alessandria only]; on the right wing was the dismounted 1 CD, which didn't actually become engaged
- . Army and supreme HQ reserves (not engaged) - XIV Corps [19 & 31 ID] and 28 ID

AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN (deployment as of 10 Oct, strengths as of 11 Oct)

- . XVI Corps (Sector II.b; only 43 LW ID was heavily engaged. Corps had 33 bns, 52 heavy guns, 150 infantry guns; 27,700 riflemen)
  - . 58<sup>th</sup> ID - 5 Mtn Bde [Bns IV/28, III/85; LW IR 23 (3); k.u. Lst IR 2 (3); k.k. Lst Bns 43, 43; k.u. Lst Bn I/7], 4 Mtn Bde LW IR 37 (4); k.k. Lst Bns IV/39, 75]
  - . 43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID - 86 LW Inf Bde [LW IR 20 (3), 22 (3)], 59 Inf Bde [IR 24 (3), 41 (4)]
  - . Corps reserves - Bns I/50, III/79, I/81
- . VII Corps (Sector III.a; had 26 bns, 53 heavy guns, 128 infantry guns; 24,350 riflemen)
  - . 17<sup>th</sup> ID - 33 Bde [IR 39 (2), 61 (2)], 34 Bde [IR 43 (3), Bn II/46; LW IR 27 (2)]
  - . 28<sup>th</sup> ID - 56 Bde only [IR 87 (3); FJB 9; Bns I/47, II/96, II/ LW IR 2]
  - . 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID - 39 Hon Bde only [Hon IR 1 (2), 17 (2); Bns II/ Hon IR 4, I/LW IR 2]
  - . Corps reserves - 55 Inf Bde [Bns IV/96, III/LW IR 2, I/LW IR 27], 81 Hon Inf Bde (in rehabilitation considerably behind the front) [Bns II/Hon IR 3, I/96; FJB 11]
- . Group Schenk (Sector III.b; had 30 bns, 37 heavy guns, 118 infantry guns; 20,180 riflemen)
  - . 9<sup>th</sup> ID - 17 Bde [IR 91 (3), 102 (2)], 60 Bde [IR 30 (3), 80 (3)]
  - . 16<sup>th</sup> ID - 31 Bde [IR 2 (4), Bn I/62], 32 Bde [IR 31 (4), Bn IV/84]
  - . k.k. 24<sup>th</sup> Lst Mtn Bde - k.k. Lst IR 11 (3), 27 (3)
  - . Corps reserve - LW IR 4 (3)
- . Army reserves (18 bns; on 1 October had 19,800 riflemen prior to detachment of parts of 44 LW ID as detailed above)
  - . 10<sup>th</sup> ID (arriving) - 20 Bde [IR 98 (3) only], 21 Bde [IR 15 (3), 55 (3)]
  - . 44<sup>th</sup> LW ID - HQ of 44 & 87 Bdes; LW IR 21 (3); IR 46 (2); Bns III/39, III/96, I/3 Hon, I/4 Hon

### 3. The course of the battle

Italian artillery fire increased between the Wippach and the sea on 30 September; the defenders had the impression that the systematic bombardment was already starting. Other indications of an imminent assault were a greater number of deserters, unit transfers along the enemy front, and heavy traffic in the area behind the Italian positions. GO Boroevic therefore felt it necessary to move the parts of 44 LW ID still at Ternova up to the Karst plateau. This Division was now his last reserve (until 10 ID arrived from Tyrol), since 5 Inf Bde - which had also come from Tyrol - had been given to XVI Corps to replace 2 Mtn Bde, on its way to Transylvania. At this time 44 LW ID had just 9 battalions; their LW IR 4 had already been placed at the disposal of FML Schenk's Group on 1 October after 10 Mtn Bde was taken away.

On 3 October the fire of the Italian guns and trench mortars intensified further. On this day local attacks took place on Heights # 144, and on 4 October the Italians penetrated the line next to Oppacchiasella (but were soon thrown back). On 5 October the artillery battle was in full swing. The defending troops suffered greatly as projectiles rained down upon the positions and barricades. Installations where rough-and-ready repairs had been completed now collapsed again. Assembly areas, approach routes, observation points and villages lay under continuous fire, even some distance behind the front. Casualties were mounting up; in the first five days of October there were 700 men killed and 3000 wounded on the Karst plateau. Therefore GO Boroevic had to place two regiments from the Army's reserve at the disposal of VII Corps so they could relieve troops as necessary.

Despite the artillery preparations against the Karst plateau, in which enormous amounts of ammunition were expended, the Italian infantry still didn't attack. Bad weather set in on 6 October with rain and fog, causing the Italians to postpone the offensive. Army Group HQ at Bozen considered the possibility that the artillery battle on the Karst was merely a diversion, but already on 7 October the massive Italian fire resumed as visibility improved.

This time the Italian commanders made no attempt at surprise. The bombardment continued day and night, increasing several times to hours of drumfire, so that the defensive installations should be destroyed and the defenders completely worn down. But the negative outcome of minor thrusts on 7 October against

Heights # 208 and on the following day against Nova Vas convinced the Italians that they still hadn't met these goals.

On 9 October the entire Karst front stood under the full weight of destructive fire starting at 6:30 AM. In the afternoon strong detachments of Italian infantry felt their way forward at many points along the line, but were repulsed everywhere by the now thin ranks of the defenders. Although the long-awaited general offensive still hadn't developed, 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ at Adelsberg no longer had any doubt that the fighting on this day had initiated the Eighth Battle of the Isonzo.

#### 10 October

At dawn on 10 October the Italians increased their fire against the Aus-Hung. front from the heights east of Görz to the sea, and especially between the Wippach and the Lisert. Like thick fog, heavy clouds of dust and smoke lay over the battlefield. The Italian infantry onslaught followed in the afternoon, bringing to the defenders, who'd been suffering heavy casualties for so long, the psychological relief of close-up combat.

The southern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army attacked the hills between S. Marco and Biglia. The troops of GM Fernengel's 43 LW ID in their badly-damaged positions held on stubbornly against the much larger enemy forces, which included three brigades just along the completely shattered lines on the heights between Sober and the triangle of rail tracks at St Peter. The fighting in this sector lasted until 12 October; the Italian took the positions at Sober along a line that was 1½ km long. Plans to recover the area in a counterattack were abandoned in order to conserve our strength. The enemy made no further progress here, despite stubbornly repeated assaults and their numerical superiority; similarly all their powerful thrusts over the lower course of the Vertojbica collapsed in failure.

The battle on the Karst plateau developed in full fury on 10 October. At the outset the 45 Italian ID of XI Corps managed to push back the defensive front between the crest on the northern edge of the plateau and Lokvica. The defenders, who'd already been reduced to half their aphorized strength by the preliminary fire, then checked the thrust with help from nearby reserves, and made a stand along the carriage road leading north from Lokvica. Farther south neither 21 nor 22 ID made any progress against the defenders.

On the other hand, the situation soon became critical in the

area south of Oppacchiasella. Between this town and the ruins of Nova Vas the remnants of 20 Hon ID succumbed to the enemy onslaught. Here the entire position fell into the hands of the Italian 47 and 34 ID, which however were hesitant in thrusting further past the lines they'd taken. This penetration also threatened the northern wing of FML Schenk's Group, which at the same time was battling a frontal attack by 33 ID. Only with difficulty and by committing the reserves stationed near the front were the defenders able to hold the hotly-contested Heights # 208 and the adjacent parts of the positions as far north as the point the enemy had penetrated near Nova Vas.

The coolness of the Aus-Hung. commanders in the sector was put to severe tests on this day, because the battle soon took an unfavorable turn also along the road to Jamiano and on Heights # 144. With parts of 33 and 16 ID the Italians overran and completely smashed the two battalions of the k.u.k. 16 ID stationed on the road east of Lake Doberdo. The enemy also captured the defensive installations on both flanks of Heights # 144, which had been completely demolished by artillery deployed above them on the Debeli vrh. Thus the enemy was already advancing toward Jamiano from two sides. If this thrust continued along the deep channel of the Brestovica valley the consequences for the southern wing of Boroevic's Army would have been very dire. But parts of the Czech IR 102, stationed on the upper part of the eastern slope of Heights # 144, fired from the rear at the Italians who were moving toward Jamiano, sowing confusion in their ranks<sup>587</sup>; together with an immediate counterattack by reserves this ruined the enemy assault. Many Italians were killed or wounded; after also leaving many prisoners in the hands of the victors the enemy gave up the ground they'd gained and pulled back to their starting points. FML Schenk had overcome all the crises of this day of battle.

On the northern part of the Karst GdK Archduke Joseph placed all reserves still available at the disposal of his divisions in the evening, and issued orders that the old positions were to be recovered with counter-thrusts. Boroevic had no further reserves to support this operation. 10 ID was arriving, but its first unit (IR 98) wouldn't reach the vicinity of the battleground until morning of the following day; the Regiment would be stationed at Gorjansko so that as needed it could be sent to help either VII Corps or Group Schenk.

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587 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Theodor Wanke of IR 102 received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria-Theresia Order for this feat of arms.

11 October

The first day of battle had ended for the Isonzo Army with a crisis that became worse the next day. At first the morning of 11 October passed with relative quiet due to thick fog. As visibility improved, the artillery battle finally resumed, while the counterattacks by the k.u.k. VII Corps initially gained ground. South of Lokvica the right wing of 28 ID advanced in the morning in the direction of the lost positions. Also 20 Hon ID, supported by LW IR 21, maintained their counter-thrust almost as far as the earlier front line when just before 11:00 AM there was a heavy new massed assault by the Italians. The enemy weren't halted until the defenders were on the line Hudilog-Lukatic, the so-called "l.c Position." The old position at Nova Vas was lost for good, since VII Corps lacked the strength to renew their counterattack.

This development once more spelled great danger for the adjacent front of Group Schenk. In the area of Heights # 208, this blood-soaked hill remained the strong point of the new front thanks to the unbroken steadiness of parts of k.k. Lst IR 11 and of (Mtn) LW IR 4. A firm line was established from here toward Lukatic.<sup>588</sup>

North of the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road, new assaults followed in the afternoon. In the positions west and south of Lokvica, as on the day before, troops from the Alpine lands (IR 87, FJB 9 and Bns I/47 and II/2 LW) stood without faltering, despite very heavy casualties. North of Lokvica the ground regained in the morning was retained, though with some difficulty. Moreover the attacks by XI Italian Corps, which at several places were repeated up to nine times, were unsuccessful.

South of the road the enemy followed up only hesitantly and then settled down in front of the new defensive position; therefore the situation for the k.u.k. VII Corps by evening could be considered stable.

While the northern wing of Group Schenk was engaged, the Group's actions on Heights # 144 continued simultaneously. Here the 16 Italian ID tried in vain to break through, as on the previous day, while 14 ID sought to advance on the heights south of

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588 Here Landsturm 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Friedrich Tischer of the k.k. Lst IR 11 won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria-Theresia Order.

Pietra Rossa.

GO Borojevic now had to decide whether to try to recover the old front - consistent with the basic rule that not a foot of ground should be given up on the road to Trieste - regardless of the heavy new casualties this would entail and whether sufficient units were available for the purpose. Most of the reserves in this sector of the front were used up; when the foremost regiment of the arriving 10 ID marched to the front it had to be attached to VII Corps, where 20 Hon ID was at the end of their strength and had to be relieved. But the condition of all the other combat troops on the Karst plateau was a source of great concern. The loss of manpower had reached shocking proportions.

"It was a fearsome struggle," wrote GM Anton Pitreich, "which made 11 October one of the most intense days of battle on the Isonzo. Casualties on both sides were unusually numerous. The defenders had already lost about 24,000 men."<sup>589</sup> Along with the casualties there was also a substantial loss of equipment; 41 guns were already out of action because of enemy fire or because of overuse.

Therefore GO Borojevic decided to forego a counterattack in order to conserve all units for continuing the defensive struggle. Because of his decision, the parts of 28 ID which were still holding out west of Lokvica had to be pulled back to the western edge of this town. This backward movement was carried out during the night; the enemy followed hesitantly the next day. A continuous defensive front now ran from the edge of the Karst at Heights # 246 through Lokvica and Hudilog to Lukatic, along which VII Corps would carry on their resistance.

The Italians had also suffered extremely heavy losses, a large number of which were inflicted by the defenders' well-handled artillery. It remained to be seen whether the enemy would be able to carry out new attacks with the same weight. If they did, the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army would be in a critical position; they were already being compelled to scrape up new reserves: four battalions from quieter sectors of the Isonzo front and two more from 10<sup>th</sup> Army. "How much longer? This was the anxious question heard at Army HQ again and again on this day."<sup>590</sup>

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589 Anton Pitreich, manuscript

590 *Ibid.*

12 October

But the course of battle on the next day (12 October) showed that the Italians' capability of attacking was noticeably in decline. Fighting slackened significantly during the day, and reached its earlier intensity only in certain parts of the battlefield. Thus late in the morning the 45 Italian ID tried again to break through the defensive line with a thrust of deeply-deployed troops on both sides of the northern edge of the plateau. Although decimated by the defenders' well-aimed artillery fire, the attacking waves pushed ahead bravely but couldn't penetrate the lines; repulsed by fire from (Mtn) LW IR 4 and Battalion II/46 they had to carry out a costly withdrawal to their starting points.<sup>591</sup>

In similar fashion all attempts to renew the attacks by the enemy masses assembled between Oppacchiasella and Nova Vas also collapsed at the outset, under the concentrated fire of the defending artillery. Attempts by the Italians to finally seize Heights # 144 had no better success. In the evening they were still making local thrusts in the Wippach valley (by Biglia), next to Heights # 208 and on the heights east of Monfalcone; but then the exhaustion of both sides put an end to the fighting.

**4. Results of the Eighth Battle of the Isonzo**

Once more the stubborn resistance of Boroevic's Army had completely frustrated the Italians' hope for a breakthrough. This victory wasn't diminished by the limited local advantages which the attacking Italian armies had bought with a heavy price in blood. The territory won by the enemy was barely 1½ km wide at the point of deepest penetration (by Nova Vas).

The only Italian success which might arguably be noteworthy was the fact that they'd driven the defenders back from the eastern edge of the Vallone between Nova Vas and Heights # 208; but the Italians were unable to exploit this gain by advancing into the important Vallone valley because Group Schenk was still holding the area west of Jamiano. The limited gains of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army at Sober, on the other hand, were insignificant since they had no effect on the situation of XVI Corps. The 43 LW ID, whose Galician regiments had fought gallantly and stubbornly,

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591 From 10 to 12 October the 45 Italian ID lost 156 officers and 4015 men ("Brigate di fanteria", Vols. IV, VI and "Bersaglieri").

came out of the unequal combat weakened by their heavy losses, but quite unshaken.

Loss of part of the prepared position between Nova Vas and Heights # 208 did worsen the technical strength of the defensive lines on the Karst plateau. Between the Wippach and Point 208 the condition of the positions of the k.u.k. VII Corps was alarming, and would be a great disadvantage to the defenders in any new actions.

Casualties in the Eighth Battle of the Isonzo were significant for both camps. The Italians estimated they'd lost 657 officers and 19,488 men, but it seems these figures are too low.<sup>592</sup> In the area where the battle was fought, Boroevic's Army lost 32,000 men during the entire month of October, so there may have been more than 20,000 casualties during the battle. The Italians reported that they'd brought in 254 officers and 7965 men as prisoners, of whom more than 3500 men were lost in the Nova Vas area and 1200 around Jamiano. The enemy also counted 46 machine guns and 31 trench mortars as booty. During the see-saw fighting several thousand prisoners also remained in the hands of the defenders.

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592 The figures shown above are given in "Le medaglie d'oro", Vol. II, p. 186. But by adding the losses of individual Italian infantry units shown in other official sources ("Brigate di fanteria", Vols. I to VII and "Bersaglieri") we have found a different total - 783 officers and 24,404 men. By Corps, the casualties were:  
. Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, XI Corps lost 286 officers and 7694 men, XIII Corps lost 231 and 8369, and VII Corps lost 101 officers and 2887 men.  
. Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, VIII Corps lost 141 officers and 4470 men, XXVI Corps lost 24 officers and 284 men.

### ***C. The Ninth Battle of the Isonzo, 31 October-4 November***

#### **1. The defensive crisis of Boroevic's Army**

In the Eighth Battle the defenders of the Karst had once more fended off repeated mass assaults by the Italians with a minimal loss of territory. But it seemed doubtful that they would continue to be successful, since their strength was already tested to the limit.

The Aus-Hung. generals were concerned above all by the state of the defenses on the Karst plateau. In the sector of the k.u.k. VII Corps between the northern slope of the Karst and Lukatic the line remained where the Italian penetration had been checked. Here it could hardly be called a "position", since the proximity of the Italian trench mortars made it impossible to do more than hastily erect some stone walls and put out thin rows of Spanish riders. Works that were completed with great toil during the nights were overthrown by enemy fire on the following days.

Moreover this defensive line, as well as the one farther south, weren't in tactically-advantageous locations. They ran along the slopes of the V. Hribach and Pecinka Heights facing toward the enemy, in some places actually in valleys, dominated and overseen by Italian positions on the opposite higher ground. Naturally the troops deployed here would be completely vulnerable to the enemy's preparatory fire whenever it started. But the Aus-Hung. commanders couldn't bring themselves to pull this most endangered part of the front back to the so-called "1.c-Line" on the crest of the two heights. They wanted to hold onto every foot of ground on the road to Trieste, especially since the Kostanjevica position wasn't completed yet.

As a means to minimize casualties inflicted by enemy artillery fire, the HQ of the k.u.k. VII Corps advocated holding the foremost line with the much-discussed "thin garrison." Reserves would be held back as far as possible behind the front to protect them from attrition and to allow them to rest; it was urgently necessary to conserve their strength. As previously Boroevic's Army lacked strong reserves, so unlike the Italians they couldn't relieve entire divisions for spells in rear area quarters.

But the dangers of this deployment were not slight. The lightly-held positions would have to be conceded at the outset, and it was very questionable whether reserves stationed some distance behind them could arrive in time to counterattack and recover them before large enemy forces consolidated their conquest. Also it was feared that while working their way through the girdle of fire - which the Italian artillery laid down behind the defensive positions in every battle - the reserves would suffer casualties just as great as if they had been part of an enlarged garrison in the foremost line. Therefore many of the lower-level commanders, as well as Army HQ, didn't share the hopes which VII Corps HQ entertained for the new tactics. Nevertheless, Army HQ didn't intervene to settle the question.<sup>593</sup>

The relative balance of strength on the Isonzo was also shifting very much against Borojevic's Army. During the last battle the 20 Hon ID had been pulled from the front, and it wouldn't be available again for deployment in the immediate future. Since arriving on the Isonzo in June 1915 the Division had repeatedly suffered very heavy casualties; they had fought at the focal point of almost every battle of the bitter campaign, and were now completely exhausted. Only months of rest, in which new troops were incorporated and trained, would enable 20 Hon ID to again become a fully battle-worthy unit.

In their stead the 44 LW ID became part of VII Corps and took over its southern sector; 28 ID, reorganized as shown in the order of battle at the end of this section, occupied the front between the Wippach and the edge of the heights north of Lokvica. Therefore 17 ID, which had also been badly damaged in the preceding battles, was able to move back to rear-area quarters and recuperate. In Group Schenk the arrival of 10 ID made it possible to pull back the troops who were most in need of rest.

Despite the relief afforded to some of the troops, HQ of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army was very much in doubt whether the Isonzo front could continue to withstand the Italians' tactics of attrition, which were apparently based on the battle experiences of the French and English. In a report to the high command on 16 October GO Borojevic asserted that his Army found themselves in a crisis. The regularly-scheduled incorporation of March formations was sufficient to offset the normal wastage of trench warfare (about 2000 men per month for each front-line division

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593 Anton Pitreich, manuscript

in the Karst sector). However, it was impossible by this means to replace the enormous casualties of major battles, which since mid-August had totaled 100,000 men. In August 4½ divisions had been enough to occupy the area from the Wippach to the Lisert; because of the reduced strength of the units, already in the Eighth Battle it was necessary to use 8 divisions here.<sup>594</sup> To continue fighting defensive actions with success, in the opinion of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ it would be necessary not only to provide substantial reinforcements of fresh, combat-ready units but also to increase the number of March formations ready for use as replacements. Furthermore there should be reinforcements for the artillery, a substantial supply of ammunition, and an immediate build-up of the trench mortar arm. Finally, steel helmets should be issued, as had long been discussed; this was urgently necessary to reduce the large number of casualties caused by stone splinters during bombardments on the Karst.

It was impossible to completely fulfill the demand for troops due to the demands of the other fronts. Once again stopgap measures would have to be adopted, even if this meant that more terrain might be lost. Moreover, increasing reports of impending Italian attacks on the Asiago plateau made it necessary to hold several battalions of 5<sup>th</sup> Army in readiness for a possible transfer to Tyrol. To at least provide some fresh units for the Isonzo front, the AOK asked the German OHL to make an Aus-Hung. division available from the northeast. The 14 ID was in fact released, and on 28 October its troops began to move by rail from Zloczow; they would arrive in the coastal lands in time to intervene toward the end of the Ninth Battle.<sup>595</sup>

The high command wanted to compensate for the lack of troops by increasing the amount of weaponry, but resources were limited. Due to the naval blockade the Central Powers had to give priority to finding food supplies. The Quadruple Alliance was falling ever farther behind in the economic battle.

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594 In the sector from the Wippach to the sea, there had been 44,700 riflemen at the front, plus 16,800 more in March formations, during the Sixth Battle. In October, although the number of units had almost doubled, the corresponding figures were 49,700 riflemen at the front and 5500 in March formations.

595 The order of battle of GM von Szende's 14 ID was: 27 Inf Bde [IR 71 (4), 72 (3)], 28 Inf Bde [IR 48 (3), 76 (4)]; 1 & 2 Sqdns/HR 5; 14 FA Bde.

## **2. Preparations of the Italians; strength of the opposing sides**

On 16 October the Italian high command ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies to be ready to resume the offensive on 24 October. In case the weather might be bad on the latter date, the Duke of Aosta was given authority to decide whether the battle should be postponed until the next favorable day.

Since Italy had declared war on the German Empire there had been constant reports that the Central Powers might be planning to attack the Italians. To Cadorna it seemed hardly likely that his opponents had any serious intention of attacking him, since their forces were so seriously committed in the East. Nevertheless he ordered Aosta that if this happened the battle should be broken off and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army placed on the defensive in the Vallone sector. This would make reserves available to fend off simultaneous thrusts from south Tyrol and in the coastal lands if necessary. Otherwise preparations for the next Italian attack were pushed ahead energetically. It was hoped that success would be won on the Karst plateau before the Italian legislature re-opened in December.

The impending action was considered a natural follow-up to the Eighth Battle, and had the same objective - to first secure the Trstelj-Hermada area. Once more the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was given the main role. Their northern wing, XI and XIII Corps, would overcome the opposing defensive system between the V. Hribach and the towns of Hudilog and Jamiano; then they would thrust against the next defensive lines between the Fajti hrib and the towns of Kostanjevica and Selo. Eight divisions were deployed on an 8½ km front for this purpose. The offensive by this main attacking group would be accompanied by efforts in the south by VII Corps, and in the north by the VIII and XXVI Corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Otherwise the latter Army would undertake only diversionary efforts.<sup>596</sup>

The Duke of Aosta's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army entered the battle with the same strength as in the Seventh Battle - 177 battalions and 24 dismounted squadrons. But this time the balance of forces would shift greatly to the advantage of the attackers, since the Italian high command wouldn't hold back the majority of its reserves as it had in the earlier fighting. Thus by the end of the Ninth Battle only 13 battalions were still in 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's reserves; 164 battalions were engaged in the actions, supported

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596 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, p. 15

by 48 more from the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Italian prisoners taken during the battle asserted that all available artillery and trench mortars had been transferred from Tyrol and Carinthia to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, so that the preparatory fire would be as powerful as possible.

Thus 225 Italian battalions would eventually enter the fray. In the sector they were attacking GO Boroovic had just 91 battalions, which could be joined by 19 more from the Army's reserves. The defenders' artillery totaled more than 543 guns.

Despite all the efforts of the defenders, the balance of forces had hardly improved. Clear recognition of the lurking dangers increased the concern of the Aus-Hung. generals about the condition of the defensive positions. Only trust in the steadiness of the Karst's defenders, which had been proven in eight battles, allowed any hope that the anticipated resumption of large-scale fighting could be endured until the start of winter.

The infantry orders of battle

## ITALIAN

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

. XXVI Corps - 43 ID [Bdes Genova & Etna], 46 ID [Bdes Taranto & Lambro]

. VIII Corps - 11 ID [Bdes Ravenna & Rovigo], 12 ID [Bdes Pavia & Treviso; Div HQ & latter Bde not engaged; apparently Bde Pavia fought attached to "reinforced 11 ID"], 46 ID [Bdes Casale & Udine]

**3<sup>rd</sup> Army**

. XI Corps - 49 ID [Bdes Pinerolo & Napoli], 45 ID [Bdes Lombardia, Toscana & Trapani; 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Bde], 4 ID [Bdes Ferrara & Spezia]; in reserve at outset were 21 ID [Bdes Regina & Pisa] and 22 ID [just Bde Brescia]

. XIII Corps - 47 ID [Bdes Marche & Spezia], 34 ID [Bdes Mantova & Alessandria], 33 ID [Bdes Valtellina, Padova & Macerata]; independent Bde Caltanissetta

. VII Corps - 16 ID [Bdes Cremona, Bari & Catania; 2 Cav Bde], 14 ID [Bde Arezzo, 1 Cav Bde]; HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Div (bdes detached as shown)

. (Apparently Bdes Lazio & Salerno came up from reserve and saw some action, but details are lacking)

## AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN (deployment as of 31 Oct)

. XVI Corps (Sector II.b, a 13 km front; had 32 bns, 51 heavy guns, 144 infantry guns; 26,500 riflemen)

. 58<sup>th</sup> ID - 5 Mtn Bde [LW IR 23 (3), k.u. Lst IR 2 (3)], 4 Mtn Bde [LW IR 37 (4); k.k. Lst Bns IV/39, 75]

. 43<sup>rd</sup> LW ID - 86 LW Bde [LW IR 20 (3), 22 (3)], 59 Inf Bde [IR 24 (3), 41 (4)]

. Corps reserves - Bns IV/28, I/50, III/79, III/85; k.k. Lst Bns 42 & 43

. VII Corps (Sector III.a; a 6 km front; had 34 bns, 55 heavy guns, 140 infantry guns; 31,000 riflemen)

. 28<sup>th</sup> ID - 56 Bde [IR 11 (4); II Bn/57], 55 Bde [IR 96 (4); III Bn/3 BH IR; BH FJB 3]

. 44<sup>th</sup> LW ID - 87 LW Bde [LW IR 2 (3), 21 (3)], 44 LW Bde [(Mtn) LW IR 4 (3), 27 (3)]

. In Corps reserve was 17 ID - 33 Bde [IR 39 (3), 61 (2)], 34 Bde [IR 43 (2), 46 (3); FJB 11]

. FML Schenk's Group (Sector III.b; a 6½ km front; had 23 bns, 52 heavy guns, 101 infantry guns; 26,600 riflemen)

. 9<sup>th</sup> ID - 20 Bde [IR 98 (2), 21 (3)], 60 Bde [IR 30 (3), 80 (3); k.k. Lst Bn 2/5]

. 10<sup>th</sup> ID - 17 Bde [IR 91 (3), 102 (2)], 21 Bde [IR 15 (3), 55 (3)]

- . Army reserves (19 bns and 14,000 men; totals don't include the ineffective 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID, or the 14<sup>th</sup> ID which was still arriving)
  - . 14<sup>th</sup> ID (*en route*) - 27 Bde [IR 71 (3), 72 (½)], 28 Bde [IR 48 (3), 76 (3)]
  - . 16<sup>th</sup> ID - 31 Bde [IR 2 (3); Bn I/62], 32 Bde [IR 31 (4), Bn IV/64]
  - . 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID - Rebuilding, ineffective
  - . 24 k.k. Lst Mtn Bde - k.k. Lst IR 11 (2), 27 (3), 32 (3)
  - . BH Gendarmerie Bn; k.k. Lst Bn III/2

### **3. Course of the Ninth Battle**

#### **a. The Italian penetration on 1 and 2 November**

Since the middle of October it was completely clear to the Aus-Hung. commanders that this time the pause in fighting would be brief. Cadorna still had fresh troops in sufficient strength to hammer the already severely-damaged defensive front in the hope of great, and perhaps later decisive, success. But his prospects would diminish in proportion to the amount of time given the defenders to build up their network of positions.

In fact it seemed from the conduct of the enemy, who undertook extensive troop transfers to and from the front, that a large new attack was already imminent on 23 October. This was confirmed by statements from the numerous deserters who came over as they did before every battle. Increased artillery activity and an attack on Trieste by Italian planes were also well-known warning signs. But another week would go by before the blow fell.

Bad weather developed on 24 October, and caused the start of the offensive to be postponed. Fire from the Italian artillery and trench mortars did continue, and reached a new intensity on 25 October; this seemed to signal that the guns were opening the expected battle. But rain set in toward noon, and along with a thick cloud cover it put an end to the bombardment.

In the following days both sides took advantage of any temporary improvement in visibility to open lively artillery fire. The targets of the Italian long-range guns were observation points, command HQ, villages and roads leading to the front. The defending artillery fired mostly at ammunition dumps and the very numerous trench mortar batteries (30 of which had been spotted between Lokvica and the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica

road); they also frustrated all attempts by the Italian infantry to move their jumping-off points forward at times when visibility was hampered. Busy traffic behind the front showed that the Italians also intended to use the unexpected postponement of the offensive to perfect their preparations.

These days of continuous readiness were a major trial for the commanders and troops of Boroevic's Army. There was no doubt that the great Italian assault would start on the first clear day. Prisoners' statements unanimously asserted that this time the preparatory bombardment wouldn't go on for days, and that 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army would strike after a short burst of surprise fire. This information led to increased watchfulness and stress among the defending troops, who were hampered also by many cases of sickness caused by bad weather (against which their makeshift installations provided hardly any shelter). No progress was made toward completing the positions, since all efforts were devoted just to maintaining their current state. Especially on the Vertojbica, the men were able only with difficulty to hold off the rising waters, which filled trenches, caused breastworks to collapse, and made all the low-lying ground soggy. The defenders also suffered significant casualties; between 24 and 28 October, in the Wippach valley and on the Comen Plateau almost 500 men were killed and more than 2300 were wounded.

Thus excessive physical demands on the combat troops of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army in the Görz area were added to the lack of an effective defensive position and a shortage of units. It's understandable that this time the Aus-Hung. commanders didn't anticipate the resumption of heavy fighting with the confidence that hitherto had seldom left them.

The weather cleared up on 30 October, ending Cadorna's impatient wait. Activity by the Italian artillery and trench mortars increased to a much higher level during this day. Around 8:00 AM on the 31<sup>st</sup> it swelled to its full fury. The Ninth Battle of the Isonzo had begun.

This time enemy aerial activity once more initiated the fighting on the Karst plateau. The towns of Duttoule and Sesana, as well as Miramar Castle, were hit by Italian bombs. In the afternoon enemy infantry tried to thrust their front forward in many places toward the defenders' lines, but were repulsed everywhere.<sup>597</sup> Afterwards the artillery preparation resumed with

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597 The defenders reported that a major offensive took place this day, but all Italian sources state that it didn't start

undiminished strength; it hardly slackened even during the night.

#### 1 November

On the first day of major fighting, 1 November, the Italian fire increased to its peak at dawn. This destructive bombardment was followed before noon by the concerted advance of the Italian infantry between Görz and the sea.

The thrust by the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army gained little success. In the Panowitz Forest and at Tivoli the attack by 43 Italian ID was checked with counter-thrusts; in the valley south of S. Marco and by Sober the 11 ID were defeated, while 46 ID were kept in their trenches along the Vertojbica by artillery fire. Thus 1 November was a day of glory for the k.u.k. XVI Corps.

In contrast to this setback to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, the first stage of the enemy's main thrust on the Karst plateau was successful. The garrisons of the positions had been kept too weak. They were worn down after suffering very heavy casualties from the artillery bombardment and proved unable to stand up to the massive thrust of the Italian infantry, who this time ran past the barrage. In extensive sectors of the front there was no sustained resistance; some of the defenders perished by cold steel in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy throngs, and the majority fell into captivity.

The 45 Italian ID achieved their first penetration in the sector of 28 ID on the crest of the northern edge of the plateau. Advancing through this gap, the enemy quickly gained ground toward the east. Here FML Schneider-Manns-Au had just a few companies available, since most of his reserves were in the Wippach valley; they were unable to limit the penetration. This would also have serious consequences for 44 LW ID, adjacent to the south.

Under this distinguished division from the Alpine lands, the 87 LW Bde was stationed between the heights east of Kote 262 and the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road; three battalions held the position, with a fourth in reserve on both sides of the Pecinka Heights and half a battalion west of Heights # 363. Before 11:00 AM this small force was attacked by the 4 Italian ID, deployed eight to ten ranks deep. The barricades had collapsed

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until 1 November.

and the positions were almost completely destroyed. Consequently the enemy overran the remnants of the companies in the first line (from LW IR 2 and 21). The nearest reserves threw themselves bravely against the Italian masses, and brought their advance to a halt. Since the men of 87 LW Bde were unaware of the developments on the southern wing of 28 ID, they still hoped that they could hold on until more reserves arrived to keep the line from falling.<sup>598</sup> But then the Pecinka Heights were suddenly occupied by the enemy.

Contrary to the Italians' usual habit of failing to complete a penetration, their 45 Italian ID took V. Hribach # 343, then pivoted south with some of their troops. These were the men who captured the Pecinka Heights, sealing the fate of the remnants of LW IR 21.

Now the Italian 49 ID also stormed the northern slope of the plateau, aiming to capture the rest of 28 ID's position. The situation of the k.u.k. VII Corps was becoming critical. The troops of 28 ID did remain steady; they held onto their posts and by committing IR 11 north of the V. Hribach were able to build a new hooked-shape position. But from here to the Kostanjevica road there was a gap 3 km wide, through which the enemy advanced up to the artillery of VII Corps. The withdrawal of the batteries was covered merely by a thin shield of worn-down companies along a line from the town of Fatji to the area around Heights # 291. Some isolated batteries did fall into the hands of the quickly-advancing enemy; they had kept firing until the Italians entered their positions.

The penetration north of the road also caused the evacuation of the adjacent positions of 44 LW Bde farther south as far as the town of Hudilog, where the northern wing of XIII Italian Corps followed up slowly. This Corps had joined the assault of the main group. Their 47 ID advanced south of the Oppacchiasella-Kostanjevica road; still farther south 34 ID attacked toward Lukatic and Versic, while the reinforced 33 ID began their thrust on both sides of Heights # 208. But Group Schenk was once more able to thwart their opponents. Italians who penetrated various parts of the line were thrown out by the quick counter-thrust of nearby reserves. The enemy made a major effort between the towns of Lukatic and Hudilog; but the

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598 Of these reserves, one came up from their southern neighbors in the afternoon; two battalions of the Division's reserves, stationed 7 km behind the front, finally arrived as darkness fell.

position here was retained by the Poles of the distinguished k.k. Lst IR 32<sup>599</sup>, supported by parts of IR 15 and 98; this also allowed LW IR 27 to retain Hudilog, at the edge of the part of the front which had collapsed. Still farther south the positions between Jamiano and Pietra rossa, especially the hotly-contested Heights # 144, were once more the objective of stubborn enemy attacks, which however were shattered by the unyielding defenders.

The situation of the k.u.k. VII Corps, which had continually worsened in the afternoon, improved toward evening because the Italian main body didn't advance further past the Heights of V. Hribach and Pecinka. The line of resistance stiffened as reserves arrived. But no consideration was given to staying for long in the open terrain. The only possibilities were either to recover the lost position with a counterattack or to fall back to the second line (from Heights # 464 east of Fajti hrib to Kostanjevica), where construction of entrenchments was relatively far advanced and thus - it was hoped - the resistance could be prolonged.

Around noon the HQ of VII Corps had already decided to restore the situation with a counterattack by the eight battalions still available, supported by three battalions from Group Schenk. They reported their intentions to Army HQ. But the heavy fighting which continued in the Hudilog-Lukatic area kept postponing preparations of the group that was to strike from the southeast. For the moment, therefore, the planned counter-thrust wasn't undertaken.

Meanwhile the crisis compelled 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to place their reserves at the disposal of the threatened sectors. 16 ID was sent to Group Schenk, which in turn was to transfer IR 21 to XVI Corps. VII Corps was given authority over 17 ID, which was first moved to the area around Temnica. Around 3:00 PM Army HQ ordered the two sector HQ to employ these units in a pincers counter-attack against the advanced portion of the Italian front, so that the old positions could be fully recovered.

Thus the reserves available to the Army at this moment were almost completely used up; until early on 2 November, when the

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599 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - The original text fails to note that k.k. Lst IR 32, normally part of 106 Lst ID, had come to the Italian front from the northeast in mid-October and joined 24 Lst Mtn Bde. According to Beilage 5, the movement by rail took place on 11-16 October.

first elements of 14 ID were expected to arrive, GO Boroëvic wasn't in a position to influence the course of the fighting by committing further troops.

The powerful counterattack which was planned by 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ (in cooperation with VII Corps HQ) never took place. FML Schenk had been completely successful in the hard defensive fighting in the afternoon, but his Group suffered heavy casualties; therefore they weren't able to provide strong units for a counter-thrust toward the northwest. And Archduke Joseph, because of the critical situation, didn't want to deploy 17 ID yet because as the last reserves on the Karst plateau they shouldn't be committed prematurely.

### 2 November

Thus the only troops to counterattack were the eight battalions of 28 ID and of 44 LW ID, as originally ordered by VII Corps HQ. While they were marching forward some of these units already had suffered heavily under Italian artillery fire.<sup>600</sup> Despite the numerical weakness of this force, during the night and in the morning of 2 November they at first gained ground toward the west and made it possible to recover ten of the guns that had been left behind the day before. At this time the Italians weren't receiving full support from their artillery because of bad weather; they were defeated in the area west of Heights # 308 and lost 500 men as prisoners. Thus the situation for VII Corps was developing favorably on the Karst plateau until a new catastrophe overcame the troops at noon.

Around this time the weather cleared and enabled the Italian artillery to fire with full effect, especially against the group (five battalions) of 28 ID attacking from the northeast. Pinned down and shaken by this well-aimed fire on their flank and rear, the group then was overwhelmed and practically destroyed by a powerful thrust from infantry of 45 Italian ID who advanced along the crest. Exploiting this success, in which they captured many prisoners, the enemy Division took the Fajti hrib (# 432) in their first onslaught.<sup>601</sup>

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600 The Italians used gas shells to pound the area through which troops had to move. These shells weren't as effective as the ones the enemy employed a few months later, but there were only a few gas masks for the men of Boroëvic's Army. 5<sup>th</sup> Army didn't receive gas masks for all the combat troops (including those of XV Corps) until the end of the month.

601 On maps the lower summit (Point 432) is designated the

Also farther south the 4 Italian ID once more struck the 87 LW Bde, weakened and bled white by the fighting to date. The VII Corps artillery stationed here came into considerable difficulty and lost some guns; the gap in the Karst front, which had been just barely sealed, once more burst open. A very serious crisis developed. The HQ of the k.u.k. VII Corps decided that in this hour of greatest emergency the 17 ID should deploy in the Kostanjevica position to check the enemy.

There was also bitter fighting in the sectors adjacent to the principal front. In XVI Corps' area, all Italian assaults on both sides of the Rosen valley collapsed against the determined resistance of 58 ID. In particular the Dalmatian LW IR 23, east Hungarian Lst IR 2 and Lower Austrian Lst Bn IV/39 frustrated all the enemy's efforts. Farther south the Italians once again engaged 43 LW ID; they attacked strongly east of Sober and launched many thrusts on the lower Vertojbica, sometimes wading through water up to their waists. The defenders defeated all these efforts with either fire or counterattacks. Here the excellent Bukovina IR 41 once more distinguished themselves. XVI Corps took 20 Italian officers and more than 400 men as prisoners, and 7 machine guns as booty. Because of this successful defense, XVI Corps were also able to assist their hard-pressed neighbors to the left, on the northern slope of the Karst plateau; they sent IR 21 to help out on the slopes of Volkovnjak Hill.

2 November was also a day of heavy fighting on the southern wing of the battlefield. Here Group Schenk used counterattacks to throw back all local enemy penetrations, and in the evening they were still in full possession of the positions. But in this successful defense all the reserves that had been supposed to support the counter-thrust by VII Corps were consumed. Group Schenk used makeshift measures to cancel the danger that developed when the Italians once more penetrated VII Corps' lines. Initially just three battalions were available to fill the gap on Schenk's northern flank between Hudilog and Kostanjevica.

Thus the crisis of the battle reached its high point late in the afternoon of the second day. The Aus-Hung. commanders, whose reserves had now disappeared down to the last battalion, were

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Fajti hrib. But in reports at that time Point # 432 is called the "Little Fajti hrib" and the higher ground to the east (Point 464) is called the "Big Fajti hrib."

anxiously waiting for 14 ID to complete their assembly. But again this time the enemy didn't know how to exploit their success. They followed the retreating defenders only hesitantly, wary of advancing too deeply into the sack which was forming thanks to the steadfastness of the sectors adjacent to the penetration. Then fire from the batteries on the northern part of the Karst plateau, all coordinated by Col. Janecka, robbed the Italians of any desire to push forward sharply.

### **b. The Battle dies out; its consequences**

GO Borojevic was by no means resigned to leaving the Italian successes uncontested. Around 4:45 PM Archduke Joseph received an order to restore the situation by having 17 ID counterattack on the northern wing. The four battalions that were arriving from XVI Corps and three battalions from Group Schenk would also take part. But at this time 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ still didn't have a clear picture of the condition of the majority of the troops of 28 ID and 44 LW ID, of whom only worn-down remnants could be assembled behind the newly-established front.

Since GO Borojevic had to be as strong as possible until 14 ID finished their assembly, the AOK gave him authority to use 20 Hon ID, which was rehabilitating in the rear; but this Division was hardly at full combat efficiency because it hadn't yet been restored to sufficient numerical strength.

As ordered, during the evening Archduke Joseph made all necessary preparations for a concentric counterattack by a total of 21 battalions. During the night the last supporting unit, 20 Hon ID, was to deploy in the Duttoule area while the parts of 14 ID that had already detrained came to the area around Temnica. With these measures the eventful second day of the battle came to an end. "The battle that was now in full fury had made this an impressive, mournful All Souls' Day. It was and remained one of the most critical of many such days of fighting on the Isonzo front, living up to its traditionally frightful reputation."<sup>602</sup>

#### 3 November

The night passed rather quietly due to exhaustion on both sides. On 3 November fighting resumed only at isolated points along the battlefield. Meanwhile the defenders were preparing for the counterattack while the Italians were shifting troops to

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602 Anton Pitreich, manuscript

continue the offensive. Gloomy weather also diminished the military activity.

In XVI Corps' sector there were actions throughout the day at Sv. Katerina and Damber. In the evening the Italians made a surprise attack between the Vertojbica and the heights west of Biglia; they took part of the position but were finally driven out again that night.

On the northern slope of the Karst plateau the troops of 56 Inf Bde who'd still stayed in the original positions were taken back so they could line up with 17 ID; the Italian 49 ID followed after them and occupied Heights # 126 south of Biglia. Soon thereafter the Italians' artillery began to fire effectively from the northern flank of the protruding wedge of their new positions against XVI Corps on the hills east of Görz. This was a very unwelcome result of the Ninth Battle.

Also on the northern edge of the Karst plateau, hot fighting broke out again in the morning east of the Little Fajti hrib. From this hill, after very powerful artillery fire, the Italian 45 ID thrust forward with three regiments, seeking to capture Heights # 464. Here, at the crucial point of the new defensive front, a new success would decide the battle. The Italians attacked with determination and did penetrate the position, which still lacked complete cover from its incomplete barbed wire barrier. At this time 17 ID was already being drawn up for the counterattack, and their IV Battalion of the Temesvar IR 61 was standing ready. Quickly recognizing the danger that threatened the new front at its most sensitive point, the Battalion carried out a counter-thrust along with the remnants of the garrison. The hitherto-victorious enemy were taken completely by surprise. The Italians suffered heavy casualties and fell back, pursued into no-man's land. They also lost 11 officers and 500 men as prisoners, as well as 7 machine guns.<sup>603</sup> This significant setback deprived the enemy of hope that they could continue with their attack in this most effective direction.<sup>604</sup>

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603 The Battalion commander, Captain Peter Roosz of IR 61, received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria-Theresia Order for this feat of arms.

604 Here the Italian Brigade Toscana were engaged. From 1 to 3 November they lost 13 officers and 377 men killed, 51 officers and 1274 men wounded, and 8 officers and 911 men missing ("Brigate di fanteria", Vol. IV).

Because of the troops' exhaustion, preparations for the counter-attack ordered by 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ were postponed until late in the morning. It was clear to Archduke Joseph that any further delay would further jeopardize the already slim chances that the operation could succeed against the larger enemy force, so he stated that the thrust would start around 3:00 PM. In the report he submitted about this to Army HQ, however, he didn't fail to mention that the commanders of 17 and 28 ID were both of the opinion that it would be better to forego the counterattack. Failure could have decisive impact on the entire front. Moreover, there were misgivings about the wisdom of leaving their current position, which at least was partly constructed and well-sited tactically, to capture the old line (now demolished) or some intermediate position on open terrain.

Under these circumstances, and because the uncertain situation made it necessary to use the insufficient reserves sparingly, GO Boroevic ordered that the counter-thrust should be canceled. The troops would instead resist to the end along the line they now occupied. It was hoped that the situation on the Karst plateau would swing considerably to the defenders' advantage in the next few days. In the evening 6½ battalions from 14 ID were marching to the front, to be followed by 4 more the next day. The 28 ID, which had already received IR 21 on 2 November, would be further reinforced by IR 47. Finally the high command announced that the k.k. 1 Lst Inf Bde was coming; they had been made available by the German OHL in the Russian theater of operations and their troop trains would immediately follow those of 14 ID.<sup>605</sup>

#### 4 November

The Italians meanwhile had completed their preparations to rip open the "Hudilog sack" by capturing the positions on the southern wing of the Aus-Hung. Karst front. Thus on 4 November the XIII Italian Corps attacked the front between Hudilog and Jamiano. Three division stormed against this line - 47 ID (reinforced with two fresh brigades from the Army's reserves<sup>606</sup>)

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605 The order of battle of GM von Soretic's k.k. 1 Lst Inf Bde was - k.k. Lst IR 2 (3), 22 (3). The movement of the Brigade to 5<sup>th</sup> Army was complete on 11 November, but their k.k. Lst IR 1 was still left behind in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's area.

606 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE - Apparently the brigades in question were Lazio and Salerno, which were engaged in the battle per "Brigade di Fanteria" but don't appear assigned to any of the front-line divisions listed in the order of battle above.

toward the corner at Hudilog, and 34 and 33 ID once more toward Lukatic and Heights # 208. Selo was the overall objective of the thrust.

In the morning the (Mtn) LW IR 27 was already repelling heavy attacks at Hudilog; after short but very heavy drumfire the Italians then stormed forward in vain along the entire front from Hudilog to Heights # 208. Along with Group Schenk's steadfast infantry, accurate and effective artillery fire played a major role in the day's success. Bitter fighting was still going on until around 8:00 PM, when the guns became silent as night fell. With these local actions the Ninth Battle of the Isonzo came to an end.

The Italians had gained more ground than in either of the preceding battles. But instead of the hoped-for breakthrough, which at times seemed to be within their grasp, they had only pushed a salient into the defensive front. This bulge wasn't deep enough to seriously threaten the Aus-Hung. positions on the hills east of Görz, or to force the southern wing of the Karst defenders, still holding onto both sides of the outlet from the Vallone valley, to waver. The Duke of Aosta thus hadn't made any noteworthy progress on the thorny road to Trieste; intensive new efforts would be needed to draw nearer to this cherished goal.

And even the meager successes of the Ninth Battle had cost the Italians very heavy casualties. Their official sources estimate the casualties were 825 officers and 28,100 men.<sup>607</sup>

On the other hand, the southern wing of Boroovic's Army lost 28,000 men. According to Italian reports, 259 officers and 8700 men were taken prisoner; 23 guns, 9 trench mortars and 42 machine guns also remained in the enemy's hands. 66 more guns and 8 machine guns became unusable during the course of the

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607 Figures are in "Le medaglie d'oro", Vol. II, p. 198. But the equally authoritative "Le brigate di fanteria" provides casualty lists for individual Italian infantry units that arrive at a different total for the dead, wounded and missing - 975 officers and 31,800 men. The southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had lost 180 officers and 6500 men. Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army the figures were: 365 and 12,500 for XI Corps, 300 and 10,500 for XIII Corps, and 130 officers and 2300 men for VII Corps. Therefore total casualties can be estimated as about 35,000, of whom 32,000 men were killed or wounded, since the defenders took 3000 prisoners.

fighting. The heavy loss of almost a third of the available riflemen could only be made up gradually. For the time being units taken from other fronts would have to help out.

Despite the casualties and the loss of territory, the position of 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Karst plateau now took a decided turn for the better. For the first time since the final phase of the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, the defenders of the northern part of the plateau were stationed in a tactically favorable position where better defenses were under construction. Completion of these works was carried out energetically in the next few weeks.<sup>608</sup>

The situation of the defenders opposite the flanks of the Italian salient was considerably less favorable. On 4 November the 14 ID was deployed between Kostanjevica and Hudilog, which finally sealed the dangerous gap on the south. But on the northern slopes of the plateau the Italians had made considerable progress south of Biglia; it would be necessary to fight in order to gain the upper hand in this area. The troops stationed here under 28 ID began to prepare for this next task.

#### **4. Summary of the autumn battles; minor fighting through the end of 1916**

The raw late autumn of 1916 brought large-scale operations to an end with gusts of rain and a Bora blowing over the cold Karst rocks. The time had come for both sides to draw clear conclusions over the results of the three preceding battles and to decide their future courses of action.

##### The Austro-Hungarian situation

The k.u.k. VII Corps had tried and failed to find a new tactical method that could reduce the casualties involved in defending a line under difficult circumstances. The result was the opposite. The garrisons of the positions were too weak, and were bled to death before the reserves - who were held too far to the rear - could intervene. Not only were the casualties greater, but a substantial amount of territory was lost. This time it was still possible to avoid a breakthrough and to check the Italian thrust along the Kostanjevica position (which was already under construction). But it was clear that in the

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608 In addition to the local garrisons, work on the installations was entrusted to a fortification construction group, which had 18,500 laborers by the end of November.

future only well-built fortifications could ensure a successful defense. Boroevic's Army directed their efforts to achieving this objective in the weeks that followed. The first goal was to complete the main position, which had been occupied prematurely due to enemy pressure; then back-up lines and intermediate strong points would be constructed.

The bloody fighting in the three autumn battles had led to heavy casualties. (The appendix to this section displays the losses of the southern wing of the k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army in the months of September, October and November.) Therefore the high command had to send units to 5<sup>th</sup> Army in addition to the normal replacement troops. Simultaneous with the approach of 1 Lst Inf Bde from the northeast, one battalion apiece also came from Tyrol and Carinthia. In addition, Archduke Eugene's Army Group would give up 3500 men and 10<sup>th</sup> Army 1000 men to rebuild the units which had suffered the most in the Ninth Battle.<sup>609</sup> Finally, an agreement was concluded with the German OHL under which 20 Hon ID would move to a quiet sector of the front in the northeast to complete their rehabilitation, and in exchange 48 ID would join 5<sup>th</sup> Army. The latter Division arrived in the second half of November.<sup>610</sup> However, only the HQ of 20 Hon ID and their 39 Hon Inf Bde left; 81 Hon Inf Bde stayed with Boroevic's Army as a reserve of the AOK, and 20 Hon FA Bde with VII Corps. In December the 41 Hon ID also came from Russia and was assembled in the Sesana area in the reserves of the high command.<sup>611</sup>

This substantial increase in the infantry, which immediately renewed the spirits of the troops, was followed by reinforcements for the artillery. Soon after the end of the Ninth Battle, the 9 FA Bde arrived in Sector III.b<sup>612</sup>; they were followed by six heavy batteries from Tyrol and Carinthia, and by the special very heavy guns (38 cm and 42 cm howitzers, 35 cm

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609 The units which had suffered heaviest losses were IR 96, III Bn/BH IR 3, and the LW IR 2, 4 and 21. The number of replacement troops who actually arrived wasn't anywhere near 4500 men.

610 The order of battle of GM Prince Schwarzenberg's 48 ID was - 11 Mtn Bde [Bns IV/3, I/10, I and II/79], 12 Mtn Bde [Bns I/3, II/37, I/93, II/100], 1 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Rif Bn.

611 The order of battle of GM Schamschula's 41 Hon ID was - 82 Hon Inf Bde [Hon IR 12 (3), 20 (2)], 40 Hon Inf Bde [Hon IR 31 (2), 32 (2)], 5 and 6 Sqdns/Hon HR 4; 41 Hon FA Bde.

612 On 10 November the HQ of Group Schenk was designated HQ of XXIII Corps.

cannon) which hitherto had been stationed at Sistov on the Danube.

### The Italian situation

On the Italian side, the more or less limited successes against the completely demolished positions which they gained at the start of each of the three autumn battles were followed by a rapid decline in the impetus of the attacking groups. This was due partly to the inadequate training of the lower-ranking officers, but above all to the caution with which the high command shrank from the full-scale assault which alone could have brought them victory. Cadorna explains the failure to achieve a substantial success as follows:

"One of the three Karst offensives in fall 1916 lasted for just a few days. It was broken off as soon as it seemed that the casualties weren't proportionate to the prospects. This was the same reason why the counter-offensive on the Asiago plateau was broken off in July, when it seemed more advisable to prepare for a new surprise offensive than to continue an exhausting operation that had slight chance of success. The lessons which we and our allies learned in 1915 indicated that most victories were gained in the first onslaught if the operations were meticulously planned in all their details. Prospects quickly shrink when the exhaustion of the troops increases. Therefore the high command terminated the three Karst offensives at the right time, even though commanders of some units definitely wanted to continue fighting and though the chances for an immediate success seemed promising. These methods noticeably held down casualties."<sup>613</sup>

Without going into further detail regarding Cadorna's assertions, we can conclude that the Italian attacks always stopped when the defenders committed fresh reserves; this is also evident from the description of the battles. This was the main reason why the Italian offensives failed, despite their careful preparation and considerable numerical superiority in men and equipment, and despite the heroism of the troops. The stout-hearted defenders once more overcame hours and days of severe crisis and prevented the enemy from breaking through toward Trieste.

Cadorna believed that the most important result of the three Karst battles was the impact they had on the general military

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613 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, p. 20

situation, particularly the fact that he had hindered the re-deployment of troops to Transylvania. But this is incorrect, as proven by the successful transport of three mountain brigades from the Southwest Front, despite the heavy fighting, to the Romanian theater of operations where they played a decisive role in the campaigns.

The fall battles had undeniably made it clear to the defenders that their enemy was becoming more proficient in handling large units. On the other hand, it soon was evident to the Italians that the four Isonzo battles of the second half of 1916 had cost their Army many of its best fighters. This led to a significant decline in the quality of the Italian infantry, especially since they soon began to form a large number of new brigades.

At this time there was still no shortage of reserve manpower in Italy; the casualties from the Ninth Battle were soon replaced. Therefore the Italian high command wished to continue thrusting toward Trieste in 1916. When early winter in the mountains led to cancellation of the planned offensive on the northern part of the Asiago plateau shortly before it could start, four brigades were shifted from there to the Isonzo. Thus the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army reached a strength of 32 brigades. They had more than twice as many troops as the opposing VII and XXIII Aus-Hung. Corps.

But unfavorable weather also dominated the Karst in November and December and hindered planning for the new offensive. And so on 26 December the Italian high command finally decided to eschew any further major attacks during the winter.<sup>614</sup>

#### Limited operations for the remainder of 1916

Despite the bad weather, the pause in fighting after the Ninth Battle was at times interrupted by lively artillery fire and by local operations. It's significant that the latter were mostly carried out by Borojevic's Army and ended successfully. The first of these blows was struck by the k.u.k. 58 ID on 14 November. Near Görz they launched a surprise assault, without artillery preparation, on Heights # 171 east of St Peter. The part of our positions that had been lost in the last battle was recovered; the Italians suffered very heavy casualties, including 540 men taken prisoner and 9 machine guns. The IV Battalion of the re-formed Prague IR # 28 were prominent in this action.

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614 Cadorna, "La guerra", Vol. II, p. 21

A few days later (on 18 November) the Styrian IR 47 attacked the important Heights # 126, which were opposite the new position south of Biglia in 28 ID's sector.<sup>615</sup> After taking this hill in the recent battle the enemy had been able to observe the southern wing of XVI Corps (on the northern bank of the Wippach) and to fire on their flank. Now the heights were recovered in a bitter fight, and then retained by the gallant Styrians against stubborn Italian counterattacks on the following days.<sup>616</sup>

Confidence in the fighting spirit of the troops, which now was as great as ever, and the substantial reinforcements which had flowed to 5<sup>th</sup> Army<sup>617</sup> naturally caused GO Boroevic to return to the idea (abandoned on 3 November) of cutting off the "Hudilog sack." This operation would take place after the Italian infantry offensive was thwarted in the new battle which was anticipated to start at any time. The goal would be to move our own front forward at least to the line V. Hribach - Pecinka - Hudilog.

Orders issued on 17 November envisioned a thrust by VII Corps to the west and by XXIII Corps to the north and northwest.

But the expected Italian offensive didn't occur. The Italians were hastily increasing the strength of their fortifications in this advanced part of their front. The Aus-Hung. leaders recognized therefore that their intended operation would lead to significant casualties which couldn't be justified by the value of shortening the front. Therefore the plan for a major counter-attack was dropped and all efforts were transferred to building up the system of fortifications, where sooner or later new actions with the stubborn enemy would break out.

APPENDIX - Casualties of the southern wing of 5<sup>th</sup> Army from September to November 1916

XVI Corps

September (58 ID & 43 LW ID) -

. 78 officers - 4 dead, 7 wounded, 57 ill, 0 missing

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615 The new organization of the infantry in 28 ID was - 55 Inf Bde [IR 11 (4) and I Bn of BH IR 3], 56 Inf Bde [IR 47 (2½) and Bn II/57].

616 Vogelsang, "Das steirische IR 47 im Weltkrieg" (Graz, 1932), pp. 506 ff.

617 On 15 November the 5<sup>th</sup> Army had 150,000 riflemen available, plus 14,000 more in March formations.

. 4170 men - 216 dead, 1040 wounded, 2860 ill, 54 missing  
 October (58 ID & 43 LW ID) -  
 . 155 officers - 11 dead, 43 wounded, 78 ill, 23 missing  
 . 8417 men - 764 dead, 3370 wounded, 2898 ill, 1385 missing  
 November (58 ID & 43 LW ID)  
 . 149 officers - 23 dead, 37 wounded, 80 ill, 9 missing  
 . 7227 men - 746 dead, 3033 wounded, 2850 ill, 598 missing

VII Corps

September (17 & 28 ID; 20 Hon ID)  
 . 271 officers - 29 dead, 7 wounded, 96 ill, 49 missing  
 . 12,675 men - 1422 dead, 6377 wounded, 2322 ill, 2554  
 missing  
 October (17 & 28 ID; 20 Hon ID, 44 LW ID)  
 . 377 officers - 51 dead, 125 wounded, 110 ill, 91  
 missing  
 . 17,729 men - 1959 dead, 7886 wounded, 2710 ill, 5174  
 missing  
 November (17 & 28 ID; 44 LW ID; 14 ID)  
 . 317 officers - 16 dead, 64 wounded, 109 ill, 128  
 missing  
 . 13,886 men - 709 dead, 4012 wounded, 3777 ill, 5388  
 missing

Group Schenk [XXIII Corps]

September (9 ID, 24 Lst Mtn Bde)  
 . 160 officers - 20 dead, 49 wounded, 66 ill, 25 missing  
 . 7870 men - 584 dead, 3611 wounded, 2016 ill, 1659 missing  
 October (9 & 16 ID; 24 Lst Mtn Bde, LW IR 4)  
 . 256 officers - 25 dead, 75 wounded, 71 ill, 85 missing  
 . 12,585 men - 1025 dead, 5321 wounded, 2201 ill, 4038  
 missing  
 November (9, 10 & 16 ID)  
 . 222 officers - 16 dead, 59 wounded, 108 ill, 39 missing  
 . 9349 men - 726 dead, 3968 wounded, 3130 ill, 1525 missing

Reserves

September (16 ID, 10 Mtn Bde)  
 . 41 officers - 4 dead, 25 wounded, 11 ill, 1 missing  
 . 2476 men - 198 dead, 1590 wounded, 537 ill, 151 missing  
 October (10 ID)  
 . 25 officers - 1 dead, 7 wounded, 17 ill, 0 missing  
 . 1078 men - 77 dead, 457 wounded, 544 ill, 0 missing  
 November (24 Lst Mtn Bde and individual battalions)  
 . 37 officers - 0 dead, 10 wounded, 23 ill, 4 missing  
 . 2125 men - 146 dead, 845 wounded, 706 ill, 428 missing

Totals

September (7½ divisions)  
 . 550 officers - 57 dead, 188 wounded, 230 ill, 75  
 missing

. 27,191 men - 2420 dead, 12,618 wounded, 7735 ill, 4418  
missing  
October (9½ divisions)  
. 813 officers - 88 dead, 250 wounded, 276 ill, 199  
missing  
. 39,809 men - 3825 dead, 17,034 wounded, 8353 ill, 10,597  
missing  
November (9½ divisions)  
. 725 officers - 55 dead, 170 wounded, 320 ill, 180  
missing  
. 32,857 men - 2327 dead, 11,858 wounded, 10,463 ill, 7939  
missing  
Grand total  
. 2088 officers - 200 dead, 608 wounded, 826 ill, 454 missing  
. 99,587 men - 8572 dead, 41,510 wounded, 26,551 ill, 22,954  
missing

## ***D. Fighting in Tyrol and Carinthia through the end of 1916***

### **1. Continuation of the Italian attacks on Tyrol's southeast front**

#### **a. The Fleims valley sector in September and October**

Since the spring offensive by the Sieben Gemeinde had been broken off, Archduke Eugene's Army Group - although engaged in heavy fighting - had constantly been giving up units to other fronts. All available troops had been flowing from Tyrol to the Northeastern front (sore-pressed by Brussilov's offensive) and to the defenses of the Karst. Now, at the start of September, the high command again was looking for more units to confront the imminent new Italian onslaught on the lower Isonzo and to build up a front against the new enemy in the East, Romania. So Archduke Eugene had to resign himself to giving up more of his force.

#### The September actions

At this time the actions in the Fleims valley sector, which had raged in the second half of August, were still continuing. Roth's Corps was holding four battalions - all experienced in the mountains - in readiness to recapture the Cauriol (which had been lost on 28 August). The attack had been scheduled for 1 September, then was postponed until the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The success of the operation seemed questionable because of the relative size of the opposing forces and the local situation, which favored the Italians. Anyway, before it could start it was canceled by the high command. This was because of the overriding need to conserve available ammunition reserves for the impending major battle on the Karst and for the Romanian front.<sup>618</sup> But in their order of 1 September the high command also clearly stated their belief that due to the situation (both in general and specifically in the Southwest) all less important operations should be canceled to make reserves available.

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618 The daily consumption of artillery ammunition at this time was 26,000 rounds for field cannon and 14,400 for field howitzers.

Army Group HQ, however, had a different opinion. The enemy had half their forces stationed on the Isonzo and half opposite Tyrol; at their discretion, they could powerfully attack either of these fronts. But a breakthrough in Tyrol would be more perilous than Italian progress on the Karst, because if the Tyrol front was threatened any units shifted to that theater would arrive too late. Therefore eight or nine battalions should remain in reserve in Tyrol, along with a large supply of ammunition to heighten the strength of the artillery, which had been reduced by giving up many of their guns.

In their reply the high command pointed out the decisive significance of the front in the coastal lands and stated that it would be sufficient to give Army Group HQ authority over the 13 Mtn Bde, which was still in Tyrol. Further decisions would follow after reconnaissance and intelligence reports provided a clearer picture of the enemy's intentions.

Italian Supreme HQ had decided that the attack in the Fassana Alps would continue while the new onslaught on the Karst plateau began. For this purpose GM Ferrari's Group, which again would lead the operation in this part of the front, was reinforced by five Alpini battalions from the northern part of the Asiago plateau. There were now 38 Italian battalions on the Fleimstal front. The 13 battalions of 17 ID were stationed between the Pellegrino valley and the Colbricon; 9 battalions of Ferrari's group were on the slopes in front of the wall of cliffs from C. di Ceremana to Coltorondo. The decisive attack would be carried out by an Alpini group of 5 battalions on a line from the Coltorondo sector through the Forcella di Coldose to the C. Cancenagol. A second group of 5 battalions would roll up the position on the crest of the Cauriol ridge from Mt Cauriol through the Gardinal to the Busa Alta. Six battalions from 15 ID were on guard toward the Fassana Alps area west and southwest of the Cauriol.

Roth's Corps anticipated the renewal of the Italian attacks since 7 September, the day when a bombardment by enemy artillery and lively troop movements in the Rolle Pass area were recognized as well-known signs that fighting was imminent. Therefore Army Group HQ shifted three battalions from 13 Mtn Bde to Cavalese and continued the process of relieving some battalions by troops more accustomed to the mountains (which had begun at the end of August when L-Sch Regt III arrived in the Fleims valley). One battalion of this mountain regiment was deployed in the Marmolata positions, which until then had been

the most difficult part of the Fleimstal front to defend.<sup>619</sup> By the middle of the month the 90 ID, in charge of this front, reached a strength of 20 battalions, so they could be confident that their defensive battle would be successful.

The Italian offensive opened on 14 September when small detachments attacked the defenders' positions. On the next day, after heavy fire preparation, GM Ferrari's two western groups tried to break through in the area on both sides of the Forcella di Coldose, while his eastern group stood ready. For the attackers the gains in the bitter fighting, which continued until 19 September, were modest: after four assaults the Italians overwhelmed the garrison of the gap north of the Cauriol. The outpost had been guarded by six platoons, of whom the remnants (3 officers and 106 men) fell into the enemy's hands along with 5 machine guns. The fighting had made it necessary to commit the majority of the reserves of Archduke Eugene's Army Group; on the 19<sup>th</sup> the HQ of 13 Mtn Bde took command over the eastern part of the sector of 55 Mtn Bde (between Mt Cupola and the C. di Cece). But it was apparent that only the onset of a snow storm had interrupted the fighting. Because the scanty reserves were thus pinned down, and because of simultaneous fighting in the Pasubio sector, it was very painful when five battalions (from 5 Inf Bde) had to leave on 17 September as ordered by the high command; they were followed two days later by a sixth battalion.

Therefore on 21 September Army Group HQ reported that in their opinion any further troop transfers would be risky. It was possible that the enemy, after their Isonzo offensive failed, might try their luck again in Tyrol before the advent of the mountain winter. But the high command felt it was more probable that Italian attacks would continue on the Isonzo; moreover they needed to bring all units that weren't absolutely needed on other fronts to Transylvania for the impending decisive campaign against Romania. Therefore the high command, because of the unavoidable demands of the general situation, had to turn a deaf ear to the understandable concerns which Army Group HQ raised concerning the front in Tyrol. On 23 September, while new fighting was raging on the Fleims valley front, the HQ in Bozen received an order to give up a division for 5<sup>th</sup> Army, so that the latter could make two mountain brigades available for the

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619 Glingenbrunner, "Intendanz-Dienst im Gebirgskriege" (in "Mil. wiss. Mitt.", Vienna, 1933 edition), provides an authentic picture of the unique difficulties of defending and supplying the glacier area of the Marmolata.

Romanian theater of operations. Because of the fighting in the Fassana Alps, only 11<sup>th</sup> Army had troops available for this purpose. 10 ID, stationed on the southern wing of III Corps by the Assa Ravine, was chosen to leave; to make its relief possible the already small garrison of the Val Sugana sector had to be further weakened. Here the 18 ID pulled 1 Mtn Bde out of the area between the Sugana valley and the Fassana crest (they were replaced by one Landsturm and two Common Army battalions), and sent the Bde to III Corps where they relieved 10 ID.

These laborious troop movements delayed the departure by train of 10 ID until the start of October; by the 7<sup>th</sup> they were followed by the HQ of XXI Corps and of the L-Sch Div<sup>620</sup>, both of which went to Transylvania. The former sector of XXI Corps (between Lake Loppio and Mt Testa) was taken over by FML Edler von Guseck's Group HQ, the sector on both sides of the Vallarsa by the HQ of 88 L-Sch Brigade.

On 23 September, after very intense artillery preparation the Italians again attacked the Fassana crest, but as previously they were unsuccessful. They did strike stubbornly against the positions of L-Sch Regt # III on the Gardinal and the Busa Alta, as well as against the Coltorondo; but the bitter fighting, which in places led to bloody hand-to-hand combat, didn't bring the Italians a step forward. After temporarily halting their offensive on 24 September, the enemy made a surprise assault on the 27<sup>th</sup> in another vain attempt to secure the hotly-contested rocky crest. Then they paused due to exhaustion.

#### The actions in October

At the start of October the Italians renewed the fighting on a broader front. GM Ferrari's eastern group had made no progress against the southern slope of the Fassana crest, which rises like a wall; to help them out the southern wing of 17 Italian ID attacked on 2 October toward the Colbricon piccolo. After six assaults a Bersaglieri battalion was able to take the western summit of the Colbricon (2608 meters), but the enemy won no further success. They had difficulty in holding parts of their conquest against repeated counterattacks on the 3<sup>rd</sup> by 9 Mtn Bde.

This opening move was followed on 5 October by very strong

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620 In Transylvania the HQ of the L-Sch Div became ID # 73; they were led by FML Ludwig Goiginger, hitherto commander of the Pustertal Division. The latter Division from now on was led by GM Edler von Steinhart.

artillery fire against 13 Mtn Bde's sector, especially on both sides of the Forcella di Coldose where it appeared the Italians wanted to break through this time into the Fleims valley. On the next day about seven Italian battalions attacked the front between the Cauriol and the C. Cancenagol, which was stubbornly defended by L-Sch Regt III. After see-saw fighting the enemy was able only to establish themselves on the southern summit of the Busa Alta.

From 5 October there was also fighting north of the S. Pellegrino valley. Here the attacks of an Alpini battalion were at first repulsed, but finally the advanced position east of the Costabella fell into the hands of the larger enemy force. To exploit this success, Col. Garibaldi's group (seven to eight battalions strong) attacked on 6 October against 179 Inf Bde's front between the S. Pellegrino valley and the Marmolata. By 10:00 PM the Italian onslaught had been checked everywhere.

In the following days the western wing of Ferrari's group continued to attack the positions between the Gardinal and the Busa Alta. The fighting on 8 October was especially heavy; the costly hand-to-hand combat lasted four hours. After this prolonged and exhausting battle it was a relief when the fighting slackened off and when on 10 October an intercepted Italian wireless message announced that the attacks were being halted. The end of the Italians' Fleims valley offensive came just in time for Archduke Eugene's Army Group. Although they were weakened by giving up units, they now could build up reserves urgently needed by 11<sup>th</sup> Army, which since 9 October had been in heavy combat. The HQ of XVIII Italian Corps, which directed operations on the Fassana front, wanted to use this pause to bring order to their units and to prepare new positions for the artillery.

The few battalions under the direct control of the Army Group at the start of October were shifted toward the southern wing of Roth's Corps so they could quickly spring to the aid of the endangered Fleimstal front. On 6 October Army Group HQ had three reserve battalions, 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ just one. At this point the high command ordered that yet another brigade should be given up to the Isonzo front, which was anticipating another massive attack. In reply the Army Group HQ pointed out that the Italians were already attacking toward the Fleims valley on a 30 km front and declared that it was impossible to immediately assemble the five battalions which would be needed to make up a brigade. Further weakening of 11<sup>th</sup> Army in south Tyrol could have unforeseeable consequences.

Although the high command wouldn't rescind the orders they'd issued, in fact the units didn't leave because heavy fighting broke out on 9 October around the Pasubio.

The pause in the actions on the Fleimstal front since 10 October was finally broken toward the end of the month. The contest around the Gardinal and the Busa Alta broke out anew on 30 and 31 October, but the Italians were unsuccessful. Thereafter actions along this mountainous front ended almost entirely; due to the lateness of the season the enemy now had to devote their energy to preparing their lines for the mountain winter. Both sides brought order to their units. Army Group HQ pulled several battalions from the front along with the HQ of 13 Mtn Bde. The Italians altered the orders of battle of 17 ID and of Ferrari's Group; the latter was designated the 56 ID in mid-December.

This was the end of the Italians' Fleims valley offensive, which had been renewed six times. They had hoped to break through toward Bozen and devoted all available resources to this end, but all they gained were a few mountain summits which allowed them to observe the Fleims valley. Although they had temporarily tied down the reserves of the opposing Army Group, this hadn't won the attackers any permanent advantage because the Italians never attacked simultaneously in the two sectors they'd chosen for their offensives. Thus the defenders were still able to deploy their reserve troops as needed, employing the tactics which the Central Powers were using everywhere in successful defensive operations.

The Italians had paid dearly for the trifling successes won in months of effort. The attackers' casualties were 300 officers and 10,000 men, including 1000 taken prisoner.

#### **b. The September actions around the Pasubio and the explosion of the Cimone**

When the Italians renewed their attacks on the Fleims valley front at the start of September, fighting in varying strength also erupted in other sectors of Archduke Eugene's Army Group.

First the Italians continued their efforts opposite District V to gain ground toward the Puster valley in a slow advance along the road from Cortina d'Ampezzo to Toblach. Although the Aus-Hung. troops stationed here were able to repulse the attacks on

the slopes southeast of the road on 4 September, on the same day the Italians took the summit of the Forame (2566 meters). The enemy didn't enjoy their success in this sector for long. Already on 5 September a detachment of 100 hand-picked Alpine troops under a mountain guide familiar with the area recovered the peak in a brilliant counterattack. To exploit this victory, on 13 September they also recovered our original main position, which had fallen to the Italians on 29 August due to treachery; these trenches were once more incorporated into the defensive lines.

The Italians made strenuous efforts to re-capture the Col Santo massif, which would gain them considerable advantage; perhaps they would be able to compel the Austrians to retreat to the positions they'd held before the spring offensive. Defense of the Pasubio sector, which thus had the greatest importance for the southern front of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, was entrusted to the Kaiser Jaeger of Col. Ritter von Ellison's 58 Mtn Bde. Here, on the western wing of GdK Fürst Schönburg's XX Corps, the 8 ID (FML Edler von Verdross) was adjacent to the Landes-Schützen Division (GM Englert) of FML Freih. von Lütgendorf's XXI Corps. The sector of the latter Division ran from Mt Testo straight through the Vallarsa to the western slope of the Zugna Torta.

Increased firing from the Italian artillery began on 8 September after the Lands-Schützen carried out a successful operation in the Vallarsa, and intensified the next day along the front from this valley east past the Pasubio. Many new batteries were identified. Soon thereafter an intercepted Italian wireless measure mentioned a planned operation "against a position higher than 2100 meters"; there was no doubt that this referred to the Pasubio.

Here the two sides were stationed in close proximity on the mountain's broad and flat upper portion. From Point # 2235, which the enemy had occupied during the spring offensive, the "Italian table-land" stretched toward the north. On the other side of a deep but passable ravine the ridge continued as the "Austrian table-land" (2206 meters high). Farther north the mountain descends in steep slopes to the surrounding plateau, and therefore the "Austrian" part of the summit can only be easily reached from the ridge mentioned above. Dominated by this mighty heart of the Pasubio position, the adjacent Aus-Hung. lines ran to the west (the Cosmagnon position) and to the Borcola Pass in the northeast. These parts of the front were vulnerable to flanking fire from the higher Italian lines they faced, and could only be held as long as was the "Austrian

table-land." Moreover, because of the terrain, once the table-land was lost there was hardly any chance that it could be recovered in a counterattack over the steep northern slopes.

Now the Italians fired upon the Austrian table-land with their artillery, which had the advantage of flanking positions, and their trench mortars. The mountain was also the arena of very bitter hand-to-hand fighting. In this narrow sector (200 meters long and 100 wide) the horrors of battle reached a hellish level for both sides. Because so many of the local Tyrolean troops shed their blood on these stones the Pasubio became known as the "Kaiser Jaeger Mountain."

In mid-August the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Italian Army had already instructed V Corps to prepare an operation against the Pasubio, with the Col Santo as the eventual objective. The attack would develop in mid-September simultaneously with the Karst battle ("Seventh Isonzo") so as to tie down the opposing reserves in Tyrol. The main role was assigned to 44 Italian ID, which was brought up to the strength of a corps and deployed in attacking columns. Four battalions would advance in the Vallarsa, and ten toward the sector between Mounts Spil and Corno. On the plateau six battalions would assault the Cosmagnon position. Nine specially-selected battalions would deliver the principal blow on the Pasubio. 27 ID, adjacent to the east, would support the attack by thrusting with four battalions toward the C. del Coston.

In the morning of 10 September strong artillery fire broke out against the defensive positions between the Zugna Torta and Mt Seluggio, immediately followed by infantry attacks against 8 ID and the L-Sch Div. The Italian assaults on Mounts Corno, Spil and Testo were soon repulsed. But the fighting on the Pasubio was lengthier and more intense<sup>621</sup>; from 1:00 PM the defenders stood under very heavy fire from Italian artillery and trench mortars, which here as elsewhere proved to be effective weapons. Small penetrations were soon wiped out. The Italians who entered the fully-battered main position on the southern part of the "Austrian table-land" were thrown out again after costly hand-to-hand combat. The fighting here was renewed during the night. Heavy fire began again at dawn, but the Kaiser Jaeger were able to defeat the assaults which followed.

The fighting on the Pasubio now ended, but the Italians made

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621 Fröhlich, "Der Kampf um die Berge Tirols" (Bregenz, 1932), pp. 121 ff.

attempts to advance in the Vallarsa and in the Posina valley on 13 September. The attackers everywhere encountered very stubborn resistance; except for the heavy casualties inflicted on both attackers and defenders, the Italian onslaught ended without any effect.<sup>622</sup>

Now there was a pause in the fighting in 11<sup>th</sup> Army's sector, which was utilized to transfer 5 Inf Bde to 5<sup>th</sup> Army as described earlier. The relative calm was disturbed later in September at just two points along 11<sup>th</sup> Army's front. In the Val Sugana an Aus-Hung. patrol operation led to heavy fighting on the Maso Brook on the 19<sup>th</sup>; it ended around midnight with the recovery of the lost trenches of the bridgehead at Mentrato.

West of the Astico valley, Aus-Hung. troops blew up the summit of the Cimone on 23 September after careful preparation. The Italians had taken this peak, which jutted ahead of the main Aus-Hung. position, on 23 July; it was important mainly because it had given us an observation point from which we could see far into the Venetian plains. The summit was only a few meters in front of the Aus-Hung. lines, but an attempt to recapture it by direct attack failed because there was only a narrow ridge connecting it to the Tonezza plateau (29 July). On this same day, while the attempt at re-conquest was still going on, 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ ordered that preparations should begin for a mining attack. The necessary labor was made easier by the fact that a cave only 20 meters in front of the Italian position was still held by the Salzburg and Upper Austrian soldiers of IR 59. After the toilsome task of constructing secure approach routes, drilling began in the cavern on 30 August.

The project was begun with hand-held tools and later continued with machines; it made quick progress.<sup>623</sup> The explosion was set off at 5:45 AM on 23 September, and was completely successful. The "Rainer" infantry stormed forward immediately afterwards and encountered no resistance worth mentioning as they occupied the crater. Most of the Italian garrison, where some troops were being relieved at the time, lay buried in tunnels and trenches.

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622 "Le medaglie d'oro", Vol. II, pp. 219 ff.

623 The project took 23 days. On average the work was carried out by 40 sappers, who were assisted by infantry. Three caverns were dug, and packed with 4500 kg of dynamite, 8700 kg of dynamon and 1000 kg of black powder and explosive charges. The tunnel was 11 ½ meters below the peak. The explosion created a crater 50 meters wide and 22 meters deep.

The survivors - 15 officers and 477 men - were taken prisoner.<sup>624</sup>

Attempts were made to save the Italians who'd been buried alive under the rubble, even though the enemy had refused to allow a truce for this purpose and kept bombarding the area with artillery. 35 Italians were rescued by 30 September.

The Cimone summit, or rather the crater which had replaced it, was incorporated into the defensive position. In the first days after the explosion it was the target of retaliatory fire. And for weeks thereafter it was still being bombarded by numerous batteries deployed in a half-circle from the northern edge of the Cengio plateau to the slopes of Mt Seluggio. Therefore construction of the new trenches was very difficult; a considerable amount of time elapsed before the work had progressed enough to bring the casualties of the garrison down to an acceptable level.

### **c. The Battle of the Pasubio, 9-20 October**

The pause after the Italian attacks on the Pasubio collapsed in September wasn't of long duration. The Italians immediately began systematic preparations to renew their assault on the k.u.k. 8<sup>th</sup> Division.

This time all efforts would be concentrated on the Pasubio plateau itself; the adjacent sectors would merely be bombarded. The principal attacking group - 7 Alpini and 6 infantry battalions with 4 trench mortar and 6 mountain batteries - would attack the lower sector of the Pasubio, while 6 battalions struck the Cosmagnon. The attack was scheduled to start on 9 October, one day before the opening of the Eighth Battle of the Isonzo; thus the defenders would be hindered from sending reinforcements to the Isonzo. But in any event the sparse reserves of Archduke Eugene's Army Group were already pinned down by the fighting on the Fleims valley front, and the movement of the k.u.k. 10 ID to 5<sup>th</sup> Army had been under way since 2 October.

#### 9 to 13 October

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624 Hoen, "Geschichte des salzburgisch-oberösterreichischen k.u.k. Infanterie-Regimentes Erzherzog Rainer Nr. 59 für den Zeitraum des Weltkrieges 1914-1918" (Salzburg, 1931), pp. 511 ff.

Lively artillery and trench mortar fire against the trenches of Kaiser Jaeger Regiments 1 and 3 began at daybreak on 8 October; it was followed on 9 October by very heavy massed fire. There were 170 Italian guns bombarding our Pasubio positions, consuming mountains of ammunition and firing very quickly. The positions, which hadn't yet been dug to sufficient depth in the brittle rock, disappeared under the hurricane of fire along with the barbed wire. But in their hastily-prepared dug-outs the Kaiser Jaeger were awaiting the call to battle, which would bring them the relief of man-to-man combat.

KJR 3 on the Cosmagnon suffered particularly severely, because the enemy could look down on the southern part of their position and hit it with flanking fire. The point the Italians wanted to attack was soon completely smashed. The defenders' approach route to this position led from the Roite Ridge down a slope which was facing the enemy; thus it was impossible to provide any help for the remnants of the garrison by day. Moreover, since July the Italians were dug in near the trenches; despite two attempts to drive them away (on 17 July and 9 August) they had clung to their own sand-bag positions.<sup>625</sup> Now when the enemy began to attack at 4:00 PM on the 9<sup>th</sup>, they broke into the position along a broad front and overwhelmed the remnants of the garrison. A counter-attack by the few available reserve troops failed, so by evening of the first day's fighting the enemy had firm possession of the southern part of the Cosmagnon position.

During the night of 9-10 October the KJR 3 again tried to recover the lost parts of the position. But the units were too small and couldn't break through; moreover, in places it was impossible to get through the terrain at night. After heavy casualties were suffered, it was decided in the morning to give up the Cosmagnon position and to pull the front back to the Roite ridge. When the exhausted group that had launched the counterattack reached the ridge in the evening, they found that the new line had been occupied by a mixture of March units, specialist troops and remnants of the field companies who'd been hastily brought forward (in some cases by auto). In two days of fighting the casualties of KJR 3 totaled 33 officers and 852 men (of whom 9 officers and 330 men were missing).

Simultaneously with the bitter fighting on the Cosmagnon position, there was also heavy combat in the sector of KJR 1, on

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625 Schemfil, "Das k.u.k. 3. Regiment der Tiroler Kaiserjäger im Weltkriege 1914-1918" (Bregenz, 1926), pp. 380 ff. Also Fröhlich, pp. 123 ff.

the Pasubio. Already in the morning of 9 October the defenders here noticed that the enemy storm troops were inching forward while the destructive fire of their artillery still continued. Around 4:00 PM all the guns were suddenly silent, and the Alpini pushed ahead. They advanced through the forward position, which had been evacuated during the bombardment, into the main entrenchments on the plateau. Fire from two machine guns put a halt to the attack, but later in the day the garrison and reserves had to carry out a counter-thrust. They finally achieved uncontested control of the main position by evening.

The fighting continued on 10 October at an intensified level. The Italians inflicted very heavy losses on the garrison with fire from mountain guns which had been brought up to close range and from trench mortars. But with support from reserves the defenders repulsed the enemy. Finally a counter-thrust in the evening drove the Italians almost entirely from the plateau; they held their ground only in the ruins of the forward position on the edge of the "Austrian tableland." The companies of KJR 1 engaged here had made a superhuman effort, but in the process lost almost three quarters of their strength.<sup>626</sup>

Now there was a pause in the fighting due to exhaustion; it was broken on just some isolated points along the front in the sector between Pasubio and Vallarsa. Thus on 12 October the Landes-Schützen repulsed an attack by two Italian battalions north of Valmorbia in hand-to-hand combat. On 13 October an enemy battalion tried in vain to capture the Roite ridge. Then several days of bad weather, which sorely tried the troops in their destroyed installations, prevented any further fighting.

#### 17 to 21 October

But it was soon demonstrated that the enemy hadn't given up their plan of securing the Col Santo before the onset of the mountain winter. The rain of shells began again as soon as the weather cleared, at 2:00 PM on 17 October. For three hours the guns and trench mortars once again pummeled the front from Mt Testo along the Roite ridge to the Pasubio. The Italian artillery concentrated their bombardment against very small

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626 Based on unpublished studies of Professor Dr.

Oberguggenberger, "Pasubio 24. Juni bis 20. Oktober 1916" and of Minister a.D. Dr. Jaconcig, "Tagebuch." See also Blaas, Hohenleitner and Loreck, "Tiroler Kaiserjäger. Ein Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an die zehnjährige Wiederkehr der Feuertaufe 1914 bis 1924" (Innsbruck, 1924), pp. 128 ff.

areas of the tableland and the adjacent parts of the position. When the waves of storm troops pushed forward around 5:00 PM on the western edge of the tableland they met no resistance because the garrison had taken refuge in a dug-out; the Italians advanced to the northern edge of the tableland. But here the defenders checked their onset; the enemy, apparently disorganized by their unexpected success, were thrown back past the main position. Yet the situation was still precarious because of the heavy casualties suffered by the Kaiser Jaeger. Lively fire was used to deceive the enemy about the strength of the garrison, so that the anticipated renewal of the offensive wouldn't begin before the thin line of defenders was reinforced. Finally toward 10:00 PM some fresh companies arrived and the crisis was past. An attempt during the night to drive the enemy completely from the tableland failed because of the Italians' numerical superiority. Next morning the massive Italian fire resumed with full force as soon as it was light enough to aim the guns. "The tableland was constantly covered with smoke and flames, while all approach routes and the assembly areas in the rear lay under a very heavy barrage."<sup>627</sup>

The enemy infantry advanced at 11:00 AM as soon as their artillery ceased fire; once again they pushed against the western wing of the position on the tableland and reached its northern edge. But also this time the garrison, though threatened from the rear, held on. A counter thrust carried out by the last available men pushed the Italians back to the lost main position.

The situation was again quite critical due to the defenders' casualties; it improved during the afternoon as reserve troops managed, despite substantial losses, to burst through the fiery girdle of the Italian barrage and make their way to the tableland. Around 5:00 PM the II Battalion of KJR 3 finally arrived; its strength had been built up by incorporating March companies, including one from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Now it would be possible to drive the enemy completely off the tableland. A first attempt failed despite the courageous advance of the Tyroleans and their Bosnian comrades. Then the formations were brought to order under cover of darkness, the remnants of the original garrison<sup>628</sup> were pulled from the front,

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627 Blaas, Hohenleitner and Loreck, p. 144

628 The commander of the Pasubio tableland, Lt i.d.R. Viktor Oberguggenberger of KJR 1, received the Knights' Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for the successful defense of

and the troops prepared for the counterattack. At 3:00 AM on 19 October the Kaiser Jaeger pushed forward and after two hours of bitter fighting recovered the advanced position. The Italians left 4 officers, 150 men and 4 machine guns in their hands.

Despite this setback the enemy's determination to attack was by no means fully broken. Around noon heavy preparatory fire opened, and after 4:00 PM two Alpini battalions made a final assault. This attempt was also shattered after two hours of combat. The two sides, exhausted, laid down their weapons; on 20 October there was only some minor fighting. Thus attempts by the Italians to make surprise attacks in fog were frustrated on the Pasubio tableland and along the Roite position. In the Vallarsa an attack by an Italian battalion collapsed with heavy casualties. The Landes-Schützen pressed forward after the retreating enemy and captured 2 officers, 159 men, 1 machine gun and 10 trench mortars. An Italian thrust toward Mt Corno on 21 October was the last action of the battle. Snowfall and icy storms made it vitally necessary for the garrisons of the damaged positions on the heights to quickly build up their installations.

The bitter fighting around the Pasubio had been costly for both armies. On the defending side, KJR 1 lost 31 officers and 1100 men between 10 and 20 October; KJR 3 lost 7 officers and 385 men on just the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, although only five companies of the latter regiment were engaged. On the Italian side the total casualties of the fifteen battalions which fought on the Pasubio were 194 officers and 5918 men between 20 July and 1 November; the Alpini Battalion "Aosta" alone lost 32 officers and 1116 men.

## **2. Autumn gives way to winter in the Tyrolean mountains**

While heavy fighting continued to break out on the fronts of the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army and of Roth's Corps after August, there were no operations of note in fall 1916 along the high mountain positions of Districts I and II, or in the Judicarien. In the Ortler area the Italians did occupy the Thurwies Summit (3648 m) and parts of the Trafoier Eiswand (3553 m) at the start of September, but an enemy assault on the Little Eiskögel (3470 m) failed. Because of persistent snowfall the HQ of District I had to evacuate the Ortler positions on 7 September because they weren't yet prepared for winter; the garrisons were taken back

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this important sector.

to the Payer Chalet. But the weather improved on the following day; the positions were re-occupied and the Trafoier Eiswand incorporated into the front.<sup>629</sup> Afterwards there were no major operations in these high-Alpine sectors because of the early onset of the mountain winter.

In south Tyrol, on the other hand, new dangers threatened on the Asiago plateau shortly after the fighting ended around the Pasubio. The Italian high command had already decided in August that here they would eventually repeat with reinforced strength the assaults which had failed in July. Therefore in September the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army received an order to start to prepare a large-scale operation against the Portule ridge.<sup>630</sup>

It seems the Italians hoped that if they continued to threaten Archduke Eugene's Army Group at the points hitherto under attack (Pasubio and Fassana crest), while striking simultaneously with or immediately after a major offensive on the lower Isonzo, the Aus-Hung. commanders wouldn't have enough units to successfully oppose the intended onslaught south of the border crest.

The Italian preparations, which as usual were meticulous, weren't long concealed from their opponents. Because the pressure against the Fleims valley was relaxed, the Army Group HQ now was free to move their reserves (which consisted of just a few battalions); they didn't hesitate in shifting them onto the plateau behind the northern wing of the k.u.k. III Corps, where 13 Mtn Bde - which had become available in the Fleims valley - would also assemble. It seemed that the storm was about to break around the end of October. But the sudden arrival of bad weather, including a heavy snowfall, compelled the Italians to postpone their attack. Enemy wireless messages intercepted in the next few days, along with prisoners' statements, indicated that the operation would start on 10 November. But continuing snow storms resumed on 8 November. Both sides soon became aware that winter had arrived early in Tyrol this year, and that large-scale military operations in the mountains were impossible.

After mid-November it was determined from Italian wireless messages that many siege batteries had been sent from XVIII and XX Corps (on Tyrol's eastern front) to the Isonzo; thus the long-anticipated offensive on the northern part of the Asiago

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629 Lempruch, "Der König der deutschen Alpen und seine Helden" (Stuttgart, 1925), p. 43

630 "Le medaglie d'oro", Vol. II, pp. 219 ff.

plateau hadn't developed.

Meanwhile fighting had once more flared up in some limited areas along the Fleims valley front. On 3 November the k.u.k. 9 Mtn Bde was able to re-conquer the summit of the Colbricon massif (which had been lost on 2 October). The attackers climbed the mountain wall with ropes and ladders, taking the Bersaglieri garrison completely by surprise. While the original situation was thus restored in this area, on the same day the Italians undertook a similar operation north of the Rolle Pass. Their surprise attack here resulted in their recovering the strong point in front of the C. di Bocche which they'd lost on 19 August.

Heavy fighting continued in the following days at both these parts of the front. On 7 November, after strong artillery fire, a Bersaglieri battalion advanced against the k.u.k. troops who'd recovered the western summit of the Colbricon, but the attack was shattered. In front of the C. di Bocche an Italian battalion suffered a similar rebuff on the 4<sup>th</sup>; an attempt by two battalions on the 6<sup>th</sup> was also defeated. On 7 November the enemy renewed their assault; after it was checked the defenders struck back and once again captured the strong point.

#### The avalanche season

The strong snowfall on 8 November put an end to military combat along all the positions at the higher elevations of Tyrol. Instead, both sides now waged a bitter fight against the "white death." By 11 November, when there was a thaw, the Army Group had already lost 123 dead, 194 injured and 51 missing due to avalanches.

After a brief break in the weather, a strong cold front arrived on 17 November, followed by new snowfall until the 22<sup>nd</sup>. In these days countless avalanches rolled over positions, reserve camps and mountain roads, and in many places interrupted traffic to the front. In two days the Army Group lost 84 dead plus 186 missing and wounded to avalanches; 7 men died and 8 were injured when struck by lightning. This was a depressing prelude to the frightful "Avalanche Winter" of 1916-17. The storms which resumed toward the end of the month piled unprecedented amounts of snow on the mountains.<sup>631</sup> In December new storms with

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631 The following snow depths were reported on 28 November:  
2.5 to 4 meters at Tonale, up to 8.5 at Adamello, 2.5 on the Pasubio and along the border crest, 5 on the Fassana crest,

plentiful snowfall developed between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, then from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> and from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup>; combat was completely impossible. Everywhere avalanches occurred once more, inflicting heavy losses. Especially severe catastrophes struck the garrisons on the Pasubio on 6 December and on the Marmolata on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The Landes-Schützen battalion stationed on the Marmolata alone lost 80 dead, 140 missing and 160 injured. 20 uninjured men were dug out.

Total losses of Archduke Eugene's Army Group during the catastrophic weather of 5 to 14 December were 795 dead, 505 missing (presumed dead) and 652 injured.

The winter weather, which had started prematurely and with unprecedented intensity, continued to keep the garrisons of all the positions on the heights in check. Just as the war of nations itself surpassed all previous conflicts in size and extent, the losses inflicted on the ranks of the troops of both sides by the white death in this winter were especially severe. For the first time in world history mass armies endured the terrors of winter in the mountains when large snow storms were interrupted by periods of considerable thawing. No one who lived through these difficult times will forget the feeling of complete helplessness when men were pitted against the unfettered forces of nature.

The heavy casualties of these months were unavoidable. It is true that on the entire Alpine front the lessons of the preceding year were remembered; everything possible was done, under the direction of experienced Alpine specialists, to protect troops, supply trains and staffs in areas menaced by avalanches. But the size of the piles of snow made a mockery of previous lessons, and the avalanches found new routes through the forests to the valleys, destroying life all along their paths. Tactical situations made it impossible to evacuate all of the points which were threatened by avalanches, and it was necessary to keep the remaining garrisons supplied despite all the dangers on the approach routes.

The bearers and the handlers of the pack animals, along with their brave beasts, displayed a quiet heroism in this dark period that often cost them their lives. In their devotion to duty they were at least equal to the front-line fighters who stayed at their posts despite all the stormy weather. The soldiers could hold onto their positions, often at dizzy

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and more than 3 meters in the Dolomites.

heights, only because of careful preparations for winter and the collection of rations in magazines on the heights. Thus they could survive being cut off from the outside world for weeks, which happened at many points despite all the self-sacrificing efforts of the supply service.

### **3. Events on the Carinthian front through the end of 1916**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Army on the Carnic-Julian front had to endure only a small measure of fighting compared to the battles fought between August and the winter by the troops on the Isonzo front and by some of those in Archduke Eugene's Army Group. There was stubborn fighting on a limited scale in the principal theaters of this part of the front (the Plöcken area and the upper Isonzo), but the only major operations occurred in conjunction with the Seventh Battle of the Isonzo in mid-September.

At the start of September the troops of XII Italian Corps (Zona Carnia) became noticeably more active opposite 25 Mtn Bde south of the upper Gail valley. Strong fire by artillery and trench mortars against the Plöcken positions was followed in the evening of 1 September by attacks from two battalions against the Little Pal. The Italian detachments penetrated the demolished positions, but were immediately pounded by the defenders' artillery fire and thrown out in a counterattack. In the following days a destructive bombardment hit the towns in the Gail valley; parts of Kötschach went up in flames on 3 September.

The fighting around the middle of the month at Flitsch, in the sector of the k.u.k. 93 ID, was of a more serious nature. IV Corps, stationed on the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, had been ordered to attack, at the latest, on 14 September (simultaneous with the offensive of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on the Karst plateau). The objectives were to prevent their opponents from diverting units to the south, and to capture the Rombon.

The Saga Sector HQ, which was in charge of the uppermost stretch of the Isonzo, assembled six Alpini battalions for this offensive. There was lively artillery fire against the positions of 26 Mtn Bde in the Flitsch basin and against Group Golobar on 14 and 15 September. It was followed on the 16<sup>th</sup> by an infantry assault on the Rombon position, conducted stubbornly and without regard for casualties. The Italians suffered a bloody defeat at the hands of two battalions of BH IR 4, accurately supported by the destructive fire of Artillery Group

Flitsch. Several more Alpini battalions who thrust in the evening against the Vrsic position and the Javorcek had no better luck; at the latter point the enemy entered the trenches by surprise, but were thrown out in hand-to-hand combat by Landsturm troops aided by artillery.

After this defensive success by the newly re-formed 93 ID the Italians made only weak attempts to renew their shattered offensive. Therefore 10<sup>th</sup> Army was able to provide two battalions to help 5<sup>th</sup> Army in their heavy battle.

The Italians gained a local success on 27 September in the Plöcken area. Here the garrison of the Kellerwand peak was cut off almost completely by the enemy, who made good use of the terrain, and had to abandon the position.

In the following months there was only the usual low-intensity fighting. 10<sup>th</sup> Army was able to send two more battalions (one each in October and November) to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, as well as 1000 replacement troops.

Just like the units in the Tyrolean mountains, those of 10<sup>th</sup> Army suffered heavily in the catastrophic weather of November and December. In just four days of December the Carnic-Julian front lost 637 dead and 143 injured during avalanches.

### ***E. Actions in Albania in the second half of 1916***

Although Albania has existed on the edge of the struggles of Europe's Great Powers, strangely enough it has always figured prominently in history. This was again the case in 1916 as the country's swamps and trackless mountains weren't a sufficient barrier to keep out the World War. The warlike Arnauts were recruited as volunteers by Austria-Hungary, Italy, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey and (toward the end of the year) also France. These countries all flattered the natives' pride in their homeland while secretly wishing to carve it up into spheres of influence.

#### Orders of battle

The following Austro-Hungarian units were serving in the western Balkans at the end of August 1916.

#### **XIX Corps**

Commander = FML Trollmann

Chief of Staff = Lt Col. Schattel

Strength = 37 bns, 5 gendarme units,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a sqdn, 31 batties, 12 tech comps, 1 Flieger comp. About 22,000 foot, 75 horse, 119 guns, 84 MG

. 47<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Rudolf Braun) = 9672 foot, 50 horse, 43 guns, 54 MG

. 14 Mtn Bde (Col. Johann von Richter) = Bns I/28, II/45, II/72, I/98 (latter attached directly to Div HQ); BH FJB 7; an independent platoon of the Dalm Mounted Rif Bn; 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 2

. k.k. 20 Lst Mtn Bde (Col. Edl. von Hoffmann) = BH FJB 2; IX Ma Bn/LW IR 23; k.k. Lst IR 23 (2); k.k. Lst Bn 46;  $\frac{1}{4}$  of 1 Sqdn/DR 5; 2, 3 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 21

. Albanian units = Bns # I, III, IV, V, VI, VII; a Sanjak Volunteer Detachment

. Attached to the Div by Corps HQ - 7 cm Can Batty Bileca, 9 cm Can Batty Sarajevo; one 15 cm L.35 can batty; Flak Platoon 18; Albanian Mountain Can Batties 1 & 2

. k.u. 211 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Lörinczy; 3294 foot, 25 horse, 28 guns, 16 MG) = BH FJB 1 (detached to 47 ID); k.u. Lst Bns IV/4, I/26, I/31, II/32;  $\frac{1}{4}$  of 1 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 1; 1 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 7; 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 9, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 6. Also under the Bde, but on coast defense, were one 4.7 cm coastal batty, one 10 cm L.50 batty, one captured 12 cm Italian can batty, one 15 cm can batty

. Corps troops (5500 foot, 48 guns)

. Grenz Jaeger Bns I, III, IV, V (of which III & V were attached to 47 ID); k.k. Lst IR 9 (3 bns; III Bn was attached to 211 Lst Bde); k.k. Lst Bn 45

. 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 5, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 19

. 1 Comp/SB 7; 8 & 9 Comps/SB 8; 7 Comp/SB 12; 6 Comp/BH SB 4; 5 Comp/PB 2, 4 Comp/PB 5, 4 Comp/PB 8, 4 Comp/PB 10; 1, 2 & 3 Comps/PB 15

. One trench mortar platoon. Flieger Comp 6

. Scutari Fortress Command (GM Dichtl) = Two field how batties (M.99); four 15 cm mortars, seven 9 cm field can batties (one of which was attached to 211 Lst Bde)

. Garrison and security units - Seven k.k. and k.u. Lst Eta Bns; five gendarme detachments

#### **Troops of the Commanding General in BHD**

Commander = GdI von Sarkotic

Chief of Staff = Col. Minnich

Strength = 25 bns, 4 gendarmerie detachments, 14 independent MG dets;  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a sqdn; 20  $\frac{1}{2}$  batties, 38 fort arty comps; 4 $\frac{3}{4}$  tech

comps; 574 fixed guns, 172 fixed MG

. Wucherer's Coast Defense Area (FML Freih. von Wucherer) had 6 bns, 2 indep MG dets, 3 batties, ½ tech comp; 24 fixed guns. Extended from the northern tip of Dalmatia to Ragusa.

. Sebenico District (Counter-Admiral Zaccaria) = Sectors Zara, Sebenico, Spalato

. Mostar District (FML Haala) = Sectors Makarska, Slano, Metkovic

. Andrian's Coast Defense Area (FML Andrian) had 3 inf bns, 1 gendarme bn, 3 indep MG dets, 6½ batties, ½ a tech comp; 32 fixed guns, 10 fixed MG. Extended from Ragusa to (and including) Mljet. Sectors were Ivanica and Gruda.

. Cattaro Military Harbor (FML von Rollinger) had 6 bns, 7 indep MG dets, 27 fort arty comps, 3¾ tech comps. 227 fixed guns, 112 fixed MG

. Fortress garrisons (5 bns, 2 indep MG dets, 4½ batties, 11 fort arty comps; 291 fixed guns, 46 fixed MG)

. Trebinje (FML Kutzlnigg) = 1 bn, 3 fort arty comps; 77 fixed guns

. Bileca (GM Rudholzer) = 1 bn, 1 indep MG det, 1 batty, 2 fort arty comps; 59 fixed guns

. Avtovac Defensive Area (Major Ritt. von Peer) = 1 bns, 1 batty; 10 fixed guns, 4 fixed MG

. Sarajevo (GM Blechinger) = 1 bn, 3 fort arty comps; 75 fixed guns

. Kalinovik (Rittm. Kostezky) = ½ bn, 1 indep MG det; 8 fixed guns, 8 fixed MG

. Mostar (with Grad and Stolac) (FML Maudry) = An infantry det; 2 ½ batties, 3 fort arty comps; 62 fixed guns, 34 fixed MG

. Additional formations - 5 k.k., k.u. and BH Lst Eta Bns; 12 March comps (from the troops of XIX Corps); 4 gendarmerie dets, ¾ of a sqdn

#### **k.u.k. Military Government in Serbia**

Governor = GdI Freih. von Rhemen

Chief of Staff = Col. Kerchnawe

Strength = 27 bns, 21 gendarme dets, 2¾ sqdns, 11 batties, 1 fort arty bn, 1 tech comp

(Units not listed)

#### **k.u.k. Military Government in Montenegro**

Commander = FML Edler von Weber

Chief of Staff = Lt Col. Hubka

Strength = 23 bns (including 11 k.k. and k.u. Lst Eta Bns on security assignments); 2½ sqdns, 3 batties, 1 fort arty bn, 1 tech comp

- . k.u. 212 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Koneczny; on coast defense) = k.k. Lst Bns I and II/37; k.u. Lst Bns IV/6, IV/17, I/20; ¼ of Res Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; two batteries
- . Garrison troops - Grenz Jaeger Bns II, VI; k.k. Lst Bn I/49; k.u. Lst Bns II & III/26, I & VII/30; 1½ res sqdns of Lst Huss Bn 1; ¾ Res Sqdn Lst Huss Bn 10; 3 Comp/SB 7
- . Also a fortress artillery bn with 11 batties of different caliber

At this time the **Italian** troops in Albania consisted of 30 bns, 12 sqdns, 56 batties and 1 tech bn. They were under HQ of XVI Corps (GM Bandini) and of the 38<sup>th</sup> ID.

- . Infantry - Bde Savona (IR 15 & 16), 10<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt; Territorial Militia Regts 15, 30, 36, 38, 47, 48
- . Cavalry - 15 & 22 Regts; Sardinia Sqdn
- . Artillery - 26 field and mountain batteries, 30 heavy batteries
- . Technical - XX Combined Engineer Bn

#### Logistical and medical problems

The tasks assigned to the troops and HQ in this theater were many and difficult, as the k.u.k. XIX Corps gradually began to realize. Here more than anywhere else the terrain, local population and weather were obstacles to supplying the troops and keeping them healthy. Nowhere else were experience, planning and knowledge of local conditions more important in administering the land and handling the inhabitants. And constant military activity by an enemy with great numerical superiority on land and sea, plus in the air, meant that there was never any rest for the commanders and their men.

Col. Johann Richter's 14 Mtn Bde couldn't be relieved due to the shortage of troops, and suffered a real martyrdom on the Vojusa.<sup>632</sup> Malaria, which was especially prevalent this year, other diseases, and a food shortage (caused by the difficulty in bringing up supplies) combined to quickly reduce the number of men fit for duty. Corps HQ therefore recommended to the high command that eight or nine battalions should be replaced by fresh units; they also asked for three Etappen battalions to relieve the Border Jaeger, who had also been weakened. The Etappen battalions were in fact sent, but it was impossible to shift any new combat units to the Corps' sector.

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632 Veith, "Der Feldzug in Albanien" (in Schwarte, "Der grosse Krieg 1914 bis 1918", Vol. V, p. 532)

The operations

Corps HQ considered abandoning the Vojusa line and pulling 14 Mtn Bde back into the healthier mountains southwest of Berat, but GdI Trollmann couldn't bring himself to this step. He was also unable to adopt mobile defensive tactics because he didn't have enough men. Moreover, it wasn't clear to him how the Italians would finally employ the new units they had sent ahead toward Tepeleni. Toward the end of August the constant skirmishing along the Vojusa developed into attacks by several Italian battalions reinforced by cavalry and mountain artillery. The intention was to divert the attention of the k.u.k. garrison from the enemy's ongoing occupation of southern Albania and to prevent the transfer of troops from XIX Corps to the Romanian or Macedonian theaters of operation. On 4 September the Italians twice pushed past the Gradica Heights, but both times were thrown back over the Vojusa and suffered heavy casualties. The rainy season began shortly thereafter; this year the rains were exceptionally heavy and forced all actions to stop. But they also interfered severely with the provision of food and military supplies to 14 Mtn Bde. The men were preserved from hunger only because malaria had reduced the strength of the units so greatly that small amounts of food were sufficient to feed everyone. The number of combat troops in 47 ID afflicted by malaria was 150 in June, 2401 in July, 3760 in August and 2831 in September.

At the start of September it was agreed with the Bulgarian high command that Albanian volunteers from XIX Corps would guard the latter's western flank. The Albanian battalion at Toci sent their outposts east 10 km toward Tepeleni; farther north the Border Jaeger held the line Cafa glavs - Gramsi (21 km south and 28 km northeast of Berat), and in the Devoli valley made contact with the westernmost Bulgarian detachment on the Trevosa bridge (11 km west of Lake Malik). In mid-October the security zone was extended to the southern tip of Lake Ochrida, and entrusted to two Albanian battalions. In the last week of October it was learned that French cavalry had occupied Korca, so Albanian volunteers in Aus-Hung. service fought their way to the edge of the mountains to the west of that town.

The dangerous situation on the Macedonian front and the possibility that Greece might join the Entente compelled the German OHL in October to propose to the AOK at Teschen that the main body of XIX Corps, reinforced with troops from Montenegro, should concentrate around Elbasan to protect the Bulgarians' western flank. Defense of the coast should be left solely to

Etappen troops. But the k.u.k. high command couldn't agree to such a wide-ranging re-grouping in the Albanian theater. The poor transportation network and logistical situation made large-scale troop movements nearly impossible. Also circumstances in Montenegro and Albania made it seem dangerous, on security grounds, to remove troops. Due to constant agitation among the hostile population of the un-guarded parts of Montenegro it was necessary to take measures to increase our own alertness and readiness to respond. Therefore the cultural activity of the troops was curtailed and more attention was paid to training for anti-partisan warfare. But also in Albania the first signs were appearing that clever enemy propoganda was causing increased dissatisfaction, and thus adding to the concerns of our administrators.

Therefore the Austrians could only shift the k.k. 20 Lst Mtn Bde (now reorganized as the 20 Mtn Bde) to the Elbasan area where it was held ready to move toward Lake Ochrida.<sup>633</sup> For now the k.u. 211 Lst Inf Bde moved forward just to the Tirana-Durazzo area, and 14 Mtn Bde stayed on the Vojusa. The only new units assigned to the Corps were five Etappen battalions. Requests to place 20 Mtn Bde under Below's newly-formed Army Group HQ, and to have them intervene toward the Korca-Zvezda road (southwest of Lake Perespa) were turned down. But orders issued to XIX Corps on 20 October did go a long way toward meeting the Army Group's desire for support from 20 Mtn Bde. A detachment from the Brigade moved ahead at the end of October to Lake Ochrida to establish a closer connection with the westernmost German-Bulgarian group under Prussian Col. Thierry, who was guarding the narrow land between Lakes Ochrida and Perespa. The Albanian volunteers around Korca, a total of 400 men, were skirmishing with French cavalry; at the start of November they repulsed their opponents' attacks and gained further round southwest of the town. Meanwhile the Italian enlarged the area under their occupation along the Vojusa as far as Ljaskoviki (26 km east of Premeti), and also toward the south where an expeditionary force of several thousand men landed at S. Quaranta and advanced to the Greek border.

After the fall of Monastir (described earlier), Group Thierry pulled back to Resna leaving just outposts farther south. The Ochrida Detachment of 20 Mtn Bde, which consisted of two battalions of Lst IR 23, continued to stand guard on the western

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633 The new order of battle for Col. Edl. von Hoffmann's 20 Mtn Bde - Bns I/28, I/92; k.k. Lst IR 23 (2); Grenz Jaeger Bn IV; ¼ of 1 Sqdn/DR 5; 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 7, 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 21.

shores of the lake in the direction of Pogradec. In case the Entente Orient Army fell back to a shorter position around Salonika and Below's Army Group thrust forward, the Brigade would help out in close cooperation with Group Thierry. To prepare for this possible role the Ochrida Detachment moved ahead to the southern tip of the lake and secured the heights north of the Cernava [Cerava]. Thus they came into contact with parts of the Orient Army; this would lead in the following year to actions with larger French forces.

## VIII. Politics and War at the End of 1916

### *A. Review of the fighting in summer and autumn*

The Entente commanders had planned a general offensive for the year 1916. Mainly because of the Russians, who were still nursing wounds from their defeats in 1915, the start of the great operation was postponed until summer. This long delay enabled the Central Powers to seize the initiative for the time being by attacking in February at Verdun and in May at Asiago. But the god of war didn't allow these "extra tours", in which the allies went their separate ways, to go unpunished. While the summer sun burned down upon blood-soaked battlefields in Volhynia and Galicia, at Asiago and Verdun and on the Somme, the armies of the Central Powers were everywhere forced onto the defensive by their enemy's powerful counter-thrusts.

The extreme tension along the fronts at the end of July 1916 has already been thoroughly described at the conclusion of Volume IV and the opening of Volume V. The distress of the Central Powers further intensified in the first half of August. The German defenders of the Somme were still burdened by a battle of attrition of hitherto unknown weight, and in the East the Russians with practically undiminished strength were assaulting the allied wall, which at many points was crumbling. Now the Italians, freed of pressure at Asiago, stormed ahead once more on the Isonzo so they could finally offer their people, already very tired of the war, a visible success; this they accomplished by capturing Görz. Only the hesitation of the attackers after they entered the city enabled the unperturbed commander of the defenders to re-establish a thin line east of the city in time.

#### The Entente armies are checked on the Eastern front

From mid-August there was relative quiet along Austria-Hungary's fronts, but it was only the calm before a new and heavy storm which was now gathering along the mountain borders of Transylvania. On the other side of the mountains the Romanians, who'd been allied with the Central Powers for 33 years, had gone over to the enemy and were taking up arms. Because of the crisis of the Danube Monarchy they had good reason to hope that they could obtain the land of their desire, Transylvania, as an easy prize of victory. To make triumph certain, there would be accompanying offensives on the Russian and Macedonian fronts.

Unlike the Russian Chief of Staff, who from the beginning had grave doubts about the advantages of the Romanian alliance, the French and English had high hopes for the intervention of their new comrades in arms. But the Western Powers were shown to have been deceived.

The course of the fluid, see-saw Romanian campaign has been described in the two sections "The Campaign in Transylvania" and "The Conquest of Wallachia." It seems wonderful that the Central Powers, despite the tension on other fronts, could still assemble enough units to check the new enemy in Transylvania and, together with their other two allies, in north Bulgaria. In a surprisingly short time the scale tipped in favor of the Quadruple Alliance. This was due in equal measure to the outstanding deeds of the troops and to their clear-sighted leaders, who were able to master each situation as it arose. Much of the preliminary staff work had already been accomplished by Conrad and Falkenhayn. And as events unfolded it was Falkenhayn who actually carried out on the battlefield the plans he'd drawn up with his Austrian colleague. He knew how to modify earlier decisions in the light of new developments and, when necessary, how to improvise further operational ideas at the right moment.<sup>634</sup> His energy was passed on to the soldiers in the foremost lines. Meanwhile the commander of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army, GdI Arz (who was defending his own home soil) proved to be a reliable and knowledgeable helper to Falkenhayn.

Unlike the allies, the Romanian high command based their campaign on a plan which from the beginning carried the seeds of its own failure. The uncertainty and nervousness of the generals was soon communicated to the troops, who moreover suffered greatly from their lack of military experience and from not having enough heavy guns and machine guns. It can't be denied that Romanian soldiers knew how to fight bravely without regard for death. This was proven once it was their duty to defend their own home soil against the onslaught of invaders. But in the end all their sacrifice was in vain. At the close of November and the start of December the Romanian commanders - already half-way under the tutelage of their allies - fought a battle at the gates of Budapest, hoping for another "Miracle of the Marne"; they couldn't change their country's fate. By the new year the remnants of their Army were pressed back into a small strip of Moldavia. The bloody game had finally been lost!

On 31 August, four days after Romania declared war, the Russians

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634 Zwehl, p. 264

stormed forward from their trenches in Volhynia and east Galicia for a new offensive. They bored their way once again into their opponents' lines on both sides of the Dniester, and south of this river seriously threatened the oil fields of Drohobycz and Boryslaw. Several times they exacted a bitter price in blood from the struggling defenders. But the Russian commander Brussilov didn't achieve the desired breakthrough. Gradually but unmistakably the striking power of his Front was fading away. Meanwhile the worsening predicament of their new Romanian ally was forcing the Russians to send corps after corps to the eastern border of Transylvania and into the Romanian plains. Their primary focus, which since the start of June had been directed toward Kovel in Volhynia, was by the end of the year switched to the mouth of the Sereth, where they now had to defend against a possible attack on south Russia. Thus the last great deeds of the peasant-soldiers of Russia - encouraged to sacrifice themselves for the Tsar by their priests as well as by various forms of compulsion - had ended in a very bitter disappointment that entered deep into their country's soul, already wracked by fever for a long time.

#### The fronts in Italy and France

Cadorna resumed his offensive on the Isonzo in mid-September. The Italian attacks flared out in three short, sharp blows directed primarily against the northern part of the Karst plateau. The dent which was made in the Aus-Hung. position by the close of the fighting was 4 km deep on a front 8 km wide. Even this limited loss of ground was due in large measure to some rather unfortunate tactical measures of the defenders in this narrow area. The success of the Italians was by no means commensurate with the enormous cost in men and resources. The defenses remained unbroken.

On the Somme the Entente resumed their offensive against the German positions at the start of September. A new German army was inserted on the southern wing of the defenders' front. Once again the attackers won many local successes. The first tanks stormed forward ahead of the infantry. But bad weather set in at the end of September and at the same time the Germans began to rotate their divisions through the battle on a regular basis. Fighting continued for another six weeks between water-filled shell holes over terrain where all the roads had been destroyed. Actions would suddenly flare up with great intensity at different points. But in mid-November the British were still stuck in front of the ruins of Bapaume and the French in front of the ruins of Péronne. Along a 35 km front the Entente had

gained 15 km at their deepest penetration, but the English had lost 410,000 dead and wounded, the French 300,000. German casualties came to 500,000 men. The attackers had thrown more than 100 divisions into the battle, some of them two, three or four times. The French writer de Civrieux<sup>635</sup> described the Somme as "typical of the bloody battles of attrition, which our ancestors had never experienced. Despite all the advances in chemistry and ballistics, modern warfare degenerated into barbaric fighting in which carnage became an end in itself."

Acting on Hindenburg's advice, Emperor Wilhelm ordered on 2 September that all attacks should cease in front of Verdun, since they had no chance of making any progress. But, as Ludendorff has written, Verdun continued to be an open sore. The embers of the battle continued to smolder until 24 October, when the French launched a major counterattack and recovered Fort Douaumont, which the Germans had previously bought with a high price in blood. Several days later the Germans also abandoned the rubble heap of Fort Vaux. On 15 December the French made another assault and recovered almost all the remaining area which the Germans had conquered on the glacis of Verdun. The concept which Falkenhayn had developed in the spring for his offensive against the fortress on the Meuse had suffered complete shipwreck. When the Battle of Verdun started Falkenhayn had reckoned that enemy losses would soon be much greater than those of the German attackers, but at the end the casualties were approximately identical. The French had lost 362,000 dead or wounded and the Germans lost 337,000.<sup>636</sup> The bills were equally shocking to both sides.

#### The secondary theaters of operation

This summary of events on the principal fronts needs to be supplemented by a brief description of the situation of the outposts of the great fortress which was now defended by the Central Powers and their allies.

In Macedonia Sarrail's motley army were obliged by the treaty with Rumania to attack on 20 August. However, they were anticipated three days earlier by the Bulgarians, who captured Florina and advanced their eastern wing to Lake Tahino. The Army of the Orient was finally able to strike back in mid-September. There was large-scale, bloody fighting west of the

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635 In Kuhl, "Der Weltkrieg im Urteil unserer Feinde" (Berlin, 1922), p. 36

636 Wendt, "Verdun 1916" (Berlin, 1931), p. 244

Vardar for two months, ending when the Entente troops captured Monastir. Their victory wasn't especially important from a military point of view, but it had political significance because the attackers included newly-reorganized Serbian divisions which thus set foot once more on territory which Serbia had annexed in 1912-13.

Meanwhile the bitter fate of Greece was being played out in the rear of Sarraill's army. A series of compulsory measures had culminated on 11 October when the Entente took over the Greek Navy. At the same time Venizelos was building a revolutionary counter-government at Salonika. On 19 November King Constantine, who'd been the target of several assassination attempts, was forced to expel the ambassadors of the Central Powers. At the start of December an uprising at Athens against Venizelos and the Entente gave the latter a welcome excuse to impose a blockade on the unhappy country. This was the prelude to further applications of force, to which the Kingdom finally succumbed.

In the Armenian theater of operations there were no further major battles after August. But when winter prematurely arrived in these barren regions it soon proved to be a new enemy to the Turkish troops; many units that had been left without supplies were decimated by the weather. Columns of Aus-Hung. and German trucks tried in vain to improve their allies' hopeless situation.

Nothing significant transpired in Mesopotamia in the second half of 1916. From southern Palestine the commander of the local VIII Turkish Corps (Djemal Pasha) and his Chief of Staff the Bavarian Lt Col. Freih. von Kress made an unsuccessful attack on the Suez Canal, in which two Aus-Hung. batteries (1 How. Batty/4 Mtn AR, 2 How. Batty/6 Mtn AR) also took part. Thereafter VIII Corps was inactive, while behind the lines the English were building a railroad along with a water pipe system through the Sinai Peninsula. Constructed at a rate of 1000 meters per day, the system reached El Arish in February 1917.

The prospects for the Ottoman Empire in the coming year were hardly promising. Despite all the bravery of individual soldiers, the organization of their army couldn't meet the challenge of the unfavorable situation. Moreover, in a self-sacrificing gesture seven divisions had been taken away and equipped at the cost of other fronts so they could be deployed in the European theaters of operation; thus there was a shortage

of men and equipment in Asia Minor and on the Tigris.<sup>637</sup> Disease also did its part to thin the Turkish ranks. The atrociously inadequate transportation system made it impossible to bring up replacement troops in timely fashion or to shift units from less threatened areas to those in greatest danger. German commanders and general staff officers held many important positions at all levels of command, but as the war went on they found it difficult to overcome either the Turks' fatalism or the mistrust which they harbored despite all courtesies.

But for now the increasing concerns about our loyal Turkish ally, and about the loss of the German colonies<sup>638</sup> was of secondary importance because of developments in the principal theaters of operation at the end of 1916. Despite the heavy burden on the Central Powers inflicted by the fighting of this third year of the war, and despite the many crises in the summer, the worst had been overcome by the time the fateful year came to a close. On the Romanian battlefield, where the Entente had hoped to force their opponents to yield, the Quadruple Alliance had fully recovered the initiative which they'd lost in June and July. The close cooperation of the allies under new leadership which they trusted completely, and the incomparable efforts of the troops, had once again dispelled all dangers. But this turn in our fortune was no cause for a victory celebration because of the economic crisis and its social ramifications. At best we'd be able to in a sense start the war over again, although under much less favorable conditions than in summer 1914.

### ***B. Peace proposals of the Quadruple Alliance and of President Wilson***

#### The proposal of the Alliance

Anticipating such a development, on 28 September the Aus-Hung. Foreign Minister Baron Burian had already suggested to his Imperial master that the Quadruple Alliance should prepare a peace proposal. The Emperor gladly agreed. The Chancellor of the German Empire, who throughout the year had carried on unsuccessful negotiations with Woodrow Wilson (President of the United States of North America), and the German Emperor also

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637 Two divisions were fighting in Galicia, three against Romania and two in Macedonia.

638 The last colony, East Africa, could no longer be saved.

concurred with the suggestion of the Ballhausplatz.<sup>639</sup> The basic idea was that the overthrow of Romania would create a military balance of forces which might enable the two camps to honorably terminate the adventure of the war. If the allies were unsuccessful in getting their adversaries to adopt this course, at least they would convince their own populations that their own governments weren't to blame for continuing the war and its horrors. The peoples of the Quadruple Alliance had already sacrificed so many lives and resources that they could only be spurred on to greater efforts if this fact was clear beyond dispute.

Meanwhile the German military leadership was already examining the question of whether to use the weapon of unrestricted submarine warfare. The German Admiralty calculated that this weapon would force England to sue for peace in five months at most, and the Army high command heeded the Navy's opinion. In the Reichstag the Center Party joined the advocates of a strong submarine campaign, giving them a majority. Before resorting to such a dangerous strategy, which would possibly bring America onto the side of the Entente, the Germans wanted to first explore all other methods which might put an end to the war.

The allies easily arrived at a basic agreement about the planned peace proposal. But preparation of a note to be released to neutral countries encountered many difficulties. As each ally outlined their war goals, the other one felt that they were excessive in some areas.<sup>640</sup> Burian urged that the Central Powers

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639 Burian, pp. 141 ff. Bethmann-Hollweg, pp. 151 ff.

640 In general, the allies were considering the following conditions: 1. Restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*. 2. Return of the German colonies, except those in the Pacific Ocean. 3. Germany to annex all or part of the Congo. 4. Germany to evacuate France except for the Briey-Longwy basin. 5. Belgium to be restored; German influence to be established through direct negotiations, and if these failed Germany to annex Liege. 6. Austria to receive strategic rectification of the border with Italy. 7. Recognition of "Congress Poland" as a kingdom. 8. A roughly straight border between the Central Powers (including Poland) and Russia; annexation of Courland and Lithuania to the German Empire. 9. Luxembourg to join Briey-Longwy as a state within Germany. 10. Montenegro to be divided between Austria-Hungary and Albania. 11. Hungary to receive border rectifications at the expense of Romania. 12. Enlargement of Bulgaria. 13. Restoration of

should at least outline their war aims in the note, but finally his suggestion was dropped as Bethmann-Hollweg wanted. Also the Aus-Hung. Foreign Minister, despite many reservations, gave in to his ally's demand that the note should adopt a strong tone, confident of victory, so that it wouldn't be perceived as a sign of weakness. On 12 December 1916, six days after the capture of Bucharest, the four allied powers believed that the moment had come to reveal their peace offer to the world.

#### Negative response from the Entente

On the Entente side there were also persons who weren't blind to the fact that the war had reached a dead end for both camps. Statesmen like the Conservative Lord Lansdowne believed that the course of the fighting made it necessary to conclude peace soon. But the London government concluded it would be "disastrous" to make peace without achieving any of their own war aims. Lloyd-George, who'd been Minister of War for half a year, succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister during December in the wake of the catastrophe in Romania, and achieved dictatorial powers for a five-member War Cabinet under his direction. This enabled him to carry on with plans to knock out Germany.

The will of the new English Prime Minister kindled spirits anew - at least among the upper strata of society - in Paris and Rome

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Serbia after satisfying the claims of Bulgaria and after border rectification in favor of the Danube Monarchy. 14. Albania to be independent under Aus-Hung. protection. There would be further discussion regarding Russia's rights in the Dardanelles question, rights of other Powers in Turkey (the so-called "capitulations"), Greece, freedom of the seas, etc. - Baron Burian intended that for Austria-Hungary the restoration of the *status quo* was the basic demand; everything else was open for discussion. He believed that the German demands in the West were hardly reasonable. Although the German statesmen tended to agree, they added that on the Adriatic their ally should be content with Mt Lovcen and the Montenegrin coast; the best solution for Albania would be to divide it between Serbia and Greece. (See notes on the Berlin conferences of 15 and 16 November 1916 in the Haus-, Hof- and Staats-archiv.)

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: What this passage fails to make clear is that the German "statesmen" were playing second fiddle to their generals, who considered Bethmann-Hollweg a weakling. See Arthur May, "Passing of the Habsburg Monarchy 1914-1918" (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 465

and even (apparently) in St Petersburg in their determination to carry on with the war until the end. In Russia on 23 November the Constitutional Democrats and the war party had compelled the Tsar to dismiss the Ministry led by Stürmer, whose successor was Trepov, the former Transportation Minister. The latter once again proclaimed Russia's wide-ranging war aims. The most important goals were control of Constantinople and the Dardanelles, and the creation of a Polish state from all three of the current parts; to weaken the effect of the Central Powers' Polish manifesto, however, Russia now had to guarantee with the rest of the Entente that Poland would be autonomous. Once more the diplomacy of the Western powers had won a complete victory in Russia. The only remaining question was whether Minister President Trepov would be able to once more get the nearly rudderless machinery of state in motion, and master the economic and social crises at the eleventh hour.

Because of this basic attitude of the Entente governments, rejection of the peace offer of the Central Powers was almost inevitable. The leading statesmen individually denounced their opponents' step as a "maneuver of war", which no one should take seriously.<sup>641</sup> The written response on 30 December contained a similar message; it stated that the Quadruple Alliance was mistaken in drawing conclusions only from the military situation in Europe, ignoring the "real strength of their opponents." It blamed the Central Powers alone for the catastrophe of the war and demanded reparations for all the damage and atrocities.

#### President Wilson's peace proposal

But the peoples of the Entente were more willing to listen to the peace proposal of 12 December than were their leaders. Apparently this fact also led Wilson to announce on 18 December that he was renewing his long-standing offer to act as a mediator. He invited the countries at war to tell him their conditions for ending the conflict, and pictured for their governments the enticing possibility of eternal peace, ensured by a league of nations, on the horizon.

The Central Powers couldn't decide to put their fate so much in Wilson's hands by revealing to him their war aims, about which they'd anyway been unable to reach a consensus. Their non-committal response to the President sounded more like a denial

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641 Briand made his announcement on 13 December, the Russian Foreign Minister Pokrovsky on the 16<sup>th</sup>, Sonnino on the 18<sup>th</sup> and Lloyd George on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

than an acceptance of his mediation. The dexterous response of the Entente was more attuned to Wilson's feelings. But the conditions contained in their note the President on 12 January 1917 were hardly moderate:

. Annexation of territory from Germany in the east and west, while the German people were to be deprived of economic and moral rights,

. Destruction of the Danube Monarchy by "freeing the Italians, Slavs, Romanians, Czechs and Slovaks from foreign rule",<sup>642</sup> and

. Destruction of Turkey by expelling the Turks from Europe and liberating the peoples who suffered under their tyranny.

These weren't limited war aims, and sprang from the imperialistic spirit of the Entente governments. However, they were made palatable to the American president (who was ignorant of Europe) since they were presented as the only means by which he could achieve the ideals which he'd inscribed on his banner, above all the "League of Nations." The Entente powers claimed that his ideals were the same as their own.

Thus the way in which the warring nations had answered Wilson's mediation proposal had hardly increased his sympathies for the Central Powers in general and for Germany in particular. Moreover, in the second half of January there fell into the hands of North American officials an offer of alliance to Mexico which the Germans had prepared in case of a break with the United States. Soon afterwards, at the end of January 1917, Germany announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and thus ended any chance, however slim, that Wilson would serve as a mediator.

### ***C. The death of Emperor Franz Joseph and accession of Emperor Charles***

The supreme commanders of the Central Powers had already announced to their armies in the first week of January that the completely unfavorable response of their enemies to the peace proposal of 12 December forced them to continue the war. The order to the armed forces of Austria-Hungary didn't appear over the signature of Emperor-King Franz Joseph, but over that of his

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642 The ethnologically peculiar mention of the "Czechs and Slovaks" as if they weren't part of the Slavs was due to the influence of the General-Secretary of the Czecho-Slovak National Council in Paris, Dr. Eduard Benes; he was able to affect the wording of the note at the last moment. See Benes, "Der Aufstand der Nationen" (Berlin, 1928), pp. 122 ff.

young heir and successor Charles.

The old Emperor and the high command

Emperor Franz Joseph passed away at 9:00 PM on 21 November 1916 in the 87<sup>th</sup> year of his life and the 68<sup>th</sup> of his reign. After decades when he was a guardian of world peace, it was one of the most tragic hours of his tragedy-filled life when he decided in summer 1914 that his government would issue the first declaration of war. He entered the great conflict without illusion, only convinced that his Empire would be giving up if he left the sword in its sheath. In these days he was in deadly earnest when he remarked to the Chief of the General Staff that "If the Monarchy must go down, at least it will do so in honor."

Because of his age, it was impossible for Franz Joseph to personally assume command over the field armies. When the AOK left for the front he gave the commander-in-chief authority that let him do almost as he liked. Through letters from Bolfras, the General Adjutant, which were published in Conrad's memoirs, the Emperor complained almost pathetically that the high command were leaving him in nearly complete ignorance of the real situation. It wasn't his intention to interfere with the military leadership, but he was still entitled to learn more about the course of events than the general public could read in the press reports of the General Staff.<sup>643</sup> Therefore every day the AOK sent the Imperial Military Chancellery a report by wire which detailed operations at the corps and division level. Every two weeks this was supplemented by an extract of the "situation maps" which were prepared daily by the Operational Detachment. Usually analyses and decisions weren't included in the written or telegraphic reports. This information was transmitted to the Emperor in person, normally by commander-in-chief Archduke Frederick or the Chief of the General Staff.<sup>644</sup> Nevertheless, especially in times of crisis such as the summer

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643 Until spring 1917 these daily press reports were signed by FML Franz Ritt. von Höfer in his capacity of "Deputy Chief of the General Staff"; thereafter they were signed by the Chief of Staff himself. For further information about the reports, see Glaise-Horstenau in "Neuen Wiener Journal" (issues of 20 April and 1 May 1924).

644 As long as the Archduke-Successor was attached to the high command (until July 1915), he also made personal reports. In exceptional cases GO Conrad had the staff of the Military Chancellery briefed by a high-ranking officer from his immediate entourage.

of 1916 the thirst for knowledge of the Emperor and his Military Chancellery was only partly satisfied. Even the very frank exchange of letters between Conrad and Bolfras could do little to alter this situation. Anxious questions were constantly being sent from the Hofburg through the Chancellery, and often they were prompted by information from the fronts that had reached Vienna through other channels. Naturally such unofficial information was often exaggerated, but it was all too easy to believe it because the reports furnished by the high command were so taciturn.

In the first months of the war the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in the Balkans, FZM Potiorek, had known far more than Conrad how to satisfy the Emperor's understandable desire to keep up with developments on the battlefields. His reports, supplemented by private correspondence with Bolfras, left no details uncovered. Along with the unbounded trust in this general which existed in the Schönbrunn and Hofburg palaces, this was one of the major reasons why the Balkan HQ finally became almost completely independent of the high command. The Feldzeugmeister even issued his own press reports, and in almost all his activities he dealt directly with the Emperor. After the unfortunate outcome of the Serbian campaign, however, no subordinate commander received such special consideration in the future.

Except for a few occasions in the initial operations against Serbia, the Imperial Military Chancellery hardly ever interfered in the course of events. There was one other exception. As demonstrated several times in regard to the defense of Transylvania, Tisza knew how to take an indirect route through the Emperor to see that his wishes were honored. All this is not to say, though, that the Monarch had no independent opinion regarding military questions. This became evident when he raised objections against various plans of the high command, either in audiences with Conrad or through Bolfras. For example, the Emperor expressed reservations prior to the south Tyrol offensive of 1916, as did also the commander of the Isonzo front (GO Boroevic) in reports to Bolfras.<sup>645</sup> But the Chief of Staff was determined to resist any attempt to influence his decisions, regardless of the source.

The Emperor had placed such wide-ranging authority in the hands

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645 This is based on a statement of GO Conrad, now lost, which the writer of these lines [Glaise-Horstenau] glimpsed while he was assigned to the Operational Detachment of the AOK.

of the high command that they had complete freedom to remove and create Army and Corps commanders. It is true that Franz Joseph disagreed with the large-scale replacement of generals which the AOK carried out at the start of the war. But Conrad responded to the objections of his friend Bolfras by stating that he would have lieutenants command his corps if there was no other recourse. The high command didn't even hesitate to take actions, when necessary, against princes of the Imperial house (who at any rate were never afforded any special protection by the Emperor). There was only one case involving a prominent general in which the AOK were unable to have their way; this was in late summer 1915 when they were unable to resist Tisza's demand that GdK Tersztyanszky should be removed from command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. In this instance the Hungarian Prime Minister proved the stronger. But anyway the recalled general was able to find new employment the next year when he was named commander of 4<sup>th</sup> Army in Volhynia.

#### The last months of the Emperor's reign

Enough has been said in the volumes of this history regarding the Emperor's relations with his German allies and his intervention in matters dealing with coalition warfare. It certainly wasn't easy for the aged Monarch to concede the primacy of his allies, to which they were entitled by their superior numbers and equipment. No doubt too there were shadows on his soul when he saw that his own Army was less favored by the God of war than the Germans were. But his self-possession, experience and keen insight into events allowed him to subordinate his feelings to the facts and necessities of the situation. Despite episodes of disharmony, for Franz Joseph the alliance of the two Empires was a matter of course, about which there could be no discussion and no change.

The fateful last years of the Emperor's personal life were spent in lonely solitude in his Schönbrunn palace. For a long time he had no longer held general audiences and even his receptions with individuals were curtailed as much as possible. At the start of the war the monarch was still able to make some visits to military hospitals, but this activity was also soon stopped at the wish of his doctors. The general public no longer saw their Emperor.

Franz Joseph's final months were especially gloomy because of the catastrophe in the East. His response to the good wishes which the Army's commander-in-chief sent him on his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday (18 August 1916) included a sentence expressing such deep

depression that the high command had it stricken from the published version of the letter. Yet as the evening of his life was already being extinguished there were victorious tidings from the battlefields of Wallachia. The daily report which announced the capture of Craiova by the allies was the last news which reached the dying man. A few hours later, having finally left his desk, he closed his eyes forever. Until the end he set a shining example of soldierly devotion to duty, which during the World War had influenced the men at the front down to the youngest fighter.

#### The accession of the new Emperor

When Emperor and King Charles ascended the throne, a fresh and energetic personality took the place of a ruler who'd become withdrawn and remote. In the first years of the great conflict the Army had often seen their new Supreme Warlord in the company of the commander-in-chief or when he visited the front. Whenever the young Archduke, with his open and gracious demeanor, appeared before his veteran soldiers he displayed a natural friendliness that won their hearts. Then in spring 1916 the 29 year old prince won fame as a commander in the May offensive from south Tyrol. His unpretentious manners also won over the German-speaking troops of the renowned regiments in the Edelweiss Corps. He never left any officer or soldier without a friendly word or a handshake. The lives of the men in his charge meant more to him than a brilliant success. Thereafter the war in the East caused the first lines of thoughtful care to appear on the young man's boyish countenance; from day to day his shoulders bore a larger part of the responsibility which - because of the Emperor's age - would probably soon descend upon him in full weight. The Archduke-Successor discharged his responsibilities as an Army and Army Group commander conscientiously and knowledgeably. Although he never said so, the presence of an authoritarian Imperial-German chief of staff at Charles' side must have been an annoying tutelage. This deeply wounded his dynastic pride and magnified his long-standing resentment of the high command at Teschen and its leading personalities.<sup>646</sup>

The new Emperor appeared at HQ on 3 December, just ten days after ascending the throne. As already arranged, he was taking over personally as Commander-in-Chief. The distinguished and chivalrous Archduke Frederick was decorated with the Great Cross

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646 Glaise-Horstenau, "Kaiser Karls Thronbesteigung" (in Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 321). Also Werkmann, pp. 38 ff.

of the Military Maria Theresia Order; he remained for several more weeks as the Monarch's deputy with the field armies, but then was relieved of his post. While staying at Teschen the Emperor also made a first visit to his German allies at nearby Pless. This meeting led to a modification of the treaty regarding the supreme command, which the new ruler had found objectionable from the beginning. Since Emperor Charles had personally taken over the k.u.k. AOK, he would have been placed under the orders of the German Emperor. To avoid this subordination, which contradicted the concept of princely sovereignty, it was decided that in the future - as had been the case in the first two years of the war - the Chiefs of Staff would negotiate the necessary joint measures. If there was no agreement, the two emperors would continue the discussions and the German ruler, as the elder, would ultimately make the decision. This alteration was kept secret from the other two allies, and was essentially a return to the command structure that had existed prior to 6 September.

The Emperor hadn't personally assumed the supreme command just because of his soldierly inclinations. It was clear to the Army that he wished to redress the balance between the civil administration and the military leadership, which had tilted greatly to the advantage of the latter under his predecessor. This effort was also served by moving the HQ of the AOK from Teschen to Baden near Vienna, which took place despite a protest from the Chief of Staff (who, together with Archduke Eugene, had been named a Field Marshal). The difference of opinion over this question between the Emperor and his principal military adviser was the start of a series of disputes - based ultimately on deeper incompatibilities - which led in three months to the fall of Conrad and a complete transformation of the high command. This will be described in the following volume.

The curtain had fallen on the age of Emperor Franz Joseph, that had both opened and ended amid the thunder of guns. The venerable Habsburg Monarchy was entering the short and tragic final phase of its long and significant history.

## **IX. APPENDIX**

Major troop movements by rail, August through December 1916

In the original, this material appears as Beilage 8. The months shown are those in which the movement was initiated.

JULY 1916

XV Turkish Corps left Constantinople on 25 July; after resting and getting equipment in Belgrade they completed their movement on 23 August. Itinerary: Constantinople-Nish-Belgrade-Budapest-Kovel, then diverted to Chodorow (52 trains)

## AUGUST 1916 - RUSSIA

- . Parts of 34 G. LW Bde - Brest-Litovsk to Poginki (16 trains) and then Poginki to Zborow (18 trains)
- . Parts of 10 G. LW ID - Brest-Litovsk to Kovel (11 trains)
- . 1 G. ID - Oderberg to Borsa (76 trains)
- . 197 G. ID - Oswiecim to Zborow (55 trains)
- . 75 G. Res ID - Brest-Litovsk to Grywiatki (59 trains)
- . 195 G. ID - Lubartow to Zborow (50 trains)
- . G. IR 346 and four other bns - Brest-Litovsk to Kowel (12 trains)
- . Parts of 1 G. LW ID - Brest-Litovsk to Kowel (15 trains)
- . Parts of 105 G. ID - Oswiecim to Chodorow (21 trains)
- . 2 G. CD - Brest-Litovsk to Ozydow (30 trains)
- . 25 G. Cav Bde - Brest-Litovsk to Kowel (9 trains), then Grywiatki to Ozydow (9 trains) (joined 2 Cav Div)
- . G. Leib Hussar Bde - Ozydow to Kowel (8 trains)
- . 199 G. ID - Oswiecim to Bursztyn (66 trains)
- . G. Res IR 4, ten more bns, and twenty MG units - Oswiecim to Halicz (70 trains)
- . 3 Cav Div - Felsö-Borgo to Körösmezö (49 trains)
- . 68 Inf Bde - Leordina to Körösmezö (13 trains)
- . G. Bicycle Bde - Bursztyn to Körösmezö (6 trains)
- . 117 G. ID - Oderberg to Havasalja (51 trains)
- . Two G. inf regts plus artillery - Halicz to Grywiatki (19 trains)
- . Half of 13 LW ID - Vladimir-Volynsky to Baranowicze (7 trains)
- . I Corps HQ and attachments - Stanislau to Körösmezö (13 trains)
- . 11 Hon CD - Maros-Vasarhely to Felsö-Borgo (24 trains)
- . 5 Hon CD - Dolina to Felsö-Borgo (33 trains)
- . 10 Bav ID - Kalusz to Felsö-Borgo (62 trains)

## AUGUST 1916 - ROMANIA

(Except for the first four entries, the movements did begin in August but were mostly carried out in September)

- . 61 ID - Sokal to Csikszereda (51 trains)
- . Three-quarters of 51 Hon ID plus Hon IR 302 - Stryj to Mühlbach (43 trains)
- . Artillery from XII Corps - Ivangorod to Schässsburg (8 trains)
- . 210 Lst Inf Bde - Zelenika to Karansebes (14 trains)
- . 1 Lst Hussar Bde - Ozydow to Maros-Vasarhely (14 trains)
- . 39 Hon ID - Halicz to Apahida (66 trains)

- . 1 Cav Div - Grywiatki to Mediasch (62 trains)
- . 187 G. ID - Salzburg to Mühlbach (55 trains)

## AUGUST 1916 - ITALY

- . IR 102 and seven other bns - From various points on the Russian and Italian fronts to the Isonzo (11 trains)
- . 8 Mtn Bde - Levico to Reifenberg (25 trains)
- . HQ of XVII Corps and attachments - Levico to Reifenberg (5 trains)
- . 2 Mtn Bde - Trent to Podmelec (29 trains)
- . GM Hrozny's Combined Div (later 57 ID) - Levico to Prvacina (58 trains)
- . Combined 28 ID - Caldonazzo to Prvacina (58 trains)
- . 44 LW ID - Kalusz (Russian front) to Podmelec (56 trains)
- . Parts of 210 Lst Inf Bde - Zelenika (Balkans) to Podmelec (11 trains)
- . 16 ID - Brest-Litovsk (Russian front) to Prvacina (58 trains) (but some small parts weren't sent until November; details lacking)

## SEPTEMBER 1916 - RUSSIA

- . G. Leib Hussar Bde - Grywiatki to Zloczow (9 trains) (joined 2 Cav Div)
- . 3 G. Gd ID - Oderberg to Bursztyn (51 trains)
- . 208 G. ID - (Originally sent to Marosludas and Szekely-Kocsard, but re-routed) Oderberg to Chodorow (41 trains)
- . X G. Res Corps HQ and attachments - Oswiecim to Chodorow (4 trains)
- . XXV G. Res Corps HQ and attachments - Brest-Litovsk to Körösmezö (4 trains)
- . Parts of 105 G. ID plus three G. Lst IR - Chodorow to Brest-Litovsk (61 trains)
- . 216 G. ID - Brest-Litovsk to Podwysokie (31 trains)
- . 115 G. ID - Brest-Litovsk to Vladimir-Volynsky (37 trains)
- . 30 ID - Kalusz to Körösmezö (61 trains)
- . 49 G. Res ID - Brest-Litovsk to Dublany (49 trains)
- . VI Corps HQ and attachments - Drohobycz to Bistritz (21 trains)
- . 59 ID - Kalusz to O Radna (44 trains)
- . 1 G. Res ID - Podwysokie to Brest-Litovsk (47 trains)
- . 12 ID - Zurawno to Taracköz (50 trains)
- . 36 G. ID - Brest-Litovsk to Bukaczowce (67 trains)
- . G. Bicycle Bde - Körösmezö to Leordina (5 trains)
- . 8 G. Cav Bde - Brest-Litovsk to Ozydow (16 trains)

## SEPTEMBER 1916 - ROMANIA

- . 3 G. CD - Oswiecim to Karansebes (17 trains)

- . *G. I Res and XXXIX Res Corps HQ plus attachments* - Oswiecim to Karlsburg (8 trains)
- . k.u. Lst IR 1 - Belgrade to Hatszeg (5 trains)
- . 72 ID - Ladamos to Ujvar (24 trains)
- . 89 *G. ID* - Oswiecim & Oderberg to Budapest; then after a pause to Maros-Ujvar & Schässsburg (52 trains)
- . *G. Alpenkorps* - Salzburg to Mühlbach (84 trains)
- . *HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> G. Army* - Oderberg to Deva (11 trains)
- . *G. line of communications troops (Etappen Inspectorate 15)* - Oderberg to Grosswardein (30 trains)
- . 37 Hon ID (minus artillery) - Vladimir-Volynsky to Des (49 trains)
- . 76 *G. Res ID* - Oderberg to Kl. Kopisch (60 trains)
- . 2 Mtn Bde - Podmelec (Italian front) to Puj (24 trains)
- . 8 Mtn Bde (mostly during September) - St Daniel (Italian front) to Hermannstadt (22 trains)

## SEPTEMBER 1916 - ITALY

- . Parts of 5 Inf Bde (six bns) - Trent to St Daniel (14 trains)

## OCTOBER 1916 - RUSSIA

- . Polish Legion - Grywiatki to Baranowicze (53 trains)
- . 49 *G. Res ID* - Lemberg to Pukow (41 trains)
- . 6 Cav Div - Kalusz to Felső-Borgo (41 trains)
- . 4 Cav Div - Iwaniczy to Ozydow (28 trains)
- . 7 Cav Div - Vladimir-Volynsky to Grywiatki (10 trains)
- . 75 *G. Res ID* - Grywiatki to Podwysokie (45 trains)
- . 199 *G. ID* - Bursztyn to Oswiecim (54 trains)
- . 208 *G. ID* - Chodorow to Sosnowiec (39 trains)

## OCTOBER 1916 - ROMANIA

- . 10 Mtn Bde - Prosecco (Italian front) to Hermannstadt (22 trains)
- . 12 *Bav ID* - Salzburg to Homorod-Reps (38 trains) and Kowel to Homorod-Reps (21 more trains)
- . 6 *G. CD* - Ozydow to Deva (17 trains) and Oderberg to Deva (21 more trains)
- . HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group - Chodorow to Klausenburg (13 trains)
- . 11 *Bav ID* - Grywiatki to Piski (76 trains)
- . Artillery of 39 Hon ID - Vladimir-Volynsky to Szasz Regen (24 trains)
- . 2 Mtn Bde - Puj to Hermannstadt (21 trains)
- . *G. 7 CD* - Salzburg to Karansebes (27 trains) and Oderberg to Karansebes (29 more trains)
- . 70 Hon ID - Vladimir-Volynsky to Lugos (26 trains)
- . 8 *Bav Res ID* - Bodenbach to Kronstadt (11 trains)

- . 10 Bav ID - Borsa to Maros Vasarhely (75 trains)
- . 3 Cav Div - Taraczköz to Des, and after a pause from Des to Marosheviz (11 trains)
- . 41 G. ID - Oderberg to Krivadia (65 trains)
- . 109 G. ID - Oswiecim to Krivadia (54 trains)

## OCTOBER 1916 - ITALY

- . 10 ID (not artillery) - Trent to Podmelec (46 trains)
- . 10 FA Brigade - Kalusz (Russian front) to St Daniel (13 trains)
- . k.k. Lst IR 32 and three bns - Radziechow (Russian front) to Posecco (12 trains)
- . 14 ID - Zloczow (Russian front) to St Daniel (66 trains)

## NOVEMBER 1916 - RUSSIA

- . 215 G. ID - Oswiecim to Stojanow (41 trains)
- . 244 G. ID - Brest-Litovsk to Kowel (38 trains)
- . 20 Hon ID - Laibach to Stojanow (10 trains)
- . 43 G. Res ID - Stojanow to France (47 trains)
- . X G. Corps (19 and 20 ID) - Kowel to France (85 trains)
- . VIII G. Corps (15 and 16 ID) - Brest-Litovsk to Lubitow (98 trains)
- . 53 G. Res ID - Oswiecim to Pukow (47 trains)
- . 3 G. Gd ID - Bursztyn to Oswiecim (33 trains)
- . 12 ID - Taraczköz to Felső-Borgo (50 trains)
- . 218 G. ID (formed in September in Volhynia from individual regiments that had been sent there) - Wojmica to Podwysokie (39 trains)

## NOVEMBER 1916 - ROMANIA

- . 216 G. ID - Stanislau to Hermannstadt (57 trains)
- . HQ of Archduke Charles' Army Group - Klausenburg to Schässburg (14 trains)
- . G. Bicycle Bde - Leordina to Mehadia (6 trains)
- . 8 Bav Res ID - Kezdivasarhely to Csikszereda (49 trains)
- . Part of 10 Bav ID - Madefalva to Szt. Miklos (7 trains)
- . 115 G. ID - Kowel to Petroseny (54 trains)
- . 24 ID - Brest-Litovsk to Kronstadt (26 trains)
- . 2 G. CD - Ozydow to Petroseny (22 trains)
- . 7 Cav Div - Kowel to Hungary (journey interrupted, resumed in Dec: see below) (32 trains)
- . 187 G. ID - Predeal to Bereczk (22 trains)
- . 49 G. Res ID - Stryj to Klausenburg (33 trains)

## NOVEMBER 1916 - ITALY

- . k.k. 1 Lst Inf Bde - Zablocze (Russian front) to Dutovlje (23 trains)

- . 9 FA Brigade - Lemberg (Russian front) to Sesana (21 trains)
- . 48 ID - Lemberg (Russian front) to Dutovlje (29 trains)
- . Heavy FAR 24 - Brest-Litovsk (Russia) to St Daniel (8 trains)
- . IR 64 - Lublin (Russia) to Caldonazzo (6 trains)

## DECEMBER 1916 - RUSSIA

- . 121 G. ID - Kowel to Lake Narotch (34 trains)
- . 51 Hon ID - (From Bucharest on foot to Kronstadt) Kronstadt to Dorna Watra (60 trains) (movement completed 9 Jan 1917)

## DECEMBER 1916 - ROMANIA

- . 218 G. ID - Chodorow to Reps (44 trains)
- . 225 G. ID - Lemberg to Schässburg (43 trains)
- . 7 Cav Div - Resumed journey from Kowel (see above); Hungary to Orsova (15 trains); then by ship on the Danube to Giurgevo
- . G. heavy artillery and supply columns - Salzburg to Schässburg (41 trains; move completed on 7 Jan 1917)
- . 49 G. Res ID - Klausenburg to Kronstadt (47 trains; move completed on 9 Jan 1917)

## DECEMBER 1916 - ITALY

- . 41 Hon ID - Kowel (Russian front) to St Daniel (65 trains)

## MISCELLANEOUS

- . Between August and December, 155 trains (77 Aus-Hung. and 78 German) were used to move smaller (sub-regimental) formations on the Russian front south of the Pripyat
- . Between September and December, 169 trains (69 Aus-Hung. and 100 German) were used to move smaller formations on the Romanian front

## TOTALS

During this period, the troop movements mentioned above involved 2500 trains in Russia, 2082 in Romania and 624 on the Italian front. Grand total was 5206 trains.