

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

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

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## **I. Military Plans for the Year 1917**

### ***A. Important decisions by the Central Powers***

#### **1. The operational ideas of Field Marshal Conrad**

FM Freih. von Conrad, the Aus-Hung. Chief of Staff, revealed his basic concept for continuing the war in 1917 in a sentence of a memorandum which he prepared on 10 January of this year. (He was already at his new HQ in Baden.) The Field Marshal wrote, "Since the war might be decided in the actions of this spring, it will be necessary to increase all our resources of men and supplies to the utmost for this period rather than counting on the war to continue for a long time; because if the decision goes against us in spring we cannot anticipate a later change in our favor with the forces that would still be left to us." And in another part of the memorandum Conrad remarked that the Central Powers would now be playing their so-called "last card." The always-determined Chief of Staff left no doubt as to how this last card should be played. If we waited for the offensive which the Entente was certainly preparing, "we would give our opponents time to carry out their attack in the most favorable moment, at the point most favorable for themselves, and with the greatest possible accumulation of strength." The only solution was to anticipate the enemy's offensive and deny them all the advantages which they would gain if we waited.

When Conrad composed this note he hadn't made a final judgment regarding the front where the decision should be sought. He was thinking of the Italian front, but also of east Galicia where perhaps we could anticipate a new Russian attack. Remarkably, he wasn't considering the Western front, even though he knew that new German units were completing their formation.

Besides preparing for a large-scale offensive, the Field Marshal also wanted to see the start of unrestricted submarine warfare. "Because of England's determination to carry on the war to the end," he noted, "our only response must be to use the weapon of submarine warfare with complete ruthlessness despite the concern of diplomats that this would cause America, Holland, Denmark, etc. etc. to declare war on us....Submarines and an action on land are our only means of changing the situation in our favor

before our strength is exhausted and all the Entente powers fall upon us with overwhelming superiority."

Although the memorandum, which was addressed only to the Operational Section, said nothing further about this "action on land", there is no doubt that Conrad was thinking primarily of the Italian theater of operations. He was aware that the Entente high commands had held conferences at Rome on 6 and 7 January, and anticipated that they could attack simultaneously on the French-Italian and Russian-Romanian fronts. Because of the condition of the opposing troops, he also believed that an offensive on the former front might take place before operations in the East. The Field Marshal believed that if the Entente began a secondary offensive in the Balkans they would only weaken their main forces, to our advantage.

Conrad felt it was unlikely that great success could be won against the enemy in the wide spaces of the East. When he later shared his ideas with the German high command he declared that he couldn't sufficiently address the conditions on the Western front. Of the two principal enemy objectives which concerned the Aus-Hung. military leadership - Lemberg and Trieste - he felt that the latter was in much greater danger for the time being, just as from his perspective the military situation on the Karst was the most tense by a wide margin. It was true that in nine battles, which had been fought honorably by both sides, the defenders had withstood the attackers' enormous superiority in manpower and equipment. But the fate of Trieste was still problematic. If the enemy broke through near Görz they would pierce the defenses of the Central Powers at a very sensitive point; because of their superior numbers they could inflict a great deal of damage in a war of maneuver. The Italians alone already had 750,000 riflemen, and they could receive substantial reinforcements of men and military gear from their allies.

#### Conrad plans a new offensive

Based on such considerations, Conrad naturally came to the conclusion that the Italians, rather than any of his other foes, should be the target of a counter-blow. Such an operation was all the more advisable because the enemy was forcing the Austro-Hungarians to commit so many troops and weapons to the Southwest front anyway that it was advisable to make our main effort there rather than weakening the sector to attack on other fronts.

Lt Col. Schneller, the "Italian" expert in the Operational Section, was involved in working out the details of the Field



Marshal's plan for the intended offensive, along with FML Metzger. For this purpose, they calculated that the Italian Army had around 60 divisions, which at the moment were confronted by 29 Aus-Hung. divisions. Because of the higher combat value of the German and Aus-Hung. troops, and because the attackers would have the advantage of deploying the new troops in a direction of their own choosing, it wouldn't be necessary to have as many units as the enemy; 45 divisions would suffice. Of the new divisions that would be needed, 13 should be German; moreover, the 3 Aus-Hung. divisions to be transferred from the Eastern front should also be relieved by German troops.

The most conspicuous factor of Conrad's plan was that this time the offensive would take place on two fronts - from Tyrol and in the coastal lands. Unlike the final plans for the May offensive in 1916, the current scheme envisioned that in 1917 the attack in the coastal lands would take place about a week sooner than the thrust from south Tyrol. This operation "would divert the Italians' attention from Tyrol with large-scale fighting and, if possible, cause their entire Julian front to waver." Conrad designated the area around Tolmein, which he had already noticed during peacetime maneuvers, as the most effective point to attack. Here six divisions (including five German) under German command should initiate the offensive and allow the entire Isonzo front to move forward.

For the same reasons as the year before, the principal thrust should be launched in the direction that offered the most effective strategic rewards, from south Tyrol between Astico and Brenta. The attacking troops would be organized in two echelons. The first, with twelve Aus-Hung. divisions proficient in mountain fighting, would penetrate the enemy line; the second, with six very mobile German divisions, would carry out the exploitation. An Aus-Hung. general (Archduke Eugene) would have overall command of the offensive from south Tyrol. Two German Army HQ would be involved (one in Tyrol, the other at Tolmein). If possible our ally should also supply an Army Group HQ for the Isonzo front.

## **2. Unrestricted submarine warfare**

While the Aus-Hung. HQ were developing this plan, a decision that would have fateful consequences for all four members of the Quadruple Alliance was being made in Germany. Without first consulting their allies the Germans had decided to wage unrestricted submarine warfare, which Conrad envisioned as the

second basic weapon to be employed in 1917.

As already narrated in Volume V, a substantial part of official opinion in the German Reich had already been advocating this development for some time. By Christmas of 1916, when there could no longer be any doubt that the peace offer of the Central Powers was being turned down, the German OHL had firmly decided to make use of the most extreme military measures.<sup>1</sup> They relied on the opinion which the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral von Holtzendorff, had stated on 22 December. His Staff reckoned that if unrestricted submarine warfare started as early as 1 February, and caused the English to lose just 600,000 tons of merchant shipping each month, they would be forced to their knees in five or six months. In his heart the German Reich Chancellor Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg was opposed to the suggestions of the high command; but in a conference that took place at Pless on 9 January, he gave in to the demand of GFM von Hindenburg and GdI Ludendorff. In the next few days the submarines were already setting out to sea with sealed orders.

Emperor Charles and his new Foreign Minister Graf Czernin followed this development with great concern, although at first they didn't know the details. They didn't believe that the submarine weapon could decide the war and feared its impact on the North Americans, whose intervention in the war signified for them certain defeat.<sup>2</sup> After several feelers were sent to Berlin, on 20 January the Foreign Secretary Zimmermann and Admiral Holtzendorff appeared in Berlin; in two meetings, the first of which was chaired by the Emperor, they sought to win the Vienna Cabinet over to unrestricted submarine warfare (after the fact). FM Conrad and Grand Admiral Haus supported the German position.<sup>3</sup> The Emperor, Czernin and both the Minister-Presidents (Graf Clam<sup>4</sup> and Graf Tisza) were in opposition. Zimmermann threw his

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1 Bethmann-Hollweg, "Erinnerungen und Betrachtungen" (Berlin, 1921), Vol. II, pp. 129 ff. and 260 ff.

2 Czernin, "Im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1919), 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, pp. 152 ff. Werkmann, "Deutsch-land als Verbündeter" (Berlin, 1932), pp. 107 ff. Glaise-Horstenau, "Österreich-Ungarns Politik in den Kriegsjahren 1914 bis 1917" (in Schwarte, "Der grosse Krieg 1914-1918", Vol. V, pp. 327 ff.) Glaise-Horstenau, "Der Katastrophe - Die Zertümmerung Österreich-Ungarns und das Werden der Nachfolgestaaten" (Vienna, 1929), pp. 90 ff.

3 Kriegsarchiv (Marinearchiv), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1933), p. 341

4 Clam was the successor of Koerber as head of the Austrian government.

weightiest argument into the scale - that without the new weapon it was questionable that the Western front could be held; Czernin effectively rebutted this argument. The Emperor sent a written objection to his German ally. Although he didn't know it, the German ambassador to Washington (Graf Bernstorff) was zealously making a similar effort in the eleventh hour. Bernstorff reported that Wilson was determined to continue his effort to negotiate peace. But the German government let the American president know that, though they were studying the outline of his peace proposals, for technical reasons it was too late to cancel the orders that had long been sent to their submarines. As Bethmann wrote after the war, the Rubicon had already been crossed.

For a time Czernin toyed with the idea of staying out of the unrestricted submarine campaign, but soon changed his mind. And so the necessary orders were issued to the 12 Aus-Hung. submarines. Effective 1 February 1917 the new campaign was waged throughout the north Atlantic Ocean, in the western part of the North Sea, and in most of the Mediterranean (except for the waters off Spain).<sup>5</sup>

On 3 February the government of the United States responded to the declaration of unrestricted submarine attacks by breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany. Wilson began his crusade against the absolutist government of the Hohenzollern Reich. But at first the actual impact was slight since for a long time America had already been supporting the Entente powers with money, military equipment of all types, and special shipments of food and raw materials. But the possibility that the Union would join the coalition of enemy statements was considerably greater.

Because of their limited radius of action the k.u.k. submarines could make little impact outside the Adriatic. On 1 February the German Navy had 111 seaworthy subs, and by June they had a total of 132. 32 of the boats were based at Pola and Cattaro, and many of these flew the Aus-Hung. flag based on an inter-allied

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5 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: "Through diplomatic channels, Czernin appraised Washington that there was virtually no likelihood that an Aus-Hung. submarine would torpedo a vessel flying the Stars and Stripes because commanders had been explicitly instructed not to attack them." (May, "The Passing of the Habsburg Monarchy 1914-1918" [Philadelphia, 1966], p. 478.) But in public statements, despite all their misgivings, the Habsburg governments trumpeted the same propaganda about the justice and necessity of the submarine campaign that was heard in Berlin.

agreement. But on 1 February the Germans had just 64 submarines ready to strike in the North Sea, and only 4 in the Adriatic.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The latest decisions regarding the war on land

Simultaneous with the decision to wage unrestricted submarine warfare the German OHL also developed very important plans for fighting the war on land. At least for now they would avoid large-scale attacks and wished only to ensure that they had available a force of reserve troops. In January it wasn't possible yet to determine where the enemy would open the anticipated spring offensive in the West; all parts of the front seemed more or less endangered. Therefore the Germans couldn't weaken one sector in order to make another as strong as possible. But it would be helpful to pull back the front where it jutted forward in an arc in the direction of Compiègne. A shorter position had already been built along the chord of the arc between Arras and Soissons (called the "Siegfried Position"). This would make it possible to bring a large number of troops into reserve and to frustrate the enemy's preparations to attack here (which were already in progress). But a withdrawal could leave an unfavorable impression. Only men with enormous authority like Hindenburg and Ludendorff would even contemplate such an idea. Despite this drawback, on 4 February the German OHL ordered that the march back to the Siegfried position would start after about five weeks of very thorough and secret preparation.<sup>7</sup>

This was the situation when the Aus-Hung. Lt Col. Schneller came to Pless on 23 January with Conrad's suggestion for an allied offensive against Italy. It is hardly surprising that although the idea wasn't turned down unconditionally it also wasn't adopted. The German OHL declared that only after they had defeated the next Entente offensive in the West, which they expected in March, would they be able to plan their next moves.

A few days later (on the 25<sup>th</sup>) Conrad himself came to Pless, accompanying the Emperor. He received the same impression as had Lt Col. Schneller. The statements of the German generals made some impression on him, and he returned to Baden on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, four days later he let the HQ of the Tyrol Army

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6 Michelsen, "Der U-bootkrieg 1914-1918" (Leipzig, 1925), pp. 48 ff.

7 Kuhl, "Der Weltkrieg 1914/18" (Berlin, 1929), Vol. II, pp. 59 ff.

Group know that "under certain circumstances, which are dependent on the development of the overall situation," they could decide "to once more attack Italy. In this scenario we would make a thrust with strong forces from south Tyrol in the first half of May, at the earliest." The necessary logistical preparations should be initiated for this purpose. The two armies directly under the high command (on the Isonzo and in Carinthia) were only instructed to use all means to hold onto their positions. Thus Conrad had by no means given up hope that he would still manage to lead his planned offensive against Italy. The idea of leaving the decision entirely up to submarines on the high seas was completely foreign to this determined, energetic commander.

These developments indicate that the German OHL, unlike FM Conrad, felt that the forces of the two allied Empires weren't sufficient to go over to the offensive on the Western or Southwestern fronts as early as spring. And in the East, where the allies confronted an enemy force almost twice as large as their own, they would have to stay within their permanent defenses.<sup>8</sup> Since the situation was similar in the Balkans, GFM Hindenburg didn't act on a suggestion from the Bulgarians that with German reinforcements they should try to take Salonika. Finally the Turks would also restrict themselves to defending their own lands.<sup>9</sup>

Hindenburg later called this complete renunciation of any offensive operations on land a "large-scale preparation of strategic reserves." For the immediate future the fate of the Central Powers was the responsibility of the submarines, now

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8 On 1 February 1917 the balance of power in the East was as follows:

. There were 41 ½ Aus-Hung., 78 German, 5 Turkish and 4 Bulgarian infantry divisions; 11 Aus-Hung., 11 German and 1 Bulgarian cavalry divisions. Total strength was 128 ½ infantry and 23 cavalry divisions with about 1,050,000 combat troops.

. There were 216 Russian and 15 Romanian infantry divisions (but 47 Russian and 9 Romanian divisions were being formed or rebuilt), 40 Russian and 2 Romanian cavalry divisions (both of the latter were being rebuilt). Total strength was 231 infantry and 42 cavalry divisions with about 2,000,000 combat troops. The Russians also had 15 infantry and 11 cavalry divisions in the Caucasus.

9 Hindenburg, "Aus meinem Leben" (Leipzig, 1920), pp. 225 ff. At this time the Central Powers had 15 ½ infantry and 1 cavalry division in the Balkans facing 25 infantry and 3 cavalry divisions of the Entente.

freed of any restriction on their activities. The main effort of the war was being made at sea.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of January the Central Powers received disturbing reports that the French and Italians intended to overrun Switzerland and then thrust either into Germany or western Tyrol. Conrad immediately reviewed all possible means of helping the Swiss Confederation. To him the best method seemed to be the quick implementation of his planned offensive against Italy. But he was also ready to give the Swiss direct support, initially with heavy artillery. Conrad's viewpoint was relayed to the Swiss Chief of Staff (Colonel-Corps Commander Sprecher von Bernegg); the latter told the k.u.k. Military Attaché in Bern that if the Entente did attack Switzerland he believed that the French rather than the Italians would be the more dangerous enemy. Therefore he would concentrate as many troops as possible (about 21 brigades) against France. Opposite Italy he would leave only enough units (about 3 brigades) to cover the rear of the main force.<sup>11</sup> In this scenario the Tessin canton would be abandoned and the defense of the southern front would take place along a line through the St Gotthard, Splügen and Bernina passes as far as the Wormser mountain ridge. Defense of the crossing point through the latter position, which was near the Tyrolean border, would be left to the units of Austria-Hungary.

## ***B. Plans and conferences of the Entente***

### **1. The military council at Chantilly in November 1916**

As early as the start of November 1916 the Entente military leaders had to recognize that the events of the year weren't at all turning out in accordance with their originally too-high expectations. To this disappointment were added concern that the Germans might accelerate their submarine campaign, continuing

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10 Volkmann, "Der grosse Krieg 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1923), p. 124. Stegemann, "Geschichte des Krieges" (Stuttgart, 1921), Vol. IV, pp. 307 ff.

11 When mobilized the Swiss Army would consist of 6 infantry divisions plus 3 independent infantry brigades, 4 cavalry brigades, 6 Landwehr brigades, some fortress garrison, and various support units at Army level. The total would be 257 battalions, 14 bicycle companies, 80 squadrons, 105 batteries and 15 engineer battalions. (Bordeaux, "La Suisse dans le guerre mondiale 1914-1919" [Paris, 1931], p. 31.)

uncertainty about the eventual intentions of the North Americans and Greeks, and above all the gathering internal difficulties of Russia. These factors all made it advisable to seek a decision to the war in 1917.

To reach an agreement about the necessary plans a conference was assembled on 15 and 16 November at French General HQ in Chantilly. Present were French Generalissimo Joffre, English Chief of the Imperial General Staff Sir William Robertson, the commander of the British troops in France FM Sir Douglas Haig, G.Lt nob. Porro representing Italy, Russian General Palitsyn, and representatives of Belgium, Romania and Serbia. It was decided that the allied armies would attack simultaneously in all the European theaters of operation and on the broadest possible front. To anticipate their opponents in every case, the general onslaught would start as early as the first half of February 1917. The operations would be synchronized as much as possible within a period of three weeks.

In particular it was determined that Bulgaria should be overthrown in a pincers attack by the Army of the Orient (to be reinforced to 23 divisions) and by Russians and Romanians attacking from the north. At this time - when the Germans were just completing their breakthrough in the Vulkan Mountains - no one foresaw the tragic fate which was about to overtake the Romanian Army. In general, the plan was to leave less important sectors with the smallest possible number of troops so that the forces in the principal theaters of operation would be strong. The conference participants also once more took measures to provide mutual assistance for countries which were the targets of strong enemy attacks. For this purpose the general staffs of France, England and Italy were already studying how to quickly shift troops between them.<sup>12</sup>

The plan drafted at Chantilly, which seemed so simple, had to be implemented through a series of detailed negotiations in which the original intentions were substantially altered. This happened first in France itself. Here the commander-in-chief General Joffre was replaced in mid-December by General Nivelle, who had just won fresh laurels at Verdun. Joffre had planned to continue the offensive on the Somme, where dents made in the German front in the summer battle of 1916 offered an opportunity to launch envelopment attacks on both banks. But Nivelle, on the contrary, set higher goals. He intended to strike the entire German front between Arras and Reims, where it bulged in an arc

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<sup>12</sup> Oehmichen, "Essai sur la doctrine de guerre des coalitions" (Paris, 1927), pp. 133 ff.

toward the southwest, with an envelopment attack from the west and south. The main effort would be made on the Aisne. But this caused the start of the offensive to be postponed until April.<sup>13</sup> Thus Nivelle intended to attack in the precise area where, as mentioned earlier, the Germans were planning to pull back their front.

## **2. Changes in the Russian plans of attack**

The Tsar's Empire had suffered enormous casualties thus far - four million men had been killed, taken prisoner, or seriously wounded.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless the Russian leaders were eager to attack. They intended to take part in the combined offensive of the Entente states with the greatest possible number of troops and plentiful military equipment. For this purpose the creation of new infantry divisions (# 128 to # 138), which was already finished by the end of 1916, would be helpful. Moreover General Gurko, who was acting as Chief of the General Staff while General Alexeiev was ill, decided to reduce all the divisions (except for the Guards) from 16 to 12 battalions beginning in January 1917. This would make it possible to form 62 more new divisions, although at first they would have no artillery. But since there was a shortage of commissioned and non-commissioned officers, this measure turned out to be a major mistake, and it would have yet more serious consequences.<sup>15</sup>

To make further decisions, at the end of December the Tsar and General Gurko met at their HQ in Mogilev with the commanders of the three Russian fronts. There were substantial differences of opinion. The commanders of the North and West Fronts, Generals Ruzsky and Evert, displayed great energy in contrast to their performances in 1916. They demanded that the decisive operations should take place north of the Pripyat Marshes. Ruzsky wanted to thrust south from Riga. Evert believed that the best plan would

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13 Palat, "L'année d'angoisse 1917" (Paris, 1927), pp. 15 ff.

14 Gurko, "Russland 1914-1917. Erinnerungen an Krieg und Revolution" (Berlin, 1921), p. 117.

15 Knox, "With the Russian Army 1914-1917" (New York, 1921), Vol. II, pp 532 ff.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The "yet more serious consequences" unfolded along with the Revolution. Naturally the commanders of the existing formations sent their poorest officers and least reliable men to the new divisions, which thus became hotbeds of anti-war sentiment and played a leading role in the dissolution of the Army in summer and fall of 1917.



be to deliver the main attack from Smorgony toward Vilna. Brussilov wanted his Southwest Front to strike along the shortest route to Lemberg.<sup>16</sup> Although each of the Front commanders thus had his own objectives, they agreed that the offensive couldn't take place before the end of April or the start of May. By that time it was also intended to reinforce the Romanian Front with about 20 divisions, since the necessary improvements to the railroad connections would be finished.

The Stavka was of a different opinion. The Tsar and his Chief of Staff wanted to send even more units to the Romanian Front so that it could attack Bulgaria during the winter in accordance with the decisions reached at Chantilly.<sup>17</sup> Since the Front commanders unanimously opposed this idea, a compromise solution was finally reached. If the Western powers really did attack in February, each of the Fronts would try to pin down their opponents with small-scale operations. But the principal offensives, in particular the one against Bulgaria, were postponed until spring. Until then it was hoped that the measures to provide the Army with more and better equipment would be far advanced and the creation of the new divisions completed.

The decisions at Mogilev didn't remain uncontested. Both General Evert, who returned to his earlier ideas, and General Alexeiev (who was recuperating in Crimea) objected to sending a large part of the Tsar's forces to Romania, leaving the front in Russia drained of reserves and vulnerable to Germany. In Alexeiev's opinion the main attack should be directed toward Lemberg and Maramaros-Sziget. The North Front, where an isolated and fruitless limited attack had been undertaken at the start of January (the Battle of the Aa) should be restricted to a secondary role.<sup>18</sup>

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16 "Mémoires du Général Broussilov. Guerre 1914-1918" (French edition, Paris, 1920), p. 240. For the conference results, see also Gurko, p. 172.

17 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See Heenan, "Russian Democracy's Fatal Blunder" (New York, 1987), pp. 15-17. Since Gurko was only the acting Chief of Staff, he lacked the necessary authority to impose his will on the Front commanders. As for the Tsar of all the Russias, "he was thoroughly absent-minded, constantly yawning, and took no part in the discussions." Nicholas left the meeting before it ended to hasten to St Petersburg, where Rasputin had just been murdered.

18 Zayonchkovsky, "The Campaign of 1917" (in Russian; Moscow, 1923), pp. 29 ff.

The Russians' special circumstances led to a new conference with their allies, which took place at the end of January in St Petersburg. It involved the military representatives of France, England and Italy along with Romania's Crown Prince Carol and Minister President Bratianu. Although the necessity of a simultaneous offensive on all fronts was once again asserted, no final decision was reached despite the understandable demand of Romania for an immediate offensive against Bulgaria. The Romanians even got the impression that for the Stavka the Sereth River was only a forward position, and that their main line of resistance would be on the Pruth or farther back on the Dniester.<sup>19</sup> French General de Castelnau, who had also urged an offensive against Bulgaria, reported that nothing more than a diversionary operation should be expected of the Russians on the Sereth.

Finally Gurko prepared a compromise proposal, which was approved by the Tsar on 9 February; it also took Alexeiev's suggestions into account. On the Romanian Front, which was still receiving reinforcements in January, the logistical difficulties would first have to be overcome, and the broken Romanian Army re-organized and re-trained. Then the Romanian Front would attack as the prelude to the general spring offensive, and Dobruja would be conquered. Gurko's plan furthermore envisioned reinforcing Russia's North and Southwest Fronts. Brussilov would carry out the main attack toward Lemberg, with subsidiary thrusts in the direction of Sokal and Maramaros-Sziget. Ruzsky's North Front, on the other hand, was restricted to a supporting offensive. It was intended that Evert's Western Front would just carry out minor operations to pin down their opponents.<sup>20</sup>

So it seemed that at the start of February the Russians had made all necessary preparations to carry out their next military tasks with their full strength. They estimated that in the quiet winter months they would lose about 150,000 men per month and in the coming spring and summer battles about 500,000 per month. To cover these enormous losses they still had available 2,000,000 replacement troops who were being trained at this time. In the spring they intended to call up the 19-year-old men. With these replacements, and with the return each month of soldiers who had recovered from wounds or illness, the Russian high command would be able to cope with the casualties.

But the leading elements of Russian society and the members of

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19 Kiritzesco, "La Roumanie dans la Guerre Mondiale 1916-1919" (Paris, 1934), pp. 288 ff.

20 Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 31

the Duma were now hearing rumors that about 2,000,000 soldiers had deserted and fled home to their villages.<sup>21</sup> Rebellions and strikes were flaring up here and there. The foreigners who'd attended the St Petersburg conference came away with the impression that Russia was no longer capable of decisively exerting its strength. But the political and military leaders seem not to have realized that revolution was imminent in their Tsar's Empire.

### **3. Italy's military situation**

At the end of 1916 the Italians were anticipating the new year with concern. The great sacrifices which the war had hitherto demanded were not proportionate to the success which had been gained. The Italian troops had only been able to raise their tricolor over Görz. The cities of Trieste and Trent, the operational goals of the Italian Army, still lay behind the Aus-Hung. front. The bonds forged with the Entente at London in 1915 were now perceived by part of the population - especially a group of Socialists - as oppressive fetters.

Thus opinion in the Appenine Kingdom was depressed. Toward the end of 1916 there were demonstrations against the war in various Italian cities. It was mainly the Socialists who unhesitatingly advocated the conclusion of a peace treaty, especially after the Central Powers' peace offer was made public. In the parliament there were open attacks against the parties supporting the war. "This unending campaign against the war, which the government couldn't control, was poisoning the country's moral energy and having a destructive effect on the Army."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Italy's military leadership never let up their efforts to exorcize these evil spirits, to improve morale in the army, and to rally their forces and strength in an attempt to end the war victoriously in the coming year.

Based on the decisions at Chantilly the Italian Army was also prepared to take part in the general offensive in February. But in Italy the determination to carry on the war in accordance to these agreements was wavering. Therefore at the start of January 1917 another conference of the Entente's statesmen and chiefs of staff met at Rome. Apparently the intention was to demonstrate the solidarity of the alliance literally in front of the eyes of

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21 Gurko, p. 117

22 Geloso, *Le battaglie di Gorizia e della Bainsizza*" (Rome, 1920), p. 120

the Italians and to raise the spirits of the country's leadership. Also it was an opportunity to review war aims.

Among the conference participants was David Lloyd George, a man of lively spirit who since December 1916 had been responsible for Great Britain's destiny as its Prime Minister. He gladly intervened in military questions; thus (as also appears in his memoirs) he called the Chantilly conference a "pure comedy" and said that the military leadership to date had been "without talent."<sup>23</sup> In Rome he surprised the assembly with the new idea of a combined offensive by the French, English and Italians through the Julian Alps toward Laibach and Vienna, which would overthrow the old Habsburg Empire.<sup>24</sup>

G.Lt conte Cadorna joyfully took up this suggestion. He prepared an operational study in which he expressed the opinion that the conquest of Trieste or - even better - of the Julian Alps<sup>25</sup> would threaten the line of the Sava River and precipitate a serious crisis in the Monarchy. For the offensive he asked for the support of at least 300 English and/or French heavy guns plus at least eight infantry divisions.

But the General Staffs of the Western Powers, which had already hammered out their plans following Nivelles's guidelines, were not to be moved from their firm conviction that the war would be decided on French soil; therefore they wouldn't send substantial forces to a theater of operations which they believed was secondary. At best they were prepared to offer 300 guns, but only until the start of April (because they had meanwhile postponed their main offensive against Germany to that point in time). But this was unacceptable to Cadorna because he felt it would be impossible to carry on military operations on a grand scale on the Italian front prior to April; also he thought the time allotted for the use of the heavy artillery he'd requested was too short.

The Italian high command now put aside plans for an attack. Annoyance over the quick disappearance of the hopes aroused by Lloyd George wasn't the only reason. The high command had received reports about a planned joint offensive by Austria-Hungary and Germany against Italy, which seem to have been a more

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23 Lloyd George, "War Memoirs" (London, 1933), Vol. II, p. 658

24 Robertson, "Soldaten und Staatsmänner 1914-1918" (in German translation; Berlin, 1927), pp. 400 ff.

25 Apparently by the "Julian Alps" Cadorna meant the area between Triglav and the Carniola Schneeberg.

important cause for their turning to defensive ideas. It can't be determined if the reports stemmed from Conrad's suggestions to Hindenburg on 23 January. In any event, it's noteworthy that at the start of February concern was awakening in G.Lt Cadorna "that this spring our opponents will renew the Punishment Expedition" (this was what the Austrians called the south Tyrol offensive of 1916) "and this time not only with Aus-Hung. but also with German units, simultaneously from Tyrol and over the Isonzo."<sup>26</sup>

At this time the new French commander-in-chief General Nivelle visited Udine. Cadorna told him that the Italian Army wouldn't be able to withstand a powerful attack by the two Central Powers. Based on this discussion and on the agreement at the Chantilly conference, the Entente made their first preparations for an eventual transfer of English and French troops to upper Italy; this would later turn out to be an important precaution.

In addition, during December 1916 the Entente commanders were busy addressing the question of how to counter a German march through Switzerland (against either France or Italy). It seems extraordinary that at roughly the same time both of the warring camps heard rumors that the other side was about to violate Swiss neutrality. Cadorna decided to reinforce the security forces on the Swiss border, and therefore in February a brigade and several bicycle battalions were shifted to Como.<sup>27</sup> The French high command planned to assemble units on the western border of Switzerland as the danger increased, and also initiated talks with the government at Berne. The inquiries from both sides disturbed the Confederation. Until now their border force, which had reached 250,000 men during the general mobilization of August 1914, had been scaled back to 30,000 combat troops<sup>28</sup>; by calling up more men on 16 January 1917 they increased the force to 86,000. The Swiss were firmly determined to resist the first units to violate their neutrality regardless of which side they were on. But the danger passed. Maintenance of Swiss neutrality was just as important to the Entente as it was to the Quadruple Alliance.

Cadorna reported to the Minister President about all these conferences and measures. Although there had been a basic inter-allied agreement about providing each other assistance, for the

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26 Cadorna, "La guerra alla fronte italiana" (New edition; Milan, 1934), p. 343

27 Ministero della guerra, "Brigate di fanteria" (Rome, 1926), Vol. VIII, p. 87

28 Bordeaux, pp. 90 ff. Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, p. 74

moment no decision was reached to actually shift troops and artillery. General Nivelle believed that if Italy got into trouble the French and English could provide relief with an immediate offensive on the German Western front. It was very questionable whether England would provide any artillery as Lloyd George had intended. Thus everything indicated that the Italians would be left alone to fight the war on their own front.

Nevertheless Cadorna didn't abandon the idea of Italy's participation in the general offensive outlined at Chantilly. As he wrote to Rome, "Because of the great importance of the operations this year, which in all probability will be decisive, we must do everything in our power and exhaust all our resources...in order to win victory under our standards."<sup>29</sup> Energetic preparations were in fact under way, but as of February 1917 the Italian commanders still didn't have a firm plan of attack.

#### **4. Entente plans for the Balkans**

The situation in the Balkans was no better. Here the first goal of the French was to improve the logistical situation, which still suffered from the menace of enemy submarines. They demanded that the Italians should build an intermediate base at Taranto, from which men and supplies could be shipped to the Greek coast by Santi Quaranta; from here the French would build a road to carry them through Korca to Florina.<sup>30</sup>

To resolve the question of reinforcing the Army of the Orient, a conference met on 26 December 1916 in London; France and England, which had different opinions, clashed sharply. The French, who by the start of 1917 were sending two divisions as reinforcements to Salonika, demanded that the English should do the same. But Lloyd George felt that England's interests would be better served by offensives in Iraq or on the Palestine front than by a new Balkan campaign. Therefore he advocated the evacuation of Monastir and the withdrawal of the troops to a favorable defensive position closer to Salonika.

Since these questions couldn't be cleared up in the London meeting, the final settlement was delayed until the conference held in Rome at the start of January. Here the English were

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<sup>29</sup> Cadorna, "La guerra", p. 349

<sup>30</sup> Larcher, "La grande guerre dans les Balkans" (Paris, 1929), pp. 179 and 188

supported by Italy, the French by Russia, Serbia and Romania. Lloyd George repeated his suggestion that Monastir should be given up and the proposed large-scale offensive in the Balkans canceled. His opponents pointed out the negative impact this course would have on the Serbs and Greeks, and the resultant danger to the new supply lines, which would be close behind the front.

The final result of the two conferences was quite negative for the Balkans. The front in Macedonia was to be held; the French promised to send another two divisions there, but England and Italy refused to transfer any troops. General Sarrail, who was little liked by the English, kept his command for the time being, but gained no leverage over his subordinate, the English General Milne. Until the start of February Sarrail knew only that the Entente was planning a general offensive on all fronts, but had not actually received an order to attack. Meanwhile Milne had already received instructions from London to remain strictly on the defensive.<sup>31</sup>

In reviewing the results of the very active negotiations and meetings on both sides around the start of 1917, it is clear that Germany had opted for a purely defensive posture on land and for an offensive with submarines at sea.<sup>32</sup> Because the other three allies were greatly dependent on Germany, this choice was also decisive for them. The Entente powers, after plans for a general offensive in February proved unrealistic, wanted to storm forward on all fronts in April. But as of the start of February only the Western powers were firmly determined on this course. In a later chapter we will explain the factors and events that would further modify the Entente's concept of a general offensive.

## **II. The Development of the Aus-Hung. Armed Forces in 1916**

### ***A. Lessons learned about military administration and operations***

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31 Deygas, "L'armée d'orient dans la guerre mondiale" (Paris, 1932), p. 141. Larcher, p. 193

32 Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, p. 54

## 1. Mountain warfare

As the very eventful year 1916 came to an end without a decision, many leading figures in the k.u.k. Army used the pause in operations to study. They wished to determine which methods of waging war had proven successful, and how to devise new approaches to replace methods which had failed.

Of the two principal theaters of operation in which the Aus-Hung. forces fought, one (the Southwestern) ran entirely through mountains or through the difficult terrain of the Karst. Also on the Eastern front the battle positions between the Pantyr Pass and the outlets from the Carpathians northwest of Focsani were located on high, wooded mountains. Thus it's understandable that much of the study involved mountain operations, all the more so since Conrad intended to first seek a decision in 1917 in the Southwest. Here the main problem was still how to most quickly and certainly advance from the mountains into the Venetian plains. Also it was desirable that this thrust should be in an operationally effective direction.

### Review of the strategic planning for the 1916 offensive

Conrad's original concept for the spring offensive against Italy in spring 1916 was for a two-pronged assault from southern Tyrol and over the Isonzo. There is no doubt that this was the correct plan, which is why the "I" Group of the k.u.k. AOK also based their plan of attack for 1917 - as described in the preceding section - on this basic concept. But due to a lack of units the 1916 offensive had to be carried out from just one direction. This was from the plateaus of Lavarone and Folgaria toward the southeast, which was rightly regarded as the most effective direction. But by the time when Italy's mighty ally, the Tsar's Empire, forced the offensive to end, our thrust hadn't reached the plains. The various reasons why the attack didn't break through the mountain zone (which was no more than 20 km wide) in three weeks were given in detail in Volume IV; here we will once more outline the principal points.

At the start of February 1916, when the final decisions were taken to implement Conrad's long-prepared and very bold plan to attack from south Tyrol, most of the units chosen for the offensive had been summoned from the Russian theater of operations and from the Isonzo front. Also, two mountain divisions with recent experience of attacking were brought from the Balkans. The experience, techniques of fighting and the important psychological strength of these troops varied



considerably. The majority were no longer accustomed to offensive operations. It was fortunate that for several weeks they had an opportunity to refresh their tactical knowledge and, especially, to learn and practice how to fight in mountains. The tasks before them were quite extraordinary. This would be the first large-scale battle in high mountains. Not only would they have to conquer a wall of mountains 20 km wide and about 2000 meters high; the attackers would also have to break through a fortified zone that included armored works and had already been constructed in peacetime. This operation was possible only because of our powerful artillery, including the incomparable 30.5 cm mortars whose shells were able to penetrate the concrete protection of the Italian armored works. Thus Conrad's operation wasn't feasible until the enormous exertion of the war industries made available a large number of these mortars, along with many 38 cm and 42 cm howitzers, and finally a rich supply of ammunition for guns of all calibers.

A significant aspect of preparing for this battle was that the deployment of the artillery was completely independent of the infantry deployment; it was initiated and completed several weeks before the infantry took up their positions. This was possible only because on the Folgaria and Lavarone plateaus, the jumping-off points for the offensive, the Austrians had fortifications which provided sufficient protection for the artillery as they arrived. The guns were well-situated quite near to the foremost line. They were in a position to shift their field of fire from one sector to another of the middle corps (XX and III), which made up the primary attacking force.

The first, ground-breaking plan emphasized that the offensive would be entirely a breakthrough battle aiming at a deep penetration of the enemy lines. The units were divided under two armies. It was envisioned that the first-line army, a larger force supplied with strong artillery, would break completely through the front; the second army would march behind them into the plains and then exploit the success with full strength. This very unusual concept hasn't met with universal approval.<sup>33</sup>

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33 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For example, see Cyril Falls, "The Great War 1914-1918" (New York, 1959), p. 234: "[The Austrian] dispositions were faulty, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army having assaulted on the whole front, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> behind it to exploit success. This looked pretty on paper, but it was in fact clumsy - the Germans always gave a front from the start to every army engaged, however narrow." Falls based the second sentence on Kuhl, Vol. I, p. 430. Considering that Nivelle's 1917 offensive was such a fiasco, it seems peculiar that the

Significantly, however, it surfaced again in new plans by Conrad and in similar deployments by other commanders. For example, in the attack by the Western powers on the Aisne in spring 1917 General Nivelle held in readiness a second army, with strong cavalry, behind the units which were supposed to break through.

#### The tactical planning

Naturally the planners for the south Tyrol offensive wanted to surprise the enemy, but this became less likely when the start of the attack was repeatedly postponed due to heavy snowfall in the mountains. This weather-imposed delay was thus an advantage to the enemy, but the attackers were also able to use the time for more careful preparations. They hoped to still overcome the Italian defenses, which were becoming visibly stronger, by increasing their own strength. The assault on the Italians' armored works, several of which were clearly visible from our lines, was now considered a more formidable task because reports from the Verdun Battle (involving Forts Douamont and Vaux) indicated the difficulty of fighting around these types of fortifications. Although the artillery men confidently asserted that they could reduce the Italian bulwarks to rubble, the infantry and sappers assigned to the initial assault were still equipping themselves with ladders and other weapons used in fortress warfare.

Thus a systematic method of attack was developed so that the offensive would be a spirited military operation. The enemy's fortified zone was to be pulverized, one sector and one work after another, and then broken through. But it was clear that the objectives of this first phase were limited to the area that was within the farthest effective range of the heavy guns. Then the infantry would stay in place until the artillery was re-deployed for the second phase of the battle. Thus the infantry's activity was greatly limited by that of their sister arm of service. The principal concept was that the powerful artillery which we'd finally been able to assemble would be used to maximum effectiveness and thus save the infantry from casualties. In an order issued at this time it was stated that a man's life is worth more than ten of the heaviest shells. It was emphasized to the lower-ranking commanders that only those who achieved their objectives with the lowest possible casualties could expect recognition and decorations.

Cooperation between the two main branches was excellent. A thick and reliable network of wires carried messages between the

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original text cites his plan in support of Conrad's concept.

command HQ at various levels. Thus it was possible for even the leaders of small infantry attack groups to stay in constant communication not only with the nearest batteries, but also with the higher-level artillery commanders and with the many observers who were watching over the battlefield in all directions. This was a great help in directing the fighting. In the mountains, more than elsewhere, possession of a few points made strong by nature or by the hand of man could decide the fate of a large surrounding area. Therefore such strong points on the enemy front were objectives, one after the other, of the attack; a call by the local infantry commander to the artillery would be sufficient to unleash massive fire in a few minutes. Because of this accurate cooperation the attackers' losses were, in fact, quite low.

#### The course of the spring operation

The success of the heavy artillery was fully up to expectations. The systematic plan of attack worked out brilliantly. But when the troops reached the outermost range of the attacking artillery, a very difficult question became paramount. The enemy had suffered enormous casualties during the destruction of their first defensive zone and lost most of their guns; in most cases they were in no condition to halt in the positions farther to the rear. Should the k.u.k. troops now stay in place to await the advance of the heavy artillery? Or should they immediately storm forward to seize the next mountain position of the enemy in a swift movement without support from the guns? In these hours and days the pros and cons were the subject of lively debate at the higher-level HQ. Meanwhile the impetus for quick action could develop only from below, among the commanders who were next to the enemy. Some of them attacked vigorously and won unexpectedly large success. Others hesitated and missed the same favorable opportunity; they didn't seek to go beyond the orders which had been issued when the battle started. Also the general instructions to spare the infantry, mentioned above, had a dampening effect. The operation lost the necessary *elan*. Later there were efforts to go beyond the original, very systematic method by allowing small detachments to advance if possible far beyond their day's objectives to seize important points, but they were unsuccessful because these troops weren't well-supported.

Thus it happened that a pause ensued precisely in the center of the attacking front, where the urge to break through should have been strongest. Meanwhile on the flanks, and especially on the left, of the phalanx the breakthrough was considerably widened by bold strokes. But because of the large bulge created in the

front there was a shortage of units, and the operation on the flanks also came to a halt. All attempts by higher HQ to remove the barriers which now prevented rapid movement forward were failures. The time that had been lost couldn't be regained.

In the fighting around the last Italian position in front of the plains there surfaced for the first time - although not yet with clear outlines - the idea of breaking through in the valleys (in particular where the Astico valley southeast of Arsiero widens already as it nears the plains). This attack, which was perhaps initiated too late, failed to break through, as did assaults on the other strong points in the enemy's new front south of Arsiero. In this final phase of the great operation, as the fighting surged considerably back and forth, it was recognized that a new breakthrough battle would have to be organized. But events on the Eastern front made it impossible at this time to bring up the fresh units that were needed.

#### Lessons learned for 1917

For spring 1917 a plan was developed, as already described above, to repeat the thrust from the Sieben Gemeinde plateau to the plains. To break through the 20 km wide mountain zone between the Astico and Brenta it was believed that 12 divisions would be needed in the first line and 6 in the second. This distribution of forces may also have been based on lessons learned in the mountain fighting on the southern edge of Transylvania. Here, when the second attempt to break through the narrow Vulkan Mountains succeeded after careful preparation, the first attacking echelon was followed by a large cavalry corps. In south Tyrol the place of the mounted force would have been taken by especially mobile infantry divisions, assigned the task of exploiting the successful breakthrough by the first echelon.

The methods which Krafft's Corps used in the Red Tower Pass to penetrate the broad Fogaras Mountains appear to have had less relevance to developing the plan to quickly reach the Venetian plains. It is true that Krafft's force had worked their own way to the Wallachian plains and thus displayed extraordinary tactical skill; however, the advance had taken more than six weeks. There was never a chance that so much time would be available in the Southwest, where the Italians could shift their troops very quickly.

In his plans for an offensive in 1917 FM Conrad furthermore paid noteworthy attention to a point where the Italian front on the Isonzo could be broken most easily and effectively - the area

around Tolmein. This part of the front would in fact be of great importance in the autumn of 1917.

Thus the high command remained true to the plans for waging war on the mountain front in the Southwest that had already originated in peacetime and had been partly implemented in 1916. It is true that in 1917 there was at first no possibility of implementing the plans because the German OHL refused to send their divisions to cooperate. But the primary concepts lived on and would in fact be utilized at a later point in time.

The practical lessons learned in carrying out these operational plans proved that attacks in mountains could succeed only if carried out by units on a narrow front, well-supported by artillery, which could penetrate the enemy defensive zone in one bound. The events of 1916 didn't cause any need to change the concepts for the defense of mountain positions.

On the cliffs and glaciers of the higher Alps, where the soldiers contended not only with other men, but also with natural forces, the defenders had gained experience in using machinery to improve their positions, shelters and logistical bases. Dynamite and drills were usually the only tools that could carve the necessary shelters and protected areas out of the rock. Both sides relied on mining and powerful explosions in the fighting around the dominant mountain summits.

## **2. Operations in more open terrain**

### **a. Lessons on the Russian front**

At almost the same time when the Aus-Hung. troops were proving their ability to attack in the most difficult conditions in the mountains of south Tyrol, they faced another test in the East. Here, where the terrain usually offered favorable conditions for a war of maneuver, they were called upon to also master the second basic type of battle, the defensive. We have already discussed in Volume IV how the commanders and troops attempted from the end of 1915 to develop theories for defensive tactics based on their war experiences to date.

At the start of 1916, in the New Year's Battle, a complete defensive victory was won east of Czernowitz and on the Strypa. The concept which emerged here was that the attackers should first be pounded by an artillery barrage in front of the barriers, then hit with flanking fire from machine guns before finally encountering the resistance of the strong garrison of the trenches, culminating in hand-to-hand fighting. If the enemy got through the first (or principal) line, they would encounter new resistance at the next parallel line as well as on perpendicular lines designed to prevent them from spreading out to the sides. With the help of reserves the defenders of these positions would defeat the enemy.

This defensive system didn't include forward positions in front of the main line to cushion the enemy onslaught. The outposts

that were usually maintained in or in front of the barriers could at most guard against a surprise raid in quiet periods.

The impact of Brussilov's offensive

Brussilov's offensive interrupted a period of almost constant positional warfare in the East. For the troops as well as the commanders of the Aus-Hung. Eastern armies it was a painful surprise that the enemy at Luck and Okna were able to easily storm through the "permanent" positions which had been built up in months of wearisome toil. All conceivable measures and arrangements had proven insufficient, and some had even caused damage instead of providing protection. The confidence of the soldiers in their own strength and in their leaders suffered a severe blow. In Volume IV we have already discussed the factors that were found to have caused the catastrophe.

In the second half of June the allies attempted to overcome the enemy along the bulge west of Luck with an attack of their own, but soon had to give up the idea because the weakened and morally shaken 4<sup>th</sup> Army naturally could no longer muster the necessary power. But also the newly-arrived, mostly German, divisions which were supposed to help 4<sup>th</sup> Army forward had run to ground after two weeks. The Russians proved not only to be masterful at stubborn resistance; they were also determined to continue the offensive, which had started so auspiciously, until their opponents were destroyed. The Stavka pursued this goal with unbending determination. Fresh units were constantly streaming to the Tsar's armies fighting south of the Pripyat. Until into October the allies in Volhynia and Galicia had to withstand, on average, one Russian onslaught at the start and in the middle of each month, involving secondary as well as major offensives.

Thanks to an infallible and reliable source of intelligence - the enemy's intercepted wireless messages - the Russians' intentions and preparations didn't remain hidden from the leaders of the two Central Powers. In no prior war did the enemy themselves always reveal their plans in advance, thus providing the other side with an opportunity to devise timely counter-measures. Nevertheless, in the defensive battles of July and August the Austrians and Germans weren't spared bitter setbacks and unpleasant surprises. Under the Russians' heavy blows, the wall erected during the winter was dismantled piece by piece. After the breakthrough at Tlumacz the South Army also had to evacuate the trenches which hitherto they'd gloriously defended. From time to time the Russians discovered the weak points in the defenders' line and drove them back; sometimes they prevailed, without this clever choice of a point to attack, by the weight of their onslaught.

In attacking, the Russians remained true to tactics based on



French theories. Without worrying about surprise, the infantry shoveled approach trenches forward day after day toward the point chosen for the penetration; here they assembled during the artillery preparation and then burst forward in thick waves. During a major battle the enemy also many times dispensed with the preparatory artillery bombardment, which betrayed the imminence of their assault, and stormed ahead seeking a *coup de main*. Apparently also based on the ideas of the Entente generals, during the high summer the Russians gathered large groups of cavalry and stationed them directly behind the advancing infantry, prepared for a sudden ride forward. But Brussilov overlooked opportunities for cavalry operations on a large scale<sup>34</sup>; in June the IV Cavalry Corps was instructed to thrust through their opponents' permanent position and into the rear, but the attempt was shattered and the Russians suffered enormous casualties.

In an effort to win a victory over the Central Powers that would decide the war - which still hadn't been secured despite all the sacrifices and partial successes - the Russian leadership with barely concealed rage constantly increased their expenditure of men and resources.<sup>35</sup> The production of modern military equipment of all types in the factories of the Entente countries also was having an impact in the Russian theater of operations. In the autumn battles the Russians fired large amounts of gas and heavy shells, kept up lively activity in the air, and finally sustained a bombardment of a weight and length that in the judgment of the German generals was little less than what they had endured in the West. The military theories of the Western powers, which had led to the Battle of the Somme, also caused the Russians to fight a battle of attrition in front of Kovel and Vladimir-Volynsky.

#### Lessons learned by the defenders

Since the enemy generally continued to attack in the same direction and repeated their breakthrough attempts in the same sectors in an almost regular pattern, from battle to battle the defenders also learned the most effective counter-measures. The main task of the high commands of the Central Powers was just to keep providing reserves and the largest possible supplies of ammunition and special equipment. After the enormous casualties at Luck and Okna it was very difficult to maintain the continuous

34 Diakow, "Brussilow und seine Reiter" in "Mil. wiss. Mitt." (Vienna), 1933 edition; pp. 9 ff.

35 By 16 September 1916, along the same length of front as on 4 June, there were twice as many Russian units confronting the 4<sup>th</sup> Army (see Volume V).

and costly defensive battle with fresh reinforcements. The unified command established in August under Hindenburg, later succeeded by Prince Leopold of Bavaria, ensured that the management of the scanty reserves was handled at one point. Since it wasn't possible to keep back-up troops behind the entire front, battle groups were established at railroad junctions so that they could be sent at the last minute to endangered sectors.

Until the coming of winter again brought quiet, the defensive fighting centered around field fortifications. Troops thrown out of their trenches, as well as their neighbors who thus were forced to retreat, either established themselves along the nearest prepared position in the rear (some of which had only been sketched out) or hastily dug new lines in terrain that was favorable for resistance. Ground that was recovered from the enemy in a counterattack was also immediately incorporated into the system of defenses. Thus a strong and continuous network of trenches, with advanced barriers and fields of fires, was maintained; it developed into one or two lines provided with transverse lines of communication. Since it was relatively easy to dig into the soil, the new trenches were completed quickly. The installations that were successfully defended naturally became the new "permanent position." Many times the leadership, in order to express their determination to stubbornly hold on, and to pass this determination on to the troops, specifically declared certain lines to be "permanent positions", even though in most cases there hadn't been enough time to build up the works in question to the necessary strength.

For the infantry, and for the cavalry fighting on foot, the machine gun was the most potent defensive weapon - just as in other theaters of operation. In a melee, while defending the trenches or throwing out the enemy, the hand grenade was the most effective tool. If the foe did break through the foremost line, then the infantry of the sector under attack had to prove themselves. In this case the area behind the main trenches was the most important terrain, where the commanders of the smallest units had to master the raging battle; courageous officers often succeeded by making quick decisions. Here it was important to take advantage of the enemy's momentary confusion as they penetrated the complicated maze of trenches by halting them along the switch positions and the next line of resistance, and then hurling them back with a counter-thrust. If this effort was unsuccessful, then the penetration should at least be sealed off reliably by the position's garrison and the nearest reserves. Only if the enemy were checked would it be possible for the mid- and upper-level commanders to follow the ever-more reliable rule

that the situation should be restored by a coordinated and powerful counterattack by the strategic reserves (who should be employed *en masse* and not scattered).

The enemy many times tried to utilize their cavalry in their original role, the mounted attack. The Aus-Hung. cavalry abandoned this tactic. Although the regiments had fewer and fewer horses available, they were however still used effectively as mobile reserves.

On level ground, just as in the mountains, the principal role in a successful defensive action was played by growing masses of artillery. The Central Powers didn't have the manpower which the Russians still apparently possessed in limitless quantities and expended by sending their patient infantry into enormous bloodbaths. Because of this fact the allies relied all the more on heavy machine guns, trench mortars and guns as the backbone of their defenses, even though the enemy also increasingly depended on the brute power of their weapons.

As the Aus-Hung. troops were reinforced by a large number of German divisions, the fire power on the Eastern front increased. For the German units were very well equipped with guns, including those of heavy caliber, and effective trench mortars; they always had a larger ammunition supply than their allies. In the most favorable situations it was thus possible by laying down timely, concentrated and coordinated destructive fire to check attacks right at the outset. In the past there had been too much reliance on firing barrages from flanking batteries, which now receded in importance. In general, barrages were to be fired frontally. In the fighting in June and July the artillery also learned to hold some batteries in reserve so they could participate in counterattacks.

The staying power of the allies south of the Pripyat was obviously improving. There were no further setbacks after the systematic withdrawal of GdI Bothmer's Army; the battles which followed in the autumn, like the fighting on the Isonzo, took place on stationary fronts. By strenuous efforts, and while suffering heavy casualties, the Russians were still able to occasionally dent the front line, but the defending officers and men were now trained not to attach too much importance to such episodes. They were able to quickly restore these situations with counterattacks. The defense was conducted with more spirit. When the mighty onslaught of the Tsar's armies slackened in late fall, the allied front from the Baltic Sea to the Carpathians was

once more shielded with rigid, unbreakable armor.<sup>36</sup>

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36 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: While acknowledging German assistance, this passage fails to adequately admit the extent to which the Germans had taken over at the front. For another opinion see Stone, "The Eastern Front 1914-1917" (New York, 1975), pp. 254 and 262: "The Austrian Army was useful only insofar as it could be joined with German troops - which happened increasingly, even to the degree that companies of Austrian and German troops were joined to make mixed battalions. It is probably not an exaggeration to state that the Austrian Army survived now by the grace of the Prussian sergeant-major...It appears that with Prussian N.C.O.s and officers even Czechs and Ruthenes would fight against the Russians."

Rigid defense or elastic defense in depth?

Military historians seeking to explain the catastrophes at Luck and Okna later mentioned, among other causes and errors, "rigid defensive tactics" which had already been proven obsolete by June 1916. This question needs to be re-visited, since it appears that other sectors which the Russians assaulted with equal strength at this time or subsequently were able to successfully hold out. Moreover, when the front south of the Pripyat finally solidified after five months of very heavy fighting there was no new type of defense; basically the lines were still held rigidly.

To be honest, this outcome can be explained as follows: the defensive tactics weren't ineffective or outmoded; rather, the troops had been unable, despite possessing several parallel defensive lines and positions, to stand up to the enemy's heavy pressure and to limit their initial penetration. And the higher-level leadership had been unable to check and then throw back the Russians with reserves. Not the system, but the spirit and nerves of the defenders had failed. As soon as the front-line troops were mixed with enough units that were still capable of and willing to fight, and supported by enough technical equipment, their trust in their own capabilities and officers was restored. Then the defense again became "rigid" in the best sense of the word. Therefore the enemy faltered even though the weight of their onslaught actually increased in comparison to what it had been in June. The course of the campaigns in summer and fall proved only that it is important that troops should have strong morale and an earnest will, and that their leaders should be determined, prudent and clear-sighted.

Meanwhile new ideas regarding more effective tactics were being developed in the West, based on the lessons of the Battle of the Somme, which wore on until deep into November. The concept was that the defense shouldn't be based on a rigid line, but rather on a wider fortified area. The foremost line could easily be demolished by the enemy's drumfire, and there was no particular value in holding it. Thus the front line should be thinly held while the bulk of the defending forces were distributed in trenches, strong points and flanking positions farther to the rear, ready to carry out counterattacks on their own initiative. If their assaults were unsuccessful, recourse would be had to a systematic counter-offensive.<sup>37</sup> This concept was adopted first

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37 To avoid unnecessary bloodshed, at the end of 1916 the German OHL advised that lost parts of the position shouldn't be recovered merely for reasons of honor; counter-thrusts should only be initiated if justified by the tactical situation. A

in the West, where it was elaborated in 1917 and sharply defined in 1918. But in the East the allies were still far from this doctrine of "elastic defense." Here the new ideas filtered in only gradually, and at first imperceptibly, through the German command HQ. Only one part of the doctrine took immediate hold, since it had already been proven in combat - counterattack was the best way to make up for initial loss of ground. But in the Russian theater of operations in general it was still believed in 1917 that the defenders should concentrate on holding strongly to the first line. The allies were content with the defensive system as it existed at the end of 1916 and had no desire to rebuild or replace it.

Thus in the winter of 1916-17, when the revised tactics first became known at the front through the writings of the German OHL, the only effort in the direction of defense in depth was the completion of some strong points and machine gun nests in the areas behind the front line, where men and weapons were assembled in reserve. Some commanders at all levels, especially on the highest rungs, became enthusiastic about the new concept of mobile defense. But practically speaking there was no impact closer to the front amongst the smallest combat units. They had been emphatically ordered to hold the ground where they were stationed and couldn't leave it without permission. Thus a "rigid defense", though modified and improved by recent experience, remained the rule in the East.

#### The allies' offensive tactics in the East

Although the allied military leaders tried several times during the summer to go over to the offensive themselves, they never developed a large-scale offensive that gained any ground. Linsingen's counter-offensive remained just a brief episode. Plans to change the course of the campaign with a thrust on both sides of the Dniester were never implemented. The two high commands, with some difficulty, had barely assembled extra troops for this purpose when they had to divert them to sectors of the front that were menaced by new Russian attacks. The enormous Russian Empire retained the initiative with its mighty Army. Attempts by the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army to advance out of the Carpathians with limited forces won little success. Finally the reserves of the high commands were drawn to the new theater of operations in Transylvania.

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switch position, or the chord of an arc, could be a equally good defensive positions; they would even be better positions than a trench that had been reached in an earlier combat and was being held solely for purposes of prestige.

The allies' operations against Russia in 1916 were a series of improvisations. But they succeeded in thwarting the enemy's strategic plan by preventing a breakthrough on a scale large enough to initiate mobile warfare.

During the great defensive battles, and in response to the conditions of trench warfare, in the second half of 1916 the allies developed a new, refined technique for attacking with limited goals. The change first involved the artillery and trench mortars; the Germans wanted to exploit the potentialities of these heavy weapons, along with poison gas, by using them systematically to open the way for the infantry. The storm of the bridgehead at Zarecze (18 September 1916) was the first example of the utilization of a careful fire plan to break the enemy's defenses under German leadership. But the infantry also had to be trained. The enormous network of trenches which had been dug through the terrain by both sides offered an opportunity to introduce the offensive tactics which the Germans were developing on the Western front. These involved qualities and skills that couldn't be expected of the majority of the insufficiently-trained troops. Therefore special "storm troops" were selected to act in close coordination with the other arms. The new-style attacks were to unfold like clockwork. All components, while fighting in their own fashion, were to cooperate fully and according to schedule. After the enemy bulwarks had been softened up by the attacking artillery, they would be taken by the infantry - often with attached technical detachments. When such an operation was carried out on a larger scale, the storm troops acted as the vanguard for the other infantry. Above all these tactics required time for training and technical preparations, the commitment of large quantities of military equipment, and finally well-drilled troops. But if well-planned, such attacks also offered the prospect of almost certain success. Among the small actions in which the newly-trained storm troops first proved their worth, mention should be made of the capture of the Russian strong point at Witoniez on 1 November 1916, the re-capture of the Magyaros Heights in 1917 and above all the conquest of the Tobol bridgehead. The latter two actions will be described below.

## **b. The defense of the Isonzo**

In the coastal lands events took a different course than they did in the east, even though the terrain - at least south of Görz - was favorable for maneuvers. Here in the winter of 1915-16, just

as in the East, the troops worked hard to build up their positions, and just as in the high mountains they made use of drilling machines and explosives. But this work always took place under the immediate threat of an enemy thrust. Before the resumption of heavy fighting in August 1916 the defenders of the Isonzo had already had to stand fast in five battles. Thus the military spirit on the blood-soaked fields near Görz and on the karst plateau of Comen hadn't been dampened by apparently pointless toil.

The major battles (the sixth through ninth) broke out in the second half of 1916; once again the defenders had to withstand Italian attacks that were ever stronger and more stubborn.<sup>38</sup> Although at the end of the hot and desperate battles some of the ground remained in the enemy's hands, such losses never had any wider consequences. Even the greatest successes of the much larger Italian forces, such as the capture of Görz, resulted in the end in less significant changes to the front than was the case in other theaters of operations.

#### Tactical lessons of the Isonzo battles

The form of the defenses here took on its own special character because of the terrain of the Karst and because of the enemy's enormous numerical superiority. From the beginning, the rigid defense wasn't completely rigid. It is true that not a foot of ground was given up until it was absolutely necessary, and that the fighting centered on one line, the foremost one. But the line was never held with especially large forces. This was because the terrain included natural terrain features that could be defended with only slightly greater difficulty than the poorly constructed man-made installations. Therefore a more elastic type of defense evolved, that was carried out over a relatively deep area rather than just on the front line. But this didn't mean that ultimately the retention or recovery of the foremost battle line wasn't the first and overriding goal.

Earlier than elsewhere it was recognized here that one line was an insufficient defense, and that positions were needed to enable the battle to be conducted in deep zones. But the inflexible soil of the Karst was a major obstacle. A project that could be finished in a few nights in other areas might here involve months

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38 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: A phrase from the original has been omitted here because I couldn't decipher it. The earlier (1915) Isonzo battles are referred to as "mehr weniger ort-gebundene Kämpfe" (literally "more less locally-bound [concentrated?] fighting").



of very difficult work which for most troops, unaccustomed as they were to construction activity, was extremely tiring and burdensome.

Thus it happened that since the Italian war started it had never been possible to fight in a proper "position." For almost a year the troops fought behind piles of stone or in inadequate trenches. They found shelter from the weather and from the enemy's massed fire in various dug-outs, or in natural caves and depressions in the ground.

By the first major action of 1916, the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, at least a continuous line of trenches existed; in many places there was already a second, so-called "I.b" line. But after the loss of the positions of Podgora, Doberdo and S. Michele, the troops in many front-line sectors were once again fighting on the naked Karst; at best they were behind stone breastworks or in shallow trenches, guarded by barriers of the simplest types. The exhausting task of building the defenses began anew, and had hardly accomplished anything of note before the seventh Italian onslaught had to be repulsed in mid-September. Nevertheless, and despite heavy casualties, the customary defensive tactics were fully successful once again even though the enemy used their powerful artillery and trench mortars to attack with more force and persistence than ever. Wherever the Italians penetrated the position they were thrown out by counter-thrusts, at the latest when the brigade- or division-level reserves arrived.

But these tactics were now causing significant personnel losses, which could be diminished by a defense in greater depth. As a first step, at least a skeleton position was needed. Although ceaseless work was initiated, it was far from finished - and a deep defense system still not in place - when the Eight Battle broke out at the start of October. After heavy fighting it also came to an end along a line that consisted of isolated stone walls, caverns and, in a few cases, half-finished strong points. There was little further improvement prior to the start of the Ninth Battle of the Isonzo at the end of October, even though the troops had exerted all their strength in building the positions.

Before the Ninth Battle the garrison on the northern edge of the Karst plateau of Comen was reduced so as to minimize the number of lives lost during the powerful preparatory fire of the Italian artillery, and to implement the often-discussed theory of conducting the defense in greater depth. But this measure was a failure. Initially the front was quickly ripped asunder and the

enemy made a deep dent in the positions. Later it was possible to restore the line thanks only to the self-sacrificing intervention of the scanty reserves, who thus paid a heavy price in blood. The lesson was learned painfully that the number of troops in the foremost battle line still had to be sufficient to hold out until the reserves could arrive.

It's no wonder that after the Ninth Battle the new concept of an elastic defense, which was assuming a standard form in the West, still didn't set down roots along the Isonzo. The Italians' operational goal, Trieste, was much too close to the front to allow any dangerous experiments.

The long pause in fighting between mid-November 1916 and the following spring was used to construct continuous second and third lines ("I.b" and "I.c") behind the entire Isonzo front. Thanks to the now numerous drilling machines, it was possible to dig out many caverns. Here machine guns, trench mortars and infantry guns were assembled, along with companies and battalions of reserves. Thus the area immediately behind the foremost line became a "fortified intermediate zone." As previously, however, the leadership was determined that the dug-outs along the first line were to be vigorously defended.

### **3. Revival of mobile warfare**

In the theaters of operation which by their nature provided opportunities for mobile warfare the Aus-Hung. Army was still forced to stay on the defensive into autumn of 1916. Then Romania's entry into the war on the enemy side surprisingly caused a change in at least parts of the long Eastern front (the great basin of Transylvania and the Wallachian plains). Here in the last quarter of 1916 there was a real "renaissance" of mobile warfare. The counter-offensive by the armies of Falkenhayn and Arz unfolded in the same way as the first operations against Russia in summer 1914.

The whole plan for the defense of Transylvania was based on mobility. Already in the first phase of this campaign, as the covering troops of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army fell back step-by-step toward the fortified Maros-Kokel line, they took advantage of many opportunities to inflict damage on their cautiously-advancing opponents. The disappearance of the shackles of trench warfare, which had provided few chances for courageous attacks, had a salutary effect on the Aus-Hung. troops. Suddenly their concerns about maintaining tight contact with neighboring units

and about having unprotected flanks vanished.

The causes were:

- . the greater war experience of the allies, which more than made up for their numerical inferiority, and
- . their plentiful supplies of heavy artillery, machine guns and communication equipment, all of which were in short supply on the Romanian side.

The porous fronts allowed the Aus-Hung. and German divisions to bring their incomparably greater operational and tactical adaptability fully and completely into play.

The allied counteroffensive provided a very fine opportunity for the display of superior generalship. The allies not only broke through Romanian positions by frontal assault, but developed wide ranging-envelopment operations around the enemy's open flanks, forcing them to retreat. The battles and smaller actions were of short duration and - since they culminated in quick and far-reaching pursuits - were decisive. Compared to the battles on all the other fronts in 1916, the victories won in Transylvania were relatively easy.

After considerably more difficult breakthrough actions through the mountains that form the southern wall of Transylvania, mobile warfare in a similar form resumed in Wallachia as the Romanians' power of resistance quickly deteriorated. The marches were almost as lengthy, and the actions almost as diverse, as in the great offensive against Russia in 1915. But the allies didn't learn any new lessons. It was rather the Romanians who here were forced to undergo a fearful military schooling.

When all the developments above are summarized, it appears that the outcome of the 1916 fighting - on both the operational and tactical levels - didn't lead to the emergence of ideas that substantially altered earlier practices. Storm-troop training did gain in importance for the offensive. The necessity of defense in depth gained further recognition, but didn't cause completely new tactical forms to emerge. The existing doctrine for the attack and defense was of course influenced by massive use of artillery, machine guns, trench mortars and air units.

#### **4. Preparations in winter**

The arrival of raw weather in the Eastern theater of operations put an end to the constantly changing fighting of the year 1916 and initiated a period of hard work for the allies. Construction

of the positions, which couldn't be finished to the desired extent in the pauses between the defensive battles, was carried out industriously. This activity was no longer unfamiliar to the troops, who now were entering their third winter at war; they already had considerable skill. Hitherto trenches had too often been built according to impractical theories and - despite all the time and effort expended - had been completely destroyed by the first serious bombardment; now they were built to be durable, with practical needs in mind.

The main line of resistance consisted of rather broad trenches deep as a man's height; their sides were secured with interweaved fencing or wood, and they were usually divided by traverses. On the sides facing the enemy, the rifles now were fired over the top of the walls rather than through loopholes. The shrapnel shields had already been discarded in spring 1916. Soil dug up during construction was scattered, so that piles of dirt weren't left in the open to betray to the enemy the course of the trenches or to serve as targets for their guns. In places where swamps or water just below the surface made it impossible to dig trenches, walls were built up. Shell-proof shelters were provided for machine guns, infantry guns, trench mortars and their crews. Efforts were made to build more and more of these shelters for the rest of the garrison, and then for the nearest reserves, so as to minimize casualties from enemy drumfire as much as possible. Artillery batteries took similar measures to protect their observers, guns, crews and ammunition supplies. It was possible to prepare only a limited number of dug-outs in Volhynia because of the swampy soil. When such shelters were built it was essential to make sure that they wouldn't collapse on the men who sought protection in them. It was now forbidden to build dug-outs in the foremost line. Concrete reinforced by iron rails was the most reliable and most useful material used to ensure that the trenches themselves could withstand heavy bombardment. If sufficiently camouflaged, concrete works also could be constructed to a limited extent above ground level.

The foremost position was a fortified zone that included a second line 150 to 400 meters behind the first plus isolated strong points between and behind the lines; often it also included a third line. Several kilometers farther back a second position was sketched out on the ground and, if enough labor units were available, was actually constructed in rudimentary fashion. The second position was sited far enough behind the first so that enemy artillery couldn't simultaneously strike them both.

Poison and irritant gases were also a very potent weapon, to

which both sides resorted more frequently. The troops were instructed how to use this dangerous tool, but more importantly they were also told how to defend themselves against it. At the end of October 1916 the Aus-Hung. high command introduced a gas defense organization, such as had long existed on the Isonzo, along their Eastern front. Weather stations in the field were constantly monitoring conditions so they could provide warning at times that were favorable for an enemy gas attack. Alarm systems were in place, and gas masks provided for the protection of the troops.

Besides all these practical measures taken to directly ensure that the front was ready for action, provisions were made to prepare the men psychologically for the next year's fighting. After the enemy coalition brusquely rejected the peace initiative of the Central Powers, the latter had to reckon that the opposing armies, including the Russians on the Eastern front, would open a general offensive in spring 1917 on all fronts.

#### German influence on Aus-Hung. doctrine and training

The majority of the Aus-Hung. divisions were now under overall German command; at the start of 1917 only the two armies of Archduke Joseph's Army Group were assigned to the k.u.k. high command. The allied units, as well as the mid- and higher-level HQ, were very much intermingled. As a result, the basic operational concepts and the tactical training of the stronger partner tended to prevail within both forces.<sup>39</sup> Common training courses for officers of both Empires were set up to ensure that all of them understood the same concepts. To further enhance mutual understanding, officers of various arms down to company commanders were switched between the armies. In November 1916 Aus-Hung. officers and men began to attend courses in storm troop tactics at several installations behind the German Western front. At the same time the German Eastern Command were attaching training cadres to their units to teach the new tactics; the various Aus-Hung. HQ soon followed their example. In February 1917 the k.u.k. Army HQ were already setting up independent storm

<sup>39</sup> The makeup of Army Groups Mackensen, Archduke Joseph, Böhm-Ermolli and Linsingen on the Eastern front was -

|                 | 1 November 1916 | 1 March 1917   |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Austria-Hungary | 41 ID, 11 ½ CD  | 40 ½ ID, 11 CD |
| Germany         | 37 ½ ID, 5 ½ CD | 35 ID, 2 CD    |
| Bulgaria        | 4 ID, 1 CD      | 4 ID, 1 CD     |
| Turkey          | 4 ID, 0 CD      | 5 ID, 0 CD     |
| TOTALS          | 86 ½ ID, 18 CD  | 84 ½ ID, 14 CD |

battalions. There weren't yet enough trained troops at the divisional level to set up further battalions, but the men who had been trained were returned to their regiments where they could assemble as companies for special operations. The earlier "Jagd-Kommandos" which had been established for such operations were now disbanded as superfluous.

German influence also extended to the advanced training of the replacement troops within the sectors of each Army.<sup>40</sup> Since the instruction they'd received in the interior was insufficient, each wave of March battalions spent some time in the divisional training centers. Here the new troops, before they were sent to their regiments, drilled for several months under strict military discipline and practiced in simulated battles.

Many times German military writings and training methods, especially for the new actions involving gas and storm troops, were accepted as standards. In other areas, however, Aus-Hung. and German methods were contradictory; moreover, many Aus-Hung. HQ issued further instructions on their own initiative for their own units. To restore uniformity amid this flood of instructions that was inundating the front, at the start of 1917 the k.u.k. AOK had a whole series of new regulations published to codify the lessons, courses and alterations to date. Reflecting the military situation of the Danube Monarchy and the course of the war, the emphasis was on trench fighting and defensive battles. The regulations deliberately relied heavily on German examples.

Just as in the East, the pause in fighting during the winter was devoted on the Isonzo front to the necessary improvements to the defenses and the ongoing training of the front-line and replacement troops.

Overall it may be asserted that this winter period was utilized to much better effect than had been the case in the similar pause during 1915-16. Then the time was spent almost entirely in construction, so the training of officers and men was neglected; thus the troops' tactical skills had declined, as did their adaptability to their commanders' orders. Now all ranks in the Army were busy learning military theory and practice; equal time was devoted to realistic maneuvers and to snappy drill.

Thus the units of the two Empires were working industriously to

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40 Ludendorff, "Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914-1918" (Berlin, 1919 and 1920), p. 186. Bernhardt, "Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben" (Berlin, 1927), pp. 449 ff. Litzmann, "Lebenserinnerungen" (Berlin, 1921), Vol. II, p. 131.

be fully armed and ready to fight if the enemy resumed the bloody game of seeking to decide the war in spring 1917.

## ***B. Changes in the Army's structure***

### **1. Personnel developments in 1916**

Events on the battlefield in the third year of the war, as well as the changes in tactics, had a decisive influence on the organizational development of the armed forces. By the end of the fighting in 1915 the Army had found new strength, and in spring 1916 the prospects for its continued development seemed excellent in many respects.<sup>41</sup> At the start of May most divisions had more riflemen available than their authorized strength of 10,000 to 12,000 - many of them had substantially more. The total infantry strength of the Monarchy was 150 battalions more than it had been when the war started; there were three times as many machine guns and twice as many artillery pieces. The dangerous shortage of ammunition, which had been a problem for so long, was at least substantially reduced if not eliminated. The armament industries, which had played a large role in this achievement, were at the high point of their productive capacities.

It's true that there was a shadow on this promising picture - the limits on the Monarchy's ability for further progress were already visible. The first shortages of many raw materials and above all of manpower were beginning! But even in these areas there was no immediate danger. Since fall 1915 casualties had been less than the normal arrival of replacements. If this trend had continued, there would have been sufficient new soldiers available until far into 1917.

#### The impact of enormous casualties

But at this point the course of events in 1916 took a dramatic turn for the worse. With one blow, Brussilov's offensive made nonsense of all calculations and plans. In a few weeks the Northeastern front lost more than 300,000 combat troops, almost half its strength; the heavy fighting that raged back and forth

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41 See Volume IV of this work. Also Franek, "Die Entwicklung der öst-ung. Wehrmacht in den ersten zwei Kriegsjahren" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt., Vienna), 1933 Edition, pp. 15 and 98 ff.

in the next few months was just as costly. 167,000 men were lost to death, wounds, illness or captivity in July and 138,000 more in August. Regiments which at the start of June had contained 4000 or more riflemen were now engaged for weeks in very heavy fighting with just one third of their authorized strength. The extra field battalions (# V, VI, etc.) soon disappeared from the order of battle, as did a substantial percentage of the Landsturm infantry battalions. The March formations, which could only receive training from their armies for a few weeks before being prematurely hurled into battle, weren't numerous enough to fill the gaps in the ranks of the fighting units. They were used up all too soon, and the call for replacements again swelled to an extent that hadn't been heard since the dark days of the Carpathian winter. The men sent to the front in the five series of March battalions which the carefully-nurtured replacement program was able to provide between June and the end of the year weren't sufficient.<sup>42</sup> The hastily-assembled replacements included the XXII March Battalions in June, a number of extra units in July and the XXIII Battalions in August, but all quickly disappeared in the whirlwind of the costly battles. At least the combat units which had the greatest need were able to incorporate men from another group of "extra" March battalions in November.

Despite the heavy fighting on the Southwestern front, total losses were always much lower than in the East. Nevertheless, here also casualties rose substantially in 1916. More than a third of the Army's overall losses were suffered in this theater of operations (as opposed to 13.7% in 1915). A happy exception to this pattern of enormous losses was only found, as previously, in the Balkans. But compared to the larger picture of our casualties this was an exception that had no great importance.

Based on the reports of the individual armies, the total losses in 1916 were as follows:

Northeastern front:

. 23,495 officers - 1406 killed (6.2% of the total), 5512 wounded (22.3%), 10,707 ill (45.5%), 6110 taken prisoner or missing (26.0%)

. 1,061,091 men - 50,577 killed (4.8% of the total), 238,443 wounded (22.4%), 394,513 ill (37.2%), 377,558 taken prisoner or missing (35.6%)

Balkan front:

. 1314 officers - 38 killed (2.9% of the total), 113 wounded (8.6%), 1156 ill (87.9%), 7 taken prisoner or missing (0.6%)

. 63,588 men - 2215 killed (3.5% of the total), 3316 wounded

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<sup>42</sup> Since the end of 1915 the March battalions had been sent forth at six-week intervals rather than every month.



(5.2%), 57,537 ill (90.5%), 520 taken prisoner or missing (0.8%)

Southwestern front:

. 12,281 officers - 945 killed (7.8% of the total), 3076 wounded (25.0%), 7354 ill (59.8%), 906 taken prisoner or missing (7.4%)

. 591,455 men - 37,324 killed (6.3% of the total), 165,683 wounded (28.0%), 335,593 ill (56.7%), 52,855 taken prisoner or missing (9.0%)

TOTALS:

. 37,090 officers - 2449 killed (6.6% of the total), 8401 wounded (22.7%), 19,217 ill (51.8%), 7023 taken prisoner or missing (18.9%)

. 1,716,134 men - 90,116 killed (5.3% of the total), 407,442 wounded (23.7%), 787,643 ill (45.9%), 430,933 taken prisoner or missing (25.1%)

GRAND TOTAL (officers and men) was thus 1,753,224 - 92,565 killed (5.3% of the total), 415,843 wounded (23.7%), 806,60 ill (46.0%), 437,956 taken prisoner or missing (25.0%)

Just as in previous years, the types of casualties were unevenly distributed among the various fronts.<sup>43</sup> As previously, in the south there was a larger percentage of men killed or wounded than taken prisoner, and the reverse was the case in the north. However, the number of prisoners as a percentage of total casualties overall continued to decline (from 35.4% in 1914 to 28.9% in 1915 to 24.9% in 1916). Even the large number of prisoners lost in the fighting of summer 1916 failed to alter this pattern, which proves that the events of that period were a one-time - although very fateful - misfortune.<sup>44</sup>

Fortunately the percentage of "bloody" casualties (killed or wounded) was also declining. Of every 1000 men who were lost from the ranks of fighters, only 53 were killed and 237 wounded. The comparable figures in 1915 were 84 killed and 296 wounded, and in 1914 they had been 109 killed and 365 wounded. Thus the only category that had noticeably increased as a percentage of losses was the number of men who left the front due to illness.

<sup>43</sup> See the figures for 1915 listed in Volume IV. In 1916 the percentage of total casualties that had been killed or wounded in the Northeast was 27.2, in the Southwest 32.5. The loss in prisoners in the Northeast was 35.4% and in the Southwest it was 18.0%.

<sup>44</sup> June 1916 was the month in which the percentage of total casualties that had been taken prisoner was the greatest of the war (in the Russian theater of operations it was no less than 58% of the grand total).

Thus in general we can confidently state that there had been a satisfactory improvement from the standpoint of the types of losses; no doubt this was due to improving military experience and tactics. The Army had learned how to be more sparing of the men than hitherto.

But despite this encouraging trend, it's still true that in 1916 the armies had lost an additional 37,000 officers and 1,716,000 men.<sup>45</sup> Under these circumstances it was difficult to keep a continuous stream of replacements flowing from the interior to the front. Nearly 2,200,000 men were needed during the year as replacements or for new formations. Although 34,000 officers and 938,000 men who'd recovered from wounds or illness became available, and thus returned to the line for the second or third time, an even larger number of new troops were needed from the homeland to make up the 2,200,000 total.

Already two drafts, and in some cases three drafts, had been held in most of the yearly classes of potential recruits; in May the 18 year old men (born in 1898) were called up. In this way about 1,400,000 men became available for service in 1916, but now the Monarchy's human reserves were nearly exhausted. This became clear during the last draft calls, which netted a very limited number of soldiers. For some time it seemed that the only solution would be to extend Landsturm duty to 17 and 51-55 year old men, but this course would have had serious drawbacks. Besides making a negative impression on both friends and foes, it would endanger the military economy, which was finally progressing favorably, by depriving it of a large number of workers.

Fortunately, however, it was possible to at least once more overcome the manpower crisis for the moment, without resorting to such a dangerous expedient. From September the casualties in the Northeast declined again to a tolerable level. At the same time the extra March battalions provided some relief. By the end of the year most division once more had 8000 to 10,000 riflemen; the units in the Southwest had even more.

Moreover, the significant flow of troops from the homeland wasn't used only to replenish the ranks of the infantry companies in the trenches. More and more men were needed to maintain the many other units of various kinds, the unavoidably expanding command,

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45 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original text has "34,000 officers", but the correct figure has been inserted here from Table 1 of Beilage 2 (as shown earlier in this section).

procurement and logistical framework, and the numerous training facilities. Thus during 1916 the number of riflemen - infantry in the strictest sense - declined from about a third of the Army's total strength to just a quarter by the end of the year. And this doesn't take into consideration the fact that for a long time many auxiliary services near the front and on the lines of communication had been provided by non-military units or by prisoners of war. For example, at the end of 1916 the total ration strength was 3,353,000 men of whom 45,000 were civilian workers and 301,000 were prisoners.

A significant change had also occurred in the allotment of the Monarchy's units among the various theaters of operation. The Isonzo became the principal Aus-Hung. front and drew upon an ever increasing portion of the total military forces. At the start of 1916 there had been 979,000 infantry and cavalry, of whom 568,000 were on the Northeastern front, 281,000 in the Southwest and 130,000 in the Balkans. At the end of the year, of the total of 852,000 infantry and cavalry there were just 452,000 in the East (even though the front had expanded to include the Romanian theater of operations); 74,000 were at the front or in the rear areas and fortresses in the Balkans, and 382,000 held the lines in the Southwest.

## **2. Changes in the infantry and cavalry**

Under these circumstances, especially the shortage of resources, there was no chance to significantly build up the infantry. Through the end of 1915 their organizational development had been undertaken in response to events, as their strength continued to increase.<sup>46</sup> The haphazard creation of new units, which in many cases was more zealous than judicious, was finally checked by the AOK, which preferred a more limited expansion in line with plans for the Army's future organization.

The responsible offices in the high command and the War Ministry had long entertained plans for a thorough reorganization. According to these plans, which had been worked out in all their details already in 1916, the Aus-Hung. military forces of the future would consist of 66 infantry and 12 cavalry divisions plus 28 mountain brigades, supported by 22 divisions and 14 brigades of Landsturm infantry.

In detail, the plan envisioned:

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<sup>46</sup> See Volume IV, and also Franek, pp. 101 ff.

- a. In Austria and Hungary:
  - 28 k.u.k. infantry divisions
  - 14 k.u.k. reserve infantry divisions
  - 8 k.k. Landwehr divisions
  - 4 k.k. reserve Landwehr divisions
  - 8 k.u. Honved divisions
  - 4 k.u. reserve Honved divisions.....
  - For a total of 66 infantry divisions; also 22 Landsturm infantry divisions
  - 8 k.u.k. cavalry divisions
  - 2 k.k. Landwehr cavalry divisions
  - 2 k.u. Honved cavalry divisions.....
  - For a total of 12 cavalry divisions
- b. In Bosnia and Herzegovina
  - 7 infantry divisions with mountain equipment, commanding 14 mountain brigades, plus 14 reserve mountain and 14 Landsturm brigades

Each infantry and reserve division would contain the following units (plus some additional supporting services):

- 4 infantry regiments (16 battalions)
  - 2 squadrons
  - 1 field cannon regiment (4 batteries)<sup>47</sup>
  - 1 field howitzer regiment (6 batteries)
  - 1 heavy field artillery regiment (3 x 15 cm howitzer, 1 x 10.4 cm cannon batteries)
  - 1 mountain artillery battalion (2 cannon and 1 howitzer batteries)
  - 1 airplane company
  - 1 sapper company
  - 2 divisional telephone detachments
- (The Landsturm infantry divisions would be similar but wouldn't have a heavy field artillery regiment, mountain artillery battalion or air unit; each would have just one telephone detachment)

The unfortunate decline in the number of replacement troops as the war continued made it seem inadvisable to carry out such major changes while the fighting continued. Now reorganization plans were placed on the back burner; they wouldn't be implemented until after the war when they would be part of a large-scale Army reform. Nevertheless, by spring 1916 much had been accomplished that at least was leading in the direction of realizing the plan outlined above. Despite the shortage of

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<sup>47</sup> When this plan was drafted, it didn't foresee the increasing number of anti-aircraft and trench mortar batteries that meanwhile were being attached to the field cannon regiments.

manpower, during the further course of the year a number of units were raised that were intended to become permanent - Infantry Regiments # 105 to 109, Bosnia-Herzegovina Infantry Regiment # 5, and Honved Infantry Regiment # 33.<sup>48</sup> Also the need to quickly create a new front in Transylvania had led to the creation of several useful formations; there were five new Brigades (141<sup>st</sup> to 145<sup>th</sup>), which however contained some existing units in addition to these new creations. Otherwise, during the phase of development that extended from the second half of 1916 until long into 1917, the principal goal was to keep the existing organization running rather than to create a large number of new units. The authorities were content to at least use the plans for the future army to resolve a number of small-scale organizational questions.<sup>49</sup>

In many cases there was no way to avoid reducing the number of infantry units, because it had finally been impossible to fully make up for all the losses in the Russian theater of operations. In the armed forces as a whole, by December 1916 there were 45 fewer battalions than in May (984 as opposed to 1029). Most of the "extra" field battalions of the infantry regiments, as well as no fewer than 36 of the 200 Landsturm infantry battalions, had disappeared from the order of battle.

At the end of 1916 the infantry units were...

|  |                |    |
|--|----------------|----|
| 108 k.u.k. infantry regiments (# 1-35, 37-107, 109; 37 <sup>th</sup> Reserve)..... | 457 battalions |    |
| 4 Tyrolean Kaiser Jaeger regiments.....  |                | 18 |
| "  |                |    |
| 5 Bosnia-Herzegovina infantry regiments.....                                       |                | 29 |
| 33 Feld Jaeger battalions.....   |                |    |
| .....  | 33             | "  |
| 8 Bosnia-Herzegovina Feld Jaeger battalions.....                                   |                | 8  |
| 6 Border Jaeger battalions.....  |                |    |
| .....  | 6              | "  |

48 But Regiment # 108 was dissolved by the end of 1916, and # 109 at the start of 1917.

49 For example, the new Honved infantry regiments were mostly assigned numbers over 300, because it was planned that in the future regiments of the Common Army would have numbers starting with 1, while those of the k.k. Landwehr would start with 200 and those of the k.u. Honved with 300.

|  |     |            |
|--|-----|------------|
| 8 high mountain companies                                    |     |            |
| 12 mountain guide detachments                                |     |            |
| 37 k.k. Landwehr regiments (including 2 mountain units)..... | 117 | battalions |
| 3 k.k. Tyrolean Landes-Schützen regiments.....               | 12  | "          |
| 42 k.u. Honved infantry regiments.....                       |     |            |
| .128   | "   |            |
| 98 k.k. Landsturm infantry battalions.....                   |     |            |
| 98   | "   |            |
| 67 k.u. Landsturm infantry battalions.....                   |     |            |
| 67   | "   |            |
| 5 Gendarmerie battalions.....                                |     |            |
| .....5   | "   |            |
| 4 border guard companies.....                                |     |            |
| .....1   | "   |            |
| 7 coast defense battalions.....                              |     |            |
| .....7   | "   |            |

These units made up a total of 986 infantry battalions. There were also 2 ½ bicycle battalions.

The volunteer forces had also already passed the high point of their development. Their units made up a worth-while and welcome source of assistance, especially the Standschützen from Tyrol and Vorarlberg (now organized as 29 battalions and 21 companies) and the volunteer rifle units from the Alpine lands (making up a total of 9 battalions). In the East the Bukovina and Ukrainian volunteers had been joined by five companies from Transylvania that made up the so-called "Tiger Battalion." But all these formations had few if any reserves available. Considering the overall unfavorable replacement situation it was doubtful that the volunteers could be expanded or even maintained at their current strength. The largest of their units, the Polish Legion, had left the Aus-Hung. armed forces altogether in autumn due to the political development of the Polish question.

At the end of 1916 volunteers made up the following units:

|   |    |            |
|---|----|------------|
| 29 battalions and 21 companies of Tyrol and Vorarlberg Standschützen..... | 34 | battalions |
| 2 volunteer rifle regiments.....  | 5  | "          |
| 4 volunteer rifle battalions.....   | 4  | "          |
| 5 volunteer companies from Transylvania ("Tiger Battalion").....          | 1  | "          |
| 1 Ukrainian volunteer rifle regiment.....                                 | 2  | "          |
| 1 Bukovina volunteer "corps".....   | 2  | "          |
| 6 Albanian Legions.....   | 6  | "          |

Thus the total strength was 54 battalions.

While the course of events in 1916 wasn't favorable to an expansion of the infantry, the development of new kinds of fighting led to the creation of completely new types of units. These were small formations designed for special purposes. The most important units were two types created on the Southwestern front to wage war in the high mountains:

. The "High Mountain Companies" were supposed to carry out special missions (combat, reconnaissance, guiding and rescue). By the end of 1916 there were 8 companies, each consisting of 4 platoons (3 infantry and 1 machine gun), a technical group, 2

telephone patrols and several mountain guide patrols.

. The "Mountain Guide Detachments" were assemblies of the best-trained and most-experienced specialists and were supposed to carry out especially difficult missions in the highest Alps; they also planned and directed construction and mining work. At the end of 1916 there were 12 detachments with a total of 1200 experienced Alpine specialists (officers and men). In the first months of 1917 the total increased to 95 officers and 1900 men under 13 detachments.

Another innovation which soon developed was the creation of "Storm battalions" or "Storm training battalions" to carry out the new tactics. Following the example of the units on the German Western front, the battalions were initially used primarily in a training role. During the winter one or two storm patrols were created per company and trained in close-up combat with the most modern equipment. But it was already intended that storm battalions would also carry out the most difficult attacks in the field.

Finally, in the second half of 1916 the Border Jaeger troops in Albania were increased from six companies to six battalions.

#### New weapons and equipment for the infantry

Even more important than the new types of infantry being developed at the start of 1917 were the changes in the inner organization of the foot units. Already for some time the machine gun and hand grenade had begun to take the place of the rifle and bayonet as the most important infantry weapons. The expansion of the machine gun arm was finally accelerating. Since the start of the war, 2384 machine gun detachments (including necessary replacement units) had been sent from the interior to the front; 1496 of the detachments - far more than half - had been sent in 1916 alone. At the end of October each infantry regiment had its own machine gun company of 4 weapons; efforts were under way to increase company strength to 8. It was hoped that this goal would be accomplished quickly, since the Styrian Works were now producing around 850 machine guns each month.

The hand grenade was proving to be a most important weapon in combat at close quarters. This was especially true of the German model "pineapple" and "potato-masher" grenades, which were so light due to superior workmanship that an experienced soldier could hurl them as far as 50 meters. The Aus-Hung. troops were still making do with the "safety fuse" grenades (shaped like ears of corn) or the "cylinder" grenades; many battles in 1917 were



fought with these weapons. But plans were afoot to arm the men with newer models which were making the hand grenade a decisive tool in the attacks of the storm troops, who in turn were fundamentally changing the nature of infantry combat.

An equally important change was caused by the realization that in modern warfare the infantry could find themselves in difficult situations in which help from the artillery was uncertain or too late; thus they were left to their own devices in attempts to break enemy resistance or to respond to dangers which arose suddenly. This problem was to be addressed by having infantry guns and trench mortars assigned directly to the infantry units. By the end of 1916, 310 platoons of small 37 mm guns were at the front, so that by this time each regiment and each independent battalion possessed at least one infantry gun detachment. The plan was to equip every regiment two such platoons.

This new weapon won only partial approval from the troops. Although generally they welcomed a weapon that could supplement the effect of artillery fire, most of the units expected these small guns to carry out tasks for which they simply hadn't been designed, such as destroying enemy defenses, concrete observation points, machine gun nests, etc. They found it hard to accept that the infantry guns were supposed to be used only in special emergencies, which anyway weren't common in trench warfare. Almost all reports demanded guns of larger caliber, greater range and more striking power; this would be impossible without increasing the weight of the pieces. Smaller improvements in construction and organization, and to the ammunition, couldn't alter this perception.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile the difficult problem of the infantry guns was overshadowed by a more urgent concern: the question of trench mortars.

The trench mortar weapon had been only slightly developed in the Aus-Hung. Army in the first two years of the war. Even in spring 1916 the infantry had just one light model (a 9 cm mortar) in any quantity. Because of the small numbers of heavier trench mortars they played essentially no role; moreover, they weren't very effective. Then, especially on the Southwestern front, the enemy's overwhelming superiority in heavy mortars became more noticeable from month to month; it was difficult for our troops to guard against them or, since we still had a shortage of high-

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<sup>50</sup> Initially it had been intended to move the guns with carts drawn by dogs, but trials proved this to be impractical - especially in the mountains. Later arrangements were made so that the infantry gun detachments could move the pieces and equipment either with manpower or pack animals.

angle guns, to destroy them with counter-fire. Everywhere the defenders suffered from the physical and psychological effects of destructive bombardment by these weapons, which had an unheard-of range for that time (1300 meters)<sup>51</sup>. Also impressive was the large number of mortars which the enemy committed to the battles. Although reports that the Italians had 8000 heavy mortars on the Isonzo front alone were exaggerated<sup>52</sup>, it couldn't be denied that the enemy had an overwhelming superiority of numbers. When the troops asked to be given weapons in equal quantity to the enemy, heavy trench mortars were at the top of their list of needs.

Earlier the high command had recognized the importance of trench mortars in fighting at close quarters, and in summer decided to mass produce these weapons. But for a long time there was a lack of satisfactory models, especially for a heavy trench mortar. A major production plan was finally initiated in autumn.<sup>53</sup> While it was carried out, the original organization of the mortars was also revised. Light "Minenwerfern" and all the "Granatwerfern" were assigned to the infantry, while the medium and heavy mortars were re-assigned from the sappers to the artillery.

This enormous undertaking - which would eventually produce 900 light, 1200 medium and 1100 heavy trench mortars - was welcomed by the troops who, especially on the Isonzo, had suffered from the enemy's superiority in these weapons. But it took some time

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51 At this time the various types of Aus-Hung. trench mortars had ranges of just 300 to 600 meters.

52 In mid-October 1916 the AOK estimated that the Italians possessed 2400 trench mortars, half of which were heavy. In the same estimate they reckoned that at most there were 800 heavy mortars on the Isonzo.

53 Each infantry regiment would receive one section armed with 9 cm trench mortars and one armed with portable "granate" throwers. Furthermore, each infantry division would have four platoons, each armed with two 12 cm air-powered mortars and two heavy 22 cm mortars. The AOK would have a substantial reserve for emergencies, containing as many of these effective weapons as all the regiments and divisions together. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The "Granaten" were thick-walled containers, with a sixth of their weight in high explosives, similar to hand grenades. The trench mortars proper ("Minenwerfer") fired projectiles called "Bomben", defined as thin walled containers with a third of their weight in high explosives. For further technical information see J.S. Lucas, "Austro-Hungarian Infantry 1914-1918" (Wealdstone, 1973), pp. 87-90.

for the good intentions to become reality. At the end of 1916 only the light trench mortars were at the front in large numbers, alongside 83 platoons of 12 cm and 100 platoons of 22 cm trench mortars.

The infantry received a further worthwhile enhancement when the pioneer detachments, which were needed for so many technical tasks but had been in short supply, were reorganized to create a larger number of "technical infantry companies." Each company had as many technical platoons as there were battalions in the regiment, plus one "heavy weapons platoon" and one "infantry telephone platoon."<sup>54</sup> Thus the communication services, which in the infantry had hitherto been split up in various detachments equipped with different kinds of gear, now also finally received a standard organization.

All these innovations and changes may have seemed minor individually, but together they had substantially enhanced the abilities of the principal arm of service during 1916. Step by step the infantry units, which for centuries had been homogenous and interchangeable, now were organized with a richer variety of arms and equipment. They were on their way to becoming mixed arms units, like divisions on a smaller scale. This trend would accelerate after the war.

The second and third years of the war also witnessed changes in the troops' outward appearance. "Pike grey" uniforms were mostly replaced by "field grey." Originally the color, fit and style, as well as (unfortunately) the quality of the material, had been identical. Now there was a greater variety. Also disappearing were the long trousers with the small bands at the ankles (called "trouser clasps"); now everyone wore breeches along with the puttees which were preferred by all the nationalities. Similarly the hide packs had mostly been replaced by the ugly but roomier rucksacks.

In 1916 the Aus-Hung. Army lost a large part of its former colorfulness. Partly due to rapid production and partly to shortages of some of the more expensive cloths, most of the new field uniforms lacked the colored patches which - along with the two colors of buttons - had differentiated the regiments. The traditional "regimental colors" were no longer seen very much;

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54 Each heavy weapons platoon had one Minenwerfer and one Granatwerfer section plus two searchlight sections. Each telephone platoon had one section for the regiment's HQ and one for each of the battalions; the platoon also had a dispatch rider section.

even the officers usually only wore them on very thin stripes.

Even at the end of the year the steel helmet was still a rare piece of equipment, found mostly in the storm formations. Although its general introduction had long been recognized as unavoidable, it was delayed by production difficulties. Significant progress was finally made after it was decided, at the urging of the k.u.k. high command, to mass produce excellent German models in Austrian factories. At the start of 1917 it was hoped that the troops would have 400,000 steel helmets by the end of March and more than 1,500,000 by the end of July.

#### The situation of the cavalry

Since the start of the war the developments in the cavalry had been pre-ordained by the changing nature of warfare and by the lack of horses. In the second year of the war, and even more in the third, there were no real mounted operations in which the horsemen could display their ancient skills. Even when it seemed that favorable opportunities beckoned for the cavalry, as was the case in the Romanian theater of operations, it turned out that they again were stuck in stationary, tiresome dismounted combat, at times even in the mountains.

It's not surprising that the cavalry were gradually deprived of horses so that the artillery could expand; they were forced to take further steps on the path that would turn them into infantry. Already in the spring of 1916 the mounted part of each regiment was reduced to four squadrons, each with 110 men. On the other hand, each cavalry division had two or three battalion-sized "rifle detachments"; they were receiving more machine guns, and introducing infantry guns. Thereafter the process of dismounting the divisions proceeded ever more quickly. In September 1916 each cavalry regiment reduced its mounted component to one detachment, while increasing its foot troops to a full rifle battalion.<sup>55</sup> But even this balance of strength didn't endure for long. The days of the mounted warriors were numbered.

At the start of 1917 the cavalry was organized as follows:  
. 15 dragoon regiments - 70 ½ mounted and 28 foot squadrons; 15 cav MG detachments

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<sup>55</sup> The number of squadrons, as well as the proportion of mounted to dismounted detachments, was different from regiment to regiment and always in flux. For the time being, however, even under the new organization the number of mounted squadrons was still nominally the same as in May 1916.

- . 16 hussar regiments - 80 mounted and 24 foot squadrons; 16 cav MG detachments
  - . 11 uhlan regiments - 47 mounted and 24 dismounted squadrons; 11 cav MG detachments
  - . 6 k.k. Landwehr uhlan regiments - 37 ½ mounted squadrons
  - . 2 k.k. Landwehr uhlan battalions - 5 mounted and 3 foot squadrons; 2 cav MG detachments
  - . 10 k.u. Honved hussar regiments - 44 mounted and 18 foot squadrons; 9 cav MG detachments
  - . 1 k.u. Honved hussar battalion - 2 mounted squadrons
  - . 1 k.u. Landsturm hussar regiment - 3 mounted and 2 foot squadrons; 1 cav MG detachment
  - . 8 k.u. Landsturm hussar battalions - 18 ¾ mounted squadrons
- TOTAL = 307 ¾ mounted and 99 foot squadrons; 54 cav MG detachments

### **3. Development of the artillery and the industrial base**

#### The field and mountain artillery

The most imposing achievement of the first two years of the war was the expansion of the field and mountain artillery. The large-scale modernization initiated at the start of 1915 advanced in 1916 to its completion with quick steps.<sup>56</sup> By the end of the latter year each infantry division already had one field cannon, one field howitzer and one heavy field artillery regiment; although here or there a battery was either missing or lacking its full number of guns, overall each division had almost 60 pieces. The original plan had even been somewhat exceeded, since anti-aircraft ("Flak") and trench mortar units had been incorporated into some field cannon regiments as their 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Batteries. Also a project was under way to create mountain artillery regiments for the Landwehr and Honved forces.

The following units were thus available at the start of 1917:

- . 61 field cannon regiments - 256 field cannon, 44 flak and 7 trench mortar batteries
- . 11 horse artillery regiments - 37 field cannon batteries
- . 63 field howitzer regiments - 303 field howitzer and 2 field cannon batteries
- . 32 mountain artillery regiments - 155 mountain cannon and 49

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<sup>56</sup> During the year General Staff Col. Pflug, who was attached to the high command, played an outstanding part in building up the artillery.

mountain howitzer batteries

- . 50 heavy field artillery regiments - 45 x 10.4 cm cannon and 119 x 15 cm howitzer batteries

- . 51 independent cannon batteries of various types, origin and calibers

The basic concept of the revised artillery organization was that the guns would mostly be available at the level of the infantry divisions, which thus could carry out missions using their own forces. Numerous experiences during the first two years of the war confirmed that this was the correct course. Initially the plan was to only assign some of the newly-produced heavy artillery to the divisions, while equipping the corps with most of the heavy howitzers and cannon.<sup>57</sup> But based on war experience the idea of maintaining corps artillery was soon completely abandoned in favor of reinforcing the divisional guns.

It had been demonstrated that infantry could never be supported by too much artillery, and that the artillery could never be too effective. High-angle fire especially had proved its worth to such an extent that it was decided to create the heavy field artillery regiments (contrary to the original plan) with three heavy field howitzer batteries and just one 10.4 cm cannon battery. Since meanwhile the number of light howitzers had quadrupled, there were now twice as many howitzers as cannon (not counting the mountain guns). When the war started the ratio had been three cannon to every one howitzer. Already there were complaints from some quarters that such a strong emphasis on high-angle fire was not appropriate in every situation.

No less urgent, and more difficult to resolve, than the question of high-angle fire was the range of the guns. From all sides came requests that ranges should be increased. Finally some entirely new models of gun were introduced into the fortress artillery for this purpose.

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57 When the war started the only heavy field artillery were under the 14 heavy field howitzer battalions, one per each corps. In the original plan, the infantry divisions would have received one 15 cm field howitzer and one 10.4 cm cannon battery, while the corps would have had one 15 cm howitzer and one 10.4 cm cannon battery for each of the divisions it controlled.

Heavy artillery

While the organization of all the field artillery (both light and heavy) and of the mountain artillery was entirely designed to place it at the disposal of the infantry divisions, the heavy and very heavy artillery was left in the hands of the higher ranking commanders so that they could concentrate a powerful force of guns as needed at various parts of the battlefield when the situation demanded.

The fortress artillery was still the branch responsible for administering the heavy guns. Since the start of the war it had included the "attack companies" which were the heaviest batteries of the field forces, alongside a larger number of garrison companies in permanent installations (the "fortress artillery" in the strict sense of the word). But most of the mobile pieces were obsolescent, so for a long time only the 30.5 cm mortars - the number of which doubled in the first two years of the war - were very effective. Thus although there were already 420 heavy mobile guns with the fortress artillery in May 1916 the majority were still quite old; they were useful, but couldn't meet all the demands of modern warfare.

But meanwhile several new, very well-designed and effective heavy guns had been developed and tested, so that the high command could now begin to expand the heavy artillery.<sup>58</sup> The models already introduced had made it possible to fully motorize the entire force of heavy artillery, and many officers wanted to continue this trend. But lessons learned in several actions to date caused other artillerists to be more cautious. Sometimes it had proven impossible to keep moving the motorized batteries forward, not only in mountains (such as in the Lovcen area and in many parts of Carinthia and Tyrol), but also in the northeastern theater of operations. 30.5 cm and 42 cm batteries had to be pulled from Volhynia because they had been unable to move even on the local highways. Under such circumstances the high command wanted to ensure that they would have some horse-drawn batteries available among the reserve guns under the fortress artillery.

Thus the large-scale plan for the complete renovation of the

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58 At the start of the war, along with the light guns there was a 42 cm howitzer under development; it had a range of 12.7 km and was moved by truck. In 1916 the following models were ready to be mass produced (they also could be used in motorized batteries): the 15 cm M.15 howitzer (range = 11.5 km), the 15 cm M.15 cannon (range = 18.3 km), a 38 cm howitzer (range = 16 km) and a 24 cm cannon (range = 26 km).

mobile fortress artillery was initiated in summer 1916; the goal was to provide 120 batteries with the most modern heavy guns. The conversion of the heavy artillery into a mobile weapon had long been under way, and now it was approaching completion. Soon the designation "fortress artillery", which was no longer appropriate, would be replaced by "heavy artillery."<sup>59</sup>

But by the end of 1916 the implementation of this great plan was only a little past its first stages. For example, there still weren't sufficient quantities of a principal new gun - the 15 cm M.15 howitzer - at the front to fulfill the urgent requests of the troops. The units actually serving with the fortress artillery were:

|                   |                                    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 5 batteries.....  | 42 cm howitzers (KHL/15)           |
| 2 batteries.....  | 38 cm howitzers (KHL/17)           |
| 1 battery.....    | 35 cm cannon (BKL/45)              |
| 27 batteries..... | 30.5 cm mortars                    |
| 8 batteries.....  | 24 cm mortars                      |
| 2 batteries.....  | 24 cm cannon                       |
| 10 batteries..... | 21 cm coastal mortars              |
| 1 battery.....    | 21 cm M.16 mortars                 |
| 8 batteries.....  | 18 cm cannon                       |
| 22 batteries..... | 15 cm mortars                      |
| 41 batteries..... | 15 cm howitzers (old)              |
| 2 batteries.....  | 15 cm M.15 howitzers               |
| 8 batteries.....  | 15 cm M.15.B cannon                |
| 10 batteries..... | 15 cm cannon (old)                 |
| 1 battery.....    | 12.5 cm ex-Russian field howitzers |
| 1 battery.....    | 9.5 cm ex-Belgian howitzers        |

The problem was that the production of artillery always was closely linked to the capabilities of industry; despite all the efforts to reinforce this arm, the demands were always greater. Moreover, our industrial and organizational labor now wasn't restricted to the heavy guns alone. Even though the program for expanding the field and mountain artillery was almost complete, it was still necessary to replace pieces that had become

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<sup>59</sup> Under the AOK's plan, the fortress artillery was to finally include 16 batteries of four 15 cm M.15 howitzers (motorized), 8 batteries of four 15 cm M.14 cannon (horse-drawn), 16 batteries of four 15 cm M.15 cannon (motorized), 8 batteries of four 10.4 cm M.14 cannon (horse-drawn), 48 batteries of two 30.5 cm M.11 mortars (motorized), 8 batteries of two 38 cm howitzers (motorized), 8 batteries of two 24 cm cannon (motorized) and 8 batteries of two 42 cm howitzers (motorized).



unserviceable or had been lost.<sup>60</sup> And finally the artillery armaments plan had to be coordinated with the overall plans for the future organization of the armed forces mentioned above. Therefore the high command's program for the artillery was still far from complete. Since the introduction of new light cannon also couldn't be postponed much longer,<sup>61</sup> the total number of guns needed to renovate the artillery was no less than 13,300 (including 520 heavy), of which only 5000 (90 heavy) were available at the start of 1917.

### The military economy

Based on earlier unfortunate experiences, the Aus-Hung. high command realized that their demands for armaments - which now were being carried out under the pressure of the war - would hardly be answered in a future peacetime. But even leaving this consideration aside, they didn't hesitate to urge that all the Monarchy's resources should now be stretched to the utmost since its existence was at stake. As the flow of men to the front increasingly threatened to dry up, it was all the more necessary to replace them with machines. For this purpose the country's industrial strength should be brought to the highest level of efficiency.

The war industries of the Danube Monarchy had made great strides in the second year of the war; all components were working at their highest level of capacity by the start of 1917. The following figures show how production increased from 1914 through the last half of 1916:

- . Gun barrel production increased from 240 to 3554 per six-month period; total produced since the war started was 9462
- . Gun carriage production increased from 148 to 1900 per six-month period; total produced was 6998
- . Machine gun production (including foreign models) increased from 1087 to 3912 per six-month period; total produced was 11,102
- . Rifle production increased from 149,000 to 630,000 per six-month period; total produced was 2,252,000.

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<sup>60</sup> In June 1916 the number of unserviceable guns was so large that the project of re-arming batteries and creating new ones was temporarily suspended so replacements could be provided.

<sup>61</sup> The 8 cm M.5/8 field cannon was a modern gun, but its performance (especially its range) wasn't keeping up with new demands. In 1916 the Army wasn't ready to introduce a new field cannon, but the need was recognized in the long-range planning of the AOK.

At the end of the month, the monthly production figures were 850 machine guns, 100,000 rifles and 500 guns; half of the latter were high-angle fire weapons. Contracts for the coming year were expected to be for even larger supplies. The circle of firms involved in armaments production was enlarged. In 1914 the contractors were the Skoda Works, Styrian Works and the Vienna Arsenal; they were joined in 1915 by the Böhler Works, and in 1916 by the Witkowitz and Resica Iron Works plus the Hungarian Cannon Factory.

Hitherto the deficiencies in the industrial strength of the Monarchy had been a barrier to the expansion of the armed forces, and it was gratifying that this was now remedied. But the high command was still by no means satisfied. The end of the war wasn't in sight. Our enemies could procure military equipment from the economy of the entire world. Already the war was becoming a contest of materiel and of machines. The side that fell behind in this development would have to succumb.

It would be possible to demand more of industrialists if they were rewarded with long-term contracts as they increased their investments. But it wasn't easy for the high command to accomplish this. For example, at the end of 1916 the artillery expansion outlined above still hadn't received approval from the governments because it cost 1.3 billion crowns.

The industrial expansion of this period is all the more remarkable because it was substantially hindered by the lack of raw materials. 3000 to 5000 tons of copper were needed each month but only 2000 to 3000 were available, even though the central office in charge of metals had already diverted 70% of all copper supplies from the private sector. Even the confiscation of church bells, copper roofs and lightning rods had only brought in 6400 tons by the end of 1916. At most, no more than another 7300 tons of copper could be expected from this expedient, which thus was of limited effectiveness in addressing the problem. Only a little more than half of the lead that was needed each month was available. Even the supplies of iron, steel and manganese were considerably less than industry's needs. To address the shortage of nickel, it was finally decided - after considerable hesitation - to issue iron coins in place of nickel currency. And finally in the winter of 1916-17 the shortage of coal began to be noticeable. At this time only private households, rather than industry, were short of coal; nevertheless this new threat to the economy due to the blockade became more of a problem every day.

It was still possible to overcome the worst of these shortages by exploiting the metal resources of Serbia and Poland, by various expedients, and - perhaps most important - by getting support from the much stronger economy of our German ally.

Although the shortage of raw materials could still be surmounted by the weapons industry, it was a greater hindrance to the production of ammunition; insufficient supplies of powder and explosive material continued to hamper production despite the erection of new factories. The problem was complicated by the fact that besides the increasing demand for ammunition, new types were needed to fire the new model guns. Thus in 1915 a hundred different kinds of shells were produced for 29 types of guns. As the artillery re-armament program progressed and the weaponry became more uniform this situation did improve.

At the start of 1916 the ammunition situation, thanks to a long pause in fighting, was more favorable than at any prior time in the war. Very substantial supplies were made available for the offensive in Tyrol, and then expended freely.<sup>62</sup> The need for and use of ammunition increased still more after the unfavorable turn of events in the Northeast. For example, at the start of July the armies fighting the Russians were demanding a daily supply that was eight to fourteen times greater than the daily production of the entire munitions industry.

Thus ammunition production wasn't keeping pace with the armaments industry as a whole since the expansion began in 1915. Although in the summer of 1916 the weekly output was 255,000 rounds for the artillery and more than 26,000,000 cartridges for the infantry, it didn't once meet the minimum demands which the high command had set as targets the year before, let alone the actual needs of the moment. Thus the high command was forced, very much against their will, to advise the troops to use ammunition sparingly at a time when the artillery fighting was becoming more massive than ever.

Especially after Romania joined the side of our enemies, all conceivable measures were taken to increase munitions production, especially for the new guns, as much as possible. But the lack of raw materials and the limited industrial capacity were barriers to these good intentions. The high command was demanding that 800,000 artillery rounds should be produced weekly, but little more than half that many were completed each

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<sup>62</sup> By the end of March 1916 the high command sent 11<sup>th</sup> Army about 613,000 rounds for guns with calibers of up to 10 cm, and 54,000 rounds for guns with calibers greater than 10 cm.

week during the second part of the year. As previously, during the heavy fighting in the fall on both the Northeastern and Southwestern fronts the daily expenditure of ammunition all too often exceeded daily production even though the troops were not being wasteful.

#### **4. Development of the air force and technical troops**

##### The air force

It was not easy for the Aus-Hung. high command to keep up with the demands caused by the growing importance of air warfare in 1916. Once again the limited capacity of the Monarchy's industries and the shrinking of the manpower reserves played an important part. It was certainly a considerable achievement that in 1916 production increased to more than 1000 complete airplanes and 500 reserve motors.<sup>63</sup> It was hoped that output could next be increased fivefold; thus two and a half new air companies could be formed each month.

At the start of 1916 the AOK had intended to form an air force of 48 companies. Each of the 8 armies and 24 corps would have their own company of reconnaissance planes; each army moreover would have two companies armed with larger bombers.<sup>64</sup> But at the end of 1916 this program was only 75% complete (there were 37 air companies at the time); by this date, moreover, the enemy's strength in the air was increasing more than ours, so the program had to be expanded. Fortunately the factories had enhanced their capacity, so that the War Ministry could promise that the number of air companies would increase to 68 by the end of 1917, and that three squadrons of large bombers would also be formed.

To fend off the enemy's ever more numerous and effective planes, anti-aircraft cannon (Flak) batteries were created as the fifth batteries within the field cannon regiments.<sup>65</sup> But the

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63 From the start of the war until the end of 1915 a total of 408 motors and 512 aircraft bodies had been produced. See Madarasz, "Die k.u.k. Luftfahrtruppen im Weltkrieg" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1928: Special Air Force Edition).

64 But until a reliable large bomber model was developed, the bomber companies would be equipped with lighter planes.

65 The Flak batteries were formed from the 60 independent platoons which had been sent to the front by the end of 1916. Only a few platoons with Russian guns and some truck-mounted mobile Flak batteries remained at the immediate disposal of the army HQ.

capabilities of the various type of gun used for this purpose still left something to be desired for quite some time.

French air attacks on German cities had caused attention to focus on the problem of defending the air over the homeland. Such attacks on industrial installations and on especially important population centers were less dangerous because of the potential damage than because they might cause mass panic among the citizens.

To at least receive timely warning of any attacks, a regular air observation and reporting system was first developed along and behind the Southwest front; it consisted of parallel lines of watch points and dispatch centers. The last of these lines stretched from Knittenfeld through Stainz and Leibnitz to Radkersburg. Moreover, certain areas - such as Vienna, Wiener-Neustadt, Graz and Steinamanger as well as the vicinity of Pressburg and Magyar Ovar - were protected by special watch posts. But until now the territory of the Monarchy was still spared from bombing raids.

#### The technical troops

To the extent permitted by the over-taxed replacement system, the technical troops were significantly built up to keep pace with the always growing demands of the war, and also to anticipate the future reorganization of the armed forces. The goal was to have 18 sapper battalions (119 companies), 14 pioneer battalions (56 companies) and 2 bridging battalions (6 companies). By the start of 1917 this goal had not only been met, but in part exceeded. At this point there were 108 sapper companies plus 15 Landsturm sapper companies which were mostly able to fulfill the same functions, 1 special sapper battalion for gas warfare, and 60 pioneer companies. Most of the sapper and pioneer battalion HQ had been dissolved. There were also many special detachments formed and maintained by sappers, such as those responsible for providing electric power and light, and those which ran the boring machines, ventilators, pumps and other technical equipment.

Similarly the communication services had been improved to such an extent that at least at the level of the middle and highest HQ all needs were being met. In 1916 each of the brigade HQ also received its own telephone detachment.

It was more difficult to ensure communications between the infantry and artillery in the immediate battle area, because here the phone lines were subject to massive enemy fire and could fail

at the most decisive moments. Then the gallant telephone troops would have to restore the destroyed lines under very heavy fire. When all else failed, runners were available to display heroism by forwarding messages. Communication by special visual and audio equipment was quickly introduced among the combat troops; these included rockets and special pistols that lit up the sky with flares of different colors and proved an effective way to maintain the link between infantry and artillery.

The transportation services continued to be of decisive importance, just as they had since the war began. They proved their worth during the fateful fighting which halted Brussilov's offensive; the railroad network of Poland and Galicia, which had been expanded with hard work, and the new rail installations which had made Kovel an effective transportation center were of incomparable importance.<sup>66</sup> It is impossible to imagine how the forces deployed for the counter-offensives could have been assembled without these improvements, which were in fact the backbone of the Eastern front.

No major innovations were introduced in the transportation services in 1916, but the projects undertaken in 1915 were continued. The outbreak of war with Romania led first to the evacuation and the (mostly temporary) destruction of 650 km of rail lines in Transylvania. After the victorious advance these lines had to be quickly restored and brought into service, along with about 540 km of the Romanian railroads. For this purpose the third k.u.k. military railroad office, the "Southeastern Army Rail HQ", was created.

In general the field railroads and the cable rail lines grew in importance as larger portions of the front achieved a stable character. The network was thickest where it was providing supplies directly to the troops in the north. The trains were hauled by small locomotives or by trucks fitted with special wheels. Most effective were the "Feldbahn-Genatorenzüge", but they were available in only limited numbers. In December 1916 a line with these trains was placed in operation from Durazzo and was of great help in supplying the Albanian theater of operations. Some of the field lines, e.g. the stretch Wochein-Fieistriz-Zlatorogg, were electrified. A rail line of standard gauge, but used by modified trucks, between Duttoule and Comen was very useful in supplying the soldiers on the Karst. Of equal importance in the higher elevations were the cable lines, which increased in numbers and capacity. A total of about 1200 km of

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66 Ratzenhofer, "Das Rückgrat der Dauerfront im Osten" (Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1932; pp. 974 ff.)

field and cable lines were operating at the start of 1917.<sup>67</sup>

State of the Army at the start of 1917 - an overview

In general, therefore, the armed forces of the Danube Monarchy can be said to have surmounted a very difficult situation by the start of 1917. Despite all the limitations, and in defiance of all the dangers, the Army had emerged from a series of crises with the number of its major units essentially undiminished.

Thus the following units were available:

- . 27 corps HQ
- . 71 infantry divisions
- . 1 cavalry corps HQ
- . 11 cavalry divisions
- . 141 infantry brigades (including 10 brigade-size groups)  
(10 units were independent)
- . 30 mountain brigades (4 were independent)
- . 3 half-brigades
- . 17 cavalry brigades

Although many of the improvisations were wasteful, there was no serious diminution in combat strength thanks in large measure to the expansion of the artillery. It was certainly a promising sign that this expansion was continuing vigorously now that industry had reached the high point of its productive capacity.

The problem, though, was precisely that the war economy could grow no further. The other disturbing trend was that the reserves of manpower were also exhausted.

These difficult issues became clearly apparent when the German OHL, as part of the creation of the inter-allied supreme command, sought with their influence to have Austria-Hungary exert all its strength to enhance the power of its Army. Not without helpless jealousy, the AOK at Teschen noted that their ally had already in the second half of 1916 created 33 new divisions in a few months; German industry as a whole had been four times as productive as Austria-Hungary's, and yet was preparing as part of the "Hindenburg Program" to double and then triple its accomplishments in the coming year.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This paragraph may contain grave errors in translation because I was unable to find English equivalents for many of the technical terms. I have no idea what a "Genatorenzug" might be.

<sup>68</sup> For example, by September 1916 the Germans formed 887 heavy batteries, we had 182. In summer 1916 German industry produced 160 heavy guns, 5500 trench mortars and 29,000 tons of barbed wire; our figures were 43 heavy guns, 45 trench

The economy of the Monarchy was so different from Germany's that statistical comparisons were somewhat unfair. In fact the Aus-Hung. high command had done everything in their power to increase their country's industrial strength and place it in the service of the war effort. But while willing to persevere in this effort, the staff in Teschen weren't deceiving themselves about the results; they made it clear to our allies that Austrian industrial capacity wasn't in the same leagues as that of the German Empire, and it wouldn't be possible to raise new units to any great extent. 7,500,000 men - 67.5% of all those between ages 18 and 50 liable to service - had already been called to arms by the end of 1916. Of this number, about 700,000 had been killed or had died from wounds or illness, 600,000 were no longer capable of service, and 1,500,000 had been taken prisoner. Thus a total of 2,800,000 men could no longer be counted on to fight. Undoubtedly new measures would have to be taken in the future to ensure that the Army had the necessary replacements for as long as possible. This difficult and important task would soon be entrusted to the new special central office of the "Chief of Replacement Service for the Entire Armed Forces." More information about the reasons for creating this position will be provided at another point.

As always, the majority of men who did become available were used as replacement troops. The high command strove to use the others as much as possible to expand and strengthen the Army, particularly the combat troops; since the war started they'd been able to create 22 new divisions.<sup>69</sup> There would be no further expansion in 1917. This was precluded not only by the shortage of manpower, but also by the perennial lack of professional officers and of "long-serving" non-commissioned officers. Although in the coming year a reorganization would make it necessary to increase the number of the Monarchy's infantry units

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mortars and 3000 tons of barbed wire. The Germans turned out 250,000 artillery rounds per day, we produced 60,000.

<sup>69</sup> The infantry, 927 battalions strong when the war started, had been at their greatest strength in June 1916 when there were 1030 battalions (including March, lines of communication, garrison, volunteer and Standschützen units). The total had fallen to 984 battalions by the end of the year. On the other hand, since 1914 the artillery had swollen from 559 to 1241 batteries, the technical troops from 126 to 183 companies, and the truck units from 41 to 217. The only types of units that had shrunk - due to the great need to provide horses for the artillery - were the mounted squadrons (from 425 to 311) and the horse-drawn supply trains (from 927 to 858).



and higher HQ, this would be accomplished by transferring personnel rather than by providing real reinforcements.

Thus in the future it would be all the more necessary to replace men as well as horses with machines. But the Austro-Hungarian armaments industries would be able to increase their capacity to just a limited extent due to lack of money and the shortage of raw materials and labor.

Despite all these concerns, the Army still looked forward to the new year 1917 with some confidence. At its current strength it could adequately address any foreseeable need, and could be somewhat strengthened with the weapons of war.

### **5. Conrad's fall and the new high command**

In the first half year of Emperor Charles' reign there were far-reaching changes among the personalities occupying the highest military posts in the Monarchy. As already noted in Volume V, the changes began when the new Supreme War Lord personally took over the AOK. FM Archduke Frederick, who'd headed the high command since the war started, had become "Deputy Commander-in-Chief", but already on 11 February 1917 was placed in reserve. Immediately after ascending the throne the monarch had also dismissed both of the aged General Adjutants of his predecessor, the General-Obersts Graf Paar and Freih. von Bolfras. The former was replaced by GM Prince Lobkowitz, who was responsible only for functions at court. The latter was replaced by FML Ritter von Marterer who, though suffering from a serious illness, was placed in charge of the Emperor's Military Chancellery. Freih. Zeidler-Daublensky von Sterneck, who'd been close to the Emperor for a long time, became Marterer's deputy.

At the start of January 1917 the high command moved from Teschen, where they had been situated since the eventful month of November 1914, to the old resort town of Baden near Vienna. Here the Emperor stayed either in the bourgeois setting of the "Imperial house" in Baden itself or at the castle of Laxenburg, about 15 minutes away by automobile. From the start the young ruler spent a great deal of time in travel around his Empire and above all to the fronts, where he always made a good impression because of his unpretentiousness and humanity. In one of his first visits to the front he came to his old beloved corps, which still held the old positions on the Folgaria plateau; now led by GdK Fürst Schönburg, the unit officially became the "Edelweiss Corps." Also during this visit, Archduke Eugene - who on 15 January had received the Great Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for

his contribution to the war against Italy - asked the Emperor to assume the same honor, which anyway was rightfully his as the commander of the Order.

From the first moment it was rather difficult for the Chief of Staff FM Conrad and the Emperor to work together. The young ruler had the ambition of wielding real power himself, and his immediate entourage encouraged him in this direction. In minor and major issues, Conrad was constantly finding that the decision had gone against him; not infrequently Imperial decisions were presented to him as accomplished facts. This was very painful because of the Chief of Staff's self-confident temperament. The Field Marshal didn't hesitate to express his own deeply-held opinions to his young All-Highest Sovereign, which deepened the Emperor's already long-standing antipathy to Conrad. These personality clashes, which were also caused by personal factors, were accompanied by deep-rooted differences of opinion about substantive issues, which in the long run were unbridgeable. Since the Emperor would soon embark on a policy of seeking peace, it may be that he thought it would be necessary to part with his Chief of Staff, who was so closely tied to the outbreak of the war.<sup>70</sup> At any event, the rift between the 29 year-old ruler and his 65 year-old principal military adviser grew wider every day; therefore it was no surprise - at least to insiders - when Conrad's fall became a fact on 27 February 1917. The Field Marshal's first reaction was to refuse to continue serving in any other post. But, based on an express written request by the Emperor, he took over the Army Group in Tyrol after being decorated with the Great Cross of the Maria Theresia Order. As the high command had hoped, this appointment had an impact on the Italians for the immediate future. On the last day of February 1917, FM Conrad silently left the high command, which for two and a half years had borne the stamp of his individual personality.

### The new leadership

To replace Conrad, after thought was given for a while to promoting FML Alfred Krauss, the post of Chief of the General Staff was given to GdI Arz von Straussenberg.<sup>71</sup> At the start of

<sup>70</sup> For the events leading up to Conrad's fall, the best sources are - Cramon, "Bundes-genosse" (pp. 98 ff.); Nowak, "Der Weg zur Katastrophe" (based on reliable authorities), Berlin, 1926, pp. 203 ff.; Werkmann, pp. 89 ff. Also see the newspaper article by Glaise-Horstenau, "FM Conrad" in the "Neues Wiener Tagblatt" of 11 November 1924.

<sup>71</sup> Arz, "Zur Geschichte des Grossen Krieges 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1924), pp. 123 ff.

the war, Arz had taken command over 15 ID during the Battle of Komarow; then he was given VI Corps and brilliantly proved himself as its leader at Limanowa and in the victorious advance from Gorlice to Brest-Litovsk. When war with Romania broke out, he received the assignment of initiating the defense of his homeland, Transylvania. In the campaign that followed Arz once more met the test of his abilities as a high-level commander. He also won great esteem with his German allies. Thus his relations with the German OHL remained undisturbed until the end of the war, at least at the personal level.

While announcing the appointment of the new Chief of Staff, the Emperor also expressed the wish that General Staff Col. Freih. von Waldstätten should be head of the Operational Detachment in place of FML Metzger. Waldstätten had been Corps Chief of Staff to the Emperor during the south Tyrol offensive and thereafter had his special trust. FML Metzger, whom Conrad had for a long time hoped would be his successor, took command over 1 ID in their trenches near Tolmein at the start of March.

There were further substantial changes in the high command based on the Emperor's wishes. Col. von Hranilovic, the head of the Intelligence Section, was replaced by General Staff Lt Col. Ronge. Since December 1916 General Staff Col. Ritter von Zeynek, who had once been Chief of Staff to GO Freih. von Pflanzer-Baltin, was in charge of the Quartermaster Section; he had replaced General Staff Col. Höfer who'd been named Austrian Minister of Food Procurement. GM Ritter von Hoen became Director of the Military Archives, and was replaced as leader of the Military Press Office by General Staff Col. Eisner-Bubna. Officers who'd been attached to the high command since the start of the war, if they were fit for the front, were with few exceptions replaced by their comrades who already had experience in the front lines. In this process the concept of "parity" between the two halves of the Monarchy was taken into account, in accordance with Tisza's constant demands.

Leadership of the Common War Ministry was assumed in April 1917 by GdI Edler von Stöger-Steiner when GO Freih. von Krobatin left to take over 10<sup>th</sup> Army. The responsibilities of this office and of the high command had both increased greatly as time went on, as had the size of their staffs. This was due not only to the expansion of the war itself, but also to the lack of men and materiel, which worsened every day. At a time when it was very difficult to find replacements, and the allotment of every artillery round, every piece of clothing, etc. had to be prioritized, naturally the number of offices responsible for

providing troops and equipment increased. This trend could hardly be avoided; in all the armies it naturally affected both the higher HQ at the front and above all the lines of communication. But it was disadvantageous for morale. Within the armed forces' administrative services, which could no longer be adequately supervised, corruption took root and some men were able to avoid combat service. The hungry troops at the front had scorn for such developments, just as they did for the war-profiteers at home. In this area the war was revealing many signs of disintegration.

To plan and oversee the flow of troops to the front, a central position was created - the "Chief of Replacement Services." This innovation, which Conrad had approved only with some reservations, was mainly due to the influence of Hungarian Minister President Tisza, who'd believed since the start of the war that the western half of the Monarchy had provided fewer combat troops and suffered fewer casualties than had Hungary. Also at Tisza's request, the new Chief of Replacement Services, whose office was in Vienna, was the former Honved Minister GO Freih. von Hazai. FML Szurmay took over Hazai's former position within the Hungarian Cabinet.

Cooperation with our allies on the battlefields was regulated by the agreements over the unified high command. As previously, the technical details were the responsibility of liaison officers. Since January 1915 GM Cramon had been the German plenipotentiary with the Aus-Hung. high command; he had been joined later by Col. Tantilov (representing Bulgaria) and by GM Pertev Pasha (representing the Turkish high command). Among the Aus-Hung. military plenipotentiaries with the allies, GM Pomiankowski was especially distinguished due to the extent of his activity while working at Constantinople. In the last years of the war, as a rule it wasn't difficult for the allies to arrive at a consensus and work together when the issues were exclusively military. But significant difficulties arose when their political and economic interests and methods clashed, and this became ever more frequent as the war dragged on.

All in all it was no light burden which rested on the shoulders of the men responsible for leading Austria-Hungary's war effort in the spring of 1917. In particular the young Emperor and King had a difficult task from the beginning. And he was also bothered by an ever stronger and more tragic conflict among his responsibilities! On the one hand, as commander-in-chief of the armies serving in the field he was still striving with all possible means to achieve the ultimate goal of overthrowing the

enemy. But on the other hand his most fervent wish was to be a peace-maker, in which role he encountered numerous obstacles both inside and outside the Monarchy which he never would have encountered if he had sought only to carry on with the war.

### **III. Winter 1917 and the Start of Spring**

#### ***A. Events in the Russian-Romanian theater of operations***

##### **1. The Eastern front through the outbreak of the March Revolution in Russia**

###### **a. The situation of Army Group Mackensen**

Toward the middle of January 1917, GFM von Mackensen's Army Group (consisting of the Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the German Danube and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies) took up permanent positions on the lower Danube, the Sereth and the Putna. Their opponents on the opposite banks of these rivers were the Russian 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Armies plus the greatly-reduced Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The majority of the Romanian forces were no longer capable of resistance and had been pulled back behind the front to the area around Jassy; here they were to be re-formed and re-trained by French officers. Meanwhile the Russians would build up the lines of communication in Moldavia so that in spring they could begin to attack Bulgaria along with the Entente Army of the Orient.

At the start of January the Russian XXX Corps (71 and 80 ID) had joined 4<sup>th</sup> Army and XXIX Corps (1 Rif and 1 Cauc Rif Divs) joined 6<sup>th</sup> Army. Further Russian units were shifted to Moldavia during the winter - XLIV Corps (57 and 111 ID) from the West Front<sup>72</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army and XLV Corps (122 and 126 ID) from the reserves of Brussilov's Front to 9<sup>th</sup> Army; the latter Army had been assigned to the Romanian Front at the start of January. Then a new division was assigned to each corps, so that by March the Russian forces on the Romanian Front had increased to a total of around 50 infantry divisions. In addition there were still 13 Russian cavalry divisions in this theater of operations. Around this time the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, which had stayed in the front lines, numbered 6 infantry divisions; 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was being rebuilt with 9 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions.

In contrast, after the conquest of Wallachia the German OHL pulled all German units they could spare from Romania and sent

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72 The "West" Front actually commanded the center of the Russian armies.

them to the Western front. Besides the troops already listed (11 Bav ID, G.Lt Graf von Schmettow's Cav Corps, 41 ID), at the start of 1917 the HQ of 301 German ID, of LIV Corps and of G.Lt Krafft von Dellmensingen's Corps left Mackensen's Army Group. At the start of February the Bulgarian Combined ID deployed on the northern wing of the Danube Army, which allowed 217 German ID to concentrate behind the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army in the Army Group's reserve. GM Graf Marenzi's 7 k.u.k. CD, commanding its own 20 Cav Bde plus 144 Inf Bde, was inserted into the center of 9<sup>th</sup> Army on the Sereth at the start of February; after the departure of LIV Corps HQ, this Aus-Hung. Division along with German 109 ID made up GM Schaer's Group. The Division's 11 Cav Bde found employment on the lines of communication. On the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army the Aus-Hung. 73 ID and German Alpenkorps Division made up a group under G.Lt Sontag (formerly Corps Krafft).

The guns fell quiet along the entire front of Mackensen's Army Group from the middle of January. Toward the end of the month the side branches of the Sereth and the swamps in the Danube delta froze over; once they could be traversed, lively patrol actions ensued and lasted for the rest of the winter. As spring approached the thawing weather brought high waters and floods, and once more made fighting impossible. At the end of March the Alpenkorps Division was pulled from the front of Sontag's Group and sent to the Western front; they were replaced by 217 German ID. The 212 ID, which had been worn down in the West, now deployed behind 9<sup>th</sup> Army as the new Army Group reserve. The war vessels of the Danube Flotilla, which had spent the winter at Turnu-Severin and Budapest, steamed down the Danube to Hirsova. Several monitors were deployed to Braila and Macin.

## **b. Developments in Transylvania and the Forest Carpathians**

### Actions on the Transylvania border

On the right wing of GO Archduke Joseph's Army Group, fighting continued around mid-January even after GdI von Gerok's group stopped attacking. The inner wings of the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> and Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies undertook a series of thrusts to securely bar the area between the Oituzu and Susita mountain valleys, through which an invasion of the plains along the Sereth was possible.

Thus the group of FML Chevalier de Ruiz (German 218 ID, k.u.k. 1 CD) were repeatedly attacked between Susita and Casinu by Russian

and Romanian units from 14 to 17 January. In the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> the oncoming enemy waves once more struck the left wing of German 218 ID, as well as the k.u.k. 8 Mtn Bde which meanwhile had arrived in the Casinu valley. In places they mounted four consecutive attacks, but all collapsed with heavy casualties. Meanwhile in front of G.Lt Sunkel's Group (formerly XXXIX Res Corps) the Russians maintained pressure on the approaches to the Ojtoz Pass. Starting on 20 January, in this sector the German 187 ID was relieved by 70 Hon ID, which came up from Lugos; the Germans pulled back to Kezdivasarhely and prepared to leave for the Western theater of operations. As strong cold set in and the month came to an end, it became quiet in the Berecke Mountains.

But at the start of February the enemy were already increasing their artillery activity in front of Gerok's Group. Russian planes bombed the positions of the German 218 ID in the Susita valley. On the 7<sup>th</sup> the artillery of the k.u.k. 1 CD had to repulse an enemy thrust east of the Casinu valley. Also FML Sorsich, who a few days earlier had taken command of the troops stationed between the Casinu and Slanic valleys (8 Mtn Bde, 71 ID [reinforced by a German Landsturm regiment] and 70 Hon ID), found that his left wing was troubled by enemy scouting detachments. A Romanian colonel, who came over to our lines along with his adjutant in the sector of 218 ID, brought a report that the Russians were aware that the front had been weakened by the departure of German troops and wanted to renew their attacks. The blow by the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian and 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Armies was being prepared for 13 February.

The possibility that GdI Letschitzky's Army might still attack the eastern front of Transylvania caused GO Archduke Joseph some temporary concern. It led him to attach the 15 Bav Res Inf Bde (Res IR 18), which was stationed in the Csik, to 70 Hon ID, part of which was made up of Romanian-speaking Hungarian troops who weren't entirely reliable. Since the southern wing of the Army Group now had no reserves, on 8 February the k.u.k. high command asked the German OHL to cancel the departure of their 187 ID, which was soon to take place. GdI Ludendorff didn't believe that the Russians would be able to carry out a major attack in winter in the barren mountains. Nevertheless, he declared he was willing to let the infantry of German 187 ID remain for a short while by Kezdivasarhely; but he demanded that this Division should soon be relieved by other reserves, since it was needed on the Western front. At the same time GdI Ludendorff advised that the k.u.k. high command should temporarily send the Aus-Hung. 7 ID (which was leaving GO von Linsingen's Army Group for the Isonzo) to Transylvania as a back-up in case Archduke Joseph's



Army Group was unable to make do with just their own units. The Archduke in turn stated that because of the reduced strength of his divisions he had to receive help. Moreover, it was questionable whether reserves could be shifted in time to the eastern front of Transylvania because of the difficult situation of the railroads; therefore the situation seemed quite threatening.

On 17 February, after powerful artillery preparation, the Russians did thrust against the left wing of Group Sorsich. But they were defeated, and thereafter made no serious attempt to attack Group Gerok. The German 187 ID was able to leave for the West before the end of February.

Under the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army, the trench fighting in the Csik and Gyergyo Mountains also didn't cease entirely in the winter. Although there were times when the weather prevented any patrol actions or even artillery fire because of frost and snowfall, at other times there were numerous skirmishes along the border heights between Mounts Nemira and Faltueanu, and at the Gyimes, Bekas and Tölgyes Passes.

#### Changes in the organization of 1<sup>st</sup> Army

GdI von Arz utilized this time of relative quiet to bring order to all the units of his Army, which had become intermingled. Already at the start of January the 73 Hon Inf Bde had left the southern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army to rejoin their parent unit, 37 Hon ID. Also the horsemen of 10 CD who'd been attached to XI Corps came back to 1<sup>st</sup> Army around this time, and were assigned to guard the trackless terrain north of the Gyimes Pass. 3 CD, hitherto in reserve, deployed in the Belbor sector on the extreme northern wing of the k.u.k. XXI Corps. At the end of January GM Lieb's 31 ID joined XXI Corps, replacing 10 Bav ID which moved to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

The chain of command within 1<sup>st</sup> Army was also altered. GdI Litzmann and the HQ of XL Res Corps, which until now had led the German units supporting the k.u.k. XXI Corps in the Gyergyo Mountains, now assumed command of the Army's right wing in the Csik. This wing consisted of the k.u.k. VI Corps (225 German ID, 39 Hon ID, 24 ID), 8 Bav Res ID (reinforced by the k.u. 16 Lst Inf Bde - the remnants of 61 Hon ID) and 10 CD. All the troops on the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army - 72 ID, 31 ID, 37 Hon ID and 3 CD - were placed under FML Freih. von Lütgendorf's XXI Corps. At the end of February, based on a request from GO Archduke Joseph and with the consent of the German OHL, Group Gerok (HQ of XXIV German Res Corps) was placed directly under 1<sup>st</sup> Army. At the

same time the HQ of FZM Ritter von Benigni's VIII Corps, which had come from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to Bereczk, was placed over the parts of Group Gerok that hitherto had made up Sorsich's command at the Ojtoz Pass.

The incorporation of Group Gerok into 1<sup>st</sup> Army had now become possible because the Army's former commander GdI Arz (who held lower rank than GdI Gerok) had been summoned by Emperor Charles to Baden on 27 February; as already narrated, he took the place of FM Conrad as Chief of the General Staff. To replace GdI Arz as leader of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, the Emperor named GO Rohr (formerly commanding 11<sup>th</sup> Army). Rohr arrived at Szekely-Udvarhely, the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, on 4 March.

#### Winter actions in the Forest Carpathians

Under the 7<sup>th</sup> k.u.k. Army in the Forest Carpathians, after the arrival of 51 Hon ID on the southern wing of XI Corps in mid-January the 24 Inf Bde and HQ of 12 ID (FML Edler von Hinke) were pulled from the sector south of Dorna Watra and Jacobeny. FML Hinke replaced GM Edler von Leiter in command of the troops fighting on the northern wing of Habermann's Corps; these were 23 Inf Bde, Col. Papp's Brigade, and the horsemen from 5 Honved Cav Div who were relieving 10 CD. The 8 CD in the northern sector of XI Corps was re-assigned to the southern wing of FZM von Scheuchenstuel's k.u.k. I Corps.

Around noon on 27 January, after heavy preparatory fire, Letschitzky's Army attacked on both sides of the Valeputna-Jacobeny road with two divisions (78 and 65 ID of XXVI Corps). Their target, as so often before, was the northern wing of the k.u.k. XI Corps. In thick waves the enemy stormed through the Mestecanesci Pass against the sector around the railroad tunnel; they pushed FML Hinke's group back almost to the road running through the Golden Bistritz valley. By committing all units available to the northern wing of XI Corps, FML Edler von Habermann managed to stem the enemy advance on the southern slope of the mountain. In the defensive fighting Papp's Brigade, 5 Hon CD and Infantry Regiments # 57 and 100 suffered very heavy casualties.

On 29 and 30 January the Russian XXVI Corps again strove to break through toward Jacobeny. On the heights northwest of the Mestecanesci Pass the attacks were broken by barrage fire from the well-aimed Aus-Hung. batteries. Southeast of the Pass the Russians stormed forward *en masse* and once again gained ground from FML Hinke's group. Attempts by the defenders to

counterattack failed.

HQ of 7<sup>th</sup> Army sent GM Paschen, the commander of 1 German ID, with five battalions of his Division to the northern sector of XI Corps and gave him the assignment of recovering the old positions by the Mestecanesci Pass. But already on 31 January GM Paschen informed Army HQ that with the units available the most he could do would be to support XI Corps' left wing; he asked for reinforcements. Now GO von Kövess in turn asked the k.u.k. high command to send a fresh division to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. He based this urgent request on the fact that the endangered defenses at Jacobeny needed to be guarded continuously by strong forces, but the extended front of the Army lacked reserves (which would also be needed in the spring to successfully fend off the Russian offensive which was expected at that time). XI Corps had to recover their original position because otherwise the enemy would dominate the road in the Bistritz valley. After the conclusion of the operation 7<sup>th</sup> Army would be able to make units available for a reserve and return the division which they'd temporarily borrowed to the k.u.k. high command.

Archduke Joseph, who'd moved his HQ on 26 January from Legesvar to Maros Vasarhely, supported the request of 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, since he had no reserves behind the entire front of his Army Group. But the k.u.k. high command also had no available reserves anywhere on the Eastern front. As noted earlier, they asked the German OHL to return them 187 ID, which had been relieved from Group Gerok, but were informed that the departure of this Divisions couldn't be delayed. However, in the first half of March GFM Mackensen would make 76 Res ID available at Ploesti so that it could be sent to Transylvania if necessary. But for now Archduke Joseph's Army Group would have to provide their own reserve; in the opinion of the k.u.k. high command this should be a unit taken from the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. On the other hand, GO Archduke Joseph reported to the AOK on 3 February that because the divisions of 1<sup>st</sup> Army were so greatly below their authorized strength he couldn't take anyone away from them. All units were suffering heavy losses from illness in their inadequate shelters against the harsh winter. The March formations behind the front weren't ready yet to be incorporated, and the completion of the defenses shouldn't be delayed by removing troops. Also, the positions on the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army that had fallen into enemy hands would have to be recovered. Preparations for this effort, which was as urgently necessary as the recovery of the Mestecanesci position, were already under way.

Thus GO Kövess had no choice other than to make ready for the attack at Jacobeny with his own resources. For this purpose, on the northern wing of XI Corps he relieved the horsemen detached from 5 Hon CD by the 6 CD; he sent the battered 24 Inf Bde to 1 German ID to replace the troops which that Division had sent to help out. GM von Puchalski, the new commander of 12 ID, temporarily took command over the southern wing of the Carpathian Corps.

On 12 February GM Paschen attacked at Jacobeny with the East Prussian grenadiers of his 1 ID, Battalion III/56 of the k.u.k. 12 ID, and parts of IR 157 from German 117 ID. He wrested from the enemy part of the old positions of the k.u.k. XI Corps at the Mestecanesci Pass.<sup>73</sup> The carefully-prepared operation was assisted by effective artillery fire. The Russians lost 1200 prisoners, 12 machine guns and 6 trench mortars. But the attackers were unable to drive the enemy from the eastern outlet of the railroad tunnel. Then GM Paschen's group held onto the ground they'd gained, fighting for two days against heavy Russian counterattacks.

The attack was resumed on 27 February, after the artillery ammunition was replenished. GM Paschen's group once more captured some trenches on the heights northeast of Jacobeny. They brought in more than 1000 prisoners, nearly reached the original positions of XI Corps, and repulsed a series of counter-thrusts against their new lines. Only the strong point at the eastern outlet of the railroad tunnel, which had been stormed by the East Prussian grenadiers, had to be relinquished once more. On 1 March the enemy tried to recover their lost entrenchments at the Mestecanesci Pass. Once more the XXVI Russian Corps ran forward in dense waves against the northern wing of Habermann's Corps, but collapsed under the effective defensive fire of our artillery.

While the exhausting trench fighting raged at Jacobeny, the 64 ID of Russian XVIII Corps at Kirlibaba (under Kaledin's Army) mounted only some completely isolated supporting thrusts with weak forces. Here storm troops from the k.u.k. 59 ID and the Carpathian Corps made many successful raids on the Russian advanced outposts along the mountain wall between the Prislop Pass and Smotrec Ridge. After prolonged artillery preparation, on 24 February troops of the Russian XI Corps strongly attacked the center of the German XXV Res Corps at the Tartar Pass, where they temporarily penetrated parts of the trenches of the k.u.k.

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73 Gottberg, "Das Grenadier Regiment Kronprinz Nr. 1 im Weltkrieg" (Oldenburg/Berlin, 1929), pp. 62 ff.

34 ID. The Russians tried to attack again on the next day, but soon collapsed under the barrage of our artillery.

Aside from these actions, there were no military operations worthy of note along the front of GO Archduke Joseph's Group during the entire winter. But despite the absence of serious combat, many troops were lost due to illness and patrol skirmishing. The winter was hard: the grim cold in the mountains reached 29° Celsius. There were frequent cases of frostbite. Rations were in short supply, considering the exertions demanded of the troops. In fact, at times it was impossible to bring food up to the combatants in the highest elevations due to the heaps of snow. Conditions were also very difficult in March, when water from melting snow poured into the valleys and turned the routes toward the positions into swamps.

### **c. The situation of the southern part of Prince Leopold of Bavaria's command**

On the long front between the Pantyr Pass and the Pripyat Marshes the first months of 1917 were passed in trench warfare. Here also actions were restricted mostly to occasional cannonades, small-scale patrol actions carried out to reconnoiter or destroy defenses on the other side, and to aerial combat which varied in intensity.

#### Developments in east Galicia

The calm of winter reigned in January along the defensive sector of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (between the Carpathians and the Dniester). Patrols of the k.u.k. 5 ID occasionally thrust ahead from their positions in the valley where the Bystrzyca Solotwinska has its source to capture Russian outposts. On 20 February a storm detachment from Hon IR 28 (of 42 Hon ID) waded the Bystrzyca Solotwinska and took the village of Lachowce, which had been occupied by Russian advance guards. The storm troops of FML von Hadfy's Group (21 LW and 48 Res ID) were especially active by Stanislau and Jezupol. In these sectors there were numerous skirmishes in no-man's land during winter. The Russians also weren't idle; their patrols were very aggressive and repeatedly clashed with the sentries of the k.u.k. XIII Corps (42 Hon and 36 ID) at Solotwina and Bohorodczany. The scouting detachments on the southern wing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were usually active. Here Stanislau and the stretch of the front between Jezupol and Halicz were the starting points of their operations in February and March. There were also repeated cannonades in this sector by Russian artillery.

Perhaps GdI Shcherbachev was preparing to attack the northern wing of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Behind the long front of this Army there were no reserves other than 15 ID, which was re-forming in the Kalusz area, and the horsemen of 2 CD on the southern bank of the Dniester. At the start of March the Army Group commander (GO von Böhm-Ermolli) relieved 21 LW ID in the Stanislau sector with 15 ID, which was now ready for action; at the end of March the 48 Res ID in turn was relieved by 21 LW ID. 48 Res ID went into reserve behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's northern wing, while the horsemen of 2 CD assembled at Rozniatow behind the Army's center.

Under the South Army, on 28 January the XV Turkish Corps (deployed between the Narajowka and Zlota Lipa Rivers with 19 and 20 ID plus the German 36 Res ID) was attacked by troops from VII Siberian Corps. The Russians were able to penetrate the Turks' trenches, but thereafter the defenders drove them out. From mid-February there was lively fighting along the positions on the Narajowka and on the Zlota Lipa at Brzezany. Strong Russian scouting detachments often thrust against the advanced positions of the Turkish XV and k.u.k. XXV Corps<sup>74</sup>. This skirmishing continued into March, when Russian long-range guns began to bombard Brzezany. The city was also bombed by enemy planes; our air units responded with raids on Podhajce and Kozowa. In the night of 13-14 March the enemy launched an ineffective gas attack against the positions of 36 Res ID. The Russian artillery opened a lively bombardment when the gas was released, but the enemy infantry stayed in their trenches. It seemed as if the Russians intended to once more attack near Brzezany in the spring so they could open the road to Lemberg. In order to stay informed about the location of Russian units, storm troops from XXVII Res Corps (German 119, 75 Res and 53 Res ID) were quite active on the Narajowka, as were storm troops of the k.u.k. XXV Corps (54 and 55 ID) on the Zlota Lipa.

South Army carried out various troop movements and reliefs, with the intention of providing a German division as a reserve and of strengthening the Brzezany defensive sector with German troops. The k.u.k. XXV Corps took over the entire sector between the Lysonia Heights and Koniuchy. This freed up 38 Hon ID to shift to the Army's southern wing, where it was placed on the southern wing of XXVII Res Corps along with two Bavarian Landsturm regiments. The latter Corps in turn gave up the German 119 ID and 75 Res ID. 119 ID was inserted into the front near Brzezany between the Turkish XV and k.u.k. XXV Corps, while 75 Res ID became the Army's reserve at Rohatyn and Bursztyn.

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74 The latter Corps, still led by FML Hofmann, had just been given # XXV.

At the end of January the troops of 10 Bav ID gradually joined the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; they deployed on the southern wing of the k.u.k. V Corps, relieving 31 ID which entrained for Transylvania. At the end of February the last component of 1 Lst Inf Bde (the k.k. Lst IR 1) left XVIII Corps to join 5<sup>th</sup> Army on the Isonzo. Meanwhile lively local actions flared up in the Zloczow sector. On 10 February a detachment of the XVII Russian Corps (of 11<sup>th</sup> Army) broke into the trenches of 195 German ID north of the Zborow-Zloczow road, but were quickly thrown out again. In the night of 12-13 February the enemy blew up a tunnel full of explosives at Zwyzyn, but were unable to establish themselves permanently in the damaged trenches of 33 ID. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, storm troops from 197 German ID brought back 300 prisoners from the Russian position on the Zloczow-Tarnopol railroad. On 22 February a larger storm-troop operation was carried out by soldiers from the k.u.k. IR # 12 and 83, along with men from the German Res IR # 233. This was a complete success; the enemy had to leave 300 prisoners as well as two machine guns in the hands of the attackers. On 12 March storm troops from 195 German ID launched a bold surprise attack at Hukalowce after an effective bombardment by artillery and trench mortars; they returned with 250 prisoners. But in the Zloczow and Brody defensive sectors it was also necessary to repulse Russian scouting detachments. Enemy planes bombed the positions of 106 Lst ID west of Brody; the German and Aus-Hung. air units replied with similar attacks against Radziwilow.

GdI von Eben's group (the Zloczow Sector) had relieved the troops of 195 German ID from the front by mid-March; along with the HQ of 197 ID they were placed in the reserves of the German Eastern Command. In exchange, the northern wing of Group Eben received two battalions of the k.u.k. IX Corps plus a German Jaeger battalion. Moreover, at Podhorce a combined division was created from five German battalions and three batteries of the k.u.k. Corps. At the end of March the German 15 LW ID arrived from the Western front to be rehabilitated; they joined the k.u.k. XVIII Corps to replace 106 Lst ID, which had been ordered to the southwestern theater of operations.

#### Developments in Volhynia

In the sector of Linsingen's Army Group the situation in general remained the same throughout the winter months. Just as in east Galicia, military activity on the upper Styr and on the Stokhod was restricted to artillery and trench mortar fire and skirmishes between outposts. There were also small-scale operations in no-

man's land by picked men, in which the Aus-Hung. and German storm troops proved more enterprising and gained the upper hand.

In mid-January the center of the Lipa Sector (HQ of GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn's XXII German Res Corps) was designated the Buzany Sector, over German 22 ID with half of 20 Hon ID attached. In mid-February the second brigade of 20 Hon ID (81 Hon Inf Bde) arrived from 5<sup>th</sup> Army. One regiment of this Brigade joined its parent Division in the Buzany sector, and the other was attached to 215 German ID. 7 ID left for the Isonzo.

Under the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army, in mid-January the LW IR 429 of 10 German LW ID was relieved from the front of FML Szurmay's Corps (Aus-Hung. 11 ID and German 10 LW ID) and took the place in the Army Group's reserve of Res IR 106, which was moving to Mitau. When GO Hazai became Chief of the Replacement Services, FML Szurmay succeeded him as Honved Minister, and FML Lukas took over Szurmay's old Corps, which now received the number XXIV. On 26 January GdI Kritek took over the k.u.k. X Corps (2 ID and half of 13 LW ID), which until this time had belonged to the Luga Sector (HQ of GdI Reimann's VI German Corps) but now was placed directly under 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ. At the start of March 4<sup>th</sup> Army received a new leader, at the request of the German Eastern Command. Because of differences of opinion with Army Group Linsingen, GO Tersztianszky changed places with GO Freih. von Kirchbach, taking over his 3<sup>rd</sup> Army while Kirchbach inherited 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

The Aus-Hung. and German storm detachments in 4<sup>th</sup> Army's sector also clashed with Russian advanced units in numerous minor actions. Thus on 26 February the German 224 ID at Swiniuchy exploded a mine and then pushed into the enemy's destroyed trenches. Farther north, patrols of the k.u.k. 11 ID repeatedly fought enemy detachments near Bubnow. On 18 February the Russians made a vain attempt to take part of 11 ID's trenches in a mining attack. In the sector north of Szelwow the storm troops of 13 LW and 2 ID often engaged with Russian sentries and repulsed enemy groups. Also the reinforced VIII German Corps (with their 15 and 16 ID plus the k.u.k. 29 ID) made many attacks on Russian outposts along the uppermost reaches of the Stokhod. In the evening of 2 March, after effective preparatory fire by artillery and trench mortars, storm troops from 29 and 16 ID penetrated the enemy positions west of Woroncryn on a front more than two kilometers wide; in this bold operation they did substantial damage to the Russian trenches and returned with more than 100 prisoners plus four machine guns. On 14 March, storm troops from the k.u.k. IR 94 raided the Russian position at Witoniez, again capturing prisoners and four more machine guns.



In the Kovel Sector (HQ of GdK von Bernhardt's LV Corps), there were repeated skirmishes on the Luck-Kovel railroad, at Mielnica, and farther down the Stokhod. Storm troops of German 92 ID, k.u.k. 4 ID, and k.k. 26 and 45 LW ID made many surprise assaults on the Russian advanced guards and outposts. In March the 92 German ID on the southern wing of the k.u.k. II Corps was replaced by the Saxon 45 LW ID (newly formed by Bernhardt's Armeegruppe), and moved to Vladimir-Volynsky under the Eastern Command reserves.

#### A glimpse at the northern part of the German front

Under GO von Woyrsch's Army Group, troops of the k.k. 26 LW Inf Bde and of the k.u.k. XII Corps (35 ID) also engaged in small-scale fighting in no-man's land along the Szczara. The k.u.k. IR # 63, detached from 35 ID to GdI Freih. von Scheffer-Boyadel's Army Detachment on the Berezina, saw similar actions.

A new battle had flared up near Riga at the end of January. On the Aa the left wing of GdA von Scholtz's 8<sup>th</sup> German Army, with reinforcements brought from the Stokhod, attacked on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to recover the positions lost at the start of the month. Despite heavy counterattacks by GdI Dimitriev's 12<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, the battle ended on 3 February in a German victory.

## **2. The fall of the Tsardom**

After the failure at the start of 1917 of Letschitzky's thrusts at Jacobeny and of Dimitriev's attempts to advance toward Mitau, the Russians refrained from any further major assault on the defenses of the allied Central Powers. It is true that initially there were attacks scheduled for February, to support the Entente Western Powers, by the 5<sup>th</sup> Russian Army at Dvinsk, the 10<sup>th</sup> at Smorgony and the 7<sup>th</sup> at Stanislau. But although the Stavka had ordered short assaults in these sectors, they weren't carried out because the Western allies themselves hadn't completed their preparations and therefore had to postpone their offensive until April. The Stavka envisioned that the general offensive of the Russian armies would commence on 1 May. They hoped to have finished preparations by then. Already in March the majority of the 62 new divisions were available. The Russian Army had now expanded to 2800 battalions and 1277 squadrons, its greatest strength since the war started. By January 1917 the number of guns at the front had increased to 5459 light and 1946 pieces. Ample ammunition was available, and there were Austrian, Japanese

and French as well as Russian rifles. Large amounts of military equipment had been ordered from the United States. The armies in the field had a total of 15,000 machine guns; it was intended to create more batteries and 100 machine gun companies. Many planes had arrived from England and France, and the French had also sent artillery instructors.<sup>75</sup>

But Russia's economic situation had become very difficult. The transportation network was in disorder, and there was a shortage of coal. The factory workers were war-weary; propaganda against the war and against the old order of the Tsarist Empire was increasing. Morale at the front was somewhat better, but here also there were signs of an imminent turn for the worst.

In mid-February GdI Ruszky, commanding the Russian Northern Front, reported to the Stavka that the good spirits of the troops were disappearing and that the Imperial Army was becoming a "militia." In an attack by North Front in January 1917 the 4<sup>th</sup> Special Division had refused to leave their trenches.<sup>76</sup> In the Southwest Front there were ominous signs of mutiny in VII Siberian Corps. Already along the entire line between Riga and Rani, more quickly in some sectors than others, the enormous process of dissolution was proceeding as a natural result of the frightful damage that the Russian armies had suffered in countless battles.

#### Background to the Revolution

Here we cannot review all the causes and events that brought Russia to the catastrophe of 1917. The Russian Army had suffered serious wounds from the blows delivered by the allied Central Powers during their victories of summer 1915. The reality of defeat was magnified by the consequences which became visible throughout the people and the state from that time forward. Hitherto the life of the broad masses of the Russian population had been just indirectly disturbed by the war; only the non-Russian nationalities living near the western border had suffered from its horrors. Now, however, millions of refugees, many of them forcibly removed, flooded all of Russia. They brought news from the front to the most remote locations, which formerly had been artificially spared all unpleasant reports. Also, in their anonymous misery, the refugees brought the seeds of dissatisfaction with and renunciation of the government that had been

<sup>75</sup> Knox, Vol. II, pp. 510 ff.

<sup>76</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: No other reference to a "4<sup>th</sup> Special Division" had been located in any Russian, German or Austrian source; no such unit is listed by Knox.

unable to prevent their misfortune. The generals were accused of incompetence and the bureaucracy, especially of the Army, with maladministration in supplying the troops with weapons and ammunition. Cries arose within the nation for liberation from the hated absolutist regime. Demands for a responsible ministry became more insistent; the upper classes of society became restive, and it was necessary to give them some opportunity to participate in the administration. The result was the creation of "voluntary organizations" which supported, oversaw or supplanted the decrepit bureaucracy; thus an axe was chopping away at the rotten tree that was the Tsar's government.

To increase the capacity of the war industries, special committees for supplying the Army were set up alongside the War Ministry. The representatives of industry and members of the Duma on these committees (which also included representatives of the working-class parties), thus attained a decisive role. Along with the War Industry Committees, the other voluntary organizations were the Union of Zemstvos and the Union of Municipalities, both of which were involved in caring for the sick and wounded.<sup>77</sup> All the groups received financial support from the state, but used this money in part to increase their power at the expense of the state. They became a refuge for a large number of shirkers, as well as a channel through which revolutionary propaganda found its way to the troops.

Despite heavy casualties, the offensive in summer 1916 gained ground. But it didn't alter the overall military situation; it won Romania over to the Entente and saved Italy, but didn't help Russia itself, which continued to bleed for its allies. Mobilization of military industry with the help of business circles hadn't brought the promised victory any nearer for the country and its war-weary population. Then in fall 1916 came the disappointment over Romania. The fight to direct policy was waged bitterly at the government's power centers; it consumed Russia's diverse sources of strength rather than uniting and enhancing them against the external enemy. The weak central

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<sup>77</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Zemstvos had been, since the mid-19th century, voluntary organs of rural self-government. For more on the role of the organizations, including that of the "defensist" (pro-war) left wing labor groups, see Katkov, "Russia 1917: The February Revolution" (London, 1969), pp. 31-62. Despite the patriotic intentions of the founders of the voluntary organizations, they inevitably became focal points of opposition to the bumbling Tsarist government and thus, as the original text charges, wound up harming rather than helping the war effort.

administration, with its proven incompetence, provided ample targets for the discontented. Upper middle-class imperialists sharply opposed peace feelers which Stürmer's government extended to the Central Powers. In November his conservative ministry collapsed. Food shortages in the cities were a welcome issue to the agitators working among the proletariat. Spokesmen on the extreme Left were the sharpest critics of the measures of the administration; they condemned the prolongation of the war as pointless and demanded the overthrow of the reactionary government of the Tsar and his generals.

The bourgeois leaders of the center and the moderate Socialists, who didn't want the reform movements to get out hand and lead to the radicals seizing power, became the spokesmen for some wide-ranging demands. On the other side, the Tsar remained true to the principles of the reactionaries. Sir George Buchanan, the English ambassador, repeatedly warned against this development and in late January was still urging the Tsar to change his policies. But Nicholas II couldn't join the reformers. He also received warnings from his own General Staff, since the Army had already lost faith in the Imperial government. Letters which the troops sent to their homes were filled with remarks about the "German" Tsarina. The soldiers would no longer fight if anarchy developed in the interior of the Empire. The murder of the miracle-working monk Rasputin on 30 December and the failure to punish his killers cast a spotlight on the unhealthy atmosphere of the Tsar's court. The deterioration in 1915 had already led by the end of 1916 to open calls for a revolution which at any moment could become a reality.

#### Collapse of the autocracy

At the start of 1917 dissatisfaction over the rise in the cost of living dominated the large cities of Russia; hunger tormented the country. The workers of St Petersburg went on strike in the first days of March. Part of the city garrison refused to fire on the strikers. Rodzyanko, the President of the Duma, urged the Tsar to form a new government. In response, on 10 March Nicholas II dismissed the Duma, which in turn decided on the 12<sup>th</sup> to ignore the Imperial order and to continue meeting. On the same day they created a "Provisional Committee to Restore Order", in which the leading figures were Rodzyanko, Guchkov, Milyukov and Kerensky. Simultaneously a "Provisional Executive Committee of the Soviets and Worker Delegates" appeared alongside the organ of the prorogued Duma. The overwhelming majority of the Petersburg garrison went over to the revolutionaries. The Duma committee tried in vain to control the uprising of the troops and to

restore discipline with orders and exhortations. The soldiers left their barracks, disarmed the officers, took part in street fighting and fraternized with the population. Representatives of the various units were sent to the Soviet, which now bore the name "Council of the Worker- and Soldier-Delegates." The first meeting of the combined delegations from the proletariat and the troops occurred on 14 March under the leadership of Sokolov, and decided that in political questions the Petersburg garrison was subject only to the Soviet. The "Military Committee of the Duma" was to be obeyed just to the extent that its orders didn't contradict those of the Soviet. It was agreed that all units should elect delegates to the workers' council. Finally, soldiers were to have the same rights as all other citizens in their political, corporate and private lives as long as they weren't on duty.<sup>78</sup>

In the night of 14-15 March the Tsar was staying at the HQ of GdI Ruszky in Pskov; he and Ruszky met with the Duma President Rodzyanko, whom Nicholas intended to entrust with the formation of a ministry that would be responsible to the legislative branch. But the Soviets and the left wing of the Duma were already demanding the abdication of the Tsar and the nomination of his brother (Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich) as regent for the under-age Tsarevich.<sup>79</sup> Rodzyanko therefore informed Nicholas that his concessions were no longer sufficient and that the existence of the dynasty itself was at stake. The Russian high command at Mogilev, where GdI Alexeiev had resumed the post of Chief of Staff from GdK Gurko at the start of March, was of the opinion that only the Tsar's abdication could save Russia from ruin. On 15 March Alexeiev informed the Front commanders by wire that according to Rodzyanko the Tsar's agreement to a responsible Ministry could no longer calm the people's agitation. But the war could be continued to a successful conclusion if Nicholas gave in to the Duma's demand that he resign the throne in favor of his son, with Grand Duke Michael as regent. Generals Brussilov and Evert, as well as Sakharov (the "assistant" to Romania's King Ferdinand, who was the nominal commander of the Romanian Front) declared that their love for the throne and the fatherland was unaltered; however, the Tsar would have to take

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78 Smilg-Benario, "Der Zusammenbruch der Zaren-Monarchie" (Vienna, 1927), pp. 209 ff.

79 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Actually by this time public opinion was shifting so rapidly to the left that the most of the Soviets were already demanding the total destruction of the monarchy, and Rodzyanko had lost the confidence of his own colleagues in the Duma. For a detailed picture of the dramatic meetings and proposals of these days, see Katkov, pp. 423 to 475.

account of the current situation, bow to the decision of the Duma, and abdicate. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievich also agreed that his nephew should give up the throne. GdI Alexeiev forwarded these telegrams to the Emperor and asked him to go along with their consensus. At Pskov, after GdI Ruzsky informed the Tsar about his conversations with Rodzyanko and the opinions of the other high-ranking generals, Nicholas II abdicated both in his own name and that of his son, from whom he didn't want to be separated, and in favor of his brother Grand Duke Michael. Before abdicating he nominated Prince Lvov as Minister President of a new cabinet and Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievich as Commander-in-Chief.

In the provisional government that was formed under the presidency of Prince Lvov after the Tsar abdicated, Milyukov became the Foreign Minister and Guchkov the War and Navy Minister. Milyukov announced on 15 March that Nicholas had given up the throne, but also caused Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich to renounce his claim to the succession. The new power-holders in Russia adopted a policy of unlimited cooperation with France and England; they were prepared to consider the treaties already concluded as holy, and called upon the Russian people and Army to fight the "reactionary strength of the Central Powers." England, France and Italy hastened on 25 March to recognize the revolutionary government; thus they abandoned the Tsarist Empire, which was no longer worthy of their alliance, along with the Tsar himself who'd remained faithful to them until the end.

The new War Minister Guchkov rapidly succumbed to the influence of the radical elements; during March he already initiated numerous changes at the front. By April eight of the armies, 27 corps and many divisions received new commanders. GdK Kaledin and Letschitzky, who'd been leading the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies, resigned. G.Lt Klembovsky, Alexeiev's assistant, and the General Quartermaster Lukomsky left the high command. GdI Ruzsky and GdK Brussilov remained at the head of the North and Southwest Fronts, and GdK Gurko took over the West Front. GdI Yudenich was the new commander of the forces in the Caucasus. The last Tsar's nomination of Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaievich as Commander-in-Chief was retracted by the provisional government; the Front and Army commanders wanted GdI Alexeiev to assume this post. Rodzyanko (still President of the Duma) objected that he preferred to give the supreme command to GdK Brussilov. But Alexeiev's election was confirmed by the provisional government.<sup>80</sup>

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80 Knox, Vol. II, pp. 553 ff. Gurko, p. 198 ff. Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 39 ff. Frantz, "Russland auf dem Wege

### 3. Condition of the Russian Army

When GdI Alexeiev became Commander-in-Chief after the fall of the Tsar, the overwhelming effects of the Revolution were already having a shocking effect on the Russian Army every day. The numerous replacement troops in the interior of the Empire mutinied. Officers were driven away. The Baltic Fleet was in the hands of the revolutionaries. Delegates of the Soviets appeared at the front and even visited the trenches to "educate" the troops; all units elected soldier committees. The death penalty in the Army was abolished. A large part of the infantry ceased to obey the authorities; only the cavalry and artillery were still half-way dependable.

The economic situation of the Russian Army also deteriorated after the outbreak of the Revolution. Strikes did heavy damage to the armament industries. Great disorder ruled along the lines of communication. At the train stations the yards were clogged with trains and their cargos. Locomotives had no coal. The field armies were coping with enormous logistical problems. Military equipment wasn't arriving. The batteries being formed for the new divisions, along with their wagons, didn't have any horses since the peasants back in the villages were in rebellion and refusing to provide animals for the Army.

Profound depression reigned within the Stavka. The first question was whether their opponents would take advantage of the current weakness in the Army to strike a blow against Russia. Because of the influence of the mutinous Baltic Fleet, order was quickly disappearing within the North Front in particular. GdI Ruszky was concerned that the Germans would attack Riga or perhaps land troops on the Baltic coast behind the North Front so they could thrust toward Petersburg. Therefore he reinforced the weak garrisons on the islands of Dagö and Osel, as well as along Moon Sound, with parts of the XLII Corps (stationed in Finland). He also demanded that the Stavka send him four corps to protect the northern flank of the front. The first response of Commander-in-Chief GdI Alexeiev was to order the West Front on 22 March to send two divisions (112 and 132 ID) to Riga.

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zur Katastrophe" (Berlin, 1296). Spannocchi, "Das Ende des Kaiserlich Russischen Heeres" (Vienna, 1932), pp. 38 ff. Paléologue, "Am Zarenhofe während des Weltkrieges" (Munich, 1926), Vol. II, pp. 384 ff. "The February Revolution: Documents of the Stavka, the supreme command and of the staff of the North Front HQ" (in Russian, Red Archives).

On the same day War Minister Guchkov announced that it wouldn't be possible to replace any men lost by the field armies for three to four months due to the disturbances in the rear. Under these desperate circumstances, Alexeiev didn't know whether or not the Russian Army would have to remain strictly on the defensive until summer. In reports he submitted to the provisional government at the end of March, he referred forcefully to pressure from the country's allies, who wanted to attack in mid-April. Russia wouldn't be able to join this offensive, even in May. Because of the danger of a German thrust, the only task now was to ensure that reserves were held ready behind the Fronts. Alexeiev asked the government to take the strongest measures to restore order among the population, the Army and the Navy. If anarchy increased within the interior, the Germans would be able to advance to Petersburg in a few months. This would mean "the end of the war, the German yoke, and civil war!"<sup>81</sup>

#### **4. Developments on the Eastern front after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution**

##### Outline orders of battle as of 1 March 1917

##### UNITS OF THE ALLIED CENTRAL POWERS

##### A. Army Group Mackensen [under the German OHL]

Commander = Prussian GFM von Mackensen

Chief of Staff = Prussian Col. Hell

**3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army** (G.Lt Nezarov) - 4 and 12 ID; reinforced 1 CD

##### **9<sup>th</sup> German Army**

Commander = Prussian GdI Erich von Falkenhayn

C/Staff = Prussian Col. Hesse

##### a) LII Corps (also called "Army of the Danube")

Commander = Prussian GdI Kosch

C/Staff = Prussian Col. von Werder

- . One reserve IR from 217 German ID
- . Turkish VI Corps [15, 25 and 26 ID] under GM Hilmi Pasha
- . Aus-Hung. 145 Inf Bde (Col. Fiebich-Ripke)
- . Bulgarian 1 ID and Combined (6) ID

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81 "The Stavka and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs" (in Russian), Red Archives; Vol. XXIX, pp. 34 ff. Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp 29 ff. and 41 ff.



- b) German 115 ID (Prussian Col. von Schönberg, acting)
- c) Group Schaer
  - . German 109 ID (Prussian GM Schaer)
  - . Aus-Hung. 7 CD (GM Graf Marenzi)
    - . 20 Cav Bde (Col. Freih. Regner von Bleyleben)
    - . Attached 144 Inf Bde (Col. Bacsilla)
- d) German I Reserve Corps
  - Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Morgen
  - C/Staff = Prussian Major von Hahnke
  - . 216 ID (Prussian GM Vett)
  - . 76 Res ID (Prussian G.Lt von Elstermann)
  - . 12 Bav ID (Bavarian G.Lt Huller)
  - . 89 ID (Prussian GM Melms)
- e) Group Sontag (Prussian G.Lt Sontag)
  - . Aus-Hung. 73 ID (FML Ludwig Goiginger)
    - . 2 Mtn Bde (Col. Panzenböck)
    - . 10 Mtn Bde (Col. Tanczos)
    - . 73 FA Bde (Col. Moc)
  - . German Alpenkorps-Division (Bavarian GM Ritter von Tutschek)
- f) In the Army's reserves
  - . Main body of German 217 ID (GM von Gallwitz gennant Dreyling)
  - . Aus-Hung. 11 Cav Bde (from 7 CD; on lines of communication) (GM Edler von Mold)

#### **Directly under Mackensen's Army Group**

- . Aus-Hung. Danube Flotilla (L.Sch-Kapt. Lucich)
- . Aus-Hung. Pioneer Group (Col. Mjk)

#### **B. Archduke Joseph's Army Group [under the k.u.k. AOK]**

Commander = GO Archduke Joseph  
 C/Staff = Prussian GM von Seeckt

#### **Aus-Hung. 1<sup>st</sup> Army**

Commander = GO Rohr  
 C/Staff = Col. Joseph Huber

- a) Group Gerok (HQ of XXIV German Reserve Corps)
  - Commander = Württemberg GdI von Gerok
  - C/Staff = Prussian Lt Col. Hoffmann von Waldau
  - . Group Ruiz
    - . Aus-Hung. 1 CD (FML Chevalier de Ruiz)
      - . 6 Cav Bde (Col. von Pongracz)

- . 7 Cav Bde (Col. Edler von Pollet)
- . German 218 ID (Prussian GM Gentner)
- . Group Sorsich
  - . 71 ID (GM Goldbach)
    - . 141 Inf Bde (Col. Lähne)
    - . 142 Inf Bde (GM Anton Klein)
    - . 8 Mtn Bde (Col Rath)
    - . An attached German Landsturm IR
    - . 71 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Falbrecht)
  - . 70 Hon ID (FML von Sorsich)
    - . 207 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Guilleaume)
    - . Attached was a Bde HQ, a regt and three batteries from 8 Bav Res ID
    - . 70 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Slotak)
- . Arriving was HQ of Aus-Hung. VIII Corps (FZM Ritter von Benigni; C/Staff was Lt Col. Max Freih. von Pitreich)

b) Group Litzmann (HQ of German XL Res Corps)

Commander = Prussian GdI Litzmann

C/Staff = Prussian Major Freih. von Rotberg

- . Aus-Hung. VI Corps (GdI von Csanady; C/Staff was Col. Balassa)
  - . 39 Hon ID (GM von Breit)
    - . 77 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Lengerer)
    - . 78 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Daubner)
    - . 39 Hon FA Bde (Col. Riedl)
  - . 24 ID (FML Urbarz)
    - . 48 Inf Bde (Col. Göttlicher)
    - . 24 FA Bde (Col. Uherek)
  - . German 225 ID (Prussian GM von Woyna)
- . Group Seekirchner
  - . Main body of 8 Bav Res ID (Bavarian G.Lt Seekirchner)
  - . k.u. 16 Lst Inf Bde (Col. von Paleta)
  - . 10 CD (GM Viktor von Bauer)
    - . 4 Cav Bde (Col. von Horthy)
    - . Attached k.u. Lst Hussar Regt # 1
  - . 47 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Wieden)

c) Aus-Hung. XXI Corps

Commander = FML Freih. von Lütgendorff

C/Staff = Lt Col. Höger

- . 72 ID (FML Bandian)
  - . 143 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Barwik)
  - . 72 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Braun)
- . 31 ID (GM Lieb)
  - . 61 Inf Bde (GM Gärtner)
  - . 62 Inf Bde (Col. Rehwald)
  - . 31 FA Bde (Col. Latka)
- . 37 Hon ID (GM Haber)
  - . 73 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Hodula)
  - . 74 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Pogany)
  - . 37 Hon FA Bde (Col. Seh)
- . 3 CD (GM Kopecek)
  - . 17 Cav Bde (only) (Col. Edler von Kirsch)

### **Aus-Hung. 7<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = GO von Kövess

C/Staff = Col. Alfred Freih. von Waldstätten

XI Corps

Commander = FML Edler von Habermann

C/Staff = Col. von Jäger

- . 51 Hon ID (GM von Benke)
  - . 200 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Farkas)
  - . 201 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Eölbey-Thyll)

- . 51 Hon FA Bde (Col. Mattanovich)
- . Group Apor
  - . 5 Hon CD (FML Freih. von Apor)
    - . 23 Hon Cav Bde (GM Graf Lubienski)
    - . 202 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Savoly)
  - . Col. Papp's Inf Bde
- . Group Paschen
  - . Aus-Hung. 23 Inf Bde (Col. Latinik)
  - . Aus-Hung. 12 FA Bde (Col. Andersch)
  - . 6 CD (GM Edler von Schwer)
    - . 5 Cav Bde (Col. von Vetsey) (only)
  - . Parts of German 1 ID (Prussian GM Paschen)

## I Corps

Commander = FZM von Scheuchenstuel

C/Staff = Lt Col. Primavesi

- . 8 CD (GM Edler von Dokonal, acting)
  - . 15 Cav Bde (Col. Brandmayer, acting)
  - . Attached Landsturm infantry
- . 59 ID (GM Kroupa)
  - . 6 Mtn Bde (Col. Gustav von Hellebronth)
  - . 18 Mtn Bde (Col. Kemmel)
  - . 59 FA Bde (Col. Edler von Steiner)
  - . Attached - Russ' Detachment
- . 11 Hon CD (GM von Jony)
  - . 24 Hon Cav Bde (Col. Hegedüs)
  - . Attached Landsturm infantry
- . 40 Hon ID (GM Edler von Nagy)
  - . 79 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Kobek)
  - . 80 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Sreter)
  - . 40 Hon FA Bde (GM Anton von Hellebronth)
  - . Attached Landsturm infantry

## German Carpathian Corps

Commander = Prussian G.Lt Conta

C/Staff = Prussian Major von Unruh

- . Aus-Hung. 12 ID (GM von Puchalski)
  - . 24 Inf Bde (Col. Johann Schubert)
  - . Parts of German 1 ID
- . German 200 ID (Prussian GM Hellwig, acting); reinforced by German, Austrian and Hungarian Landsturm

## German XXV Reserve Corps

Commander = Prussian G.Lt Freih. von Richthofen

C/Staff = Prussian Lt Col. Freih. Schäffer von Bernstein

- . Aus-Hung. 34 ID (GM Skvor)
  - . 67 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Luxardo)

- . 68 Inf Bde (Col. Greger)
- . 34 FA Bde (GM Edler von Zwiedinek)
- . Aus-Hung. 30 ID (FML Jesser)
  - . 215 Inf Bde (Col. von Spiess)
  - . 30 FA Bde (Col. Stepanescu)
- . German 117 ID (Prussian GM Seydel)

Directly under 7<sup>th</sup> Army...

16 Inf Bde (from 30 ID) (GM Sallagar)

C) Southern portion of the German Eastern Command (under the German OHL)

Commander = GFM Prinz Leopold of Bavaria

C/Staff = Prussian Col. Hoffmann

\*\* Army Group Böhm-Ermolli \*\*

Commander = GO von Böhm-Ermolli

C/Staff = GM Dr. Bardolff

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

Commander = GO von Tersztyanszky

C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Salis-Samaden

XIII Corps

Commander = FML von Csicseric

C/Staff = Col. Csoban

- . 42 Hon ID (FML Snjaric)
  - . 83 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Minnich)
  - . 84 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Novakovic)
  - . 42 Hon FA Bde (Col. Scholz)
- . 36 ID (GM Nöhrling)
  - . 13 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Löw)
  - . 72 Inf Bde (Col. Budiner)
  - . 36 FA Bde (Col. Freih. von Bibra)

Group Hadfy

Commander = FML von Hadfy

C/Staff = Lt Col. Stromfeld

- . k.k. 21 LW ID (GM Podhajsky)
  - . 41 LW Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Schwanda)
  - . 42 LW Inf Bde (Col. von Grossmann)
  - . 21 FA Bde (GM Franz Edler von Portenschlag)
- . 2 CD (GM Freih. von Abele)
  - . 3 Cav Bde (Col. Freih. von Spiegelfeld) (only)
- . Aus-Hung. 15 ID (finishing rehabilitation) (GM von Aust)
  - . 29 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Karapanca)
  - . 30 Inf Bde (GM Leide)

- . 15 FA Bde (Col. Viktor Primavesi)
- . German 48 Res ID (Prussian G.Lt von Oppeln-Bronikowski)

Directly under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army...

- 5 ID (GM von Felix)
  - . 9 Inf Bde (Col. Trimmel)
  - . 10 Inf Bde (Col Hubinger)
  - . 5 FA Bde (Col. Freih. von Wolf-Schneider)

**German South Army**

Commander = Bavarian GdI von Bothmer

C/Staff = Bavarian Lt Col. Ritter von Hemmer

German XXVII Reserve Corps

Commander = Saxon GdI von Ehrental

C/Staff = Saxon Major von Loeben

- . 119 ID (Prussian GM Grunnert)
- . 53 Res ID (Saxon G.Lt Leuthold)
- . 75 Res ID (Prussian GM von Eisenhart-Rothe)

Turkish XV Corps

Commander = Djevad Pasha

C/Staff = Lt Col. Nehefik Bey

- . Turkish 20 ID (Lt Col. Hasim Hilmi Bey)
- . Turkish 19 ID (Lt Col. Sedad Bey)
- . German 36 Res ID (GM von Leipzig)

Aus-Hung. XXV Corps

Commander = FML Hofmann

C/Staff = Col. Pawlowski

- . 54 ID (GM Edler von Severus)
  - . 131 Inf Bde (GM Blum)
  - . 132 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Bolzano)
  - . 54 FA Bde (GM Regnier)
- . 55 ID (GM Ritter von Unschuld)
  - . 129 Inf Bde (Col. Baukovac)
  - . 130 Inf Bde (Col. Stanoilovic)
  - . 55 FA Bde (Col. Seidl)

Directly under South Army...

38 Hon ID (GM von Molnar)

- . 75 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Freih. von Than)
- . 76 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Karleusz)
- . 38 Hon FA Bde (GM Werz)

**Aus-Hung. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army**

Commander = GO von Böhm-Ermolli

C/Staff = GM Dr. Bardolff

a) Zloczow Sector (HQ of I German Corps)

Commander = Prussian GdI von Eben

C/Staff = Prussian Major Klette

1) Aus-Hung. IX Corps

Commander = FML Kletter

C/Staff = Col. Edler von Ruzicic

- . 19 ID (FML Böltz)

- . 37 Inf Bde (Col. Augustin)
- . 38 Inf Bde (Col. Graf Zedtwitz, acting)
- . 19 FA Bde (GM von Elmar)
- . 32 ID (GM von Bekic, acting)
  - . 63 Inf Bde (Col. Brunader)
  - . 64 Inf Bde (Col. Gaksch, acting)
  - . 32 FA Bde (Col. Teisinger)
- 2) German 197 ID (Prussian G.Lt Freih. von Wechmar, acting)
- 3) German 195 ID (Prussian GM von Hofmann)
- 4) Aus-Hung. IV Corps (FML von Hordt)
  - Commander = FML von Hordt
  - C/Staff = Col. Edler von Merizzi
    - . Prussian Leib Hussar Brigade (Col. Freih. von Ledebur)
    - . Aus-Hung. 33 ID (GM von Iwanski)
      - . 65 Inf Bde (Col. Freih. von Mor-Merkl)
      - . 66 Inf Bde (Col. von Magerl)
      - . 33 FA Bde (GM Kaufmann)

## b) Aus-Hung. V Corps

Commander = FML Kosak, acting

C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Catinelli

- . Aus-Hung. 27 ID (FML Kosak)
  - . 53 Inf Bde (Col. Lederer)
  - . 54 Inf Bde (GM von Watterich)
  - . 27 FA Bde (Col. Seewald)
- . Bavarian 10 ID (G.Lt Langhäuser, acting)
- . 4 CD (GM Berndt)
  - . 21 Cav Bde (Col. Graf Spannochi) (only)

## \*\* Army Group Linsingen \*\*

Commander = Prussian GdI von Linsingen (with the rank of a GO)

C/Staff = Prussian Lt Col. Keller

## a) Lipa Sector (HQ of German XXII Reserve Corps)

Commander = Prussian GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn

C/Staff = Prussian Major von Winning

- 1) k.k. 46 LW ID (GM von Urbanski)
  - . 91 LW Inf Bde (GM Frauenberger)
  - . 92 LW Inf Bde (Col. Kandler)
  - . 46 FA Bde (Col. Exner)
- 2) Buzany Sector (HQ of German 22 ID)
  - . German 22 ID (Prussian G.Lt Krüge)
  - . 20 Hon ID (GM von Lukachich)
    - . 39 Hon Inf Bde (Col. Stadler)
    - . 81 Hon Inf Bde (Col. von Ledniczer)
    - . 20 Hon FA Bde (Col. Pohl)
- 3) German 215 ID (Prussian GM Gronau)



b) **Aus-Hung. 4<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = GO Freiherr von Kirchbach

C/Staff = Col. Demus

1) Luga Sector (HQ of German VI Corps)

Commander = Prussian GdI Riemann

C/Staff = Prussian Lt Col. von Lettow-Vorbeck

a) Raczyn Sector (HQ of German 108 ID)

. German 108 ID (Prussian G.Lt Beckmann)

. Reinforced Prussian 2 Gd Cav Bde (Col. von Arnim)

. German 224 ID (Prussian GM Rüstow)

b) Aus-Hung XXIV Corps

Commander = FML von Lukas

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)

. German 10 LW ID (Prussian G.Lt von Stocken)

2) Aus-Hung. X Corps

Commander = GdI Kritek

C/Staff = Col. Rasky

. 13 LW ID (FML Edler von Kalser)

. 25 LW Inf Bde (Col. Hromatka)

. 13 FA Bde (Col. Schulhof)

. 2 ID (GM Ritter von Jemrich)

. 19 Inf Bde (Col. Schmidbacher)

. 2 FA Bde (GM Edler von Rosenzweig)

3) Reinforced German VIII Corps

Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Dieffenbach

C/Staff = Prussian Col. von Fabeck

. 15 ID (Prussian GM von Götzen)

. 16 ID (Prussian GM Freih. von Lüttwitz)

. Aus-Hung. 29 ID (GM Steiger)

. 58 Inf Bde (Col. Novottny)

. 29 FA Bde (Col. Mazza)

c) Kovel Sector (HQ of German LV Corps)

Commander = Prussian GdK von Bernhardi

C/Staff = Prussian Major von Bartenwerffer

1) German 92 ID (Prussian GM Rusche)

2) Aus-Hung. II Corps

Commander = FML Kaiser

C/Staff = Col. Purtscher

. German 107 ID (Prussian GM Havenstein)

. Aus-Hung. 4 ID (FML Pfeffer)

. 7 Inf Bde (Col. Ritter von Steinitz)

- . 8 Inf Bde (Col. von Köckh)
- . 4 FA Bde (Col. Edler von Antony)
- 3) Aus-Hung. XXII Corps
- Commander = FML Rudolf Krauss
- C/Staff = Col. Ludvig
- a) Group Wernitz
  - . k.k. 26 LW ID (GM Edler von Wieden)
    - . 51 LW Inf Bde (Col Scholze)
    - . 52 LW Inf Bde (Col. Otto Richter)
    - . 26 FA Bde (Col. Reichenauer)
  - . k.k. 45 LW ID (GM von Stöhr)
    - . 89 LW Inf Bde (GM von Habermann)
    - . 90 LW Inf Bde (Col. Freisinger)
    - . 45 FA Bde (Col. Wolff)
  - . German 86 ID (Prussian G.Lt von Wernitz)
- b) Group Clausius
  - . Aus-Hung. 53 ID (FML von Pongracz)
    - . k.u. 127 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Hajek)
    - . 128 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Karpellus)
    - . 53 FA Bde (Col. Adler)
  - . German 91 ID (Prussian G.Lt Clausius)
- 4) German 45 LW ID (forming) (Saxon GM von Reyher)

- d) Cavalry Corps Hauer  
 Commander = GdK Freih. von Hauer  
 C/Staff = Col. Ritter Fisher von Ledenice
- . 9 CD (GM von Le Gay)
    - . 9 Cav Bde (GM Freih. von Sessler) (only)
  - . German 1 LW ID (Prussian GdI von Jacobi)
  - . Bavarian CD (GM Freih. von Egloffstein)

D) Aus-Hung. units under Army Group Woyrsch

- XII Corps  
 Commander = GdI Ritter von Henriquez  
 C/Staff = Lt Col. Freih. von Abele
- . 35 ID (FML von Podhoranszky)
    - . 69 Inf Bde (Col. Guha)
    - . 70 Inf Bde (Col. Funk)
    - . 35 FA Bde (GM Gröschl)
  - . Also some unspecified German units

26 LW Inf Bde (detached to Woyrsch's forces from 13 LW ID) (Col. Ritter von Zygadlowicz)

- E) k.u.k. Military Government Lublin  
 General Governor = GM Graf Szeptycki

C/Staff = Lt Col. Hausner

Had 21 Lst Etappen bns, 3 Streifkorps detachments, 1 Lst squadron

## RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN UNITS

Note: The corps assignments of some of the Russian divisions isn't certain. Also it's unclear to what extent the creation of the new divisions had proceeded by the start of March. Knox<sup>82</sup> writes that at this time several Russian armies had a larger number of divisions than appear here. Apparently the English author had before him figures reflecting the strength the Russian Army would have after the expansion was complete. Specifically, on the Romanian Front the creation of new Russian divisions didn't take place until during March and April.

**Romanian Front**

Commander = King Ferdinand of Romania

Commander of the Russians, and C/Staff to the King = GdK Sakharov

Romanian C/Staff = Div.Gen. Presan

Russian 6<sup>th</sup> Army (GdK Zurikov)

. XLVII Corps [1 "See" Div (?)<sup>83</sup>, 115 ID], IV Sib Corps [9 & 10 Sib Rif Divs; 61 ID], XXIX Corps [1 & 7 Rif Divs; 3 Cauc Rif Div], IV Corps [30, 40, 124 ID; 3 Rif Div]; 57 & 111 ID; VI Cav Corps [3 & 8 CD], 3 Don Coss Div

. Total - 14 infantry and 3 cavalry divs

Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Army (GdI Ragosa)

. XXX Corps [71, 80 & 190 ID], VII Corps [13, 34 & 179 ID], VIII Corps [2, 14 & 15 ID]; III Cav Corps [10 CD; 1 Don & 1 Terek Coss Divs], 12 CD, Cauc Native CD, Trans-Amur Border CD

. Total - 9 infantry and 6 cavalry divs

Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (Div.Gen. Averescu)

. II Corps [1, 3 & 12 ID], IV Corps [6, 7 & 8 ID]; Russian Ussuri Coss Div

. Total - 6 infantry and 1 cavalry divs

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

. XL Corps [2 & 4 Rif Divs; 3 Turkestan Rif Div], XXIV Corps [48, 49, 126 & 188 ID], 103 ID, XXXVI Corps [25 & 68 ID], II Corps [26, 84 & 193 ID], XXVI Corps [65 & 78 ID], XLV Corps [122 & 194 ID]; V Cav Corps [11 CD; (3) Orenburg Coss Div], 6 Don Coss Div

. Total - 17 infantry and 3 cavalry divs

1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army (rebuilding in the rear) (Div.Gen. Iliescu)

82 Knox, "With the Russian Army 1914-1917", Vol. II, pp. 534 ff.

83 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: No "1<sup>st</sup> See [Naval] Div" has been found in any other source. It seems likely that this is a misprint for "1<sup>st</sup> Serbian Div", which is listed by Russian sources as assigned to XLVII Corps in mid-summer.

. I Corps [2, 4 & 11 ID], III Corps [5, 13 & 14 ID], V Corps [9, 10 & 15 ID]; 1 & 2 Cav Divs  
Total - 9 infantry and 2 cav divs

### **Russian Southwest Front**

Commander = GdK Brussilov

C/Staff = GdI Sukhomlin

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

. XVIII Corps [37, 43, 64 & 106 ID], XXIII Corps [59, 79, 82 & 167 ID], XI Corps [11, 12, 32 & 165 ID]; 7 CD, 3 Cauc Coss Div  
. Total = 12 infantry and 2 cavalry divs

7<sup>th</sup> Army (GdI Shcherbachev)

. XVI Corps [41, 47 & 160 ID], XII Corps [19 & 117 ID], XXXIII Corps [1, 2 & 4 Trans-Amur Border Divs], XXII (Finnish) Corps [1 & 3 Finn Rif Divs], VII Sib Corps [12 & 13 Sib Rif Divs; 23 ID], XLI Corps [74, 108 & 113 ID; 3 & 5 Trans-Amur Border Divs], III Cauc Corps [21 & 52 ID], II Cav Corps [9 CD; Combined CD]  
. Total - 20 infantry and 2 cavalry divs

**11<sup>th</sup> Army** (GdI Balanin)

. VI Corps [4 & 16 ID], XVII Corps [3, 35 & 156 ID], V Sib Corps [6 Sib Rif Div; 50 & 158 ID (latter redesignated 22 Sib Rif Div)], XXXII Corps [101, 105 & 157 ID]; VII Cav Corps [6 & 13 CD; 20 ID]; 2 & 4 Finn Rif Divs; Trans-Baikal Coss Div  
. Total - 14 infantry and 3 cavalry divs

**Special Army** (GdI Baluyev)

. V Corps [7, 10 & 151 ID], II Gd Corps [3 Gd ID, Gd Rif Div], I Gd Corps [1 & 2 Gd ID], XXV Corps [3 Gren Div; 46 & 152 ID (latter redesignated 6 Gren Div)], XXXIX Corps [53, 102, 125 & 154 ID], I Turkestan Corps [1, 2 & 8 Turkestan Rif Divs], XXXIV Corps [56, 104 & 153 ID]; Gd Cav Corps [1, 2 & 3 Gd CD]  
. Total - 20 infantry and 3 cavalry divs

Under Russian West Front...

**3<sup>rd</sup> Army** (GdI Letsch)

. XLVI Corps [5 Don Coss Div; 77 & 100 ID; Combined Border Guard Div], III Corps [73 ID, 5 Rif Div], IV Cav Corps [27 ID; 16 CD, 2 Comb Coss Div, 1 Kuban Coss Div], XXXI Corps [75, 83 & 130 ID]; Czecho-Slovakian Rif Bde  
. Total - 9 ½ infantry and 4 cavalry divs

The allies seek clarity about the Revolution

Immediately prior to the outbreak of the Russian Revolution the situation of the Central Powers was not as threatening as had been the case at the end of August 1916, but it was still serious enough. The front in the East was secure, but it was impossible to withdraw substantial units to either the Western or South-western fronts so that offensives could be undertaken there. After the hungry winter of 1916-17, spirits on the home front were lower. And then came news that the United States of America had broken off relations with Germany. The March Revolution in Russia erupted at this difficult moment. But in the first days it wasn't possible yet to determine how this event of world-historical importance would weaken the fighting capacity of the Russian Army and thus provide major relief for the Central Powers.

To gain clarity about the enemy's situation, the Aus-Hung. and German storm troops became very active along the entire long front between Riga and the Black Sea. The Russians' behavior varied from sector to sector. On 15 March, the day when Milyukov announced the Tsar's abdication, they flew red flags in their trenches. Many of the muzhiks left their positions and invited their opponents to come over. From this point forward the enemy ceased hostilities in numerous parts of the front and sought to negotiate. Delegations came over to our trenches. With great sincerity the Russians discussed conditions along their lines; they related that they were driving their officers away and electing committees. In general they sympathized with their new government, but announced that they no longer wanted to attack. They advised our men that this was the quickest way to put an end to the war. But in other locations the Russians continued to be hostile, especially their artillery if it was commanded by French or English officers. Anyway the artillery often were regarded as an enemy by their own infantry in the trenches.

Thus curious events unfolded on the Eastern front in March. In many places the guns were completely silent, at others there were artillery duels, gas attacks, and aerial combat. During these weeks the Aus.-Hung. and German troops carried out a series of operations to improve their lines that they had carefully planned for a long time.

#### Minor actions

Thus on 8 March, in the defensive sector of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army and of GdI Litzmann's Group on the eastern border of Transylvania the crest of the Magyaros Heights was wrested from the Russians on a front of four kilometers. Parts of 39 Hon ID, 24 ID, 225

German ID and of 8 Bav Res ID took part in this victorious action under the leadership of GM von Breit, commander of 39 Hon ID. The 49 ID of Russian XXIV Corps had to leave 1000 prisoners, 17 machine guns and 5 trench mortars in the hands of the attackers.<sup>84</sup> A weak enemy counterattack was undertaken early on the 9<sup>th</sup>, but soon collapsed under a barrage from our accurate artillery.

Two weeks later, on 23 March, parts of the k.u.k. 24 ID took the 1343 meter high Solyomtar crest on the border. Moreover, they captured 500 prisoners and a machine gun. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the German 225 ID improved their positions south of the Uz valley by storming Mt Farcu. Meanwhile the Russian 49 ID made two unsuccessful attempts (on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>) to recover the Magyaros Heights from 39 Hon ID. Russian attempts to recapture the Solyomtar Heights on the 26<sup>th</sup> and Mt Farcu on 1 April also ended in defeat thanks to defensive fire from our artillery.

On the right wing of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, storm troops from 12 ID pushed into the Russian positions at Jacobeny on 30 March and returned with 100 prisoners. On the same day a detachment from 59 ID successfully thrust against the Russian trenches near Kirlibaba. All the other Aus-Hung. and German armies in the Army Groups of Böhm-Ermolli and Linsingen also undertook numerous storm-troop operations in March and until April, especially in the Stanislau, Brzezany, Zborow and Brody sectors as well as east of Vladimir-Volynsky and Kovel. Special mention should be made of a successful action in the sector of GdI Scheffer-Boyadel's German Army Detachment at Zabieriezina on the Berezina. Here on 21 March parts of the k.u.k. IR 63 and troops from XVII German Res Corps, after powerful artillery preparation, overran the foremost Russian line in a breadth of four kilometers; then they thrust two kilometers deep into the enemy's second position. The 11 Sib Rif Div (of 10<sup>th</sup> Russian Army) had been taken by surprise in this fighting, and lost more than 220 prisoners, 2 revolver cannon, 6 machine guns and several trench mortars. But all these thrusts were just a prelude to the severe catastrophe that overtook III Corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army at Tobol on the Stokhod at the start of April.

#### **a. The storm of the bridgehead at Tobol**

Prussian Landwehr and the Aus-Hung. and Bavarian troops of GdK Freih. von Hauer's Cavalry Corps (German 1 LW ID, k.u.k. 9 CD,

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<sup>84</sup> Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 149 ff.

Bav CD) had been unable to keep the Russians from crossing the Stokhod at Tobol in August 1916. It had to be assumed that in summer 1917 the enemy would accompany their next thrust toward Kovel with an attack from the Tobol bridgehead, so as to roll up the Stokhod front from the north. The result was that, at the least, some strong units would be continually tied down opposite this Russian sally port; possibly when decisive fighting developed the scanty available strategic reserves would have to be split up.

Therefore since fall 1916 GO Linsingen had intended to wipe out the bridgehead. For this purpose, Corps Hauer would be reinforced by twelve battalions plus artillery and trench mortars. But at the start of 1917 the preparations for this operation, which were already far advanced, had to be interrupted when a large part of the German troops who were supposed to go to Tobol were diverted to the Aa River in response to the Russian attacks near Riga. Preparations for the attack were finally resumed in February. Also in this month the reinforcements arrived - two regiments from the German 86 ID<sup>85</sup> and one from 91 ID, along with parts of the k.k. 26 LW ID and German 92 ID. In addition, 78 German and 18 Aus-Hung. batteries (about 300 guns) were available with around 100 trench mortars. GdK Hauer decided to first assault the southern part of the bridgehead (which was more than 12 km wide) and deal with the northern part later. He placed particular importance on selecting a time for the attack when the Stokhod and the area around it were impassable due to high waters. A thaw began on 28 February, so GdK Hauer chose 4 March as the date to begin. But when a strong cold front moved through on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, he decided to further postpone the operation until spring brought a permanent thaw.

Meanwhile the Russians were aware that their opponents were preparing to attack. On 27 March they released gas against the positions of the German 1 LW ID and k.u.k. 9 CD, while their artillery fired gas shells. But the defenders' gas masks provided full protection. The Russian infantry didn't attack.

On 28 March occurred the long-expected rise in the water level of the Stokhod. Now GdK Hauer ordered the commander of 1 German LW

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85 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Finally, however, only one regiment from 86 ID (the 343<sup>rd</sup>) took part in the attack (German General Staff, "Die Schlachten und Gefechte des Grossen Krieges" [Berlin, 1919], p. 269). But overall coordination of the artillery was entrusted to the commander of 86 ID, Lt Col. Bruchmüller, who was quickly becoming the most famous gunner of the World War.



ID, GdI von Jacobi, to carry out the attack on III Russian Corps in the Tobol bridgehead on the next day. But the operation had to be postponed one more time because the trenches of 1 LW ID, which made up the jumping-off point, were flooded. It would finally take place on 3 April.

On 29 March the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Russian Army, GdI Letsch, considered whether to evacuate the bridgehead. But the commander of III Russian Corps was opposed, since his bridgehead was tying down strong opposing units. The Russian corps commander also felt he'd be able to withstand the threatening onslaught. He had stationed the majority of 5 Rif Div plus parts of 27 and 73 ID, a total of 17½ battalions, in the bridgehead; additionally he had more than 12½ battalions in reserve on the opposite bank of the Stokhod.

In the night of 2-3 April the Stokhod overflowed its banks, and high water washed away many of the bridges. The artillery bombardment by Jacobi's Group began around 6:00 AM. The Russians' telephone stations, command HQ, reserve encampments and batteries were all hit by gas- and explosive-shells. The artillery started to pound the front-line enemy positions at 7:30 AM. The walls which the Russians had built up above the swampy ground were blown apart, and the high waters flooded the trenches. The bridges over the Stokhod (including the footbridges) which hadn't already been swept away by the flood were now brought under the fire of the guns, which continued to pound the bridgehead for six hours.

The main attacking group (the reinforced 172 German Inf Bde) under the command of GdI Jacobi began to attack the southern part of the bridgehead at 1:12 PM. In the first onslaught they broke through the center of 5 Russian Rifle Div, and then took both enemy wings from the rear. At 4:20 PM the northern group (four German Landwehr battalions and I Bn of the Austrian LW IR 10) also attacked, and were completely successful. Rudka Czerwiszcze and Tobol were taken. The Russians fled from their ruined trenches, under the fire of our artillery, over the high waters of the Stokhod. Around 7:00 PM, when the moon was already high in the heavens, the dismounted Bavarian 2<sup>nd</sup> Uhlán and 2<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Cavalry Regiments thrust ahead to the Stokhod at Stare Czerwiszcze; sinking into the mud of the swamp, they waded water that was up to their breasts. At 10:30 PM the Russians blew up their last remaining bridge at Rudka Czerwiszcze.

Only remnants of III Russian Corps managed to reach safety on the opposite bank of the Stokhod; many of the defenders drowned in

the river while fleeing. Letsch's Army lost more than 12,000 men, among them more than 9000 prisoners. The booty which fell into the victors' hands also included 15 guns and 200 machine guns.<sup>86</sup>

### **b. Beginning of peace propaganda**

The official Aus-Hung. and German reports about this brilliant were worded as cautiously as possible, so as not to disturb prospects for making peace. The German OHL was following the advice of Reich-Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. For the same reason GFM Hindenburg, who'd moved his HQ from Pless to Bad Kreuznach (behind the Western front) at the end of February, forbade any further major operation on the Eastern front. The German Foreign Ministry, through their contacts with foreign agents, had initiated negotiations with the new rulers of Russia. Young Emperor Charles was also exploring new ways to seek a compromise peace. The Aus-Hung. Foreign Minister and German Reich-Chancellor were both very concerned about the impact of the Russian Revolution. Both feared something similar in their own countries. Moreover, the unrest in Russia led to hopes that a separate peace could be concluded with this nation. Anything that might re-awaken the Russian Army's will to fight had to be avoided. The Aus-Hung. and German troops on the Eastern front received from their leaders some very specific instructions on how to conduct themselves. The basic idea was that any hostile action would be met with decisive military counter-measures, but otherwise the Russians were to be left alone.

It is true that around mid-April the German OHL did consider carrying out a major offensive with the units of GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria's command. But the plan foundered because units were lacking and because the Reich-Chancellor wanted to avoid stirring up the Russians. At this time there were no indications of an impending Russian onslaught. But it was still necessary to keep 43 Aus-Hung., about 80 German, 3 Bulgarian and 5 Turkish divisions in the East so as to be ready for all eventualities. The German OHL and the k.u.k. high command prepared a common theme to be used in peace propaganda by the armies under Prince Leopold, Archduke Joseph and Mackensen. They

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86 Suhrmann, "Geschichte des Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 31 im Weltkrieg" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1928), pp. 273 ff.

Bruchmüller, "Die deutsche Artillerie in den Durchbruchschlachten des Weltkrieges" (Berlin, 1921), pp. 53 ff.

Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 47 ff.

were to spread it from trench to trench so they could complete the inner deterioration of the Russian Army.<sup>87</sup>

Now the Austrians, Hungarians and Germans sought with newspapers, leaflets and loud-speaker announcements to make the Russians ready to negotiate an end to hostilities. This trench-to-trench propaganda didn't have as much of an impact as expected, but the situation did become more peaceful along the entire front between Riga and the Black Sea. Hostilities ceased almost completely during the Russian Easter in mid-April. Delegations of Russian soldiers visited our trenches, and provided our intelligence service a welcome opportunity to review and confirm evidence about the opposing forces. But there were also attempts at fraternization, which normally were strictly forbidden by our leadership so that revolutionary ideas wouldn't infect the k.u.k. troops.<sup>88</sup> This highly unusual situation of half-war, half-armistice led to confusion and uncertainty at the lowest levels of the chain of command, especially in units of Slavic nationality. Yet despite this drawback the higher-level HQ continued their propaganda campaign.

Thus at many points discussions were carried on through translators. The allies indicated that if the Russians wanted to open negotiations they should send accredited representatives. But by May there still had been no official talks regarding an armistice. The Russian generals still hadn't completely lost their authority. Their officers, along with some English officers at the front, were constantly trying to put an end to the unwelcome traffic between the opposing lines.

### **c. Plans of the Russian leadership**

#### Decision to accelerate the offensive

The Stavka decided at the start of April to change their plans by opening their offensive as early as mid-May. This was due to concerns that their opponents otherwise could either anticipate the Russian assault with one of their own, or that they would profit from being left alone until summer to improve their

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87 Arz, pp. 151 ff.

88 Just like Emperor Charles (see Werkmann, "Deutschland als Verbündeter", pp. 109 ff.), GdI Ludendorff also had serious reservations at first about the eventual effect on his own troops of the peace propaganda (per a report to von Glaise, at that time a General Staff Captain).

defenses. Two of the Front commanders, Gurko (who'd replaced Evert) and Brussilov, agreed with the Stavka. General Sakharov, the "assistant" to King Ferdinand of Romania, also supported an early attack. Alexeiev therefore reported the Stavka's new decisions to War Minister Guchkov, adding that despite the difficult situation Russia had no right to remain inactive until summer. The defeat at Tobol had shown clearly that the Russian troops didn't have much fighting value on the defensive. The weaknesses in the transportation network made it impossible to quickly shift troops behind the front, which was a necessary pre-condition for a successful defense. But a noticeable success during an offensive would enhance the country's will to carry on with the war and provide a welcome means to remove the troops from the corrupting influence of revolutionary propaganda. Moreover, Russia's allies shouldn't be left to bear the entire burden of the offensive. In that case, if the Germans did attack in the East during summer the Western powers would have been already exhausted and thus unable to take any effective relief measures.

Only the commander of the North Front, GdI Ruzsky, had another opinion. He declared that the Russian armies shouldn't attack until they were sure that there would be sufficient replacement troops available, and until the supply of rations and military equipment was once more in reliable order. He was also still concerned that the Germans might attack Riga while simultaneously landing troops on the Baltic coast, all the more so since he had learned that they had shortened their front in the West and were creating 13 new divisions. General Ruzsky reported to the Stavka that the Germans could perhaps concentrate 40 divisions to open the road to Petersburg. Therefore the entire Russian plan for an offensive should be suspended. The focus of attention should be shifted to the northern wing and to the protection of the northern flank with an entire army.

General Alexeiev, on the other hand, wanted to direct the main thrust toward Lemberg; true to the plan already devised, he refused to further reinforce the North Front at the expense of the Southwest Front. He responded to General Ruzsky that in any event strong reserves should be held near the latter Front so that they could be shifted into Moldavia in case Romania didn't want to fight any longer at Russia's side. As for the North Front, the commander-in-chief believed that with their 500 battalions and 420,000 troops they were strong enough to resist opponents who had just 250 battalions and 200,000 men. Alexeiev did order that XLII Corps in Finland should be reinforced by ten battalions and a cavalry division from the Caucasian Front.

Moreover he gave General Ruzsky authority to use the Stavka's reserves in the vicinity to guard the coast by Riga, and the Baltic Sea Fleet was placed under him. The Black Sea Fleet would be ready to support the left wing of the Romanian Front.

#### Plans for the individual sectors

Alexeiev still hoped that the condition of the Russian Army would improve by mid-May. He wanted all the Fronts to begin to attack around that date. Mitau and Vilna would be the goals of the North and West Fronts, respectively.

On the Southwest Front, Brussilov wanted to thrust along the shortest route to Lemberg. His plan was to advance with the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army through Zloczow and Gliniany from the sector on both sides of Zborow. He also wanted the right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army to attack from Brody along the railroad line. During the attack on Lemberg the Special Army (part of his command since the end of December) would pin down their opponents to prevent troops from shifting elsewhere. The Special Army's left wing should thrust toward Milatyn and Sokal while the right thrust toward Vladimir-Volynsky. 7<sup>th</sup> Army would have their right wing also advance toward Lemberg from the line Baranowka-Potutory-Mieczyszczow through Brzezany and Bobrka, while threatening the allies' lines of communication to western Galicia and to the Carpathians. Simultaneously the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army would carry out two diversionary attacks - one south of Mieczyszczow and the other to capture Halicz.

During the offensive toward Lemberg the 8<sup>th</sup> Army would stand guard opposite the Carpathians. They would also attack - with their main body on the road through the pass from Körösmezö to Maramaros-Sziget and with weaker forces at the Pantyr Pass and from Szybeny (with a turning movement through the Czornahora to Ruszpolyana).

GdI Alexeiev wasn't happy that Brussilov wanted to attack simultaneously at several points, and advised him to assemble the strongest possible force for the sector he'd chosen for delivery of the principal thrust. But Brussilov declared that based on the lessons of the summer offensive in 1916 an attack along the entire front seemed to be the best road to success.

The commanders of the Russian Fronts anticipated the start of the offensive half-heartedly, with nagging doubts that their armies no longer had the moral force to carry out the operation. General Brussilov reported on 24 April that despite all efforts

the deterioration of the Army, caused by revolutionary propaganda, was still continuing. General Gurko was of the opinion that it would be better to abandon the planned offensive by his West Front toward Vilna than to implement it with unreliable units. General Ruzsky had meanwhile once more demanded that the northern wing of the Russian forces should be reinforced, and finally convinced the high command that it was necessary to deploy an entire army in the area between Riga and Reval, even though there was no firm evidence that the Germans were planning an amphibious operation behind his North Front.

On 22 April the high command, with a heavy heart, decided to transfer some units. The North Front would receive from Brussilov the I Corps (22, 24 and 161 ID), which had been stationed at Luck in his Front's reserve, and from Gurko the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army with XXXVII Corps (120 ID). From these units, as well as from 121 and 135 ID plus 4 Don Coss Div, a new 1<sup>st</sup> Army was formed in Livonia and Estonia to guard the approaches to Petersburg. The West Front was extended north to the Dvina and south to the Pripyat; in place of the former 1<sup>st</sup> Army (whose remaining units were divided between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies), a newly-created 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was deployed south of the Dvina with X, XX and XXV Corps. This Army would cover the routes to Polotsk. The troops from the original 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (whose commander GdI Letsch had been dismissed after the defeat at Tobol) were divided between 2<sup>nd</sup> Army of the West Front and the Special Army of the Southwest Front.<sup>89</sup>

At the start of May the situation in the East was still unclear. The Russian commanders had crafted plans of attack, but were completely in the dark as to whether the troops would obey orders. On the other hand the Central Powers were fully prepared to fight in almost unaltered strength. But they were avoiding any activity that might bring the war back to life. It was to their advantage that the Russians would stay quiet while the Entente armies attacked in the West and in the Balkans. But thus far they had been unable to convince the Russians to conclude an armistice. Moreover, as already noted, many commanders of Aus-Hung. units containing troops who were no longer firmly on the side of the Monarchy had the uncomfortable feeling that the poison of deterioration could also spread within their own ranks.

The Romanian regiments at the front were completely unconvinced by our peace propaganda.

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<sup>89</sup> Zayonchkovsky, "Campaign of 1917", pp. 44 ff.

## ***B. The Southwest in the first third of 1917***

### **1. Measures of the Austro-Hungarian leadership**

The new plan for a hopefully decisive offensive against Italy, which the k.u.k. high command prepared at Conrad's instructions at the start of 1917, had no effect on the actual measures taken to reinforce the defensive front in the Southwest. The enemy's intentions were uncovered only a few days after the conference of the Entente powers in Rome on 6-7 January. The intelligence section of the high command, which coordinated the gathering of information on all fronts, also issued many reports about the rapid growth of Italian armaments. Therefore there was hardly any doubt that Italy would launch a powerful new offensive; several signs indicated that it would take place at the end of February or the start of March, more or less simultaneous with the attack of the French and English on the Western front.

While considering this danger, FM Conrad expressed the opinion at the end of January "that this time the Italians won't attack only in the area between Salcano and the sea, but also farther north (between Plava and Tolmein)." GO von Boroevic didn't dispute this idea, but remained firmly convinced that "the main enemy attack [would take place] once more on the Karst plateau south of the Wippach." Soon after this exchange of views, on 6 February some wireless messages between Rome and Petersburg were intercepted. They rounded out the picture of the enemy's intentions. Now we could reckon almost with certainty that the French wouldn't attack on the Western front before the end of March; the Italians, whom we knew had pledged to strike three weeks later, would do so in mid-April at the earliest. The only indication of the Russians' intentions was that they hoped to be ready by the end of April. These intercepted wireless messages were extremely helpful, since it was now known that in the next few weeks the defensive measures under way wouldn't be interrupted in the next few weeks.

The three commanders on the Southwest front were advised accordingly. Archduke Eugene was also informed that the offensive envisioned on our side wouldn't happen in the foreseeable future. But he was to continue preparations so that the Italians would still hear rumors about an impending attack. 10<sup>th</sup> Army was ordered to continue with its current measures. 5<sup>th</sup> Army alone was given more detailed instructions. They were outlined by FM Conrad and signed by Emperor Charles as his first operational order as commander-in-chief. Part of the order read:

"As previously, the principal goal is still to ensure that 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which will be called upon to defend against the principal Italian efforts, will start the anticipated heavy fighting in spring with units that are at their authorized strength, as rested as possible, and deployed in defensive positions that are complete and ready in every respect. The AOK believes the best way to meet this goal during the period of relative quiet is to take troops out of the firing line. A plan should be devised so that many large formations can be relieved through the end of March for plentiful rest and training."

Then Conrad, referring to GO Borojevic's recent assertion regarding the probable direction of the enemy thrust, repeated that:

"besides anticipating that the Italians will obviously continue to make their principal attack on the lower Isonzo, we must reckon that the growing size of the Italian Army will also allow them to widen the scope of the offensive by increasing their pressure against the area by Plava and Tolmein."

If the enemy were successful by Tolmein and then turned toward the southeast they would have an impact on the situation east of Görz. The Italians could also be tempted for political reasons to capture the Tolmein bridgehead. Currently the high command had no new units that could protect that sector. Therefore it was necessary that 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ should initiate their own measures, if only to ensure that in an emergency they could quickly bring a strong force of artillery into position in the vicinity of Tolmein. Some of the batteries that would be arriving by rail must be diverted in this direction. The decision as to whether a stronger reserve should be held in readiness for the northern sector would remain up to Army HQ.

#### Reinforcements and reorganization

GO Borojevic was furthermore informed that 7 ID, which would soon arrive north of Trieste, was a reserve under the AOK. His Army HQ could indeed rotate this Division, just like 41 Hon ID, to relieve other units but he would have to ensure that two divisions were always stationed in readiness on the Southern Railroad as a reserve for the high command. This restriction on his authority may have been little to GO Borojevic's liking. But the AOK felt compelled to take this course because otherwise they would have had no reserves available for themselves. Unlike other forces, the Aus-Hung. Army hadn't created any new units in the last year (except for five brigades assigned to the Romanian



theater of operations), and it wasn't easy to release units from other front-line sectors. The Army Group in Tyrol had already been drained and in fact would need to be reinforced in the near future, as soon as the severe winter ended. Also there were no more troops to be had from 10<sup>th</sup> Army in Carinthia, and little possibility of drawing any from the Balkan theater. On the contrary, at the start of March the 102<sup>nd</sup> IR had to be sent quickly from the Isonzo front to the HQ of the General Government at Belgrade because an uprising had developed southwest of Nish. After fourteen days the Regiment was returned to 5<sup>th</sup> Army. There remained just the Eastern front, from which 41 Hon ID had come in December and 7 ID in the second half of February. The high command would have to draw any further reinforcements only from the East.

On 25 February GFM Hindenburg, who was responsible for the inter-allied high command, wrote to Baden that for the time being the Southwestern front would have to stay on the defensive. This disposed of one of the arguments for reinforcing the Southwest at the expense of the East, which had the same assignment. The transfer of some small units to the Southwest was approved. Thus k.k. Lst IR 1 would move to 5<sup>th</sup> Army and FJB 31 to 10<sup>th</sup> Army. But it would be difficult to transfer an entire infantry division or mountain brigade. The General Field Marshal pointed out that Mackensen's Army Group already had to give up two Turkish divisions for the Trans-Jordan front, so it wasn't advisable to remove any further major units from him. In Hindenburg's opinion, Archduke Joseph's Army Group - which was widely stretched - shouldn't be weakened either. And because of the Russians' preparations to attack, Prince Leopold of Bavaria's Eastern Command had to ensure that the Polish-Galician front was firm and that dangers like those that developed in 1916 were avoided.

Finding enough units to defend each of the three principal theaters of operation (the West, Southwest and the East) was a very difficult task because of the enemy's substantial numerical superiority. Of the entire Aus-Hung. Army, which was organized as 71 infantry divisions and 13 independent brigades (about 780,000 riflemen and 7200 guns), when spring started about two fifths were on the Southwest front and not quite three fifths in the East; the remainder (about 6.5%) were on the Balkan front.

The changes that took place within the k.u.k. high command at the end of February also had a direct effect on the Southwestern front. FM Conrad at Bozen took command over the Army Group that from this time forward carried his name. GM Richard Müller was

named the Army Group's Chief of Staff. FML Alfred Krauss became commander of I Corps. FM Archduke Eugene returned after a one year absence to Marburg, where his "Southwestern Front HQ" was re-established on 16 March. The Archduke's Chief of Staff was now GM Konopicky. The responsibilities of the reformed HQ were somewhat less than they had been in the first period of its existence. 10<sup>th</sup> Army also received a new leader. On 12 April FML Scotti was succeeded by GO Freih. von Krobotin, who since the start of the war had borne a heavy burden as Minister of War. The leader of XV Corps, GdI Stöger-Steiner, became the new War Minister, and his place as Corps commander was taken by FML Scotti. Until this time the brigades and divisions of 10<sup>th</sup> Army had been placed directly under Army HQ; on 26 April GdI Archduke Peter Ferdinand, who hadn't held a command since September 1914, took over the Army's eastern half (93 ID and 59 Mtn Bde). On the same day the k.u.k. AOK placed the HQ of FML von Hordt's IV Corps, which had become superfluous on the Russian front, at the disposal of 10<sup>th</sup> Army; at the start of May the HQ took over the divisions of the western sector (92 and 94 ID). There was no change to the HQ of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, but to ensure that there was a central command over the defensive forces that were piling up on the Karst plateau a new HQ was established at Sesana; called "Sector Command III", it was placed under the former commander of XVI Corps, FZM Wurm.<sup>90</sup> FML Kralicek took over XVI Corps.

In mid-March the inter-allied high command found an opportunity to take a division from the Western front and send it to the East where it relieved an Aus-Hung. division. The result was that in the first days of April the 106 Lst ID joined 5<sup>th</sup> Army. Moreover, at this time the Feld Jaeger Battalions 17 and 25 were relieved from the k.u.k. 25 ID and sent to 10<sup>th</sup> Army. But there were still reservations about switching an entire mountain brigade from the eastern Carpathians to Tyrol. The inter-allied high command suggested that the Austrian citizens of the Polish Legion, which was inactive at Lublin, should be sent instead. But this didn't seem advisable to the Aus-Hung. high command, since it would involve the controversial military-political question of the administration of Poland and its army. Finally, instead of a mountain brigade the k.k. 26 LW Inf Bde was taken from the sector of the German Eastern Command in the second half of April and brought to Tyrol; the snow was melting there and enemy operations were anticipated, especially since the Italians had a significant numerical superiority and, according to the

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90 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The creation of FZM Wurm's new sector command was the first step leading to the division of Boroevic's large command into two armies; in August the forces under Wurm would become the "1<sup>st</sup> Army of the Isonzo."

latest intelligence, were preparing to attack.

#### Awaiting the Italian offensive

Now the general offensive of the Entente powers, as already noted, began on 9 April with a major attack by the English at Arras. The Italian onslaught was expected at the end of April.

The Aus-Hung. AOK received from Kreuznach substantial information about the English method of attack, and sent it to GO Boroevic since it was possible that the Italians would employ a similar approach. The characteristics of the offensive were:

- . Preliminary air attacks on a large scale,
- . Three to five days of fire for effect, followed by six to eight hours of hurricane fire (directed also against the lines and observation points in the rear), and
- . Massive use of heavy explosive- and gas-shells, especially against the batteries near the front.

Moreover it was reported (as a negative lesson) that the defenders' artillery had been sparing with their ammunition, and thus in many places had missed an opportunity to strike with strength when the right time arrived. The defenses lacked depth, which was a considerable disadvantage.

The high command had made a major effort to beef up the artillery on the Isonzo. During the winter 5<sup>th</sup> Army had been assigned 15 light and 5 heavy field batteries plus many heavy and very heavy batteries from the fortress artillery. GO Boroevic was ordered to keep ready a strong, mobile artillery group in the battle zone. Based on lessons learned from the Western front the ammunition supply was increased; thus in the Army's sector there were available 2450 rounds per each field cannon, 170 per each field howitzer, 710 and 1580 per each heavy field howitzer of the old and new models (respectively), and finally 750 rounds per each heavy field cannon. It was estimated that this supply would be sufficient for a battle lasting twenty days.

According to a report from Army HQ, in the sector where the enemy attack was expected the fortifications of the First Position between Salcano and the sea made up a system that varied in strength, but overall was sound. Great emphasis had been laid on the construction of shell-proof shelters (caverns). So much progress had been made in this effort that in all sectors we could anticipate that the reserves could be brought up on time and in complete safety. Construction of the Second Position, on the other hand, was still lagging very much behind in April. It had no significant combat value because there was a lack of

trained labor units to build it.

The report stressed that the fortifications were strongest on the Comen plateau in the sector of VII Corps. The defensive installations along the front east of Fajti hrib, as far as Kostanjevica, were just one kilometer deep and therefore could all be bombarded simultaneously by the enemy artillery. Work had just begun on the rearmost defenses, the second position, which was one half to one and a half kilometers behind the first line (and thus also within the effective range of the Italian guns). Under XXIII Corps the sector between Kostanjevica and the Jamiano depression was very weak. It seems to have been especially difficult to secure the junction of the inner wings of the VII and XXIII Corps. In the sector of XVII Corps in front of Görz, parts of the first position were well constructed but because of the nature of the terrain other parts were less secure against the weather and shelling. This was also true of the second position which was being built three or four kilometers in the rear.

Since Conrad's re-assignment the high command, now in full concurrence with the HQ of Southwestern Front and of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, believed that the Italian offensive would be directed against the southern sector of the Isonzo front. In connection with the evaluation of the fortifications of this sector (summarized above), the situation was analyzed in mid-April, thus shortly before the time when the Italians were expected to attack. An attempt was made to predict the course of the impending battle. At Baden it was believed that the Italians, with their greatly increased force of infantry and artillery, would be able to strike "the entire front between Salcano and the sea." It was believed that a thrust in deep waves on the northern part of the Comen plateau, against VII Corps, would be the most effective but also the most difficult because here the enemy was stationed at the greatest distance from the Aus-Hung. lines. Based on their past practice, it was therefore more likely that they would make a strong thrust against the important part of the front between Kostanjevica and Jamiano. Based on the experiences of the earlier Isonzo battles and of the recent events on the Western front we had to reckon that despite all our efforts the Italians would punch some holes in the line, several kilometers deep. But there would be no reason to lose confidence as long as the enemy offensive was brought to a halt ahead of the line Trijesnek-Hermada. This would be as far as they could be permitted to get without threatening Trieste, assuming that at that point there were no reserves left.

These considerations caused the new Chief of the General Staff, GdI Arz, to ask the inter-allied high command on 14 April if they could hold two Aus-Hung. divisions in readiness on the Eastern front so that in case of great need they could be shipped to the Isonzo without losing time. In his reply GdI Ludendorff pointed out that already four Aus-Hung. divisions had been sent from the East to the Italian front and four German divisions to the Western front, and they hadn't been replaced. The German OHL was now compelled by the heavy fighting in France to exchange worn out units there for full-strength units from the Eastern front. To avoid weakening the latter front too much, after the battle started on the Isonzo a similar exchange should take place between the East and Southwest. The German Eastern Command pledged to have the k.u.k. X Corps ready for this eventuality. Moreover if absolutely necessary Ludendorff intended to send the German Alpenkorps to the Southwestern front.

## **2. Developments by 5<sup>th</sup> Army**

After the Ninth Battle of the Isonzo ended, for some time there was still tension on the Karst plateau. A few days after the roar of the fighting had ceased, the Italians relieved their troops in the front lines and seemed to be making ready for a new attack by slowly moving their saps and communication trenches forward. It was inferred from statements by prisoners and deserters that an assault was impending between the Wippach and the sea on 20 November 1916. But on the 19<sup>th</sup>, when some storm troops of VII Corps carried out an operation to clarify the situation, the enemy was clearly taken by surprise; this proved they weren't ready to attack. Their busy activity was directed more toward preparing their defenses; in the area they had recently captured, by the end of November they'd already dug a complete network of trenches about 800 meters away from the Aus-Hung. positions. This "respectable distance" was somewhat shorter only on the Wippach. So began a period of deadlock that would last for almost half a year.

Fighting between patrols continued in no-man's land. In a general report issued at the end of the year, FML von Schariczner (the commander of VII Corps) noted with satisfaction that "enemy attempts to drive back the outposts we'd established ahead of the lines, particularly on 28 and 30 November and several times in the first week of December, were without exception thwarted by our brave infantry. The watchful, energetic activity of our artillery caused the Italians to stop showing themselves by day and to noticeably curtail their eagerness to attack." The

neighboring corps reported with equal confidence.

Naturally the k.u.k. troops worked with no less energy than the enemy to enhance the strength of their defensive positions, and made great progress during the winter and through mid-May 1917.

The personnel situation on the Isonzo

Despite the ever growing shortage in the Monarchy of men able to bear arms, the flow of replacement troops (in March units) was still large enough to fill up the units and to keep them at their authorized wartime strength. During the winter several battalions could even form fifth and sixth companies. As the long deadlock continued the number of replacement troops exceeded casualties, so there were excess trained March units. The total strength of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's infantry rose between 1 January and 1 May from 125,000 to 156,000 riflemen; the strength of the March units waxed to 70,000 men.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, casualties were relatively great. In the four months in question they included 2844 men killed, 12,540 wounded, 371 missing and at least 52,270 who were ill. The large number who were sick is proof of how health was declining in the ranks, in part due to shortage of food.

The considerable number of men killed or wounded, spread out rather equally throughout this period, was due mostly to artillery fire, which despite the pause in major fighting still rolled over the static battlefield. In this context a report which GO Boroevic submitted to the high command in January is significant. The AOK had advised that 41 Hon ID shouldn't be deployed at the front in the near future because its troops weren't familiar yet with the peculiarities of fighting on the Karst. Boroevic responded that, on the contrary, troops who'd come from other theaters of operations should be used as soon as possible so that they could get accustomed to conditions in which artillery and trench mortar fire along the Isonzo reached an intensity that was unheard of in the East. He added, "Many of the officers who come here from the Eastern front go so far as to assert that Russian drumfire was the same as normal artillery fire here." Although this comparison was somewhat exaggerated, it is important to understand what was meant by the phrase "normal artillery fire" which often appeared in daily reports of the period, or the impact when it was stated that on the Isonzo "despite unfavorable weather, there was very lively combat activity." For example, the report for 12 January said "Because visibility is good the enemy artillery is extraordinarily active; the Italians are firing heavy gas shells. Their planes cross over the battlefield, and one is shot down in aerial combat."

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91 Starting on 1 January 1917 the number of March troops ready to join front-line units was no longer counted in the total for the riflemen. This was the reason behind discrepancies in the totals shown in this volume and those at the end of Volume V.

Some minor infantry actions

In the first four months of the year there were no major infantry actions. However, small operations were repeatedly initiated with the goals of maintaining the troops' fighting spirit, improving the layout of the positions, and bringing back prisoners. Thus on 18 January storm troops from 28 ID thrust toward the Fajti hrib, capturing 150 Italians. A week later detachments of LW IR 20 broke into an enemy advance position southeast of Görz, bringing back 100 prisoners and 3 machine guns. In the last days of January storm troops from IR 91 and 71, and from k.k. Lst IR 2, succeeded in a similar operation at Görz and Kostanjevica; there were 200 prisoners. Despite the colder weather that set in at the start of February, on the 7<sup>th</sup> parts of IR 86 made a successful thrust at Tolmein. In the night of 9-10 February there was a whole series of small attacks, in which several stretches of the enemy's trenches were captured, along with 650 Italians and 10 machine guns. This involved detachments of IR 87 by Salcano, of IR 41 and of k.k. Lst IR 22 on the Wippach, and finally of LW IR 23 and of k.k. Lst Bn IV/39 near Görz. Battalion III/85 played the largest role in this operation; they alone stormed Italian positions 1000 paces long near the Görz railroad station. In the next few days there was bitter fighting around the captured trenches, in which Battalion IV of LW IR 37 was also distinguished, taking 300 more prisoners. On 11 February storm troops from Battalion IV/80 were successful at the Mrzli vrh. On this day there was also very lively aerial activity on both sides, involving many bombing attacks and dog-fights.

The Italians were also active in this small-scale warfare. They often thrust at various points, and sometimes managed to surprise the defenders. They never won any lasting success, which anyway was apparently not their objective. In the next few weeks, through around mid-March, the situation reports often reverted to the well-known phrase "normal artillery fire." There were successful patrol operations on 1 March at Tolmein (IR 80), on the 3<sup>rd</sup> near Görz (IR 24 and LW IR 20) and on the 8<sup>th</sup> at Kostanjevica (Hon IR 32).

On 12 and 13 March the Italians launched what was apparently a probing attack on the Karst plateau; first they fired with stronger than average artillery and many new trench mortars, then thrust ahead with infantry. One of their detachments penetrated the position of 7 ID at Jamiano, but it was soon forced to withdraw from the trenches when reserves arrived and counter-attacked. Then for several more days the guns resumed their



angry fire, which later developed into a systematic bombardment which destroyed several targeted localities. This was an opportunity to verify for the first time that the Italians had several 15 cm cannon with very long ranges; shell fragments indicated that this armament was of English origin.

While good weather prevailed around the middle of March, very active aerial operations resumed. There were repeated actions in the air. Italian squadrons bombed Nabresina in particular; the Aus-Hung. airmen took their revenge over the enemy's command HQ. We learned at this time that the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had moved the HQ of his staff from Cormons to Cividale and that the HQ of the "Zona di Gorizia" had been formed at Cormons.

Activity increased again in the last days of March, especially on the Karst plateau. Enemy thrusts in the Kostanjevica area were easily repulsed. On the other hand, an operation in the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> by Battalion II/100 at Biglia on the Wippach, well-supported by artillery, was a brilliant success. The gallant Silesians and north Moravians captured a forward enemy position, took 500 Italian prisoners, and seized 12 machine guns and 3 trench mortars; in the next few days they thwarted all the enemy's attempts to recover the position. A thrust by storm troops from the Transylvanian Battalion IV/64 west of Jamiano brought in several dozen more prisoners. In the next few days the storm troops of VII Corps were equally successful in several minor operations which shook up the enemy and also forced them to open lively artillery fire. The losses of 5<sup>th</sup> Army in March totaled 762 dead, 3692 wounded, 12,525 ill and 95 missing.

These small actions ceased at the start of April due to storms and rain. Strangely, the quiet continued after better weather arrived, and until the first days of May. The only operation worthy of note was carried out on 12 April at Vertojba by detachments of 14 ID, who took 150 Italians prisoner. Aerial fighting in April became more intense as both sides tried to gain information about the others' measures. The Italians bombed Trieste. A counter-attack on Venice was forbidden by the Emperor.

### **3. Events in Carinthia and Tyrol**

On the upper course of the Isonzo, in Carinthia and in Tyrol this winter passed more quietly than had the previous one. Apparently the Italians' eagerness to attack, which had still flashed out during their first winter at war, was now extinguished. And the

Aus-Hung. troops had no reason to advance from the positions they'd chosen themselves, in front of which the enemy stayed more or less inactive most of the time. The plans for an offensive which the high command considered in January were only sketched out for the commander in Tyrol, who moreover merely considered options and didn't take any measures that could betray his intentions.

10<sup>th</sup> Army was involved in just one action worth mentioning; it occurred on 14 February at the Lahner-Joch (10 km west of the Plöcken Pass) and resulted in the capture of 40 prisoners and some booty by parts of FJB 30. In the sector of the Army Group in Tyrol the points where small groups from both sides were active were the Pasubio, several sectors on the Sieben Gemeinde plateau, the Val Sugana, and the areas around the Rolle Pass and Mt Sief. In the Sugana valley parts of Battalion X/14 made a surprise attack on an enemy position on 12 February and brought back 90 prisoners.<sup>92</sup> On the same day the Reserve Battalion II of IR 37 carried out a raid in the Tonale sector which led to the capture of two dozen Alpini.

In the first week of March the Italians suddenly became more active in the Fassana Alps. During a lively bombardment of the entire sector between the Marmolata and the Colbricon, they made a surprise attack on the C. di Costabella and occupied its summit, 2738 meters high. The defenders (part of 90 ID) lost more than 50 men, one gun and two machine guns. But an Italian assault on the C. di Bocche soon afterwards was easily repulsed, as was a surprise attack on the Colbricon. The return of bad weather hindered measures taken to recover the Costabella. The counterattack didn't take place until 16 March, but led to the recovery of the snow-covered summit. Curiously, the enemy casualties were exactly identical to those we'd suffered several days previously.

On the often-contested Mt Sief, the Italians exploded a powerful mine on 6 March, similar to the one they'd dug under the Col di Lana the year before. But this time the attempt failed. When the explosion detonated it created a gorge between the two positions, which along with furious artillery fire prevented the attackers from carrying out their mission.<sup>93</sup> Spring storms occurred in the second week of March. Warm and cold streams of air intermingled to produce rain and snow.

92 Ehn1, "Das X. Bataillon des ober-österreichischen IR. Ernst Ludwig Gross Herzog von Hessen und bei Rhein Nr. 14" (Vienna, 1932), pp. 56 ff.

93 Schemfil, "Col di Lana" (Bregenz, 1935), p. 315

In these days there were many avalanches in the high mountains, and the white death claimed a large number of victims. In Carinthia the commander of 57 Mtn Bde, GM Freih. von Henneberg, was buried while visiting the positions near Dellach in the Gail valley; his body was found several days later with the head shattered. The start of spring in the mountains brought new snowfall and avalanches, which once more wreaked havoc and forced a complete halt to military operations. In the first days of April the tragic losses due to avalanches increased. On 3 April, the worst day, more than 200 men were buried in Carinthia and Tyrol.

On 12 March FM Conrad took command over the Army Group at Bozen. Now that he could see the beloved mountains of Tyrol, which the Italians wanted to wrest from the fatherland, the Field Marshal wanted more than ever to retaliate. While he was arriving in Tyrol news of the upheaval in Russia was broadcast throughout the world. Therefore the Marshal wrote to the new high command that he considered it probable that disorganization would now lame Russia's Army, which would no longer be capable of any major effort. Thus large parts of our forces in the East would become available so that we could now implement the offensive against Italy which he'd planned in January. But events didn't unfold as quickly as he expected.

#### **4. Activity of the Italians**

During February there were concerns in Italy about an impending Austrian offensive from the Isonzo. The high command therefore took the heavy artillery groups which had been in reserve on the south Tyrolean front and shifted them to the Julian front. At the same time they ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies not to give up a foot of ground.

At the start of March General Cadorna stated very firmly that any offensive operations must be avoided until the Central Powers were under attack and pinned down by the French-English and Russian-Romanian armies, which thus would dispel any danger to Italy. This declaration aroused deep suspicion in the camp of the Western Powers. On 21 March General Nivelle demanded that the French War Ministry should intervene through diplomatic channels with the Italian government; the latter should put pressure on General Cadorna to carry out the inter-allied agreements. "An offensive by the Italian Army is indispensable for the success of the entire combined war effort and also for

Italy itself."<sup>94</sup>

This measure had no effect on the thinking of the Italian high command. In March events took place that caused anxiety not only in Italy, but also in France and England - the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, and the almost simultaneous withdrawal of the Germans from the bulge in their Western front to a shorter position. The Western Powers found themselves obliged to postpone the start of their offensive.

Cadorna considered it highly probable that powerful German forces released from other tasks might join the Aus-Hung. Army for a joint attack on Italy. Persistent rumors of an impending German march through Switzerland, which in 1917 led once more to a partial mobilization by the Confederation, and the news that GO Conrad had taken command in Tyrol both reinforced fears that Italy might be struck from the rear. Therefore new entrenchments were constructed and occupied on the border with Switzerland, and four divisions held in readiness opposite southern Tyrol and in the area between Vicenza, Monselice and Padua. There was opposition in political circles, especially on the part of the Socialists, like that which had occurred in 1916 during the Austrian offensive in south Tyrol. Cadorna had to hasten to Rome to calm the most anxious politicians.

At the end of March the Chief of the English Army's General Staff, General Robertson, came to Italy. Cadorna urged him to prepare to support Italy's defenses directly in the event of an emergency. But he received the same answer which he'd gotten several weeks earlier from General Nivelle.<sup>95</sup> Finally in April, when General Foch came to Italian HQ along with the new French War Minister Painlevé, an agreement was reached under which Italy received 16 batteries of English 15 cm howitzers and 35 batteries of French heavy guns.

To be ready meanwhile for any eventuality, in the first days of April the Italian high command created a general reserve, ten divisions strong, taken mainly from the armies on the Isonzo. At the same time the front on the Sieben Gemeinde plateau was somewhat reinforced. When the armies of the Western powers finally assaulted the German front in mid-April, the Italians breathed easier. Apparently the Italian General Staff was

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94 de Civrieux, "Pages de verité. L'offensive de 1917 et le commandement du général Nivelle" (Paris, 1919), p. 124.

Alberti, "L'azione militare italiana nella guerra mondiale" (Rome, 1924), pp. 70 ff.

95 Cadorna, "La guerra" (new 1934 edition), p. 352

relieved of concern regarding an Austrian-German offensive. Now, on 19 April, they issued orders for their own attack, once more on the Isonzo. But some weeks would pass before the fighting began.

The Italian Army was numerically stronger for this new offensive than they'd been the year before. During the winter 151 new battalions were formed, of which 96 were used to create 8 new divisions. The artillery was augmented by 52 light, 166 heavy and 44 mountain batteries. The number of very heavy guns had increased from 1180 to 2100 between May 1916 and May 1917. Many machine guns and large trench mortars were also available.

But the Italian sources all agree that this numerical increase was accompanied by a decline in the troops' fighting spirit. "Their morale could hardly be characterized as mediocre."<sup>96</sup> The decline was first evident from the increasing number of malingerers and deserters. Then in March one unit, and in May an entire brigade, displayed signs of open disobedience. The high command now intervened with a firm hand to prevent this destructive tendency from spreading. But these isolated instances were only a foretaste of the crisis that would beset the Italian Army in fall 1917. In the May battle the troops still fought with good morale.

### ***C. Events in France and the Balkans***

#### **1. Winter and spring 1917 on the Western front**

While fighting in the French theater of operations during February and March stayed at a moderate level, there was very busy activity behind the front. Between Arras and Soissons the Germans prepared for their retreat by building the Siegfried position and by systematically destroying the roads, rail lines and towns - in short, everything which could be useful to the enemy. To coordinate the operations of the French and English armies, their commanders held a conference on 26 February at Calais. The two Minister Presidents (Briand and Lloyd-George) were able to overcome the reservations of the English generals to having their armies placed under overall French command. Generalissimo Nivelle was given the assignment of bringing the operations of the attacking English and French armies into

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<sup>96</sup> Baj Macario, "Kuk - 611 - Vodice - Mt. Santo" (Milan, 1933), p. 32

harmony. The English were supposed to attack at the start of April from Arras toward Cambrai, while the French wanted to strike somewhat later over the Aisne, breaking through the German positions toward the north.

At the end of February, the English intelligence service was already reporting that the Germans were about to retreat from the bulge in their positions that pointed toward Compiegne. But Nivelle didn't want to believe them. Moreover, on 6 March he fed the English the hope that their common offensive was planned so that even if the Germans retreated to the strong position which aerial reconnaissance had identified in the rear, their line would still be rolled up in both the English and French sectors.<sup>97</sup>

On 16 March the Germans disappeared along the entire sector between Arras and Soissons. Three quarters of the front that was the target of the offensive was now eliminated; only on the extreme wings of the attacking groups was the original plan still relevant. A new decision was needed, especially since the unrest in Russia and Cadorna's resistance were very substantially altering the prospects for a simultaneous offensive by all the Entente countries. Although the United States of America declared war on Germany on 6 April, help from the Army of the Union, which was still being built up, couldn't be expected for some time.

Also, in mid-March there was a change of government in France. Ribot succeeded Briand as Minister President, and he brought Painlevé into the cabinet as War Minister. The latter demanded that Nivelle should take account of the altered military situation. Politicians also raised objections to the impending offensive, which promised no chance of success. In a council of war at Compiegne, which took place under the President of the Republic, Nivelle even had to defend his plan of attack against the doubts of his own army Group commanders. But nothing could shake Nivelle's confidence. After his offer to resign was turned down, he stated that the English would open their infantry attack, as planned, on 9 April. The main offensive by the French was scheduled for 16 April.

The onslaught of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> British Armies won a substantial initial success, mainly because the German reserves had been held back too far in the rear. To keep the front from being broken, German divisions east and northeast of Arras were systematically

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<sup>97</sup> Churchill, "World Crisis 1916-18" (German translation; Vienna, 1928), Vol. I, p. 267

withdrawn about five kilometers. Here their resistance quickly stiffened. Three further attacks in April and at the start of May were repulsed, and hardly any further ground was lost.

The French had assembled an enormous force. 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Armies were in the front line, with 10<sup>th</sup> Army and two cavalry corps behind them to exploit the breakthrough which Nivelle was sure to occur. Moreover, 1<sup>st</sup> Army was stationed on the Aisne as a strategic reserve. The French intended to push through the German front between Soissons and Reims. The Germans were clearly aware of the danger; they had taken all necessary defensive measures, inserting 1<sup>st</sup> Army - which had been pulled from the line when the front was pulled back - between 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies.

After ten days of artillery preparation the French did move forward on 16 April. But already on the evening of the second day of the battle the fate of the attempted breakthrough was decided - it was a failure. Although Nivelle had promised never to allow the fighting to degenerate into an exhausting battle of attrition like the Somme, he now decided to continue to carry out attacks on a smaller scale. These attacks began at the end of April and were renewed many times in May, but never gained any decisive success. For the French the battle was finally lost. <sup>98</sup>

This misfortune, which cost the French 61,000 men killed in April and May, undermined Nivelle's position. On 15 May he was replaced by General Petain, who'd recently been made Chief of the General Staff; Petain's new Chief of Staff was General Foch.<sup>99</sup> Petain inherited difficult problems; the inner cohesion of the French Army began to break up.

## **2. The Balkans through the end of May 1917**

### **a. Winter in Albania**

#### The balance of forces

As previously, GdI Trollmann's XIX Corps was stationed in Albania. Its 47 ID (under GM Ritter von Weiss-Tihanyi) held the Vojusa front with 14 Mtn Bde; parts of the Brigade farther east guarded the area on both sides of the Osum. Still farther east,

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<sup>98</sup> Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 83 ff.

<sup>99</sup> Palat, p. 379

Albanian irregular troops commanded by Salih Butka blocked the roads leading west and south from Korca. The other mountain brigade of 47 ID (the 20<sup>th</sup>) was stationed in the extremely barren mountains southeast of Elbasan; two battalions were farther ahead in the sector between Lakes Ochrida and Malik. The 20 Mtn Bde thus was in contact with a group under German Col. Thierry on the western wing of the Bulgarian-German front. This group, with 3 Bulgarian Cav Bde, an Austrian Landsturm battalion and two Aus-Hung. mountain batteries, blocked the peninsula between Lakes Ochrida and Prespa. Coast defense on the Adriatic was the responsibility of 211 Lst Inf Bde (which also belonged to 47 ID) and to Col. Babic's Group (assigned directly to XIX Corps HQ).

The Aus-Hung. troops on the Vojusa were opposed by the Italian Expeditionary Corps (the reinforced 38 ID). Korca was occupied by a French brigade. In the area by the Albanian lakes parts of 156 French ID guarded the western wing of General Sarrail's Army of the Orient.

At the start of January Sarrail found himself compelled to pay more attention to his western wing. This was because of the need to guard the new supply line running from Santi Quaranti through Korca, and to cut off contact between the Central Powers and Greece through the lake region. Therefore the newly-arrived 76 French ID was sent to this area. Since the Italians were also reinforcing their Expeditionary Corps with an infantry and a territorial brigade plus several batteries, the balance of forces shifted against the k.u.k. XIX Corps. The latter was in a very unfavorable situation anyway because of the almost insurmountable difficulty of bringing supplies forward and the poor health of the troops. The Corps was reinforced by one Landsturm battalion, which was hardly much help. To at least increase fire power along the land front, the mountain batteries which had been guarding the coast were replaced by guns from the Skodra (Scutari) fortress, and were assigned to the mountain infantry brigades.

#### Actions from January through April

The increased pressure by the French in southern Albania was already noticeable soon after New Year's Day. But the attacks between 10 and 14 January against the Cerava position (south of Lake Ochrida) were repulsed by 20 Mtn Bde with support from Thierry's Group. Only the impressive "Monastery Heights" on the southern shores of Lake Ochrida had to be abandoned to French colonial troops.



Small-scale fighting flared up from the end of January in the mountains west of Korca, since the French wanted to throw back the Albanians who were a constant threat to this town. Salih Butka's bands were relieved by Border Jaeger Bn # 4 and shifted to the south; they were still able to block the enemy's supply line leading to Liaskovik at the Cafa Kjarit Pass southwest of Korca. When 76 French ID intervened in mid-February, the gallant Albanians finally had to pull back. Thus the overland connection with Greece was severed. Therefore the k.u.k. high command closed the station at Pogradec where a German officer had been enlisting Greek volunteers who supported the Central Powers. The Entente had gained another success in their efforts to impose their will on Greece by force.

But the Albanian companies, reinforced by newly-formed bands, once more thrust toward Korca and in see-saw fighting during April were finally able to control the Moskopolje Heights.<sup>100</sup> Behind them the eastern group of 14 Mtn Bde, which had been further strengthened, guarded the roads leading to Gramsi in the area between the Tomorica and Devoli Rivers. This eastern force was now designated "Group I/47" and commanded by Col. von Spaics, who was placed directly under 47<sup>th</sup> Division's HQ. 20 Mtn Bde (including the advanced group on the Cerava which now was led by Col. Böttner) was ordered to at least hold onto the Kamia Ridge and the narrow low ground by Pogradec if the enemy eventually attacked in overwhelming strength. Arrangements were made with Group Thierry for mutual support. To relieve 47 ID of some of their responsibilities, the two coastal defense groups were taken away. They were placed under GM von Eckhardt's new "Albanian Coastal Sector" HQ. 211 Lst Inf Bde was put in the Corps' reserve.

Italy's protest against the occupation of Albanian soil by French troops compelled 76 ID to halt their attacks against 20 Mtn Bde. The French Division shifted at the start of March to the peninsula between Lakes Ochrida and Prespa, intending from here to threaten the western wing of the Bulgarian-German front and thus to make easier the planned capture of the heights in the area north of Monastir. The attacks by 76 ID began on 12 March and reached their greatest strength on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. After committing several Turkish battalions and a mountain battery, Col. Thierry was able to hold onto his entire position. The Aus-Hung. units had provided useful cooperation in this fighting. The actions north of Monastir were concluded on 27 March with a counterattack by German battalions; except for the loss of Height # 1248, which dominated the city, this combat was also

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<sup>100</sup>Veith, "Der Feldzug in Albanien" (in Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 532)

successful.

At the start of April, XIX Corps HQ limited 47 ID's responsibility to the areas west of a line drawn through the Mali Siloves and Tomor mountain ridges and the Osum valley. The troops stationed east of the line made up "Group I/XIX" under FML von Gerhauser.

## **b. The spring battles in Macedonia**

Winter passed on the Macedonian front without any noteworthy developments. But the Bulgarians and Germans had to prepare for an enemy onslaught at the start of spring. They did so with confidence, because a simultaneous intervention by parts of the Russian and Romanian armies from the north was hardly probable due to the unrest in Russia. This factor, coupled with the reluctance of England and Italy to sacrifice themselves for French interest in the Balkans and the exhaustion of the Serbs, prevented Sarrail from utilizing his numerical superiority to deliver a great, decisive blow. His original plan, formulated after the Chantilly Conference, was to weaken his opponents' front with local attacks, and in case of success to advance with his reserves through the passes either by Rupel or Demirkapija toward Sofia. But this plan was presently of little use. According to the guidelines issued at Calais at the end of February, the Orient Army was supposed to pin down as many Central Powers' units as possible to benefit the Western front. General Sarrail hoped that he could most easily accomplish this by threatening the Bulgarians' lines of communication in the Vardar valley (in general in the direction of Negotin and of Gradsko).

When a date was set for the start of the great offensive in the West, Sarrail was instructed to also attack, on 15 April. Thus it seemed that even if Russia had fallen out and Italy still was holding back, at least operations would be coordinated between the Western and Balkan fronts. But for various reasons the Orient Army was also unable to stick to the schedule. A thrust intended as a diversion wasn't launched until 25 April; it involved an attack by two British divisions between Lake Doiran and Vardar preceded by a smaller operation, supported by naval forces, between Lake Tahino and the sea. The British won only an initial success which, since it wasn't exploited, had no bearing on the course of the offensive by the main forces. This was started by the Vardar Group (consisting of French and Venizelist Greeks) on the 5<sup>th</sup>; because of ongoing snow storms the Cerna

Group (Serbs, French, Italians and Russians) couldn't attack until 9 May.<sup>101</sup> By this time a large part of the terrain which the English had won was lost again to Bulgarian counter-attacks. Nevertheless the inner wings of the Vardar Group and of 2<sup>nd</sup> Serbian Army were able to make a little progress.

The elan of the Cerna Group's attack, which started on 9 May after prolonged artillery fire, was dampened by tidings about the fate of the Entente offensive in France. Even the Serbs' hitherto undiminished eagerness to attack now left something to be desired; this was partly due to their close relationship with the war-weary Russians. Also the constant decline in the Serbs' numerical strength had an effect. 12,000 Aus-Hung. prisoners of Slavic nationality, who were intended to fill their ranks, didn't reach Salonika until mid-May. Thus it's no wonder that the Bulgarian-German Army Group under GdA Scholtz was able to repulse the offensive without losing any ground worth mentioning. There were only 24 German battalions under Scholtz, along with a strong force of artillery and special troops. On 24 May Sarrail broke off the futile battle. A French attack near the Albanian lakes on 8 May had also collapsed in front of the Aus-Hung. and Bulgarian positions.

The Italian Expeditionary Corps, now designated XVI Corps, were content to extend their front east to Herseg (south of Korca) and thus close the gap between themselves and the French western wing. The Italians also sent units south over the Greek border and occupied the city of Janina without encountering resistance.

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<sup>101</sup>Yugoslav Great General Staff, "Serbia's Great War to Liberate the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" (in Serbo-Croatian; Belgrade, 1924), Vol. XXIV, pp. 220 ff.

The opposing forces in May

The following were the outline orders of battle at the start of May.

**Aus-Hung. units in the western Balkans**

XIX Corps

Commander = GdI Trollmann

Chief of Staff = Col. Schattel

- . 47<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Weiss-Tihanyi)
  - . 14 Mtn Bde (Col. von Szivo)
  - . k.u. 211 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Kirschhofer)
  - . Col. von Spaics' Group
  - . Col. Ritter von Trezic's Artillery Bde
- . FML von Gerhauser's Group
  - . Reinforced 20 Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Hoffmann)
  - . Albanian volunteer groups
- . Albanian Coast Defense Command (GM von Eckhardt)
- . Scutari [Skodra] Fortress Command (GM Ritter von Bolberitz)

k.u.k. Military Government in Serbia

General Governor = GdI Freih. von Rhemen

C/Staff = Col. Kerchnawe

Strength was 13 bns, 2 gendarme bns, 13 gendarme detachments, 3¼ sqdns, 3 batties, 54 fixed guns

k.u.k. Military Government in Montenegro

General Governor = FML Edler von Weber

C/Staff = Col. Hubka

- . Occupation troops - 11 bns, 17 gendarme detachments, 1½ sqdns, 4 fixed guns
- . Coast defense troops - k.u. 212 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Koneczny) with 5½ bns, 3½ batties, 37 fixed guns

Troops of the Commanding General in B-H-D

Commander = GdI von Sarkotic

C/Staff = Lt Col. Landt

- . North Dalmatia Coastal Sector (FML Freih. von Wucherer) - 5 bns, 10 coast guard detachments, 3 batties, 24 fixed guns
- . South Dalmatia Coastal Sector (FML Haala) - 3 bns, 2 coast guard detachments, 2½ batties, 42 fixed guns
- . Cattaro Military Harbor (FZM von Rollinger) - 8 bns, 4 batties, 253 fixed guns
- . Other garrison troops - 8 bns, 2½ batties, 297 fixed guns

**Italian units in Albania**

XVI Corps had the reinforced 38 ID (equivalent to about 5  
brigades) and the 9 Cav Bde

**The Bulgarian-German front in Macedonia**

Overall commander was Bulgarian King Ferdinand  
C/Staff = General Zekov

Army Group Scholtz (Prussian GdA von Scholtz)

. 11<sup>th</sup> German Army (Prussian G.Lt von Winckler) - LXII Corps (1, 6, 8 Bulgarian ID), LXI Corps (302 German ID; 2 and 3 Bulgarian ID); Bulgarian-Macedonian Mountain Div

. 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army (G.Lt Geshov) - 5, 9 Bulgarian ID; 101 German ID

2<sup>nd</sup> Bulgarian Army (G.Lt Todorov) - 7, 10 Bulgarian ID; 11 [Macedonian] Bulgarian ID; 3 Cav Bde; 50 Turkish ID

**The Entente armies in the Orient**

Commander = French General Sarrail

. French Army of the Orient - 9 inf divs, 1 cav bde

. English Army (XII and XVI Corps) - 6½ inf divs, 1 naval bde, 1 cav bde

. Serbian Army (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies) - 6 inf, 1 cav div

. Italian contingent - 35<sup>th</sup> ID

. Russian contingent - Two brigades

. Venizelist Greek contingent - 1 inf div

**c. The Serbian uprising in the Morava area**

After the allies conquered Serbia in late autumn of 1915, they hadn't fully pacified the country, especially its mountainous and wooded southern portion. Thus partisan bands were able to form, especially in the Bulgarian occupation zone in southeast Serbia where the remaining men capable of bearing arms hadn't been interned. When the strength of the occupying garrison was reduced after Romania entered the war, partisan activity substantially increased. It received a further boost when from Salonika an uprising was prepared that would break out at the same time as the spring offensive by the Orient Army. But because the Bulgarians announced at the start of 1917 that they would register Serbs who were eligible for military service, the partisans rose up at the end of February. About 1000 men fell upon a Bulgarian company at Kursumlje and destroyed it, drove back at Prokuplje some troops sent as reinforcements, and advanced toward Nish. Now the Bulgarians turned to the k.u.k. Military General Governor at Belgrade for help.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Kerchnawe, "Bandenkrieg und Bandenbekämpfung im serbischen

GdI Freih. von Rhemen, the General Governor, sent all available units to suppress the rebellion that was flaring up along the border of his area of responsibility. These were three March companies from replacement battalions stationed in Serbia, twelve guard companies, a gendarmerie battalion, a battery, and a Landsturm battalion that was created from railroad security troops. Since this didn't seem a sufficient force, the AOK sent to Serbia from the Isonzo front the IR 102 (two battalions) and a mountain battery, and from Bosnia the Border Jaeger Battalion III plus a battalion apiece from the military police and Etappen troops. All these units (5100 riflemen, 12 guns and 40 machine guns) were placed under Lt Col. von Jarmy, who was attached to the Military Government.

The first blow was delivered from Brus toward Blace. On 15 March Jarmy's force captured Kursumlje, one or two days before Bulgarian reinforcements also hurried to the scene. Then the Komitajis were encircled in the mountains east of Raska. On 18 March the rebels had been cleared from all of the Bulgarians' western occupation zone. Order was restored, if only temporarily. IR # 102, which had been very distinguished, was returned to the Isonzo.

### **3. Major command decisions through the start of May**

#### The Entente

The general offensive on all fronts, which the Entente powers had planned at the conferences of Chantilly, Rome, Petersburg and Calais, had failed to materialize. The fall of the Tsar had created an entirely new situation in Russia, where the Army was for the time being unable to attack. Thus the Entente's entire Eastern front remained dormant. Italy until now was playing a waiting game. On 19 April Cadorna did decide that since all the German reserves were pinned down by the Anglo-French thrusts in France, he needn't fear an Austro-German flank attack from Tyrol; he therefore scheduled a new onslaught against the Aus-Hung. Isonzo front. But this offensive couldn't begin until mid-May, so Cadorna didn't meet his commitment to attack within three weeks of his allies. Also the achievements of Sarrail's multi-national Orient Army didn't meet the expectations of the Western powers. The main body of his force did attack on 5 and 9 May; but the operation as a whole, in which assaults were made on

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Okkupationsgebiete", in Mil. wiss. Mitt. (Vienna, 1929), pp. 20 ff. and 185 ff.

various sectors points along the front without any focal point, could hardly lead to any decisive success.

Only the French and English in the West lived up to their commitments by attacking in mid-April. But after an initial success they gained nothing of substance. They didn't achieve the breakthrough they were seeking. Their objectives, which included points up to the lower Meuse, remained far behind the German front.

To find a way out of their difficult situation, the leading statesmen and generals of England and France conferred in Paris on 4 May. At their meeting they were also concerned about the unexpectedly great successes of the German submarines.

The participants were fully aware of the military situation as outlined above. They decided that despite all the current problems they would continue to attack on the Western front so that the Germans wouldn't gain the impression that they'd won a defensive victory. The Entente no longer had the means to initiate a major new offensive. However, by localized attacks they planned to pin down the Germans' reserves and exhaust their front-line troops. Thus, the leaders of the Western powers hoped, they'd pass through the critical time until the American Army could intervene. But they couldn't hide the fact that this wouldn't take place for months. Another open question was whether at that time there would be sufficient shipping to transport the American troops.

The French Generalissimo Nivelle, whose position was already quite shaky, agreed with the demand - mainly from the English - for new attacks but he had great concerns. The French high command were aware of the signs of deep-seated discontent in their Army, which was caused by the heavy casualties in the April battle and by the disappointment within the regiments when they hadn't achieved the victory that they'd been promised. France was facing a difficult hour. Meanwhile the English decided to switch their main effort to Flanders; their objective was to capture the Belgian coast, which the Germans were using as a base for their U-boats and for air attacks against England. Weeks would pass before the armies of the Western powers moved forward in a new offensive.

### The Germans

The German Western armies could look back with satisfaction on the defensive successes they'd won east of Arras and on the



Aisne. But all of their available reserve troops had been committed. Although the German Crown Prince wasn't aware of the breakdown of discipline in the French Army, he suggested that the victory already won should be followed with a counterattack. However, the German OHL had to turn the idea down because of the shortage of battle-ready units.

The German defensive victory had been possible only because the Russians stayed quiet. Col. Hoffmann, the Chief of Staff of the German Eastern Command, reported in a conference at Kreuznach on 17 April that the morale and fighting strength of the Russian Army was already greatly shaken by the Revolution. But there was no attack by the allies. The German commanders did consider whether they might accelerate the deterioration with an offensive. But the units stationed in the East weren't strong enough for the job and, as already noted, the German OHL had no reserves. A major offensive was impossible.

This was consistent with the ideas of the German political leadership. They greeted the Russian Revolution, which they had silently expected for a long time, because they hoped that Russia would soon leave the ranks of the enemy powers. Now they were concerned that an attack might halt rather than accelerate the disintegration of the Russian Army; therefore in general the Russians shouldn't be antagonized but rather encouraged to seek peace. This was also the opinion of Emperor Charles, which he expressed in an audience he gave to the German plenipotentiary GM Cramon on 26 April.<sup>103</sup>

The inter-allied high command therefore believed at the start of May that there was no need to deviate from the original plan of making the main military effort at sea. Their belief was reinforced by the achievements of the submarines, whose attacks were like sorties from an enormous, besieged fortress. In fact during the first three months of their unrestricted employment the U-boats had even exceeded their target - the destruction of 600,000 tons of enemy shipping each month. 781,000 tons were sunk in February, 885,000 in March and then 1,091,000 in April.<sup>104</sup> The submarine war was greatly adding to the enemy's difficulties in shipping food and supplies; if their armies did finally become worn out through fruitless assaults, perhaps a counter-offensive could be mounted at a decisive point. Until then the armies of the Central Powers awaited with complete confidence the next onslaught of their enemies.

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103Cramon, "Unser österreichisch-ungarische Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg" (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Berlin, 1928), p. 118

104Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, p. 155



## **IV. The May and June Battles in the Southwest**

### **A. *The Tenth Battle of the Isonzo, 12 May to 5 June***

#### **1. Preparations of both sides**

##### **a. The Italian plan of attack**

The Italian high command utilized the significant increase in the number of units in 1917 to assemble a much greater mass of troops and equipment on the Isonzo. On the other hand, the strategic situation of the Italian Army had been much less favorable since May 1916 than previously. This was because the many attempts to recover the solid wall of the Arsiero and Asiago plateaus (which had provided reliable security in the rear) had been unsuccessful. Thereafter the high command felt compelled to permanently deploy substantial forces in front of south Tyrol. Attention was given to planners who suggested that before the great Isonzo battle scheduled for the spring, an attack should be launched against the Austrians stationed in the threatening position opposite Thiene and Bassano so as to drive them back into the pass by Rovereto. Thus two plans were developed side-by-side - one for the main offensive on the Isonzo and another for an assault on south Tyrol. The latter received its final form in orders issued by the high command on 19 April. It envisioned a pincers attack against the bastion of the position in the highlands of south Tyrol; one group would thrust against the mighty Col santo and the other against the mountain complex crowned by Mt Kempel. This plan would be carried out at a later date than the tenth battle of the Isonzo.

On the Isonzo front, in March the Italians had already taken the first step in preparing for the upcoming decisive battle. The high command took VI and VIII Corps, as well as 12 ID and XXIV Corps (the latter held in reserve) from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; with the title "Zona di Gorizia", these units were placed under G.Lt Capello. This General was strong-minded, but also self-willed. After capturing Görz, which won him the honorary title "Victor of Görz," he had been reprimanded for insubordination. Now he was restored to favor as the commander of an army. In April the II Corps was also placed under the Zona di Gorizia. As compensation, the area of authority of the diminished 2<sup>nd</sup> Army

was extended north to include XII Corps, which was stationed on the Carinthian border and hitherto had been autonomous as the "Carnic Group." Thus G.Lt duca d'Aosta's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was stationed from the Adriatic to the Wippach. Then the "Gorizia Army" (as the Zona di Gorizia became known) held the lines from the Wippach to the town of Ajba near Canale. From here G.Lt Piacentini's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was stationed as far as Mt Peralba at the source of the Piave. Farther west and around Tyrol the areas held by 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies weren't altered.

At the start of May, the high command had available 59 division HQ, with 110 infantry brigades, 21 Bersaglieri regiments, 4 independent Bersaglieri battalions, 88 Alpini battalions, and several Finance Watch battalions.<sup>105</sup> There were also four cavalry divisions (plus cavalry with 38 ID in Albania). Total strength was about 850 battalions, 3000 light and 2100 heavy guns and 8200 machine guns.<sup>106</sup> Also there were heavy batteries lent by England and France, and - finally - 1500 large-caliber trench mortars.

About half of these units were scheduled to take part in the hopefully-decisive battle, which would be waged this time not just between the sea and Görz, but also farther north as far as a point beyond Canale; thus a front 50 km long was involved. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with 16 divisions (186 battalions) was given the primary assignment of breaking through; their first goals were Trsteli and Hermada. The Görz Army with 12 divisions (146 battalions) were supposed to capture the line Kuk # 611 - Mt Santo - Mt S Gabriele - Mt S Marco. In the strategic reserves were 40 battalions, 8 squadrons and 6 batteries in Friauli, which during the battle were joined by 30 more battalions which came from the Tyrol front to the Isonzo. 7 May was the day chosen to start the offensive.

According to the orders of 19 April, the operation would develop in three phases. First there would be powerful artillery fire along the entire front; then Capello's Army - after a short but

<sup>105</sup>In the series of Divisions the numbers 39, 40, 41 and 42 were left open, but the 60, 61, 62 and 63 ID existed. 35 ID, three brigades strong, was fighting in Macedonia. 38 ID, with two brigades, a Bersaglieri regiment, and militia units, was in southern Albania.

<sup>106</sup>The total of infantry battalions doesn't include an enormous series of Territorial Militia battalions or the numerous March battalions. The majority of infantry battalions at this time had three infantry companies apiece, plus a machine gun company with six weapons. The artillery strength is from Cadorna, "La guerra" (new edition, 1934), p. 342.

destructive bombardment - would make a surprise attack. Finally 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would strike the decisive blow. This sequence of events would deceive the Austro-Hungarians and cause them to divert the reserves in an erroneous direction. To facilitate the artillery operations, a number of heavy but easily moved batteries were placed in special groups so they could be switched between sectors. In the battle's first phase the Görz Army would have 53 of these batteries, while 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would have 18. In the second phase the group from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would shift quickly into the Görz area, where they would join the fighting. In the third (decisive) phase all these units would return, along with the groups from the Görz Army, so they could be placed under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

This maneuver was ingenious, but also very complicated; it left little room for improvisation during the entire operation.<sup>107</sup> Capello's Army would initially have 988 guns and about 400 trench mortars. In the decisive final phase the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would have no less than 47 very heavy, 733 heavy and 470 light guns as well as 584 trench mortars.<sup>108</sup>

### The order of battle

The following is a general order of battle for the Italian front on 12 May 1917; units engaged in the offensive were those of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Görz and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies.

Commander-in-Chief = King Victor Emanuel III  
C/Staff = G.Lt conte Cadorna

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

Commander = G.Lt conte Pecori-Giraldi

Had 8 inf divs, about 135 bns, 5 sqdns and 800 guns

- . III Corps
  - . 5 ID - Bde Marche [IR 55 & 56] plus about 5 Alpini bns
  - . 6 ID - Bdes Modena [IR 41 & 42], Chieti [IR 123 & 124]
  - . 4<sup>th</sup> Alpini Regt
  - . Also 4 territorial militia bns, 1 sqdn
- . V Corps
  - . 44 ID - Bdes Valtellina [IR 65 & 66], Liguria [IR 157 & 158]
  - . 55 ID - Bde Piceno [IR 235 & 236], 10<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group
  - . Also 1 territorial militia bn, 1 sqdn

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107Capello, "Note di Guerra" (Milan, 1920), Vol. II, pp. 52 ff.

Here General Capello delivered a sharp criticism of the plans.

108See "Rivista di Artiglieria e Genio", October 1933 issue, p.

1357

- . X Corps
  - . 9 ID - Bde Roma [IR 79 & 80], 4<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Bde [Regts 14 and 20]
  - . 32 ID - Just Bde Volturmo [IR 217 & 218] plus a militia bn
  - . Also 3 Alpini battalions, 2 sqdns
- . XXIX Corps
  - . 37 ID - Just Bde Macerata [IR 121 & 122]
  - . 59 ID - Just Bde Taro [IR 207 & 208] and some Alpini
  - . 6<sup>th</sup> Alpini Regt
  - . Also 1 Finance Watch bn, 6 militia bns, 1 sqdn

#### **6<sup>th</sup> Army** (on the plateaus)

Commander = G.Lt Mambretti

Had 10 inf divs, about 148 bns, 7 sqdns and 1200 guns

- . XVIII Corps
  - . 15 ID - Bdes Venezia [IR 83 & 84], Campania [IR 135 & 136]
  - . 51 ID - 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Bde [Regts 17 and 18]; independent 13<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt<sup>109</sup>
  - . Alpini Raggruppamento # 4
  - . Also 1 Finance Watch bn, 1 militia bn
- . XX Corps
  - . 13 ID - Bdes Catania [IR 145 & 146], Pesaro [IR 239 & 240]
  - . 29 ID - Bdes Arno [IR 213 & 214], Grosseto [IR 237 & 238]
  - . 52 ID - Consisted of 16 Alpini bns under Alpini Groups 1, 2, 8 and 9
  - . Independent Bdes Piemonte [IR 3 & 4], Aosta [IR 5 & 6]
  - . 9<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . Also 4 militia bns, 1 sqdn
- . XXII Corps
  - . 25 ID - Bdes Piacenza [IR 111 & 112], Sassari [IR 151 & 152]
  - . 57 ID - Bdes Porto Maurizio [IR 253 & 254], Veneto [IR 255 & 256]
  - . 5<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . Also 5 militia bns, 1 sqdn
- . XXVI Corps
  - . 12 ID - Bdes Casale [IR 11 & 12], Pavia [IR 27 & 28]
  - . 30 ID - Bdes Cremona [IR 21 & 22], Aquila [IR 269 & 270]
  - . A cavalry regt

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

Commander = G.Lt Nicolis di Robilant

<sup>109</sup>TRANSLATOR's NOTE: The reference to presence of 13<sup>th</sup>

Bersaglieri Regt in 51 ID is an error. Later the text also shows the Regt in its correct position in the order of battle (in 56 ID). I have been unable to ascertain the identity of the unit that was mis-labeled in 51 ID.

Had 4 inf divs, about 75 bns, 4 sqdns, 400 guns

- . I Corps
  - . 1 ID - Bdes Como [IR 23 & 24], Umbria [IR 53 & 54]
  - . 8<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . Also 3 Alpini bns, 1 Finance Watch bn, 4 dismounted sqdns
- . IX Corps
  - . 17 ID - Bdes Calabria [IR 59 & 60], Basilicata [IR 91 & 92]
  - . 18 ID - Bdes Reggio [IR 45 & 46], Alpi [IR 51 & 52]
  - . 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . Also 3 Alpini bns, 1 Finance Watch bn
- . Independent 56 ID - 13<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt; Alpini Raggrupamento # 3

**2<sup>nd</sup> Army** (Carnic Alps and upper Isonzo)

Commander = G.Lt Settimio Piacentini

Had 6 inf divs, about 85 bns, 3 sqdns and 450 guns

- . IV Corps
  - . 19 ID - Bdes Napoli [IR 75 & 76], Spezia [IR 125 & 126]
  - . 43 ID - Bdes Genova [IR 97 & 98], Etna [IR 223 & 224]
  - . 46 ID - Bdes Caltanissetta [IR 147 & 148], Alessandria [IR 155 & 156]
  - . 50 ID - Bde Friuli [IR 87 & 88]; 19<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . 2<sup>nd</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . Also 3 Alpini bns, 4 militia bns, 1 sqdn
- . XII Corps
  - . 26 ID - Bde Lazio [IR 131 & 132]; 3<sup>rd</sup> Alpini Group (8 bns), 16<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
  - . 36 ID - Bde Benevento [IR 133 & 134]; 15<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt, 7<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group

**Zona di Gorizia** ["Army of Görz"]

Commander = G.Lt Capello

Had 12 inf divs, 146 bns, 988 guns, 402 trench mortars

- . II Corps
  - . 3 ID - Bdes Udine [IR 95 & 96], Firenze [IR 127 & 128]
  - . 47 ID - 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Bde [Regts 6 & 12]; independent 4<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt; 6<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group (of 4 bns)
  - . 53 ID - Bdes Teramo [IR 241 & 242], Girgenti [IR 243 & 244]
  - . 60 ID - Bde Avellino [IR 231 & 232]; independent 21<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
- . VI Corps
  - . 8 ID - Bdes Palermo [IR 67 & 68], Emilia [IR 119 & 120] (during the battle "Emilia" was replaced by Bde Livorno)
  - . 10 ID - Bdes Ionio [IR 221 & 222], Campobasso [IR 229 & 230]
  - . 24 ID - Bdes Abruzzi [IR 57 & 58], Milano [IR 159 & 160]

- (during the battle "Milano" was replaced by Bde Emilia)
- . VIII Corps
  - . 7 ID - Bdes Ravenna [IR 37 & 38], Messina [IR 93 & 94]  
(during the battle "Messina" was replaced by Bde Treviso)
  - . 11 ID - Bdes Cuneo [IR 7 & 8], Treviso [IR 115 & 116]  
(during the battle "Treviso" was replaced by Bde Messina)
  - . 48 ID - Bdes Taranto [IR 143 & 144], Lambro [IR 205 & 206]
- . XXIV Corps
  - . 23 ID - Bdes Livorno [IR 33 & 34], Elba [IR 261 & 262]  
(during the battle "Livorno" left and wasn't replaced)
  - . 49 ID - Bdes Re [IR 1 & 2], Puglie [IR 71 & 72] ("Puglie"  
moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on 23 May)



**3<sup>rd</sup> Army** (on the Karst plateau)

Commander = G.Lt duca d'Aosta

Had 17 inf divs, 162 bns, 1250 guns, 584 trench mortars

- . VII Corps
  - . 16 ID - Bde Bergamo [IR 25 & 26], 2<sup>nd</sup> Bersaglieri Bde [7 & 11 Regts]
  - . 45 ID - Bdes Toscana [IR 77 & 78], Arezzo [IR 225 & 226]
  - . 62 ID - Bdes Murge [IR 259 & 260], Gaëta [IR 263 & 264]
  - . 29<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regt
- . XI Corps
  - . 4 ID - Bdes Barletta [IR 137 & 138], Bisagno [IR 209 & 210] (Reinforced during the battle by Bde Parma)
  - . 21 ID - Bdes Regina [IR 9 & 10], Pisa [IR 29 & 30]
  - . 22 ID - Bdes Brescia [IR 19 & 20], Ferrara [IR 47 & 48]
- . XIII Corps
  - . 14 ID - Its bdes (Acqui & Pinerolo) were detached elsewhere in the Corps
  - . 31 ID - Bdes Bologna [IR 39 & 40], Lombardia [IR 73 & 74] plus Acqui [IR 17 & 18]
  - . 33 ID - Bdes Padova [IR 117 & 118], Mantova [IR 113 & 114]
  - . 34 ID - Bdes Salerno [IR 89 & 90], Catanzaro [IR 141 & 142] plus Pinerolo [IR 13 & 14]
- . XIV Corps
  - . 2 ID - Bdes Parma [IR 49 & 50], Tevere [IR 215 & 216] (Bde Parma left during the battle, not replaced)
  - . 28 ID - Bdes Bari [IR 139 & 140], Trapani [IR 149 & 150]
- . XXIII Corps
  - . 54 ID - Bdes Lario [IR 233 & 234], Cosenza [IR 243 & 244]
  - . 61 ID - Bdes Sardegna [Granatieri Regts 1 & 2], Bari [IR 139 & 140]
- . XXV Corps
  - . 58 ID - Bdes Pallanza [IR 249 & 250], Massa Carrara [IR 251 & 252]
  - . 63 ID - Bdes Rovigo [IR 227 & 228], Lecce [IR 265 & 266]

**Reserves of the high command**

- . 20 ID (by Görz) - Bdes Pistoia [IR 35 & 36], Novara [IR 153 & 154], Tortona [IR 257 & 258]; 12<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group (of 4 bns). (The Pistoia and Novara Bdes moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army; Bde Tortona and the 12<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group moved to the Zona di Gorizia.)
- . 2 Cav Div - 3 Cav Bde [Regts 7 & 10], 4 Cav Bde [Regts 6 & 25] (the Bdes were detached to XXIV Corps); 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Bicycle Bns
- . Inf Bde Sesia (in Görz garrison) - IR 201 & 202

**Reinforcements for the 10<sup>th</sup> Isonzo battle**

The following units arrived and were deployed during the

fighting:

- . 27 ID HQ (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army) joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Army [XIV Corps] on 24 May
- . Bde Forli (from 6<sup>th</sup> Army) joined the Zona di Gorizia [8 ID] on 17 May [IR 43 & 44]
- . Bde Perugia (from 6<sup>th</sup> Army) joined the Zona di Gorizia on 17 May, then on the 21<sup>st</sup> moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (not engaged) [IR 129 & 130]
- . Bde Siracusa (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army) joined the Zona di Gorizia on 18 May, then on the 21<sup>st</sup> moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (not engaged) [IR 245 & 246]
- . Bde Verona (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army) joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Army [45 ID] on 25 May [IR 85 & 86]
- . Bde Ancona (from 1<sup>st</sup> Army) joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Army [20 ID] on 28 May [IR 69 & 70]

### **b. The k.u.k. 5<sup>th</sup> Army makes ready**

When April came to an end, the time had come when every day we had to be prepared for the great Italian offensive. 5<sup>th</sup> Army was well-armed and ready for action. Never had GO von Boroevic had such a mighty instrument at his disposal.

#### The deployment

The Army's front stretched for 67 km from the high mountain massif of the Krn to the Adriatic coast. It was divided into four large sectors.

. Sector I had its northern end anchored on the cliffs of the Krn. To the south the positions descended sharply into the Isonzo valley; they crossed the river twice where they made up the Tolmein bridgehead. Then they ran along the eastern bank of the Isonzo. The southern boundary of Sector I's 24 km front was at the village of Auzza (by the mouth of the Avscek Brook). The Sector was held by FML Scotti's XV Corps, consisting of 50 and 1 ID with a total of 19 infantry battalions and 40 batteries.

. South of Auzza the positions of Sector II.a followed the course of the Isonzo where it bends to the west. At Salcano, where the river after another sharp turn enters the plains of Görz, was the southern boundary of the Sector's 20 km front. It was defended by FML von Fabini's XVII Corps. At the end of April this HQ commanded 22 battalions (of which 13 were Landsturm) and 42 batteries. Shortly before

the battle, FML Fabini received 5 more Landsturm battalions. Nevertheless, it must be said that his Sector was relatively weak, especially the northern part where 62 ID was stationed. The situation was somewhat better on the southern wing, where 57 ID held fast to the northern bastions of the Görz basin, the high ground of Mt Santo and Mt S Gabriele.

. Sector II.b was 11 km long, between Salcano and the Wippach. It was held by the strong XVI Corps (35 infantry battalions and 85 batteries); FML Kralicek had taken command of the Corps in March, succeeding FZM Wurm.

. The defenses of Sector III, which included the positions on the Karst plateau, were particularly strong. This winding front of 19 km was held by FML von Schariczzer's VII Corps and by FML Edler von Schenk's XXIII Corps. Each of these units had three divisions and was subordinate to the Sector III HQ. FZM Wurm commanded the Sector, with Col. Edler von Körner as his Chief of Staff and Col. Janecka as the artillery commander. The strength of the units on the Karst plateau was 69 battalions and 174 batteries.

Thus at the start of May there was a total of 126 battalions and 301 batteries on the 50 km long front between Auzza and the sea which soon would become a battlefield. The units standing ready behind the front were:

- . 24 Lst Mtn Bde, with five battalions at Ternova;
- . 106 Lst ID, which had recently arrived and whose 12 battalions and 8 batteries were re-arming in the area southeast of Idria; and
- . four more divisions (a total of 49 battalions) on the Karst plateau, roughly in the Comen-Sesana-Trieste triangle: 43 Sch Div<sup>110</sup> and 16, 48 and 10 ID. (The latter was placed directly under FZM Wurm.) The batteries of these four divisions were deployed ahead of them in the positions.

#### Speculation about the Italians' plans

The concentration of units on the Karst plateau shows clearly that the high command anticipated that the enemy would make their main effort on the southern wing. This conclusion was to a large

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<sup>110</sup>On 1 May 1917 the Emperor re-designated all the k.k. Landwehr infantry units as "Schützen" (riflemen), abbreviated here as "Sch." The Tyrol Landes-Schützen became Kaiser-Schützen (Imperial Riflemen) and the k.k. Landwehr Uhlans became Reitende Schützen (Mounted Riflemen).

extent based on intelligence reports about the situation of the opposing forces. It was known that the Italian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was bunched together in the area between the mouth of the Wippach and the sea, and that General Capello had taken command of a special army around Görz. It wasn't known that in April Capello's area of responsibility had been extended north as far as the area by Ronzina. This information would have been an indicator that greater attention should be paid to Sector II.a.

The first days of May went by in oppressive silence. This was the sultry calm before the gathering storm. The Italians were carefully making their final preparations, and kept their artillery as quiet as possible. They were assisted by rainy weather, which kept our observers from noticing any major changes by their enemies.

Meanwhile deserters came over in large numbers. This development not only showed that the offensive was imminent, but also that the battle would take place on a broader front which included the area far to the north of Salcano. When the weather cleared, aerial reconnaissance was able to identify many new installations for troops and supplies in the areas of the Kolovrat and the Korada. Moreover, on 7 May the presence of numerous new batteries deployed opposite the k.u.k. XVII Corps was revealed by their heavy fire, directed especially against the points where the reserves and the commanders' HQ were stationed.

This seemed to confirm the opinion which the ex-Chief of the General Staff FM Conrad had already expressed in February. On 9 May GO Boroevic sent a wire to Marburg, stating that the danger to XVII Corps was becoming noticeably greater. It would be necessary for 5<sup>th</sup> Army to have strong reserves ready behind this Corps, which hitherto had expected to only play the role of an observer; the one Landsturm brigade stationed for this purpose was not sufficient. Army HQ therefore planned to be ready for unpleasant surprises, and to carry out the battle along the entire front, by deploying a division in the Ternova area. Then three divisions would be stationed behind Sector III, one behind XVI Corps and one behind XVII Corps.

The HQ of the Southwest Front, which had been inserted between 5<sup>th</sup> Army and the AOK since the end of March, didn't agree with GO Boroevic's suggestion, because they'd just been informed by Baden that it was highly improbable that any further reinforcements would be sent to the Italian front. Therefore it was vitally important to carefully husband the available forces. On 10 May Archduke Eugene ordered "that any transfer of the major reserve

units shouldn't take place until there are concrete signs that the situation is changing and that the balance of forces in an individual sector has substantially shifted. HQ of the Southwest Front has already addressed the need to support the Army's northern wing - if demanded by the situation - when we moved 106 Lst ID forward to their camps in the area by the Wippach."

Meanwhile 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ had already taken some measures to strengthen XVII Corps. They had given the Corps command over the k.k. 24 Lst Mtn Bde, which moved from Ternova to the Bainsizza plateau. Then, when it was noticed that the enemy were preparing to cross the Isonzo opposite Auzza, a regiment from the Brigade was attached to 62 ID. In addition, the neighboring XV Corps was ordered to hold reserves ready on their southern wing to support 62 ID if necessary.

But a third measure, which was intended to bring four more infantry battalions from XV Corps to the area of XVII Corps, had to be abandoned. This was because of problems with the Dalmatian Sch Regt 37, which had been supposed to relieve these four battalions; the Regiment had been pulled from the Görz front in April at the specific request of FML von Zeidler because it was unreliable. Then under XV Corps the unit was sent to occupy a sector that was considered less endangered, but it gave new grounds for concern. Two officers and thirteen men went over to the enemy as soon as they returned to the front. Now it seemed unavoidable that the Regiment would have to be taken completely from the front so that its discipline and order could be restored. And so the four infantry battalions which had been picked to go to XVII Corps had to stay with XV Corps. This development and the objection of the HQ of Southwest Front (described above) kept the plans of 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ from being carried out in their entirety.

While signs of an impending major operation against XVII Corps were thus multiplying, none were detected in front of XVI Corps and Sector III despite the vigilance of the observers. Nevertheless Boroevic held fast to his opinion that the main enemy blow was planned to take place on his Army's southern wing and was being prepared in great secrecy. This conviction kept him from moving one of the four divisions stationed behind the southern wing on the Karst plateau in lieu of the 106 Lst ID after permission to transfer the latter was denied. On 10 May quiet returned to the front, and continued on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Had the Italians given up their operation at the last minute or postponed it for a later date? This question was earnestly debated at 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ. The general military situation of the Entente was

unfavorable. Neither the English nor French had succeeded in breaking through on the Western front. Russia seemed to be weakening due to events in the country's interior. Therefore the Italians were perhaps reluctant to attack alone, without any direct help from their allies.

Then all doubt disappeared in the morning of 12 May. The first light of day had barely dawned when the thunder of artillery swelled along the entire front from Tolmein down to the sea, and soon reached an unprecedented intensity. The battle had begun.

The order of battle

The following was the general order of battle on the Italian front as of 12 May 1917.

Overall commander (HQ Southwest front) = FM Archduke Eugene  
Chief of Staff = GM Konopicky

**A. Conrad's Army Group**

Commander = FM Freih. Conrad von Hötzendorf  
C/Staff = GM Richard Müller

## 1) Area I [the Stilfserjoch]

Was under 53 Half Bde (Col. Freih. von Lempruch) - Res Bn IV/29; a K-Sch Streif Comp; SS Dets Prad, Schlanders, Stilfs, Taufers; a mountain guide det; 22 fixed MG. Half a mtn how batty; a comp of Fort Arty Bn 4 (39 light fixed guns). A detachment from SB 8. The Gomagoi fortification.

TOTAL = 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  bn, 4 SS dets,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mobile batty, 1 fort arty comp,  $\frac{1}{2}$  tech comp. 2150 foot, 41 light guns, 30 MG

## 2) Area II [Tonale]

Commander = Col. Förster

Res Bns I/29, II/37; IV Bn/K-Sch Regt I; a K-Sch Streif comp; a high mtn comp; SS Dets Cles, Innsbruck III, Lienz, Malé, Passeier, Ulten; a mountain guide det; 57 fixed MG. 1 & 2 Foot Sqdns of Tyrol Mntd K-Sch Bn. 5 Can Battys/Mtn AR 8, 1 & 2 Comps/ Fort Arty Bn 7 (48 light and 6 heavy fixed guns); several trench mortars. 1 Lst sapper comp

TOTAL = 4 bns, 2 foot sqdns, 6 SS dets, 1 mobile batty, 2 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp. 1400 foot, 52 light and 6 heavy guns, 81 MG

3) **11<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = FZM von Scheuchenstuel

C/Staff = Col. von Soos

## Area III [South Tyrol]

Commander = GdI von Koennen-Horak

C/Staff = Lt Col. von Pfersmann

Had 12 bns, 8 SS dets,  $\frac{1}{4}$  sqdn, 5 mobile batties, 7 fort arty comps, 3 tech comps. 12,200 foot, 30 horse; 124 light and 43 heavy guns; 162 MG, 2 inf guns

. Adamello Border Sector (Col. von Lorx) - I Bn/Hon IR 311; k.k. Lst Bn 166; two KJ Streif comps, a K-Sch Streif comp; SS Det Valarsa; 18 fixed MG. 3 Can Battys/Mtn AR 28; one improvised mtn can batty; one comp of Fort Arty Bn 1 (10 light fixed guns)

. Judicarien Border Sector - Held by 50 Half Bde (Col. Spiegel) with Res Bn I/37; k.k. Lst Bns 163, 170; one KJ Streif comp; SS Dets Klausen, Bezau; 44 fixed MG. 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 28, a flak batty; 2 comps of Fort Arty Bn 7 (32 light and 19 heavy fixed guns)

. Riva Border Sector (FML Edler von Schiesser) - Res Bns III/29, V/37; k.k. Lst Bns IV/2, 173, 174; SS Dets Bozen, Lana, Sarntal, Gries, Riva; 44 fixed MG. A flak batty; two comps of Fort Arty Bn 1, four comps of Fort Arty Bn 4 (with a total of 66 light and 24 heavy fixed guns)

. Directly under Area III - Two flak batties; one comp apiece of SB 4 and 14 and PB 3; several trench mortar platoons; ¼ of 1 Sqdn/UR 5

Etschtal [Adige valley] Group

Commander = GM Edler von Wieden

C/Staff = Lt Col. de Grancy

Had 14 bns, 6 SS dets, 1 sqdn, 13 mobile batties, 5 fort arty comps, 3 tech comps. 10,400 foot, 120 horse; 84 light, 38 heavy and 5 very heavy guns; 113 MG, 61 inf guns

. 88 K-Sch Bde (Col. Ritter von Mülleitner) - Bn V/BH IR 2; k.k. Lst Bns IV, 172; SS Dets Reutte I, Kitzbühel; 10 fixed MG

. k.u. 28 Lst Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Sparber) - I Bn/L-Sch Regt I; k.u. Lst Bns VIII/17, VIII/19, III/20, II and III/30; SS Dets Schwaz, Glurns, Kufstein; 4 fixed MG

. 98 K-Sch Bde (Col. von Sloninka) - K-Sch Regt I (2), II (3); SS Det Brixen; 9 fixed MG

. Group units - 3 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Sch Bn; one comp each of SB 8, 12 and 14; several TM platoons

. Etschtal Arty Command (Col. von Smekal) - Mtn AR 6 (7); three flak batties; one 15 cm cannon batty; one 30.5 cm mortar and one 42 cm mortar batties; 2 comps of Fort Arty Regt 1; one comp each of Fort Arty Regt 4 and of Fort Arty Bns 1, 4 (total for fort arty was 44 light, 34 heavy and 3 very heavy fixed guns; the latter were 3 captured Italian 28 cm howitzers)

XIV (Edelweiss) Corps

Commander = GdK Prince Schönburg-Hartenstein

C/Staff = Col. Günste

Had 23 bns, 3 sqdns, 30 mobile batties, 3 fort arty comps, 4 tech comps. 13,400 foot, 345 horse; 135 light, 25 heavy and 9 very heavy guns; 174 MG, 18 inf guns

. 8<sup>th</sup> (KJ) ID (FML Edler von Verdross) - 7900 foot, 145 horse, 52 guns, 106 MG, 8 inf guns

. 1 KJ Bde (Col. Ritter von Ellison) - KJR 1 (3), 2 (3)

. 2 KJ Bde (Col. Julius von Lustig) - KJR 3 (3), 4 (3); k.k. Lst Bns 161, 164



- . Div troops - 2 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Sch Bn; 8 Comp/SB 14
- . 8 FA Bde (Col. Petersilka) - FKR 8 (3), FHR 8 (4), Hvy FAR 8 (3)
- . 3<sup>rd</sup> (Edelweiss) ID (FML Edler von Horsetzky) - 5500 foot, 200 horse, 47 guns, 68 MG, 10 inf guns
  - . 15 Inf Bde (GM Phleps) - IR 14 (2), 59 (3)
  - . Independent IR # 50 (4)
  - . Div troops - 1 & 2 Sqdns/RSR 6; 1 Comp/SB 14
  - . 3 FA Bde (Col. Grandowski) - FKR 3 (4), FHR 3 (3), Hvy FAR 3 (1)
- . Corps troops - A mtn guide det; 22 fixed MG. Mtn AR 20 (8); two 24 cm and one 30.5 cm mortar batties; two flak batties; one comp of Fort AR 3 and 2 comps of Fort Arty Bn 6 (for a total of 16 light and 10 heavy fixed guns); many TM platoons. One comp each of SB 6 and PB 10

### III Corps

Commander = GdI Ritter von Krautwald

C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Karg

Had 28 bns, 4 SS dets, 3 sqdns, 40 mobile batties, 2 fort arty comps, 6 tech comps. 16,600 foot, 295 horse; 160 light, 32 heavy and 11 very heavy guns; 216 MG, 24 inf guns

. Col. Vidossich's Group (2900 foot, 160 horse, 40 guns, 35 MG, 2 inf guns) - Bns I & III/14, I/63, II/64; k.k. Lst Bn IV/23. 5 Sqdn/RSR 2. 3 Comp/PB 3

. Col. Koppensteiner's FA Bde - 1 Batty/FKR 22, 3 Batty/FHR 6, 3 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 10, 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11; ½ 1 How Batty/Hvy FAR 6; one 12 cm and one 15 cm can batties; one 24 cm mor batty; one flak batty

. 22<sup>nd</sup> Sch Div (FML Edler von Kochanowski) - 7900 foot, 95 horse, 66 guns, 96 MG, 2 inf guns

. 43 Sch Bde (Col. Edler von Merten) - Regts 3 (3), 26 (3)

. 141 Inf Bde (Col. Laehne) - IR 64 (2), 73 (3); Tyrol k.k. Lst Bn I; SS Dets Kaltern, Bludenz; eight fixed MG

. Div troops - Res Sqdn/DR 12; 5 Comp/SB 3, 1 Comp/SB 9

. 22 FA Bde (Col. von Walzel) - FKR 22 (3), FHR 22 (3), Hvy FAR 22 (2); 4 Batty/FHR 3, 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 10, 3 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 11; 1 ½ 24 cm mor batties; TM Batty 6/22

. 6<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Mecenseffy) - 6500 foot, 100 horse, 73 guns, 107 MG, 12 inf guns

. 11 Inf Bde (Col. de Brunfaut) - IR 27 (3); BH IR 2 (3)

. 12 Inf Bde (Col. von Dorotka) - IR 17 (3); FJB 7, 23; SS Dets Levico, Lavarone; five fixed MG

. Div troops - 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 5; 5 Comp/SB 5; 5 & 7 Comps/SB 8

. 6 FA Bde (Col. Kratky) - FKR 6 (4), FHR 6 (3), Hvy FAR 6 (3 ½); 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10; 1 & 4 Can plus 2 How Batties/

Mtn AR 11; one 30.5 cm mortar  
 . Corps troops - 2 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 6 (with 24 light fixed guns)

Sugana Valley Group, same as independent 18<sup>th</sup> ID (FZM Edler von Scholz)

Had 10 bns, 5 SS dets, 1 sqdn, 16 mobile batties, 4 fort arty comps, 2 tech comps. 7300 foot, 75 horse; 91 light and 15 heavy guns; 36 MG, 10 inf guns

. 181 Inf Bde (GM von Vidale) - Bns IV/4, X/14, X/59, V/BH 1; FJB 22; Res Bn III/37; a bn of Upper Aus Vol Rifle Regt; SS Dets Zillertal, Landeck; 19 fixed MG

. 1 Mtn Bde (Col. Teus) - Bns I/1, I/51, I/102; SS Dets Meran, Sterzing, Lechtal; 4 fixed MG

. Div troops -  $\frac{3}{4}$  1 Sqdn/UR 5; 7 Comp/SB 4, 1 Comp/PB 2

. 18 FA Bde (Col. Sekullic) - Mtn AR 1 (5), 7 (5), 28 (2); 2 Batty/FHR 22, 4 Batty/Hvy FAR 22; two flak batties; one comp each of Fort AR 1, 6 & 7, and of Fort Arty Bn 1 (for a total of 35 light and 11 heavy fixed guns)

11<sup>th</sup> Army troops (2900 foot) - IR 22 (3); a Sturm bn; Flyer Comps 17, 21, 24

TOTALS for 11<sup>th</sup> Army - 91 bns, 21 SS dets, 8 sqdns, 104 mobile batties, 21 fort arty comps, 18 tech comps, 3 air comps. 62,800 foot, 865 horse; 594 light, 153 heavy and 25 very heavy guns; 751 MG<sup>111</sup>; 60 inf guns; 332 light and 106 heavy TM

#### 4) XX Corps

Commander = GdI Ritter von Roth

C/Staff = Col. Hohenberger

Had 46 bns, 18 SS dets, 41 mobile batties, 19 fort arty comps, 8 tech comps, 1 air comp. 33,900 foot; 327 light, 91 heavy and 5 very heavy guns; 466 MG, 34 inf guns, 190 TM

. 90<sup>th</sup> ID, or Area IV (Fassana Alps - Pordoi) (FML Heinrich Goiginger) - 14,500 foot, 168 guns, 217 MG, 20 inf guns

. 13 Mtn Bde (GM Gustav Edler von Fischer) - K-Sch Regt III (2); Bns II & IV/104, II/SchR 5, I/SchR 36, II/K-SchR II; Res Bn II/29; k.k. Lst Bn 169; SS Dets Auer, Feldkirch; a mtn guide det; 15 fixed MG

. 9 Mtn Bde (Col. Lercher) - Bns IV/12, IV/84, III/SchR 36; Res Bn IV/37; Lt Col. Edler von Schönner's Bike Bn; SS Det Rankweil; a mountain guide det; 12 fixed MG

. 179 Inf Bde (Col. Covin) - Bns III/74, II/92, I/K-SchR

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<sup>111</sup>The fixed artillery and MG that had been left far behind the front in the fortifications of Lafraun-Vielgereuth aren't included in these totals, since they were not in range to fire.

III; KJ Streif Comp 3; k.k. Lst Bns 38, 39, 139, "Urban"; SS Dets Nauders, Welschnofen, Campitello, Dornbirn, Kastelruth; a mtn guide det; 35 fixed MG

- . 90 Res FA Bde (Col. Hubischta) - Mtn AR 2 (7), 14 (7); 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 7, 4 Batty/Res FKR 2; 4 & 5 Batties/Res FHR 2; one 10.4 cm can batty; a How Batty from Hvy FAR 3; two 24 cm and two 30.5 cm mor batties; one comp each of Fort AR 2 & 6 and of Fort Arty Bn 5; two comps of Fort Arty Bn 4; 2 Lst Arty Comps (total of fixed guns - 60 light and 29 heavy)
- . Under Div HQ - Bns III/49, IV/K-SchR III
- . One comp each of SB 6 and of PB 5, 8 & 10

. Pustertal Div, or Area V (Buchenstein to Carinthian border) (GM Edler von Steinhart) - 17,600 foot, 205 guns, 104 MG, 10 inf guns

- . 96 Inf Bde (GM Korzer) - Bns III/73, I/KJR 2, III/KJR 3; KJ Streif Comp 6; three high mtn comps; k.k. Lst Bns 160, 165, 167; SS Dets Bregenz, Enneberg, Gröden; a mtn guide det; 24 fixed MG
- . 56 Mtn Bde (Col. von Krammer) - Bns II/KJR 2, III/BH 4; k.k. Lst Bns 29, 162, 168; two high mtn comps; SS Dets Sillian, Silz, Welsberg; a mtn guide det; 33 fixed MG
- . 21 Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Maendl) - Bns I & III/104, VI/KJR 2; two high mtn comps; k.k. Lst Bns II & III (Tyrol), 171; SS Dets Innsbruck I & II; a mtn guide det; 34 fixed MG

. Pustertal FA Bde (Col. Pengov) - Res FKR 2 (2), Res FHR 2 (2), Mtn AR 8 (6); 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2; one 10.4 cm can batty; 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 22; one comp each of Fort AR 1, 2 & 6; two comps of Fort Arty Bn 1 and four of Fort Arty Bn 4; 3 Lst arty comps (total of fixed guns - 103 light and 46 heavy); "numerous" TM

- . One comp each of SB 1 & 4; 2 comps of SB 14

. Corps troops (2800 foot, 22 guns, 32 MG, 8 inf guns) - Bns III/27, II/59, IV/87, II/SchR 36; SS Dets Imst, Rattenberg; 2 & 4 Batties/Res FKR 2, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 14; 1 & 4 Batties/Hvy FAR 2; a flak batty; Flieger Comp 15

#### 5) Directly under Conrad's Army Group

26 Sch Bde (GM Ritter von Zygodlowicz; 3050 foot, 48 MG, 8 inf guns) - SchR 14 (3), 25 (3)

TOTALS for Conrad's Army Group - 149 bns<sup>112</sup>, 49 SS Dets, 8 sqdns, 151 mobile batties, 43 fort arty comps, 32 tech comps, 4 air comps. 106,300 foot, 865 horse; 1014 light, 250 heavy and 30 very heavy guns; 1376 MG, 102 inf guns, 628 TM

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<sup>112</sup>The inf bn total includes 18 independent high mountain companies.

The following were the major changes in Conrad's Army Group through mid June 1917 -

26 Sch Bde relieved 141 Inf Bde. In May Infantry Regiments # 64 and 73 along with Bn III/57, FJB 23 and II Bn/SchR 36 went to 5<sup>th</sup> Army. At the end of June there arrived from Mackensen's Army Group:

. 73<sup>rd</sup> ID (Ludwig Goiginger) with just 2 Mtn Bde (Col. Panzenböck), commanding Bns III/8, III/55, II/70, III/BH 1 and BH FJB 4

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

Commander = GO Freiherr von Krobotin

C/Staff = Col. Domaschnian

IV Corps<sup>113</sup>

Commander = FML von Hordt

C/Staff = Col. Ernst Hittl

- . 94<sup>th</sup> ID (or Sector I) (GM Lawrowski) - 11,100 foot, 100 horse; 105 light, 19 heavy and 3 very heavy guns; 108 MG, 12 inf guns
  - . Lesach Valley Group (Col. Edler von Fasser) - Bn II/7; FJB 30; a high mtn comp; Salzburg Vol Rifle Bn
  - . 25 Mtn Bde (Col. Ritter von Wasserthal) - Bns I & III/7, V/47; FJB 8; k.k. Lst Bn 30; two high mtn comps, 4 fixed MG
  - . 57 Mtn Bde (Col. Albert von Watterich) - Bn III/18; a combined FJB; k.k. Lst Bns 148, 157; a high mtn comp, 4 fixed MG
  - . Div reserves - IR 28 (2); Bn III/57
  - . Div troops - 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; 7 Comp/SB 3
  - . 94 FA Bde (Col. Hlubek) - Res FKR 94 (6)<sup>114</sup>, Res FHR 94 (4), Mtn AR 17 (8); 6 Batty/Res FKR 203; one 10.4 cm can batty, one 15 cm how batty, one 30.5 cm mor batty; one comp each of Fort AR 2 & 4 and of Fort Arty Bns 2 & 5 (total of fixed guns was 21 light, 15 heavy and 2 very heavy); several TM
- . 92<sup>nd</sup> ID (or Sector II) (GM Edler von Krasel) - 5500 foot, 80 horse; 39 light and 15 heavy guns, 33 MG
  - . Rattendorf Alps Group (Lt Col. Eltz) - Bns V & VI/104, 1 Hon IR 316; a high mtn comp
  - . Nassfeld Group (Lt Col. Wolf) - k.k. Lst Bns 149 & 151; Styria Vol Rifle Bn; a high mtn comp, 2 fixed MG
  - . Div troops -  $\frac{3}{4}$  3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4;  $\frac{1}{2}$  6 Comp/PB
  - . 92 Res FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Senkowski) - Res FKR 203 (2), Mtn AR 203 (5); 5 Batty/Res FHR 203; 1 Batty/Res Hvy FAR 203; two 24 cm mortars; one comp each of Fort Arty Bns 5 & 14 (for a total of 3 light and 15 heavy fixed guns); several TM

## Archduke Peter Ferdinand's Group

Commander = GdI Archduke Peter Ferdinand

C/Staff = Lt Col. Buzek

- . 59 Mtn Bde (or Sector III) (GM Edler von Dietrich) - 5100 foot, 40 horse; 63 light and 15 heavy guns, 54 MG

<sup>113</sup>When IV Corps HQ arrived from the northern theater of operations on 10 May they assumed tactical command of Sectors I and II; Archduke Peter Ferdinand's Group HQ had tactical command over Sectors III and IV.

<sup>114</sup>The 6<sup>th</sup> Batteries of Res FKR 94 and Res FKR 203 were each armed with 8 TM.

- . Group Fella (Col. Heinrich von Lustig) - k.k. Lst Bns 10, 41; Carinthian Vol Rifle Regt (2); two high mtn comps, 13 fixed MG
- . Group Raibl (Col. Scotti) - IR 7 (2); two high mtn comps, 7 fixed MG
- . Sector troops - ½ 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 15, 9 Comp/SB 3
- . Sector arty - Mtn AR 5 (7); 4 Batty/Res FKR 203, 4 Batty/Res FHR 203; one 30.5 cm mor batty, one TM batty; one comp each of Fort AR 7 & Fort Arty Bn 14 (for 22 light and 15 heavy fixed guns)
- . 93<sup>rd</sup> ID (or Sector IV) (GM Edler von Greiner) - 7000 foot, 20 horse; 69 light, 11 heavy and 4 very heavy guns; 71 MG, 3 fixed guns
  - . 26 Mtn Bde (GM von Zhuber) - BH IR 4 (5); second FJB 20<sup>115</sup>; k.k. Lst Bns I & II/26, 152; one high mtn comp, 15 fixed MG
  - . Div troops - ¼ 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; 3 Comp/SB 11, ½ 6 Comp/PB 3
  - . 93 Res FA Bde (Col. Sterling) - Mtn AR 3 (8); 3 Batty/Res FKR 203, 1 & 2 Batties/Res FHR 203; a TM batty; one comp each of Fort AR 4 and Fort Arty Bn 5, two comps of Fort Arty Bn 14 (total of fixed guns - 22 light, 11 heavy and 4 very heavy); many TM

Directly under 10<sup>th</sup> Army HQ - FJB 20, a Storm company; Flyer Comp 16, Armored Train X

TOTALS for 10<sup>th</sup> Army - 39 bns (including 11 independent high mtn comps), 2 ½ sqdns, 50 mobile batties, 12 fort arty comps, 5 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 armored train. 28,700 foot, 240 horse; 276 light, 60 heavy and 7 very heavy guns; 266 MG, 15 inf guns, 205 TM

Changes to 10<sup>th</sup> Army through 15 June -  
On 19 May Bn III/57 and FJB 20 left for 11<sup>th</sup> Army

**C. 5<sup>th</sup> Army** (on 24 May became **Army of the Isonzo**)

Commander = GO von Boroevic

C/Staff = FML von Le Beau

XV Corps (or Sector I)

Commander = FML Scotti

C/Staff = Col. Ritter von Pohl

Had 19 ¼ bns, 1 ½ sqdns, 40 batties, 3 tech comps. 19,700 foot, 140 horse; 130 light, 26 heavy and 2 very heavy guns; 222 MG, 24 inf guns, 8 TM

. 50<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Gerabek) - 8900 foot, 80 horse, 70 MG, 10 inf guns

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<sup>115</sup>The second FJB 20 was formed from the Bn's extra March companies.

- . 3 Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Tlaskal) - Bns II/18, IV/30, IV/37, III/46, IV/80
- . 15 Mtn Bde (Col. Koschak) - Bns IV/33, I/61, II/66; one high mtn comp
- . Div troops - 4 Sqdn/Tyrol Mntd Rif Bn, 8 Comp/SB 13
- . 1<sup>st</sup> ID (FML Metzger) - 8000 foot, 60 horse, 64 MG, 8 inf guns
  - . 7 Mtn Bde (Col. Schöbl) - Bns II/5, IV/25, IV/53, III/86; BH FJB 3
  - . 22 Lst Mtn Bde (Col. von Colerus) - k.k. Lst Bn 155; k.u. Lst Bns V/4, IX/19
  - . Div troops - ½ 1 Sqdn/UR 12
- . Artillery in corps sector (under 50 Res FA Bde and the Arty HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> ID) - Res FKR 50 (4), k.k. Res FKR 1 (2), Res FHR 50 (6), k.k. Res FHR 1 (1); Hvy Res FAR 50 (4), Res Hvy FAR 48 (1); Mtn AR 13 (8); one batty each from Mtn AR 5 & 24; k.k. Mtn AR 1 (2); one 10.4 cm can and one 13 cm can batties, one 15 cm how batty, one 15 cm and one 30.5 cm mor batties, 4 flak batties, one TM batty
- . Corps troops (2800 foot, 88 MG, 6 inf guns) - FJB 17, 25, 31; 40 fixed MG; 2 Comp/SB 6, 2 Comp/PB 8

## XVII Corps (or Sector II.a)

Commander = FML von Fabini

C/Staff = Col. Edler von Lerch

Had 27 bns<sup>116</sup>, 1 ¼ sqdns, 42 batties, 3 tech comps, 1 air comp. 18,100 foot, 110 horse; 136 light, 40 heavy and 4 heavy guns; 193 MG, 4 inf guns, 8 TM

- . 62<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Novak von Arienti) - 8100 foot, 60 horse, 91 MG
  - . k.k. 205 Lst Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Lewandowski) - k.k. Lst IR 409 (3); k.k. Lst Bn 37; 3 fixed MG
  - . 121 Inf Bde (Col. Kouff) - IR 22 (3); Bns II/52, III/69; k.k. Lst Bn II/5; k.u. Lst Bns I/2, VI/4, III/5
  - . Div troops - One platoon each from DR 14, HR 10 and Lst Huss Bn 4; 6 Comp/SB 13
- . 57<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Hrozny) - On 12 May had 6400 foot, 50 horse, 26 MG, 4 inf guns
  - . 5 Inf Bde (Col. Freih. von Albori) - Bn II/34; k.k. Lst Bns III/26, 40; k.u. Lst Bns IV/6, III/25
  - . 18 Inf Bde (Col. Laxa) - IR 87 (3); FJB 9
  - . Div troops - ½ 3 Sqdn/Lst Huss Bn 4; 7 Comp/SB 6, 7 Comp/SB 9
  - . Reinforced on 13 May by Col. Wokoun's 24 Lst Mtn Bde (3600 foot and 40 MG) - k.k. Lst IR 11 (2), 27 (3)
- . Corps artillery
  - . 62 Res FA Bde (Col. Vollgruber) - Res FKR 62 (4), Res FHR

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11618 of the 27 bns of XVII Corps were Landsturm (the total includes 24 Lst Mtn Bde).

62 (4), Hvy FAR 62 (1)

. 57 Res FA Bde (Col. Padiaur) - Res FKR 57 (4), Res FHR 1 (3), Mtn AR 24 (3); 4 Batty/FHR 28, 1 & 2 Batties/FHR 44; one how batty each from Mtn AR 3 & 5; two 10.4 cm can batties, one 15 cm can batty; five 15 cm how batties; two 15 cm, one 21 cm and one 30.5 cm mor batties; five flak batties, one TM batty

. Corps troops - Flyer Comp # 2

XVI Corps (or Sector II.b)

Commander = GdI Kralicek

C/Staff = Col. Graf

Had 35 bns, 1 sqdn, 85 batties, 4 tech comps, 2 air comps.

21,300 foot, 100 horse; 240 light, 96 heavy and 14 very heavy guns; 299 MG, 22 inf guns, 32 TM

. 58<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Erwin von Ziedler) - 9400 foot, 104 MG, 100 inf guns

. 4 Mtn Bde (GM Adalbert von Dani) - Bn III/85; SchR 23 (3); k.k. Lst Bn 42

. 5 Mtn Bde (Col. Prey) - IR 96 (4); Bn IV/28; FJB 2; k.k. Lst Bns IV/39, 75

. 4 Comp/SB 6

. 14<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Szende) - 7400 foot, 100 horse, 114 MG, 8 inf guns

. 27 Bde (GM von Schilhawsky) - IR 71 (3), 72 (3); FJB 11

. 28 Bde (Col. Pollak) - IR 48 (3), 76 (3); five fixed MG

. 1 Sqdn/HR 4

. 1<sup>st</sup> k.k. Lst Bde (GM Rotter von Soretic) - 4500 foot, 71 MG, 4 inf guns - k.k. Lst IR 1 (3), 2 (3), 22 (3); one TM batty, five fixed MG. Lst IR 1 and 2 were attached to 58 ID, Lst IR 22 to 14 ID; Bde HQ was therefore without assigned troops

. Corps artillery

. 58 Res FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Hussarek) - Res FKR 58 (4), Res FHR 58 (4)

. 16 FA Bde (commander not listed) - FKR 16 (4), FHR 16 (4), Hvy FAR 16 (3); FKR 28 (4), FHR 28 (5), Hvy FAR 28 (4); FKR 44 (4), FHR 44 (3), Hvy FAR 44 (4); two batties each of FKR 7 & FHR 7, one batty of Hvy FAR 7; 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 24; two experimental can batties; seven 15 cm can batties, five 15 cm how batties; one 15 cm, three 21 cm and five 30.5 cm mor batties; seven flak batties, four TM batties

. Corps troops - One comp each of SB 1 & 3 and of PB 7; Flyer Comps # 4, 10; some heavy TM batties

The VII and XXIII Corps made up Sector III which was led by FZM Wurm (C/Staff was Col. Theodor von Körner). Corps troops were Flyer Comps # 12, 23, 28, 34. In the Sector reserve was:



. 10<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Ritter von Gologorski) - 8400 foot, 96 MG, 6 inf guns)

- . 20 Bde (Col. Edler von Lunzer) - IR 21 (3), 98 (3)
- . 21 Bde (GM Friedrich von Weisz) - IR 15 (3), 55 (3)
- . 8 Comp/SB 4

Total strength of Sector III was 81 bns, 3 ½ sqdns, 174 batties, 20 tech comps, 4 air comps. 51,800 foot, 330 horse; 410 light, 217 heavy and 40 very heavy guns; 588 MG, 48 inf guns, 144 TM

#### VII Corps

Commander = FML von Schariczzer

C/Staff = Lt Col. von Panos

. 44<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (GM Schönauer) - 8600 foot, 80 horse, 96 MG, 8 inf guns

- . 44 Bde (Col. Kranz) - Mtn SchR 1 (3), 2 (3)
- . 87 Bde (Col. Edl. von Schuschnigg) - SchR 2 (3), 21 (3)
- . Res Sqdn/DR 10

. 17<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ströher) - 8700 foot, 96 MG, 2 inf guns

- . 33 Bde (GM von Berzeviczy) - IR 39 (4), 61 (3)
- . 34 Bde (GM Wolf) - IR 43 (3), 46 (3)
- . 5 Comp/SB 7

. 41<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (FML Schamschula) - 7500 foot, 110 horse, 92 MG, 4 inf guns

- . 82 Bde (Col. Ritter von Sypniewsky) - HIR 20 (3), 31 (3)
- . 40 Bde (Col. Freiherr von Benz-Albkron) - HIR 12 (3), 32 (3)
- . Div troops - 5 Sqdn/Hon HR 4; 1 Comp/SB 11

. Corps artillery

- . 14 FA Bde (Col. Kapretz) - FKR 14 (4), FHR 14 (6), Hvy FAR 14 (3)
- . 17 FA Bde (Col. Svoboda) - FKR 17 (4), FHR 17 (4), Hvy FAR 17 (4)
- . 41 Hon FA Bde (Col. Capp) - Hon FKR 41 (4), FHR 41 (5), Hvy FAR 41 (4)

. Reserve artillery group (Col. Edler von Ellenberger; he was commander of 44 FA Bde and also in charge of Col. Freih. von Augustin's 28 FA Bde HQ) - Two batties each of FKR 7, Hvy FAR 7 and Hvy FAR 16; two 10.4 cm and four 15 cm can batties; three 15 cm how batties; three 15 cm, three 21 cm and eight 30.5 cm mor batties; one 38 cm and one 42 cm howitzers; eleven flak batties, four TM batties

. Corps troops - One comp each of SB 10 & 12 and of PB 3, 4 and 5; many TM platoons

#### XXIII Corps

Commander = FML Edler von Schenk

C/Staff = Lt Col. Szahlender

- . 28<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schneider Edler von Manns-Au) - 6600 foot, 90 horse, 88 MG, 10 inf guns
  - . 55 Bde (Col. Rada) - IR 11 (4); Bns IV/77, III/BH 3
  - . 56 Bde (GM Eugen Straub) - IR 47 (4); Bn II/57
  - . Div troops - Res Sqdn/DR 3, 4 Comp/SB 14
- . 7<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Schmid) - 6900 foot, 80 MG, 12 inf guns
  - . 14 Bde (Col. von Falkhausen) - IR 68 (4) only
  - . 71 Bde (Col. von Sarkany) - IR 37 (3), 38 (3)
  - . 1 Comp/SB 13
- . 16<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Adalbert von Kaltenborn) - 7100 foot, 50 horse, 80 MG, 6 inf guns
  - . 31 Bde (Col. de Fekete) - IR 2 (4); Bns I/62, III/64
  - . 32 Bde (Col. Fleischmann) - IR 31 (4); Bn IV/64
  - . Div troops - ½ 2 Sqdn/HR 4; 4 Comp/SB 13
- . Corps artillery
  - . 9 FA Bde - FKR 9 (4), FHR 9 (6), Hvy FAR 9 (3)
  - . 10 FA Bde - FKR 10 (4), FHR 10 (5), Hvy FAR 10 (2)
  - . 43 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Sostaric) - FKR 43 (4), FHR 43 (4), Hvy FAR 43 (4)
  - . Reserve artillery group (under HQ of Col. Scheucher's 7 FA Bde) - Res FKR 48 (3); two batties of FHR 7 and one of Hvy FAR 7; four 10.4 cm and three 15 cm can batties; seven 15 cm how batties; two 15 cm, two 21 cm and five 30.5 cm mor batties; four 15 cm naval guns, one 35 cm cannon and one 38 cm how; eight flak batties, four TM batties
- . Corps troops - Two comps each of SB 1 & 2; one comp each of SB 7, 13 and 10/I and of PB 7 and 10. Many TM platoons

## Sector IV (Trieste Coastal Area)

Commander = Counter-Admiral Freih. von Koudelka

Had 6 bns, 9 ½ sqdns, 16 batties. 5470 foot, 750 horse; 56 light and 11 heavy guns, 35 MG

- . Foot - Trieste Naval Bn; a Lst bike bn; Vol Rifle Bns Marburg IV, Laibach VI, Trieste VII; Trieste Police Bn; ten coastal defense detachments, seventeen naval MG dets
- . Horse - One sqdn each of DR 7, HR 16, RSR 1, RSR 2, RSR 6 and the Tyrol Mntd Rif and Lst Huss Bn 10; ½ sqdn of HR 4
- . Arty - 16 batteries of various calibers

## Sector V (Fiume Coastal Area)

Commander = FML von Istvanovic

Had 2 ½ bns, ½ batty. 1900 foot, 2 guns, 3 MG

k.u. Lst Eta Bn VII/26, a combined March bn; k.k. Lst Watch Comp Volosca; a Young Rifle comp; several Gendarmerie, Gend. Lst Assistance, Border Police and Border Finance Watch dets; one 9 cm fixed cannon platoon

Reserves of 5<sup>th</sup> Army

Total of 49 bns, 2 sqdns, 8 batties, 4 tech comps. 32,600 foot, 240 horse, 48 light guns, 380 MG, 38 inf guns

- . 9<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Gruber) - 8300 foot, 160 horse, 104 MG, 10 inf guns
  - . 17 Bde (Col. Chwostek) - IR 91 (4), 102 (3)
  - . 60 Bde (Col. Ritter von Hiltl) - IR 30 (3), 80 (3)
  - . Div troops - Res Sqdn/UR 12, 5 Comp/SB 2
- . 13<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (FML Fernengel) - 9600 foot, 104 MG, 12 inf guns
  - . 59 Inf Bde (Col. Kosel) - IR 24 (3), 41 (4)
  - . 86 Sch Bde (GM Meisel) - SchR 20 (3), 22 (3)
  - . 4 Comp/SB 7
- . 48<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Gabriel) - 7100 foot, 92 MG, 16 inf guns
  - . 11 Mtn Bde (Col. Hugo Fischer von See) - IR 79 (4); Bns IV/3, I/10
  - . 12 Mtn Bde (GM Prince Schwarzenberg) - Bns I/3, I/93, I/100; FJB 21, BH FJB 6
  - . 7 Comp/SB 2
- . 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID (GM Kratky) - 7600 foot, 80 horse, 48 guns, 56 MG
  - . 110 Bde (GM Haas) - k.k. Lst IR 31(3), 32 (3)
  - . 111 Bde (Col. Strohuber) - k.k. Lst IR 6 (3), 25 (3)
  - . Div troops - Res Sqdn/UR 1; 2 Comp/SB 6
  - . 106 Res FA Bde (Col. Meckel) - Res FKR 106 (4), Res FHR 106 (4)
- . Also under Army HQ - SchR 37 (4); Flyer Comps 32, 35, 41, 42; Flyer Sqdn # I; Balloon Dets 1 & 13

TOTALS for 5<sup>th</sup> Army - 215 bns, 18 sqdns, 336 batties (196 light, 115 heavy, 25 very heavy), 34 tech comps, 12 air comps, 2 balloon dets. 151,900 foot, 1670 horse; 1020 light guns (including 88 flak plus 18 naval 47 mm pieces), 390 heavy guns (including 28 naval guns of various calibers), 60 very heavy guns; 1765 MG, 154 inf guns, 714 trench mortars<sup>117</sup>

Reinforcements arriving during the 10<sup>th</sup> Isonzo Battle...

- . 24<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Urbarz) - 8600 foot, 75 horse, 70 guns, 101 MG, 16 inf guns. The Division arrived from Archduke Joseph's Front. The infantry detrained east of Tolmein on 17 May, the cavalry came to Sector IV. The artillery didn't arrive until the start of June.
  - . 47 Bde (Col. Edler von Wieden) - IR 9 (4), 45 (2)
  - . 48 Bde (GM Göttlicher) -IR 10 (2), 77 (2)
  - . 3 Res Sqdn/RSR 3

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<sup>117</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Here and in the other figures given for trench mortars the totals for "Minen-" and "Granat-" werfer are combined; in the original they are usually shown separately.

- . 24 FA Bde (Col. von Uherek) - FKR 24 (6), FHR 24 (6), Hvy FAR 24 (4)
- . 35<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Podhoranszky) - 13,700 foot, 200 horse, 60 guns, 128 MG, 8 inf guns. The Division came from the German Eastern Command and detrained at Opcina. The artillery came later (some not until the start of July).
  - . 69 Bde (Col. Guha) - IR 51 (4); k.k. Lst IR 51 (3)
  - . 70 Bde (Col. Funk) - IR 62 (3), 63 (4); k.u. Lst Bn I/34
  - . "Combined" k.u. Lst Huss Bn 2 (2)
  - . 35 FA Bde (Gm Gröschl) - FKR 35 (5), FHR 35 (4); Hvy FAR 35 (3)

Reinforcements joining 5<sup>th</sup> Army in June after the 10<sup>th</sup> Battle...

- . 12<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Puchalski) - 9530 foot, 112 MG, 10 inf guns. The Division came from Archduke Joseph's Army Group and detrained at Opcina in June.
  - . 23 Bde (Col. Latinik) - IR 56 (3), 100 (2)
  - . 24 Bde (Col. Reindl) - IR 3 (4), 20 (3), 57 (1)
- . 21<sup>st</sup> Sch Div (GM Podhajsky) - 10,600 foot, 90 horse, 96 MG, 8 inf guns. The Division came from the German Eastern Command without its artillery; it detrained east of Tolmein at the start of June.
  - . 41 Bde (Col. Edler von Schwanda) - SchR 6 (3), 7 (3)
  - . 42 Bde (Col. von Grossmann) - SchR 8 (3), 28 (3)
  - . 4 Sqdn/DR 7
- . 10<sup>th</sup> Mtn Bde (Col. Kofron) - Came from Mackensen's Army Group and detrained at Laibach at the end of June. Had just Bns IV/20, I/21 and I/90.

#### **D. The Sector of the Pola Military Harbor**

Commander = Vice-Admiral Fiedler

C/Staff = Col. Edler von Zuna

Had 8 bns, 10 mobile batties, 26 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp. 9600 foot, 550 guns; 18 mobile and 96 fixed MG

- . The Pola garrison
  - . k.k. Lst IR 5 (2); k.k. Lst Bn 5; k.u. Lst Bns V/8, II/27, V/29; Naval Bns 1 & 3
  - . 4 Fortress Arty Bde (FML Edler von Hlavacek) - 13 line, 6 reserve and 7 March comps of Fort AR 4
  - . An 8 cm Russian FK batty, a 12.5 cm Russian FH batty; eight 9 cm can batties, one flak batty. 3 Comp/SB 6.
  - . Various Gendarme posts and Finance Watch detachments.
- . Parenzo-Rovigno and Albona Coastal Sectors - 7 coast defense dets, Gendarme posts and Finance and Cable guard posts
- . Lussin Island - One Coast Defense det; two comps from Fort AR 4; Gendarme, Finance and Cable guard posts

## 2. The first period, 12-20 May

### a. The great attack of the Görz Army

#### The Italian units and their objectives

The commander of the Görz Army, G.Lt Capello, believed his primary task was to wrest from his opponents the northern bastion of the Görz basin, the block of high ground that included Mt S Gabriele and Mt Santo. This would enable his VIII Corps (7, 24 and 48 ID), whose first effort was aimed at capturing the low hills east of Görz, to penetrate the Wippach valley. To occupy the heights to the north, which were divided by the Dol Pass, Capello would send VI Corps (8 and 10 ID) in a frontal assault from the Salcano area. The row of summits (Mt Santo 682, Vodice 652 and Kuk 611) make up a continuous chain of hills that is very difficult to attack, but in the north they descend gradually toward Plava. Therefore II Corps (3, 47 and 60 ID) would thrust from the Plava bridgehead and through Zagora to first capture the Kuk and the Vodice, as well as the Kobilek (# 627) if possible, reaching out toward VI Corps on Mt Santo.

G.Lt Garioni, commanding II Corps, intended to facilitate this assuredly difficult mission with an envelopment maneuver by his left wing. Thus the capable 47 ID, consisting of Bersaglieri and Alpini, would cross the Isonzo between Canale and Loga and thrust strongly south through the village of Vrh toward the Jelenik (# 788). Several days before the start of the battle, however, General Capello wanted to reduce the strength of the planned flank attack; this was because of an erroneous report that the Austrians had been significantly reinforced in front of II Corps' center. This resulted in an argument with the Corps commander, who doubted that a purely frontal attack would succeed; the result was that G.Lt Garioni was relieved of his command. On 13 May he was replaced by Capello's Chief of Staff, G.Lt Badoglio. Thus II Corps received an energetic commander. Badoglio put greater weight into the attack at Plava, which he had already advocated while he was still the Army's Chief of Staff. The operation on the left wing was scaled down. There were also some last-minute, not very precise changes to the plans of the extreme southern wing of the Görz Army, which in general was supposed to advance in conjunction with the northern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army toward Biglia.

Besides the units already mentioned, the following were standing

ready on 12 May - 53 ID behind II Corps, 11 ID behind VIII Corps, and northwest of Cormons (where General Capello had his HQ) the XXIV Corps (23 and 49 ID). Also available in the sector of the Görz Army, although initially at the disposition of the high command, were 20 ID (three brigades strong) and 2 CD which had 12 bicycle battalions in addition to its horsemen.<sup>118</sup> In all, General Capello had available more than 146 infantry battalions and 990 guns. Of this force, he was initially sending about 70 battalions and 550 guns against the k.u.k. XVII Corps. Here the attackers had a roughly threefold superiority over the defenders. At the outset Capello deployed around 40 battalions and 40 guns against the k.u.k. XVI Corps, so he didn't have a substantial superiority in this sector.

#### Units and disposition of the k.u.k. XVII Corps

The strength of the k.u.k. XVII Corps was unevenly distributed between its two divisional sectors. In the area of GM Novak von Arienti's 62 ID, the thinly held battle lines of Col. Edler von Lewandowski's 205 Lst Inf Bde ran right alongside the Isonzo from Auzza downstream to Descla-Britof. In the adjacent area to the south there were two close, parallel lines. The first position was situated on the heights east of Plava and the Kuk Ridge, about half way up the slope, and didn't reach the crest until a point near Vodice # 652. It was occupied by Col. Kouff's 121 Inf Bde. Opposite this line the Italians had been entrenched on the eastern bank of the Isonzo since the first weeks of the war. There had been no lack of attempts to drive the enemy from this bridgehead. But all had ended many months ago with large casualties, and had not been resumed. Any movement on the slopes leading down to the enemy was exposed to flanking fire from the batteries on the Korada and on Mt Sabotino, which also bombarded our trenches. Therefore there had been several suggestions that the main line of resistance should be pulled back to the crest of the Kuk Ridge, where the second position was situated. But this voluntary abandonment of terrain might open the way into the Isonzo valley downstream from Plava to the enemy. Therefore the Army commander had decided to hold onto the forward battle line.

From the barren Vodice Heights, which were still in the sector of 62 ID, a ridge led northeast in the direction of the Bainsizza-Heiligengeist highlands. This ridge and the western edge of the highlands were fortified by strong points. Here the k.k. Lst IR

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118TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original states that 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav Div also had an attached infantry brigade but this isn't confirmed by the order of battle in the Italian official history (which was given above).

11, attached to XVII Corps, had taken up their position.

GM von Hrozny's 57 ID were stationed south of 62 ID. Their main position ran along the ridge from Vodice to Mt Santo, crossed the Dol Pass (through which the road from the Britof valley ran to Salcano) and then surrounded the western slope of Mt S Gabriele. The northern part of 57 ID's front was held by Col. Freih. von Albori's 5 Inf Bde, and the southern part by Col. Laxa's 18 Inf Bde.

#### 12-13 May

This was the situation when XVII Corps began their battle with a much larger enemy force on 12 May. FML Fabini, who led the defense from Chiapovano, at first had just the k.k. Lst IR 27 available in reserve. But in the evening he learned that 106 Lst ID was marching toward Ternova. The enemy's very destructive fire lasted throughout the night; it intensified on the 13<sup>th</sup> and finally became a hurricane bombardment on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Italians fired at all the positions and the areas reaching far to the rear, particularly against the HQ of the higher commanders. Damage was great. In many places the barriers were destroyed and the trenches choked with rubble. Casualties weren't light. But this continuous and exhausting hail of iron couldn't break the strong will of the defenders, who resolutely defied death. The k.u.k. artillery, which in this sector wasn't numerous but at least was well-supplied with ammunition, returned the attackers' fire throughout this whole period. They inflicted heavy losses on the Italians even before they emerged from their forward trenches. The enemy infantry didn't move forward until noon on 14 May.

Already on the first day of the battle GO Borojevic identified the width of the area chosen for the enemy offensive from the heaviness and geographical extent of the Italian artillery fire. Because of the very large number of new batteries that began to fire on 12 May from the hills in front of XVII Corps, he had no doubt that they couldn't have been placed there merely for a diversionary maneuver. The Colonel-General once again asked HQ of Southwest Front to release 106 Lst ID; after he received permission, in late evening he ordered the unit to march - as already planned - from the area around the Wippach toward Ternova. To replace 106 Lst ID, a brigade from 43 Sch Div moved up to occupy the empty installations by the Wippach and at Hl. Kreuz. After these transfers were carried out, in the night of 12-13 May the major reserves were grouped as the Army HQ had wanted Front HQ to permit several days earlier. Meanwhile the

intense artillery fire continued day and night without respite along the front between Auzza and the sea.

The question now was where would the main thrust take place? The Italians couldn't be expected to attack in equal strength along the 50 km front. The consensus was that the operation in progress in the northern sector, against the Bainsizza Plateau, was intended to divert our units, while the enemy's main blow would probably still be directed against the southern wing in the direction of Trieste.

Since no infantry attack took place on the 13<sup>th</sup>, it was possible on this day for Sector III to have 16 ID systematically relieve 9 ID. Thus on 14 May the reserves in the Comen-Sesana area on the Karst plateau were 9, 10 and 48 ID plus half of 43 Sch Div. Now Army HQ received the glad tidings that two more divisions would come from the Russian theater of operations. These would be 24 ID, which as GO Boroevic wished would come forward on the railroad leading to the northern wing and detrain near S Lucia, and 35 ID which would take the Southern Railroad to the Army's left wing.

#### 14-15 May

After a storm of fire that lasted for two and a half days, at noon on 14 May the infantry battle opened along the entire Isonzo front, with the exception of the sector held by the k.u.k. XV Corps.

The first assault from the Plava bridgehead was launched by 3 ID, deeply deployed and reinforced by Bersaglieri. At the same time the leading brigade of 60 ID crossed the Isonzo near Zagora and stormed toward the trenches in front of the ruins of this small hamlet. There was heavy fighting around the projecting foremost bastion, "Bloody Hill" # 383. Twice the Italians were able to penetrate the trenches, but both times were driven out by the heroic troops of the Hungarian Infantry Battalion II/52. At Zagora the Dalmatians of IR # 22 were engaged with a greatly superior force, but they also wouldn't yield. Thus in the evening 62 ID were able to report that they had defeated the initial enemy onslaught along their entire front.

The nearly simultaneous operation of 10 Italian ID against Mounts Santo and S Gabriele was smashed by the defenders' accurate artillery fire. The enemy fled back down the slope toward Salcano. Thus the afternoon report by 57 ID was also encouraging. Then news suddenly arrived that the enemy stood



upon Mt Santo. Corps HQ alerted their reserves, as well as 110 Lst Inf Bde (part of 106 Lst ID, which had arrived at Ternova after an exhausting march) and sent them toward Mt Santo. But before these troops could intervene the momentary uproar had ended. The brigade and divisional reserves had struck back and recovered the mountain during the night. Soldiers from the k.u. Lst Inf Bn III/5, who'd been taken prisoner by surprise, were liberated.

This disturbing episode, which fortunately ended happily, was caused by an unusual development on the Italian side. The commander of the brigade attacking Mt Santo had originally planned to have one regiment make a frontal assault, roughly along the winding road that leads to the monastery; the other regiment would turn north into the Isonzo valley so as to climb the western slope, covered with bushes, and thus take their opponents by surprise. The brigadier's concept wasn't approved by his superiors, but he was permitted to send one battalion along the secret path he'd identified.<sup>119</sup> The result was that this battalion alone gained the success narrated above; but since it wasn't adequately supported, finally it suffered defeat. Meanwhile all the other renewed attacks by VI Italian Corps during the night against the Dol Pass and Mt S Gabriele failed. Repeated mass attacks in the morning of 15 May against Mt S Gabriele collapsed due to destructive artillery fire and to the gallant defense by the Styrians of IR 87 and FJB 9; casualties were so heavy that the Italians refrained from any further assaults against this bulwark on the southern wing of XVII Corps.

On the other hand, II Italian Corps - after their first vain attempts - finally succeeded during the night of 14-15 May in forcing their way out of the cramped Plava bridgehead. In hard fighting they captured several completely destroyed trenches in the position on the slopes by Zagora and Zagomila; widening their penetration toward the south, they worked their way forward to the works on the heights running from Point 535 through Kuk 611 to Vodice 652. Starting at daybreak, the enemy assaulted this position. But the battalions of 121 Inf Bde stationed here weren't lax; in bitter fighting, in which the defenders' artillery was just as powerful as that of the attackers, they finally gained the upper hand. But the majority of the position on the slope was lost for good. Only in its northern part were Battalion II/52 on the "Bloody Hill" and k.u. Landsturm Battalion VI/4 at Globna still offering heroic resistance against the larger enemy forces. 121 Inf Bde was obviously melting away in these intense actions. Fresh units were needed to make up for

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<sup>119</sup>Baj-Macario, "Kuk", p. 43

the heavy casualties. But XVII Corps HQ had little opportunity to provide help, because simultaneous developments on the northern wing were acting as a diversion.

According to the morning reports, in the north the enemy had crossed the Isonzo at Bodrez and Loga and was advancing toward the south. This information was all the more disturbing because earlier intelligence had indicated that the Italians were planning a major operation in this area. Actually the enemy had constructed a bridge during the night and with two battalions had overwhelmed the k.k. Lst Bn III/409, which held completely-trampled trenches on the bank of the Isonzo. In the morning the batteries and infantry reserves of 205 Lst Bde intervened along with parts of k.k. Lst IR 11 which had been held in readiness on the edge of the plateau, and the enemy were quickly brought to a halt. Moreover, their bridge was destroyed by shelling. Thus the danger had passed by the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>. But the anxiety caused by the initial shock hadn't dissipated, and was even increased when the Italians sent another battalion over the river. An overestimate of the enemy's designs led to the k.k. Lst IR 27 also being sent to the apparently threatened area. Thus all of 24 Lst Inf Bde had been committed. Finally, an infantry battalion from XV Corps was also held fast here.

By diverting these units, the enemy had succeeded in placing XVII Corps HQ in a serious dilemma as they tried to find a way to support their center, which really was in danger and under heavy attack. Because of the urgency of the Corps' requests for reinforcements, Army HQ also became rather concerned. In the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> they had already released 110 Lst Inf Bde, which Corps HQ felt they needed to ensure they could hold Mt Santo. Then GO Boroevic ordered that SchR 37, which had been resting at Slap in the Idria valley, should move forward on the Bainsizza Plateau; he placed two battalions of this Regiment under Corps HQ.<sup>120</sup> FML Fabini sent both battalions, along with k.k. Lst IR 31 (from 110 Bde) to the Corps' center.

Regardless of the heavy losses which the Italians had suffered on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, they tried again in the night of 15-16 May to capture the "Bloody Hill" and the Kuk-Vodice Ridge. But their attempts failed in both locations. Now General Badoglio committed another brigade of 53 ID plus parts of 47 ID. After a heavy hurricane bombardment, tightly-deployed forces stormed against 121 Inf Bde<sup>121</sup>, which at the last moment was reinforced by

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<sup>120</sup>Fabini, "Die Kämpfe um die Hochfläche von Bainsizza" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1933 edition), pp. 334 ff.

<sup>121</sup>As shown in the order of battle, Landsturm troops made up half

Lst IR 31. The brave Landsturm troops defended themselves like heroes; enemy soldiers who penetrated the lines at several points were hurled out in savage hand-to-hand combat. But finally the much larger Italian force prevailed. Then in the afternoon the k.k. Lst IR 6 hurried to the scene and intervened. After brief but well-concentrated artillery fire, the gallant men from Eger stormed forward and wrested from the enemy the ground they'd won with so much bloodshed. Only a few parts of the trenches next to Points 535 and 524 remained in Italian hands.

The insertion of two regiments from 106 Lst ID in 121 Inf Bde's sector caused Corps HQ to give the leader of the 106<sup>th</sup>, GM Kratky, command over the Corps' center. The authority of GM Novak-Arienti was restricted to the 205 and 24 Lst Inf Bdes.

Opposite 57 ID the Italian VI Corps repeated their attacks against Mt Santo and the position on the ridge near Point 503 with their 10 ID and parts of 8 ID. But the operation was shattered by a well-aimed barrage from the defending artillery and by the gallant conduct of the reinforced 5 Inf Bde.

## **b. Fighting in the Görz basin**

In the first three days of the offensive, the left wing of General Capello's Army had at least been able to gain a very restricted success. But the right wing in the Görz basin hadn't been able to advance a foot forward, despite all their efforts. Here the three reinforced divisions which VIII Corps sent into the fray had battered in vain against the unyielding wall held by the k.u.k. XVI Corps.

On 12 May the latter corps, led since the end of March by GdI Kralicek, was in good order and prepared to defend themselves. The northern wing consisted of 58 ID (now as always led by FML Zeidler) with 4 and 5 Mtn Bdes. After the latest troop movements were complete, GM Adalbert von Dani's 4 Mtn Bde had two battalions apiece from the Vienna Lst IR 1 and Linz Lst IR 2 plus Bn III/85 and k.k. Lst Bn 42. Col. Prey's 5 Mtn Bde was made up of the Karlstadt IR 96 and Zara SchR 23, plus FJB 2 and one battalion each of IR 28 and k.k. Lst IR 1. The right wing of 58 ID held the bastion of Sv. Katarina at the foot of Mt S Gabriele; the center was stationed at Grazigna near the Görz cemetery, where they barred the way into the Rosen valley in well-built trenches on Heights # 174, at Tivoli and on Heights # 171. The

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of 121 Inf Bde.

left wing was firmly anchored on Heights # 227.

The lines south of the triangle of railroad tracks at St Peter had been held for about a month by GM von Szende's west Hungarian 14 ID, which had relieved 43 Sch Div. Their positions stretched through Sober and the rising ground east of the Vertojbica Brook to the Wippach at Biglia. The 14<sup>th</sup> had all of its own assigned units, and now had been reinforced by the Czernowitz Lst IR 22.<sup>122</sup> Four of the division's infantry battalions were detached in the Corps' reserves, as were three battalions of 58 ID.

XVI Corps wasn't surprised in the morning of 12 May when the Italian batteries and trench mortars began their great cannonade. The assault had been expected for several days. But the intensity and duration of the hail of iron surpassed all expectations; it completely destroyed large parts of the trenches and at many points finally turned the terrain into a real field of shell-holes. Meanwhile the defenders' own powerful artillery was by no means idle. They kept the Italian infantry, who were waiting to attack, pinned down in their foremost trenches, and at times were able to quench the fire of the enemy guns. Both sides also employed gas-shells.

The waves of Italian troops who stormed forward in the Görz bridgehead at noon on the 14<sup>th</sup> were more closely coordinated in time and space than those which attacked XVII Corps. The main assault was directed against 58 ID; it was obvious that the enemy intended to break through on the heights between Sv. Katarina and S Marco. Two regiments thrust against the trenches at Sv. Katarina; they immediately suffered very heavy casualties from our artillery barrage and then were completely defeated. At Grazigna several companies penetrated the lines, but then were overcome in hand-to-hand combat. Four brigades attacked the Rosental and S Marco defensive sectors. In both places the grim combat continued into the night. SchR 23 suffered heavy losses, but finally was able to halt the enemy within the foremost line. The Italians took one trench on Mt S Marco. Under 14 ID only the northern wing was heavily engaged; here the heights by Sober were the focal point of the fighting. The Italians couldn't achieve any success. The enemy didn't attack the other parts of 14 ID's front with any determination. They hesitated, apparently because they didn't receive the cooperation they'd expected from the neighboring 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. An attempt to attack Vertojba village soon collapsed under artillery fire. During the afternoon GdI Kralicek had already marched his Corps' reserves nearer to the

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<sup>122</sup>Lst IR 1, 2 and 22 belonged to the 1<sup>st</sup> k.k. Lst Inf Bde, whose HQ was not in use at this time.

front and reinforced 58 ID with a battalion from 14 ID; he asked Army HQ to give him 86 Sch Bde as a new reserve for the Corps. GO Boroevic complied with this request. In the evening 86 Bde moved forward to Cernizza. By nightfall on the 15<sup>th</sup> it was replaced in the area around Hl. Kreuz by HQ of 43 Sch Div with 59 Inf Bde.

The tireless enemy renewed their attacks between Grazigna and Vertojba on 15 May. However, they didn't make another attempt to advance against the formidable positions, well supplied with machine guns, at the foot of Mt S Gabriele where their Milano Brigade had been so roughly handled.<sup>123</sup> The very bitter fighting in the Pannowitz Woods raged until evening, as did the actions at Heights 171 and around Mt S Marco. The veteran troops of 58 ID fought well and thwarted all the enemy's efforts; the Dalmatian SchR 23 was especially distinguished.<sup>124</sup> Repeated Italian thrusts against the northern wing of 14 ID at Sober and Vertojba were completely repulsed by battalions from the west Hungarian Infantry Regiments 71 and 76.<sup>125</sup>

As on the day before, our air companies intervened once more in the ground fighting. But the enemy's "Capronis" were also active<sup>126</sup>; cruising low over the field, with their machine guns and bombs they caused difficulties for the Austrian units, especially the batteries. The few available anti-aircraft guns weren't able to drive them away. This unfortunate scenario was repeated in the next few days.

The stubborn Italian VIII Corps made one more attempt to break through on 16 May. Seven brigades of this Corps had already entered the fighting, and now two more units joined them. The Emilia Brigade was deployed south of Sv. Katarina opposite Damber. Their troops, with fresh spirits, were given the assignment which had led to the ruin of their predecessors from the Milano Brigade. In a gallant assault the Italians were able to reach some of their objectives by Sv. Katarina. But they didn't enjoy their success for long. The Viennese 1st Bn IV/39, disregarding the numerical superiority of the enemy troops who'd

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123"Brigade di Fanteria", Vol. VI, pp. 203 ff.

124SchR 23 had already lost more than 1000 men, and that night was relieved by a regiment from 86 Sch Bde.

125Some of the personnel of IR 76 were recruited in areas that since 1919 have been part of Austria's Burgenland.

126Although "Caproni" was the name of a specific class of biplanes, our troops used the word to refer to all Italian aircraft.

penetrated our lines, mounted a bold counterattack. They not only recovered the position, but took 500 prisoners.

The focal points in the center of the battlefield were the same as on the previous day. The Cuneo Brigade was brought to this area, but couldn't give new impetus to the assault since the other four brigades here were already becoming weaker. The Italians couldn't overcome the unbroken, steadfast Aus-Hung. troops. All enemy attempts to attack 14 ID were also shattered. A final thrust on both sides of the Rosen valley failed in the evening, after which HQ of VIII Corps had to suspend their attacks.

### **c. The subsidiary attack of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army**

On 12 May the Duke of Aosta's Army opened their massive artillery fire at the same hour as the guns of the Görz Army, so that Boroevic's Army HQ at Adelsberg gained the impression that the battle was commencing on the entire front between Tolmein and the sea. This impression continued because the Italians also maintained their destructive work on 13 May with the same intensity. Damage to the fortifications was quite substantial. On the other hand, casualties were kept within reasonable limits because the garrisons had taken refuge in well constructed shelters. Here for hour after hour they awaited the order to re-occupy the trenches, which were being pounded constantly by shells and mortar rounds. The most endangered part of the Karst front was the sector that jutted forward between Hudilog and Point 208, which the Italians could bring under crossfire. Moreover, the enemy here were stationed very near our lines and had well-protected assembly points behind them. When the destructive fire of the attackers reached its height in the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, HQ of Sector III reported their belief that an enemy breakthrough attempt was imminent along the Fajti Ridge as well as between Hudilog and Heights # 208.

But per the orders of the Italian high command their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army made a serious assault in the second phase of the battle just with their left wing, in order to help the right wing of Capello's Army. Therefore at noon on the 14<sup>th</sup> only XI Corps moved forward. Their 22 ID on the Wippach was supposed to first recover the position that had been lost on 26 March near Heights 126, while 22 ID tried to capture the high ground between Points 464 and 363. The Corps' 4 ID, stationed at the bend in the line in front of Kostanjevica, were only supposed to harass their opponents with thrusts by isolated battalions. This was also the assignment of the divisions of XIII and VII Corps.

Therefore the fighting involved mainly GM Schönauer's 44 Sch Div and GM Ströher's 17 ID. With admirable calm, the troops of both divisions - men from the Alpine lands and from Hungary - allowed the two days of shelling to pass by. Then they offered energetic resistance when the Italian infantry stormed forward at noon on 14 May. In the sector of 44 Sch Div, the enemy were able to penetrate part of the trenches and installations of the Carinthian Geb SchR 1, which had been wrecked by the drumfire. But the defenders soon rallied, drove the Italians out, and even pursued them past the foremost line. The next echelon of attackers, who'd been standing by ready to follow up, were now afraid to come under the heavy barrage that the Aus-Hung. artillery was laying down between the opposing trenches. The Italians stayed in place. The troops who advanced against 17 ID fared no better. After the first infantry assault failed, the enemy artillery once more pounded the positions on the eastern Fajti hrib and Hill 363. Then the already-reduced ranks of the Italian 22 ID moved forward again. But this renewed attempt also failed; the gallant Hungarians - in particular the Magyars of IR 39 stationed at the focal point of the fighting - refused to fall back a step. Finally the enemy realized that their efforts were in vain; they refrained from further attacks after evening fell. Opposite 41 Hon ID only a few battalions had initiated some isolated assaults, which were easily repulsed.

The k.u.k. XXIII Corps also experienced similar isolated thrusts, but the general offensive which had been so tensely expected didn't materialize. It seemed that the enemy had been unable to fully deploy their units because of the extraordinarily heavy fire by the accurate Aus-Hung. artillery, and that the advance might still take place the next morning. But again on 15 May there were no major developments. Only some small enemy groups emerged here and there from the trenches, but quickly took shelter as soon as the artillery fired some well-aimed salvos. Because of the ample ammunition supply, it was possible to periodically bombard the foremost enemy trenches. Therefore, or so it seemed, the Italians' eagerness to attack had dissipated.

The k.u.k. VII Corps, on the other hand, once more had to withstand new attacks, but these were less determined than on the previous day. Again the Italian batteries and trench mortars hammered the positions of 17 ID for several hours while the infantry skirmishing lines inched forward before rushing boldly to the attack. At several points there was combat with hand grenades or bayonets, in which the Hungarians gained the upper hand. The impetus of the Italian attacks was already in decline.

In the night which followed this fourth day of the battle the guns and rifles were quiet. In the darkness figures were spotted upon the blood-soaked battlefield; apparently they were trying to save the countless badly-wounded soldiers and to recover the bodies of the fallen.

On the next day (May 16) the Italians restricted their efforts to some local thrusts. Around noon they made a surprise attack near Spacapani on the Wippach, which was easily repulsed by the riflemen of 44 Sch Div. At the same time troops of 17 ID noted that the enemy, creeping forward or bounding ahead in brief spurts, were apparently assembling for a new assault in the cavities in the Karst in front of Heights 378. But this enterprise was soon cut short when our batteries opened fire. In front of XXIII Corps the Italians once again merely undertook several small-scale operations, such as in the Hudilog area. The only result was to cause our artillery to fire. Late in the evening there was a heavy two-hour cannonade against the front of 16 ID in the Jamiano depression. There was no explanation for this development, since afterwards it was quiet on the entire Karst plateau. The pause - interrupted only by the diminished thunder of the guns and brief exchanges of machine gun fire - lasted throughout the next day (the 17<sup>th</sup>).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army had been unable to carry out their mission. They were supposed to help the right wing of the neighboring Army, but hadn't done so. And the very energetic response of their opponents, above all the weight of the defensive artillery fire, made such a strong impression at 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ that they now anticipated their impending principal assault with trepidation. Acting under this impression, the Duke of Aosta suggested to his high command that the original battle plans should be altered.

The defenders on the other hand had found no quick explanation for the enemy's behavior on the Karst plateau, where much more had been expected at the close of the two days of artillery preparation. The overall picture which emerged as the battle developed was very confusing. GM Anton Ritter von Pitreich, at the time the Chief of the Operations Section at Army HQ in Adelsberg, stated later that the night of 15-16 May was one of the most anxious during the entire prolonged battle.<sup>127</sup>

The k.u.k. XXIII Corps had planned to relieve 28 ID with 10 ID on 15 May, but then postponed this action. Finally, when despite all expectations the stalemate continued along the entire Karst

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<sup>127</sup>Pitreich, "Die zehnte Isonzoschlacht" (in Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 372)



front, the two divisions began to switch places at night on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

d. The Battle's first phase dies out, 17-20 May

Analyses by the opposing commanders

On 16 May the Italian high command already found themselves obliged to alter their order of battle, since events weren't unfolding as expected when they issued their guidelines on 19 April. In Cadorna's opinion the operations by the Görz Army had been noticeably vigorous only in the area between Kuk and Mt Santo, where some noteworthy successes had been won. The attacks in the Görz basin, on the other hand, had apparently lacked energy. The plan of attack had envisioned the third phase of the battle as flowing directly from the second, without interruption. The failure in the center had brought the plan to nought, since the only advance by the Görz Army was taking place in an area remote from the sector where 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was going to attack. Based on these considerations, Cadorna ordered that although General Capello's left wing should continue their offensive for now, it should stop when the Kuk and Mt Santo were captured or even "when a favorable tactical situation is achieved." The main thrust would still develop on the front farther south, between Mt Santo and the sea. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's goals were unchanged. But General Capello's Army was supposed to make a powerful new assault in the area of the Görz basin (including Mt S Gabriele). The original plan for employing the artillery was also changed; instead of transferring the batteries around Görz (which were ready to move and mobile) to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the majority of the medium and heavy batteries deployed on Capello's left wing (with II and VI Corps) would be sent.<sup>128</sup> With these alterations, the third phase of the battle was now scheduled to start on 20 May.

It's noteworthy that at this time the HQ of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were suggesting a completely different concept to General Cadorna. The Duke of Aosta stated his belief, based on the setbacks of 14 and 15 May, that the tasks assigned to his Army were extraordinarily difficult. He proposed to abstain from an offensive on the Karst plateau. Instead he would give up units to reinforce Capello's Army, which was already achieving some success, so that they could win a decisive victory.

General Capello apparently learned of the suggestions of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ and thus anticipated that he would be given a larger part to play on the Bainsizza Plateau. To him therefore Cadorna's actual

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<sup>128</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (new 1934 edition), p. 368

orders were like a cold shower.<sup>129</sup> On 17 May he peevishly reported to the high command at Udine that the ammunition he'd been provided wasn't sufficient for the new plan of attack. He would have to restrict his efforts to capturing the Kuk and Mt Santo while refraining from a renewal of the offensive in the Görz basin. He wouldn't exploit the success of the diversionary operation on the left wing (at Bodrez and Loga)<sup>130</sup> and even decided to pull back the battalions that here had crossed to the east bank of the Isonzo.

It was not a coincidence that in this period there were also alterations in the analysis of the situation on the other side, at 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ in Adelsberg. Already at noon on 16 May GO Borojevic sent a wire to FML Fabini to express his surprise about the events on Mounts Santo and Kuk. Here a weak Italian force had gained some ground for reasons that weren't clear. The reserves hadn't been employed efficiently and the units were very much inter-mingled. XVII Corps wouldn't receive any more reserves from Army HQ, and should even be prepared to give some up. But before 24 hours had passed the Army commander felt obliged to send XVII Corps another battalion from XV Corps as well as both the battalions of SchR 37 which had been held back in the Army's reserve. Moreover, he ordered 59 Inf Bde (from 43 Sch Div) to climb from the Wippach valley to the high ground at Ternova.

The reason why Borojevic changed his mind was that the enemy attacks in the Görz basin noticeably died down in the afternoon of 16 May and came to a halt that night. They weren't renewed the following morning. In XVII Corps' sector, on the other hand, fighting continued for the entire period and even seemed to become more intense. Army HQ also seems to have been disturbed by the latest intelligence about the disposition of the enemy forces.

### 17 May

In fact there was very heavy fighting on the Kuk ridge in the night of 16-17 May, in which the heroic Eger-land troops of Lst IR 6 repulsed repeated penetrations in bitter hand-to-hand combat. The enemy's numerical superiority was coming ever more into play. Against the weakening ranks of 121 Inf Bde, which at this point had been reinforced by Lst IR 6 and then only by the first two battalions of SchR 37, the Italians had already thrown

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<sup>129</sup>Baj-Macario, "Kuk", p. 57

<sup>130</sup>Capello, Vol. II, pp. 58 ff.

a fifth brigade into the fight.<sup>131</sup> The enemy artillery, especially the guns deployed on the Korada, delivered overwhelming fire against the flank and rear of the completely exhausted defenders. Soon after noon a final powerful thrust, delivered regardless of casualties, overcame the heroism of the gallant units which had held onto Kuk ridge for three days despite acute water shortage and insufficient rations. Meanwhile it still hadn't been possible to drive back the Italians who'd crossed the Isonzo at Bodrez, and whose strength had been considerably overestimated.

The loss of the Kuk heights had a great impact on the leadership. FML Fabini wanted to immediately recover the lost positions with a thrust from Vodice along the ridge-line. But Army HQ made an all too-hasty decision; they delivered the following order to the Corps commander:

"Because of the condition of the troops on the left bank of the Isonzo between Auzza and Descla, you should refrain from further offensive thrusts in this area to ensure that the position is held firmly. Your guideline for the operations in the Plava-Kuk area is to hold onto the line running from Descla along the eastern edge of the heights of Rohot p. through Vodice to Pint 652. If by early morning conditions are favorable to recover the Kuk ridge, Corps HQ are free to take their own measures to do so. But Corps HQ should be aware that even if it's possible to provide further reinforcements, none will be available before early on 19 May."

Meanwhile Army HQ ordered that the artillery brigade of 106 Lst ID, which was being equipped far in the rear (in the area south of Idria) should move forward. Two 15 cm howitzer batteries were re-assigned from Sector III to XVII Corps. Finally (but still in the evening of 17 May) the 48 ID were ordered to march from the Karst plateau to the Hl. Kreuz-Heidenschaft area, where they would stand ready to keep moving to the high ground by Ternova if necessary. Since at this time the first battalions of 24 ID, which had been assigned to the Army's northern wing, had arrived at Podmelec and sent on to the Bainsizza plateau, the concentration of forces in Sector II.a (the area commanded by XVII Corps) would soon reach five divisions. It seemed desirable to make new provisions for the chain of command. Therefore GO Boroevic sent the HQ of GdI Lukas' XXIV Corps - which the high command had made available to him at the end of April - to Chiapovano; here they would receive orientation about the area

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<sup>131</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Per Beilage 8, the Italians by now were employing the Avelino, Firenze, Teramo and Udine Inf Bdes and 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Bde plus the 21<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Regt.

and later could take control of the sector.

Strangely enough, the loss of the Kuk ridge - which had caused the latest wide-ranging measures of the Aus-Hung. commanders as narrated above - was the result of a limited, even isolated, Italian offensive operation. Along the rest of its entire front the Görz Army remained inactive on 17 May. General Capello had decided to use this day to bring order to his units and re-arrange them. Therefore the group that had been successful on the Kuk didn't proceed any further after they reached the crest, and in the evening this area also became quiet. After further consultations with Army HQ, FML Fabini abandoned plans for a counterattack. Battalion II/52, which was still holding out on the "Bloody Hill" although now completely isolated, were ordered to give up their position and reinforce the lines near Heights 363 (north of Paljevo). From this point the new defensive line would cross the Rohot valley and lead toward Heights 652 (northwest of the Kobilek). Throughout 18 May patrols detached from the Battalion were able to conceal its withdrawal, which was completed that night, from the enemy.

In the Görz basin it was surprisingly quiet on the 17<sup>th</sup>. After darkness fell one Italian brigade made a sudden assault in the Damber-S Marco sector without any artillery preparation, but failed to surprise the alert defenders, who repulsed the enemy.

#### 18-19 May

On 18 May General Capello resumed the offensive in full strength; he gave II Corps the goal of capturing the Vodice-Mt Santo ridge. The principal objective was the large hill complex called Point 652, which rises between the hamlet of Vodice and Ridge 503 and whose importance for military operations is evident from a glance at the map. Therefore, besides 53 ID the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group (taken from 47 ID) were deployed in the front line. The 12<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group were stationed in readiness behind them.

At daybreak there was a completely unsuccessful assault on Mt Santo. It was followed by four hours of destructive fire and then, around 10:00 AM, by the first enemy attack at Vodice and toward Heights # 652. This thrust was parried; several small detachments that drove into the defenders' line were forced to give themselves up. A second attack soon followed, but it was hurled back with the powerful cooperation of the artillery. The Italians suffered large casualties, but didn't give up; once more they ran forward against the brave troops of 106 Lst ID. In the afternoon they finally occupied the summit. But a brilliant

counterattack by the Neu-Sandez k.k. Lst IR 32 hurled them back. The tumult of battle lasted until late in the night, and ended in victory for the defenders. Meanwhile the Alpini also attacked Ridge 503, but recoiled from the heroic resistance by the Czechs and Germans of k.k. Lst Bn 40.

Meanwhile 59 Inf Bde (IR 24 and 41) reached Ternova after a difficult night march. Although unwillingly, Army HQ agreed that in the evening hours this Brigade could move nearer the battlefield "to ensure that the Vodice-Mt Santo area is held." At the same time GO Borojevic advised Corps HQ to be very cautious. The situation in their sector would permit no experiments. The primary goal should be to never relinquish another foot of ground. It seemed more advisable to keep the main battle line strongly garrisoned than to carry out bloody counterattacks with reserves that had been stationed far to the rear.

It seems that Borojevic's opinion wasn't considered up to date by Corps HQ, which were actually on the battlefield and better informed about the developing situation.<sup>132</sup> Therefore FML Fabini ordered that the troops in the Vodice area should be relieved by Colonel Kosel's 59 Inf Bde. This change took place just in time. When the Italians managed to climb onto Heights # 652 around midnight they were defeated in a counterattack by the Bukovina IR 41. In the night it was also finally possible to relieve the reduced and tired battalions of Col. Kouff's Brigade with those of the second brigade of 106 Lst ID (the 110<sup>th</sup> Landsturm). Casualties among the battalions going to the rear had been very high. Some units had lost up to 60% of their authorized strength.

The days which followed were also filled by fighting which surged back and forth, especially on the Vodice-Mt Santo ridge. The persistence with which the Italians sought to attain their goal was no less marvelous than the stubbornness with which the heights were defended by troops from all parts of the Danube Monarchy. Emperor Charles visited the Isonzo front on 18 May and issued an order which stated "Here, during the tenth offensive by the Italian Army, I was an eyewitness to the fighting which my Army of the Isonzo once more had to endure. Your gallantry and death-defying stubbornness has been successful as it was before; under the veteran leadership of your Army commander and all your proven generals, this time you again defied the enemy. I can vouch for the noble spirit and confident attitude of the many troops whom I am personally greeting today. May the Lord of

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<sup>132</sup>Fabini, "Bainsizza", p. 348

Hosts lead my brave Army of the Isonzo to glory and victory!"

In the morning of 19 May the enemy who were lying in front of the Vodice Heights were held in check by the powerful fire of the defending batteries. They finally rose for a new attack in the afternoon. They couldn't be kept from penetrating the fully destroyed defensive position, and so there was heavy fighting with bayonets and hand grenades. The 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment held on, and the Italians had to retreat.

At noon GdI Lukas took control of operations in Sector II.a. The authority of XVII Corps HQ was restricted to the two northern divisions (106<sup>th</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup>), while 57 ID to the south was placed directly under Sector HQ. To coordinate all the guns, Army HQ sent Colonel von Scheucher of their artillery staff. 106 Res FA Bde now could start deploying their batteries on the Bainsizza after a very difficult march.

Otherwise there was little serious fighting on the 19<sup>th</sup> along the Army's entire front. There were no clues to reveal the enemy's further intentions. All that was certain was that Italian reinforcements were moving toward the area of Heights # 652 and Mt Santo. The events of the last few days were causing attention to center ever more on Sector II.a. We estimated that eight enemy divisions were available here. Nevertheless, tension was undiminished in the Görz basin, where eight more divisions were believed to be stationed, and along the Karst front where about fourteen divisions had been reported. Although Army HQ still believed that a new onslaught against the southern wing "was not out of the question", on 19 May they reported to Marburg and Baden that to keep the fight going on the Bainsizza plateau they would still need to use 48 ID (which had marched to Ternova in the preceding night) as well as 24 ID which was arriving by train. The two divisions in reserve on the Karst plateau by Comen would have to be held back for use in the Wippach valley and on the Karst. It would be good to know what further help the Isonzo Army could receive "in case the battle lasts very much longer." Meanwhile in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> GO Borojevic authorized 60 Inf Bde (half of 9 ID) to shift from the Comen area to Hl. Kreuz, so that the Brigade would be closer to Sector II.a without increasing its distance from the Karst front. As he had asked, in the next few days the high command considered what they could do to further reinforce the Isonzo Army.

Late in the evening the HQ at Adelsberg received some noteworthy information: the Italian Army press report of 19 May stated that their troops near Loga and Bodrez had gone back to the western

bank of the Isonzo. This retreat (which actually took place at night on 18 May) hadn't been noticed by the Landsturm soldiers stationed there.

### 20 May

During the night of 19-20 May, all the batteries of 106 Res FA Bde were finally deployed on the Bainsizza. They reinforced the greeting which their artillerist-comrades sent the enemy in the morning. Nevertheless, the Italians didn't give up their plan of conquering Mt Santo this time. The assault on the western slope of the hill against 5 Inf Bde was checked at first by the fire of the barrage; then the enemy rallied and in their next attempt penetrated the battered defensive installations at several points near the ruins of the monastery. But they couldn't stay there because the sector reserves came forward and re-conquered the position. During this counterattack the south Styrian Lst Bn III/26 was especially distinguished. Immediately afterwards the enemy artillery resumed their very heavy and destructive fire, which caused substantial casualties to the gallant Aus-Hung. battalions. But our batteries also stayed active and prevented any movement by the enemy. Finally, when night was falling and causing the fire of the guns to dwindle, the brave Italians made one more effort, this time along the entire front from Vodice to the Dol Pass. This was a death march which cost them very heavy losses. The action was the end of what General Capello himself called his major attack. The next days were relatively quiet. The fighting which developed later (after 23 May) in the Vodice and Mt Santo area, as well as near Görz, was part of the secondary role which was allotted to the Görz Army during the third phase of the battle.

Italian losses had been very heavy. In the narrow battlefield around Vodice alone, where three brigades and two Alpini groups (a total of 26 battalions) had fought, they lost 464 officers and more than 11,000 men.<sup>133</sup> But the casualties of the Aus-Hung. troops weren't light. Between 12 and 20 May the XVII Corps lost 1600 dead, 8370 wounded and 2450 missing, as well as 12 light guns and 6 trench mortars. The casualties in XVI Corps' area were 860 dead, 3150 wounded and 930 missing, and in Sector III they were 770 dead, 4010 wounded and 150 missing.

During this period the combat strength of the Isonzo Army, which also had 6500 men on the sick rolls, declined by nearly 30,000 troops. The Army still had about 65,000 men available in the March units. But this total didn't seem sufficient, since it was

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<sup>133</sup>Pinchetti, "Isonzo 1917" (Milan), p. 94

estimated that 60,000 more casualties might be suffered in the battle. The AOK therefore felt it necessary to send new units to the Isonzo as soon as possible. On 23 May they requested the supreme inter-allied command to release two more divisions from the Eastern front so they could be sent to the Southwest. Thus 21 Sch Div came to the Isonzo Army at the start of June and 12 ID around the middle of the month.

### 3. The second period, 23 May to 5 June

#### a. The main attack by Aosta's Army

The Italian high command had to pay heed to the objections of General Capello concerning the involvement of the right wing of his Army in the third phase of the battle, because it was no longer possible to increase the ammunition supply of the Görz Army to the necessary extent. Therefore they revoked the order of 16 May which had instructed Capello to participate in the hopefully-decisive main attack. Now the reinforced 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would attack alone between the Wippach and the sea. Their commander, however, was counting on simultaneous diversionary thrusts by his neighbor in the Görz basin, and especially on powerful direct support with artillery. The Duke of Aosta was authorized to choose the date for the start of his operation.<sup>134</sup> His 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had been significantly reinforced by three brigades which earlier had been assigned to the Görz Army, and by several brigades which arrived in mid-May from the Tyrol front. Moreover, many medium and heavy batteries were transferred from Capello's to the Duke's Army. Thus 3<sup>rd</sup> Army reached a strength of 246 battalions, with an estimated 1250 guns and 584 trench mortars.<sup>135</sup> This enormous mass of men and equipment was deployed on a battlefield about 18 km wide!

The simultaneous operation by the Görz Army grew into something that was much more than a diversionary assault. Apparently General Capello wanted to win at the last hour the objective he'd failed to secure in the battle's second phase - the capture of Mt Santo. Also he took into account his high command's once explicit desire that he should keep up strong pressure in the Görz basin. Thus the fighting in these two sectors bore all the characteristics of very serious attacks.

#### 23 May

Thus on 23 May major fighting began on the Isonzo with a force

<sup>134</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (new 1934 edition), p. 371

<sup>135</sup>Pinchetti, pp. 64 and 98



which had never hitherto been witnessed on this front. With one blow the battle was raging along the 40 kilometers from Plava to the sea. GO Borojevic very quickly grasped the situation. Already around 8:00 AM he reported: "Today it seems that the second part of the bloody contest has begun; this time it may be played out primarily on the Karst plateau." And actually the battle now did take the course which had been expected from the beginning.

But meanwhile a very significant transfer of the major reserves had taken place. Now the only units stationed behind the Karst front were 17 Inf Bde and the bulk of 28 ID (which had just left the firing line). The approach of 35 ID had merely been announced. As previously, the six divisions of VII and XXIII Corps held the first line. Based on the earlier fighting, it was expected that VII Corps would be able to stand fast using their own resources; therefore Sector HQ had advised FML Schariczner that he shouldn't count on getting reinforcements. The Corps commander had created a reserve out of five battalions which he'd detached from his own divisions. XXIII Corps was judged to have equal powers of resistance. But the latter's situation was more problematic because their front jutted so far forward. In particular the sector between Hudilog and Point 208 was considered the most endangered on the entire Karst front because the Italians had their front-line troops here stationed in such proximity and also had the opportunity to mass large units immediately behind their positions. Nevertheless, FML Schenk - whose troops hadn't withdrawn a step during the autumn battles of the preceding year - awaited the enemy onslaught with complete confidence. His Corps had three divisions with 25 battalions at the front and 8 more detached in the Corps' reserve (five from 10 ID and three from 7 ID). And they could count on some reinforcements.

It was unfortunate that the relief of 28 ID by 10 ID, originally scheduled for 15 May, had finally taken place in the night of 21-22 May. When the very heavy artillery and trench mortar fire opened in the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, two battalions and the HQ of 28 ID were still at the front, so that FML Schneider Edler von Manns-Au was in charge of the sector. Also, under 7 ID the relief of IR 37 by IR 38 took place in the night of 22-23 May, while the Italian artillery were already commencing their cannonade.

The bombardment increased hour by hour, and soon reached a strength that hadn't been seen in this theater of operations.<sup>136</sup> Under cover of this fire the Italian infantry worked their way forward. It seems that at Kostanjevica they already wanted to start their attack in the morning, but were prevented from doing so by our barrage. Beginning at noon the defenders' guns were also fully employed. All of the Karst resounded and moaned under the thunder of the artillery and the roar of their exploding projectiles.

The great infantry assault started around 4:00 PM. The 63 and 22 ID stormed forward against the right wing and center of the k.u.k. VII Corps. Their attack collapsed, just as it had eight days earlier, partly under artillery and machine gun fire and partly in bitter combat involving hand grenades. Where the Italians were able to penetrate the foremost position (as on Heights # 379) they were expelled by immediate counterattacks. The situation developed differently at Kostanjevica. Here the reinforced 4 ID achieved a clean breakthrough against 41 Hon ID. The Italians drove into the ruined village and established a firm foothold in the cemetery on the adjacent heights. But they achieved nothing further because the Honveds soon rallied and opposed the intruders with well-conducted counterattacks. The fighting around Kostanjevica lasted until late in the evening. FML Schamschula was finally able to report that the enemy had been pushed back completely and that the front line was fully recovered. Since the enemy was expected to try again to break through, FML Schariczner returned to 41 Hon ID a battalion which they'd detached to the Corps' reserve, and held two battalions of 17 ID in readiness northeast of Vojscica.

But the main body of Aosta's Army (XIII and VII Corps) had been hurled against the k.u.k. XXIII Corps. Opposing the 25 battalions which this Corps had at the front were - in the first echelon - the 31 ID with four brigades, the 34, 33 and 16 ID (each with three brigades), and 45 ID with two brigades. Thanks to this enormous numerical superiority, the Italians were able at some points to overrun the defenders - who were worn down by the

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<sup>136</sup>To judge the heaviness of the fire it's necessary to take into account the rate of fire along with the number of guns employed. Based on a wealth of experience, the Aus-Hung. artillery had found that in a "lively prolonged bombardment" each light or medium piece could fire 30 to 40 rounds per hour. The Italian artillery presumably fired at the same speed. Thus during the ten hours of preparatory fire more than a half million rounds from guns and trench mortars rained down on the Aus-Hung. positions.

ten hours of destructive fire - at the first onset. The initial setback occurred at Lukatic, where IR 98 (on the southern wing of 10 ID) had just taken over their unfamiliar positions a few hours earlier. Soon thereafter the enemy broke through the left wing of 7 ID in the Jamiano depression, where IR 38 had just relieved IR 37 the night before. The three battalions of 7<sup>th</sup> Division fighting in the center and on the right wing were struck from the flank and rear, and captured. In an alarmingly short time the center of XXIII Corps had literally been torn to pieces.

Undaunted, the nearest reserves had meanwhile hurried forward. The IV Bn of the badly-damaged IR 98 was able to recover Line 1.b at Lukatic. Here they covered the left wing of Bohemian IR 21, which had held onto their sector at Hudilog - though it jutted so far ahead - against all enemy attacks. Under 7 ID, Battalion I/68 daringly hurled themselves against the enemy who were continuing to advance through the hole they'd punched in the line. This well-led Magyar Battalion was not only able to reach the first line, but even pushed beyond it and captured 700 prisoners. Although the Battalion suffered heavy losses themselves (they were reduced to just 100 riflemen), their gallant deed caused confusion among the enemy masses and temporarily brought them to a halt. During the breakthrough in the Jamiano depression the right wing of GM Adalbert von Kaltenborn's 16 ID had also been swept away. The HQ of the Transylvanian IR 2 and one of its battalions were captured. Here also the reserves intervened with determination, and the IV Bn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment were able to recover the lost positions at Kote 144 while capturing 800 prisoners. Meanwhile Battalion I/38 at Komarje opposed the enemy who'd already advanced through Jamiano. Throughout this time the center of 16 ID (Battalions II/2, I/62 and III/64) at Pietra rossa repulsed all the enemy attacks. The left wing, IR 31, had a difficult fight since they lacked artillery support due to a series of unfortunate circumstances.

Since the frightful and destructive enemy fire had destroyed all telephone lines to the front, and also slain the runners, the Corps HQ and divisional commanders depended for information mainly on the artillery observers watching from the Hermada. When the Italians started their massive attack all of the battlefield was covered with dust and smoke. Corps HQ at first only gradually received tidings; then they were deluged with over-hasty and alarming reports that often exaggerated the momentary situation. Thus they quickly were told that the front had been broken at Lukatic, that the infantry were falling back toward Versic, that enemy masses were streaming forward, etc. Around 5:00 PM the HQ heard that the enemy had already crossed

the line Heights 235 - Jamiano in an easterly direction; a half hour later it was said that the left wing of 16 ID had also been broken through. The Corps HQ had already let some of their reserves march forward in the morning. Now they quickly ordered two battalions to join 10 ID and one to 7 ID while instructing the divisional commanders to recover the first line. But the course of events was rushing faster than was believed. It seemed that the artillery in the forward positions were already endangered. FML Schneider-Manns-Au was therefore ordered to send his reserves forward to guard the batteries in the Versic switch-position. At the same time the commander of 7 ID, GM Edler von Schmid, received a new order; he was given IR 37 and instructed to throw the enemy out of the Brestovica valley or "at least to hold the K-Line."<sup>137</sup> The only large units in reserve behind the front, the brigades of 28 ID, were ordered to be ready; 55 Inf Bde was in the area east of Nabresina, 56 Inf Bde south of Comen. Finally, Sector III HQ moved 17 Inf Bde forward about one hour's march, into the area between the 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup>.

#### Evening and night, 23-24 May

Meanwhile evening had come. At Hudilog IR 21 and Battalion IV/98, fighting with extraordinary gallantry, stood firm against all attackers. Battalion II/11 and half of Bn IV/47 were stationed in the switch-position by Versic.<sup>138</sup> This sector was commanded by the leader of the 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Col. Edler von Lunzer. Around 7:00 PM the Italians once again drove into Lukatic. At the same time their leading regiments reached Hills 247, 241 and 235 on the Fornaza west of Selo; here they were assaulted by two battalions of IR 55, two of IR 15 and one of IR 37 (although the attacks weren't coordinated). Fighting around these hills on the Fornaza dragged on into the night, but at the end they remained in enemy hands. In the Jamiano depression Battalion I/38, along with Bns IV/38 and III/15 which had arrived as reinforcements, were engaged against a larger Italian force along the l.c Line. The center of 16 ID were still holding onto their original positions. But meanwhile the Division's left wing was driven back. Here IR 31 finally had to give up Heights 77 after heavy fighting. Only a few survivors from this gallant Transylvanian regiment, along with some platoons of sappers who'd come to the aid of their comrades, took up a new station on the

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<sup>137</sup>The Versic switch-position lay west of the homonymous town. The "K-Line" was a rallying position that ran in an almost straight course from Kostanjevica through Brestovica dl. to Hermada.

<sup>138</sup>Vogelsang, "Das steirische IR 47 im Weltkrieg" (Graz, 1932), pp. 554 ff.

1.c Line at S. Giovanni and the railroad tunnel farther north. Here they were joined by three fresh companies, the last reserves of 16 ID.

Night sank over the battlefield. FML Schenk was still pursuing with determination his goal of striking back at the enemy who'd penetrated his lines. Around 10:00 PM he ordered all reserves to prepare for a united counterattack along the road from Selo to Point 208. But it seemed that coordinating the battalions wouldn't be possible because some of them were already engaged in the battle and exhausted. Also the commanders still hadn't been able to gain a clear picture of the situation. IR 37, which after their relief had marched far to the rear, didn't arrive - extremely exhausted - at Stara Lokva until night. Therefore Corps HQ, which now received their instructions from Sector III HQ, decided that above all they needed to secure their hold on the position Kostanjevica-Korite-Fornaza-Flondar, which protected the artillery; for this reason they would pull back the parts of the Corps that were still holding the foremost position to this line. The necessary orders, which weren't issued until midnight, made it necessary for 7 and 16 ID to withdraw many of their batteries. Despite the very short time frame the movement was successful; only four damaged field cannon and two trench mortars fell into enemy hands.

In this night the 17 Inf Bde, now placed under XXIII Corps, came up to Vojsca dl. and Bihula; 55 Inf Bde arrived behind the Hermada. 56 Inf Bde stayed in the area south of Comen so that they could finally get some rest. As ordered by Army HQ, 60 Inf Bde marched from Hl. Kreuz (in the Wippach valley) back onto the Karst plateau in the area of Kopriva and Krajna Vas. Also 48 ID was called from the northern wing. First the Division's HQ came from Ternova into the Wippach valley with 12 Mtn Bde; the 11 Mtn Bde would follow. Since it was finally announced that 35 ID would be arriving at Sankt Daniel, it was possible to anticipate the upcoming events with assurance. GO Borojevic informed the high command that "currently we are dealing with at least 32 enemy division which have massed ever closer against the southern wing." Until now the Army had been able to withstand this massive onslaught. When 35 ID arrived it would be "the last intact unit available to throw into the fighting after 26 May." Whether this reinforcement would be sufficient would depend on the intensity of the enemy attack as it unfolded. Then he requested the high command to do everything possible to speed up the transfer of units from the Eastern front to the Isonzo Army that had already started. He asked the HQ of the Southwest front to order 10<sup>th</sup> Army and the Army Group in the Tyrol to hold

reserves in readiness in case they were needed quickly.

### 24 May

Dawn had just begun to break on 24 May when the fighting began anew. It was unleashed by IR 37 which, in obedience to the orders received around midnight, now advanced from Selo toward the hills on the Fornaza. The fighting around these heights in the center of XXIII Corps had already started the evening before. There was no fortified position here, and the battle developed as a kind of encounter engagement since the Italians - after occupying the hills - were striving to advance farther. Our troops struck before the enemy did. The artillery was still silent when the first battle groups of IR 37 began to advance in the darkness. A battalion commandant described his experience in a few plain sentences<sup>139</sup>:

"I lead the battalion in person. We collide with the Italians in front of Point 247. Short fire, then a spirited charge by my men. Breakthrough! Several hundred Italians throw their weapons down and give up. We pursue immediately. Hill 241 taken by storm. More Italians give up. My men can barely be held in check. They want to go forward into the position that was given up yesterday. I hold them back, because we are far in advance of other units and have no link with them. A bright day has developed. Heavy shells explode around us. This is a massive fire such as I have never experienced. The rounds are also bursting behind us. We can't move. Around 7:00 the enemy attack. We hold them off. I have only one machine gun left. New massed fire hits us. There is no shelter. The troops crawl on the ground and are killed or wounded. With several men I lie in a crater on Hill 241. A shell lands very near me and buries several men alive. We dig them out and leave the hole. Toward 11:00 the fire slackens. I want to assemble the men, but it's in vain. Italian infantry appear suddenly. Shots ring out - I come to in an Italian military hospital."

Around noon the contested heights were in the hands of IR 37. At this time Colonel Chwostek's 17 Inf Bde was at Selo, ready to advance. Early in the morning they'd received an order from Corps HQ to thrust with their left wing past Heights 235 to Lukatic. When the Brigade began to advance, a murderous rain of iron descended on the heights lying before them, and soon thereafter IR 37 pulled back. Now the battalions of 17 Inf Bde hurled themselves upon the advancing enemy and - along with the

<sup>139</sup>The passage is from a letter submitted by GdI Schenk.

remnants of the 37<sup>th</sup> - took back the high ground. But the enemy also threw fresh units into the fighting, which was carried on with great bitterness until evening.

Simultaneously with the difficult fighting in the Corps' center, the battle raged around the Flondar position. Here the badly-weakened ranks of 16 ID stood up to the enemy, who advanced with strong units shortly before noon. At first the Italians in the low ground around Jamiano were able to thrust ahead to Klarici. Corps HQ ordered Battalions III/BH 3 of 28 ID and I/91 of 17 Inf Bde to counterattack, and they recovered the 1.c Line. After several hours of artillery preparation, in the afternoon wave after wave of Italians advanced against the entire front of 16 ID. Although the enemy onslaught was furious, the defenders' resistance was stubborn. The Italians penetrated the lines on Heights # 146 and at Flondar, but were hurled out, in bitter hand-to-hand fighting, by Battalions III/2 and IV/77. Then accurate artillery fire kept the enemy from any further attacks.

On the Corps' right wing, where 10 ID was deployed, their commander FML Lischka took over from FML Schneider Manns-au in the afternoon. During this difficult day of battle the mainly Czech IR 21 at Hudilog stood against the onrushing enemy without flinching, fast as a rock in the sea. Finally after darkness fell Hudilog was evacuated as ordered, and the Versic switch position became the main line of resistance.

The fighting on this wing developed in close connection with the actions of VII Corps. Here it was once again the sector around Kostanjevica (held by 41 Hon ID) where the enemy wanted to break through at any price. The Italians brought fresh brigades to join those already in the area, and in the morning made four massive assaults; after new artillery preparation, they attacked five more times in the afternoon. All failed, some under barrage fire, others in savage man-to-man actions involving hand grenades. Not one Italian was able to enter the 1.a Line. The new thrusts against 17 ID weren't as stubborn, and only on Heights # 378 did they lead to hand-to-hand combat. At other points the Italians collapsed under the defenders' artillery fire. This was also true in front of 44 Sch Div, which easily repulsed all attacks.

Thus on 24 May the Italians couldn't make progress anywhere along the front of Sector III. The Sector HQ reported that until now they'd been attacked by 40 regiments, and estimated that the enemy still had a substantial number of fresh troops available. They expected heavy new fighting, particularly in XXIII Corps'

area. FZM Wurm therefore let FML Schariczzer know that he would have to make do with his own VII Corps units; he ordered FML Schenk to relieve 7 ID, which had suffered very heavy casualties, as soon as possible so that it could be replenished with March formations. Then he should do the same with 16 ID. The following major units were still in reserve -

- . 60 Inf Bde, which moved up to the area south of Comen and in the night reached Vale with their leading troops,

- . 28 ID HQ, where FML Schneider Manns-Au resumed command at noon,

- . 56 Inf Bde behind the Hermada, and

- . the parts of 55 Inf Bde which were still in the rear on the 2.a Line (at the western foot of the Hermada).

Finally, 12 Mtn Bde was marching toward Comen.



25-28 May

Fighting in XXIII Corps' area was still lively that night and hindered the relief of the remnants of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. Thus the scattered troops had to endure a third day of difficult battle in the firing line. Starting on 25 May the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army were clearly making their main effort on the southern wing. Since they couldn't open the way to the Hermada through Kostanjevica or through the Hudilog bastion, and also had been unable to tear down the newly-built wall by Versic and Fornaza, they sought to reach their goal through Flondar and Medeazza.

North of the Jamiano depression the twelve battalions of Col. Chwostek (17 Inf Bde and remnants of 7 ID) held on throughout the 25<sup>th</sup> along the line they'd reached the day before. After 4:00 PM the Italians mounted an enormous attack that was supposed to break through the Flondar position, but it was shattered north of the Brestovica valley. When the fighting finally died down, the last troops of 7 ID were pulled from the front; around midnight the HQ of 9 ID (GM Ritter von Gruber) took command in the Selo area. 7 ID had lost 190 officers, 5200 men and 41 machine guns.

16 ID also repulsed many thrusts. The battalions of this Division were greatly reduced in three days of fighting but still always defended themselves stoutly. Finally the massive assault which, as mentioned above, started after 4:00 caused them to waver. Then parts of 28 ID hurried forward and threw themselves on the enemy. Here the Bohemian Battalion III/11 were especially distinguished; they recaptured the heights directly west of Medeazza and brought in at least 1200 prisoners.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile the powerful blows of the defending artillery wore down the Italians' *elan*, while the intervention of bold infantry-support planes delayed the approach of the reserves.

All these developments held up the enemy long enough so that the XXIII Corps HQ would be able to carry out their planned counter-attack. But night fell before preparations were complete. FML Schenk had entrusted overall command of all troops stationed between the Brestovica valley and the sea (28 and 16 ID plus 60 Inf Bde) to FML Schneider Manns-Au. Simultaneously he ordered a "Counterattack by the right wing with the goal of recovering the 1.c Line. At the very least the Hermada position is to be held under any circumstances." The sector commander FZM Wurm arranged the advance of 12 Mtn Bde behind 60 Inf Bde to Klanc and the

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<sup>140</sup>The Battalion's commander Captain Stanislaus Wieronski received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for this feat of arms.

reinforcement of the Styrian Volunteer Rifles who'd moved from the coast defenses to S. Giovanni and there had participated brilliantly in the defensive fighting. But this exhausted all of his resources. On the other hand it was encouraging that in the evening six battalions of the approaching 35 ID arrived at St Daniel and that two of the battalions of IR 28, coming from Carinthia, detrained at Prosecco.

During 26 May the enemy again concentrated their attacks on the Army's southern wing. In the morning the Italians were also active on VII Corps' front, but as on the previous day they gained no success whatsoever. The same was true in front of the northern wing of XXIII Corps, even though the defenders didn't yet have a well-established position. Therefore the fighting here, which lasted until 6:00 PM, cost substantial casualties. The Bohemian IR 91 was particularly distinguished.

But the situation was critical on the southern wing. Early in the morning FML Schneider-Manns-Au opened the counterattack, planned as described above, to recover the Flondar position. At first his men recaptured the heights north of Flondar and west of Medeazza, while taking many hundreds of prisoners. IR 11 alone captured 16 machine guns, and the Styrian IR 47 was no less successful.<sup>141</sup> But at S Giovanni the attack couldn't break through.

And in the afternoon the ground regained by Medeazza was lost again, because the Italians had assembled an enormous numerical superiority. They were seeking a decision within sight of the Hermada, their principal objective. In fighting that raged back and forth the battle unfolded on an open field between the Flondar position and the 2.a Line which had been built along the western foot of the Hermada.

The day's events had increased concerns regarding the future course of the battle on the southern wing. At noon the Army HQ ordered VII Corps to give up all their available reserves to XXIII Corps. As compensation, XVI Corps was to send two battalions to VII Corps. GdI Lukas was instructed to make sure that 11 Mtn Bde went into the Wippach valley by 29 May at the latest. Finally, XV Corps would station two battalions by the railroad so they could be called to the Army's southern wing. The commander of the Southwest front, FM Archduke Eugene, ordered the Army Group in Tyrol to immediately send the six battalions they'd been holding in readiness (Infantry Regiments 64 and 73). The high command informed GO Boroevic that the leading troops of

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141Vogelsang, pp. 560 ff.

the next division of reinforcements would arrive on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Also several batteries from XVI and XV Corps were sent to XXIII Corps; the guns from XV Corps were moved by rail.

The commander of the Isonzo Army, expecting further heavy fighting, also ordered that it was necessary to be sparing with the troops. Commanders were to avoid "bloody counterattacks to achieve local successes on open terrain, which soon prove illusory because it's been proven that the enemy always has sufficient numerical superiority." Success could be won only by fighting from fortified positions. Combat on an open field should be avoided whenever possible.

But meanwhile the enemy's strength was also exhausted. Fighting on the Karst plateau was already markedly in decline in the night of 26-27 May. Despite all expectations, it didn't resume on the next day. The battle, though, still raged in the areas north of Görz.

b. The last attack by the Görz Army, 23-26 May

As mentioned earlier, the operation by the Italian Görz Army, carried out at the same time as the massive offensive by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, was far more than a diversionary thrust. Therefore it's fully understandable that GO Borojevic reported in the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> that the battle from the seacoast north to beyond Plava was raging with an intensity "which the Isonzo front until now hasn't experienced."

After an "unprecedented artillery preparation against the entire sector from Grazignia to Biglia", in the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> the enemy in the Görz basin carried out a major attack against 58 ID, especially against the heights on both sides of the Rosen valley. Only directly south of this valley were the Italians able to finally penetrate the first line after several vain attempts. FML Zeidler, who could look back on some truly difficult experiences on the Isonzo battlefield, reported that considering the strength of the fire and the intensity of the attacks, "today was the most difficult since the start of the battle." The day ended with the defeat of VIII Italian Corps, which then only maintained vigorous artillery fire on the 24<sup>th</sup>. On 25 May they tried their luck a final time. Because of the artillery and trench mortar fire by both sides, a mixture of smoke, dust and asphyxiating gas once more rose over the battlefield. And once more the defenders emerged victorious from the scene of destruction. In many places it had been necessary to overcome the enemy in bitter hand-to-hand combat. The

Croatian IR 96 and Galician-Bukovinian Schützen Regiments 20 and 22, as well as the Viennese Lst Inf Bn IV/39, were especially distinguished for their perseverance and disregard for casualties. When darkness had already fallen, an Italian regiment made a final attempt to storm the hotly contested trenches on Heights # 171, with which the battle in the Görz basin finally came to an end for now.

The second part of the battle in the highlands north of Görz was carried on with no less intensity. Here the worn-out troops of 106 Lst ID had been pulled back during the two day pause in fighting (on 21-22 May). Thereafter the center of Sector II.a was held by 59 Inf Bde and also by Col. Edler von Wieden's freshly-deployed 47 Inf Bde, which had arrived as the leading unit of 24 ID. Behind them Col. Fischer von See's 11 Mtn Bde HQ (from 48 ID) stood ready with IR 79, while 12 Mtn Bde was encamped at Ternova. The artillery had been reinforced in the last few days by 48 light, 22 medium and 4 heavy guns (belonging to 106 FA Bde and independent batteries). Although the fortifications on the recently occupied line at Vodice and farther north were defective, the situation in the Sector seemed secure, so that Army HQ had no serious concerns here.

Aerial reconnaissance reported that the tents of the large camp behind the Kolovrat Ridge had vanished. The Italians had built a fourth military bridge at Plava. The front was completely quiet opposite the northern wing of XVII Corps. The Italians were digging trenches on the Kuk Ridge. Although it was possible that the enemy might remain passive, we also had to be ready for new attacks. Meanwhile FML Fabini was also considering whether to launch a major counterattack toward Plava.

The attacks which the Italian II and VI Corps resumed on 23 May were apparently supposed to capture the ridge between Vodice and Mt Santo. In particular, Heights # 652 - whose great importance for the further course of operations on the Bainsizza was evident to both sides - was the scene of heavy and repeated fighting. The new attacks on the entire Isonzo front opened, after several hours of preparatory fire, around 4:00 PM. The enemy advanced in several parallel lines along a front nearly four kilometers wide; they were completely repulsed at Vodice and Hill 503. They penetrated a position on Mt Santo, but had to withdraw after a bloody melee with parts of 11 Mtn Bde that had intervened. In the morning of 24 May the Italians prepared for another assault, hoping mainly to overrun the Vodice Heights. They captured this barren high ground, but it was taken back in a counterattack by Col. Fischer's group (IR 45 and Battalion I/79). The bitter

contest resumed in the evening of the next day, and made it necessary to commit parts of Infantry Regiments 9 and 77. Thereupon the commander of 24 ID, FML Urbarz, took over direction of the fighting in this sector from GM Kratky.

Meanwhile, during the night the enemy managed to enter the so-called Paljevo position near Hill 363. It seems almost unbelievable that the gallant defenders had been able to hold this isolated advanced trench for so long. Now they occupied the switch position that had already been prepared at Descla. Toward midnight on the 26<sup>th</sup> the enemy tried to take the Vodice Heights in a surprise assault without artillery preparation. It failed. The front was quiet the next day, which made it possible to alter some of the troop deployments. 59 Inf Bde, which with Infantry Regiments 24 and 41 had fought so gallantly, was relieved by GM Göttlicher's 48 Inf Bde. Thus all the infantry of 24 ID were now deployed; along with their artillery brigade, which had also arrived, they were henceforth responsible for holding the sector.

On 28 May the 24<sup>th</sup> Division repulsed two attacks. Also defeated were two enemy thrusts at Mt Santo (in the morning and evening) and one at Hill 503.

A very unusual situation developed on the fiercely-contested Heights 652. It was thus reported by GdI Fabini<sup>142</sup>:

"The enemy stood on the western edge [of the plateau], we on the eastern. After effective and destructive fire, our patrols were easily able to drive the enemy away, but then a hostile barrage opened up in front of our patrols' position. This was soon followed by a strong attack. Our patrols fell back quickly to their position on the reverse slope, and as the enemy attack continued it collapsed under our barrage. Then the plateau was once again left unoccupied."

Another action broke out here in the afternoon and again on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>. Finally on 30 May both contestants recognized it would be useless to resume their efforts, and thereafter refrained from trying to occupy the empty summit.

Some explanatory words about the nature of this battlefield may help to correctly evaluate the difficult fighting. This was GM Pitreich's report<sup>143</sup>:

"The Bainsizza plateau, and especially the surrounding heights, displayed in general the same terrain

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142Fabini, "Bainsizza", p. 355

143Anton Pitreich, "Zehnte Isonzoschlacht" in Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 373

characteristics as the area which in the south was called "Karst" - mostly naked, barren, impenetrable stony ground. Only in places were there thin coverings of soil. The slopes were naked or only scantily covered with underbrush. The rugged granite plateaus of Lom, Kal, Bainsizza and Ternova lacked water and were very difficult to traverse; they rose steeply to heights of up to 1000 meters. They were more or less deserts of stone, which by their nature imposed very severe toil and deprivation on the defenders. Because of their considerable distance from the railroad stations, supplying the troops on these inhospitable heights was a problem in itself. It was difficult not only to bring up military equipment in timely fashion, but also to deploy reserves in moments of danger. Because we trusted in the barrier of the Isonzo ravine, which lies in front of the largest part of the front - which anyway wasn't on the direct line of advance to Trieste or Laibach - hitherto our only efforts to prepare this area for a major battle had been insufficient improvisations. Thus we were very far from having a "position" in the modern sense. There had always been a lack of resources, particularly labor. There hadn't been much progress beyond the obsolete linear system. In many places, even [installations based on] this system were lacking."

From this statement we can see the endless difficulties which the troops and their commanders encountered on this battlefield.

c. The counterattack, 28 May-5 June

The reduction in tension starting on 27 May made it possible to calmly evaluate the situation. From the number of units which the enemy had thus far thrown into the fighting, it was evident that the majority of their force had already been used. Perhaps the battle was already approaching its end. At any rate, the interruption in the enemy attacks was advantageous. Now trains arrived in quick succession, bringing to the Isonzo Army the troops of 35 ID and (in the night of 27-28 May) also of Infantry Regiments 64 and 73 which came from Tyrol.

As these units joined the Army, along with 12 ID and 21 Sch Div whose arrival had also been announced, the high command had ordered that at least three worn-out divisions were to be sent to the Eastern front. Army HQ planned to carry this out by rotating their forces. Ultimately XVII Corps would consist of 21 Sch Div and 106 Lst ID, while 62 ID was made available to the high command. XXIV Corps, whose commander GdI Lukas was also in charge of the entire Sector II.a (including XVII Corps), would

control 24 and 57 ID. Only small changes were planned for XVI Corps; 86 Sch Bde was to be relieved to join 59 Inf Bde. Thus 43 Sch Div would be re-assembled, and would serve as the Army's reserve in the Wippach valley. VII Corps was unchanged. On the other hand, XXIII Corps was to consist of 9, 35 and 48 ID. The 10, 12 and 28 ID would stay on the Karst plateau in the Army's reserve. 7, 16 and 62 ID - repaired and filled up by March formations - would be sent to the East.

In the morning of 28 May, while the bells of Pentecost rang out in the distance, fighting flared up once more in the Karst area. At sunrise artillery and rifle fire began at Kostanjevica "perhaps from nervousness" and spread among the troops as far as Medeazza. Reserves were brought up in expectation of an attack. But there were only some isolated local thrusts, such as an assault toward S. Giovanni by about three battalions. Here the enemy was quickly stricken by artillery and defeated by Vol Rif Bn Marburg IV. They lost more than 800 prisoners. Then at noon quiet descended once more on the entire Karst front. Prisoners asserted that a final large offensive was to follow on 29 May, and an Italian order was found which pointed in the same direction. But the next day went by without any major fighting. The activity of the enemy, who were exhausting their units with isolated thrusts, seemed to be without a fixed plan.

#### Intentions and deployments of the opposing armies

On 28 May the Italian high command issued the order to break off the offensive, since "in fact exhaustion has already set in along the entire front."<sup>144</sup> The order went on to state that the territory won should be held fast and that local efforts should be made to improve jumping-off points for a future offensive. As goals for such operations, VII Corps was given a line in front of the Hermada, from which they could in the future capture the mountain in one bound, and XIII Corps was given the line Kostanjevica - Stara Lokva. Furthermore the capture of Mt Santo was ordered. General Capello was somewhat perplexed, since the high command now was stating that efforts were feasible which hadn't been successful during the large-scale fighting. The Duke of Aosta also had serious reservations. Instead of planning to carry out such operations, General Cadorna was therefore advised "to do nothing."<sup>145</sup> The high command said they were satisfied with this. They now ordered that on 1 June the Görz Army would be designated the "2<sup>nd</sup> Army" and that its authority should be extended to the Tolmein basin. There were further changes to the

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<sup>144</sup>Pinchetti, p. 117

<sup>145</sup>Capello, Vol. II, pp. 70 ff.

chain of command. Hereafter 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would consist of IV, VI, XVIII and XXIV Corps, while 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had VII, XI, XIII and XXV Corps. Since each Army was assigned nine divisions, the high command had at their disposal ten divisions and seven brigades. These units were to be assembled in two groups of roughly equal strength, one behind each Army. XII Corps on the Carinthian front was once more placed directly under the high command and called the "Zona Carnia" (Carnic Group). The HQ of 10, 21 and 27 ID, along with five brigades plus many groups of heavy artillery, were to be sent to the Sieben Gemeinde plateau.

Meanwhile the k.u.k. Isonzo Army decided to launch a powerful counterattack on the southern wing. Already on 26 May FML Schenk had emphasized to Army HQ the necessity of recovering the 1.c Line. As justification, he stated that this Line would be easier to hold than the Kostanjevica-Hermada-Duino position, because this would allow the artillery to be used with full force (which wasn't possible while the front was so near the Hermada). FZM Wurm concurred with the proposal, whereupon XXIII Corps HQ issued initial orders for the planned assault. A simultaneous report from the Sector commander to Army HQ explained the purpose and goal of the operation, for which FZM Wurm proposed to use 35 ID and 12 Mtn Bde. But GO Boroevic was influenced at this time by the fighting which was again raging north of Mt Santo, one of the results of which was that the planned release of 12 Mtn Bde from this area had been temporarily postponed. Therefore he responded that "although we fully agree with the idea, its implementation can't take place until enough artillery and infantry are available to ensure the operation's success."

Corps HQ understandably wanted to carry out their counterattack as soon as possible so that the enemy wouldn't have a chance to entrench and deploy fresh forces. The plan which they drew up on 28 May (and later expanded) envisioned a systematic attack in two phases that would be carried out on 1 and 2 June. First FML Schneider Manns-Au's group would recover the Flondar position, then 9 ID would also thrust forward. Army HQ placed equal emphasis on careful preparation, which anyway couldn't take place until the situation was fully clarified. Therefore the start of the counterattack was postponed until 4 June.

Meanwhile the units took up their positions and prepared. IR 73 was attached to 10 ID. 9 ID relieved the last remnants of 7 ID (IR 37) in their sector, and on 3 June stood at the front with IR 30 and 91. FML Schneider Manns-Au's group, from which 16 ID had already been re-assigned, now also pulled the troops of 28 ID back to recuperate behind the Hermada. The group built up two



forces for the attack:

- . one at Medeazza under the commander of 12 Mtn Bde, GM Prince Schwarzenberg, with the battalions of his own Brigade plus two battalions from IR 63; and
- . the other at S Giovanni under the commander of 56 Inf Bde, GM Eugen Straub, with IR 28 plus Battalion I/51 which relieved the Styrian Rifles.

The main body of 35 ID, which still hadn't been concentrated, remained for now in the Army's reserve. The regrouping and reinforcement of the artillery was carried out with the greatest care, so as to ensure the operation's success. Deployment of the numerous batteries at the most effective points was entrusted to Col. Janecka, who had already provided outstanding service as artillery commander of Sector III.<sup>146</sup>

At the start of June the Italians also made various changes in their order of battle based on the orders of their high command described above. These movements gave the Aus-Hung. artillery an opportunity to inflict as much damage as possible on their enemies. The Italian batteries, in return, tried to check our fire. Thus at times there were lively cannonades, which on both sides gave the impression that a new attack was being prepared.

### 3-5 June

On 3 June the Italians' attention was diverted in large measure to the Görz basin. Here a locally significant part of the trenches at S Marco had remained in their hands. The commander of the Viennese 1st Inf Bn IV/39 had made ready to recover this position. The plan succeeded beyond all expectations. The Viennese captured the trench, took 900 Italian prisoners, and seized 9 machine guns.<sup>147</sup>

Meanwhile preparations were completed for the attack in the Hermada sector. To divert the enemy, the 17 ID of VII Corps first thrust toward the Fajti hrib late in the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The gallant 39<sup>th</sup> Regiment conquered the very strong Italian position on Point 432, hauling in 350 prisoners as well as substantial booty. Then before daybreak they evacuated the

<sup>146</sup>In recognition of his activity as an artillery commander in the 10<sup>th</sup> Battle of the Isonzo, as well as for service in the south Tyrol offensive of 1916, Col. Joseph Janecka of the artillery staff was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

<sup>147</sup>The battalion commander, Captain Gustav Sonnewend from IR 72, was recognized for this glorious feat of arms with the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

heights to avoid enemy artillery fire. Now, early on 4 June, began the attack of FML Schneider Manns-Au's group.<sup>148</sup> The artillery preparation lasted for just 40 minutes, but was strong enough to maul the enemy. Shortly before 5:00 AM the infantry advanced, with a total of six battalions in the first echelon. The battalions of 12 Mtn Bde (I/3, FJB 21 and BH FJB 6) already reached the Flondar position and the northern railroad tunnel in their first onslaught. The Prague IR 28, which had to attack along a wide sector and was hindered by strong enemy counter-thrusts, carried out their task in two phases. In the morning they took possession of Heights # 110 by the southern tunnel, and in the evening (after darkness fell), forced the Italians trapped in the tunnel - more than 1000 men - to lay down their arms. Thus the entire Flondar line, the goal of Schneider's group, had been recovered. The enemy left no fewer than 7000 men in the hands of the attackers. A substantial amount of military equipment was also captured. IR 28, hitherto used only with reservations, had fought much better than anyone expected. In this action the Regiment lost almost two-thirds of its combat strength: 8 officers and 300 men were killed, 21 officers and 870 men wounded.

It was anticipated that the enemy would seek revenge for this severe setback. For this reason the main body of 28 ID was held in readiness. On this day the Italians' counterattacks had little significance, but it was observed that they were bringing forces up from all parts of the battlefield. At dawn on 5 June the enemy artillery opened a strong bombardment on the lost Flondar position, and (with particular strength) on the Fornaza where 9 ID was trying to capture the part of the l.c Line which jutted forward there toward the west. In the morning and again in the evening the Italians launched counter-thrusts which led to seesaw fighting. But neither the troops of 9 ID nor the enemy were able to make any gains. On the other hand, 10 ID - which now had brought the Eger-land IR 73 up to the front - occupied the entire Versic switch-position. The number of Italians taken prisoner in the last two days increased to 10,000 men.

In the night of 5-6 June the badly worn-out troops of 12 Mtn Bde were relieved on the Flondar position by IR 62 of 35 ID. At daybreak the 9 ID on the Fornaza once more thrust ahead to capture Heights # 235; strangely, the 1000 prisoners they captured came from ten different regiments. This attack led to new fighting, which again centered on possession of the same

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<sup>148</sup>For his outstanding leadership of the counterattack, FML Schneider Edler von Manns-Au was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

summits on the Fornaza. In the evening the commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Division, GM Gruber, reported that the events of the last few days proved that the very strong enemy artillery fire was causing the attackers such heavy casualties that a continuation of the operation wasn't advisable. He proposed that we should be content to hold the line between Points 247 and 241. Therefore Corps HQ ordered that if the original mission couldn't be accomplished the position now occupied should be held in strength. Thus the grim contest on the Fornaza, which had gone on for days, finally came to an end, since the Italians also made no further attacks.

When the sun set on 5 June the last phase of the battle (which this time hadn't been initiated by the Italians) was over. The setback had a depressing effect on the Italian high command, not only because they'd lost terrain that had been taken with enormous sacrifice, but much more because they correctly believed that their troops' spirits had suffered. General Capello reported: "At this time a very painful incident occurred which for the first time showed how greatly the troops' determination to fight had been undermined. While the enemy was attacking, several of our units offered no resistance, and three regiments which hadn't even been engaged went over to the enemy."<sup>149</sup> This event made the high command aware that the spirit of the soldiers was declining under influences which emanated from the interior. General Cadorna complained to the government because they were making so little effort to prevent parties hostile to the state from disseminating destructive propaganda.

#### **4. Analysis of the Battle**

The combat just described, which raged for three weeks, took place on a considerably larger scale than the nine earlier battles on the Isonzo. As part of the great general offensive which the Entente had planned after brusquely rejecting the peace offer of the Central Powers, the Italians hoped that regardless of costs they could decide the war with their tenth attack on the Isonzo. Although Russia had proven to be powerless, and although the spring offensive by the Western powers had already been shattered, the Italians after some hesitation set out to implement their grand scheme.

For six months the Italian high command had stretched their country's resources to the limits to ensure success. Old and

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<sup>149</sup>Capello, Vol. II, p. 62

young men who hitherto hadn't been drafted were called to the colors. Great emphasis was placed on the production of military equipment and ammunition. Thus, even after leaving substantial numbers of troops to guard the flank and rear, the high command could deploy no fewer than 280,000 front-line combatants for the decisive battle, along with 2200 guns and about 1000 trench mortars.

But the enormous effort, which was supposed to close with a hymn to victory, in fact ended as a severe disappointment. The attacking armies lost about 36,000 dead and 96,000 wounded as well as 27,000 prisoners, while gaining only some insignificant ground. The k.u.k. Army of the Isonzo, on the other hand, could add a great new defensive victory to the history of the Aus-Hung. armed forces. Of the 165,000 riflemen who entered the battle, 76,300 became casualties - 7300 were dead, 45,000 wounded and 23,400 captured.

The majority of the casualties had fallen victim to the artillery, whose strength and effectiveness was much greater than in the earlier Isonzo battles. The Aus-Hung. artillery consisted of about 1400 guns and 500 trench mortars. They fired an enormous amount of ammunition - 37,800 tons. The Italians no doubt fired an even greater amount, but the losses known to have been caused by the Aus-Hung. guns were significantly greater. In part this was due to the defenders having more protection than the attackers. But the greater effectiveness of the Aus-Hung. batteries was also due to their superior leadership, more accurate fire and more proficient crews. A proclamation of the commander on the Karst plateau summarized the contribution of the cannoners in a few sentences:"

"The commander and the infantry unanimously recognize and praise the extraordinary conduct and self-sacrificing cooperation of the brave artillery. Standing day and night in readiness or in combat, they repeatedly nipped attacks in the bud. The batteries often stayed heavily engaged until the last moment. Some were overrun by the enemy, but recovered in combat with hand grenades; then they either started firing again or were pulled back in good order to re-enter the battle later. Other batteries dragged their guns out of their positions so that they could fire directly into the melee."

At the risk of seeming repetitious, we must again praise the gallantry of the Aus-Hung. infantry. In our sketch of the fighting we have described only the especially glorious deeds. But no less wonderful was also the quiet heroism which

allowed the troops to endure the frightful hurricane fire for days. After the enemy's surprisingly quick breakthrough on the southern wing of the Army, questions were raised from many sides as to whether this was due to the failure of weak-willed troops. But a thorough review of the circumstances refutes this accusation, even though more than 6000 men were taken prisoner. In every instance it turned out that the reserve battalions which saved the day belonged to the same regiments whose foremost lines had been broken; the reserves threw themselves upon the enemy without a second's delay, and without wavering. It's also significant that in areas where well-constructed and protective positions had been lost the men still fought heartily on open terrain and proved themselves greatly superior to the enemy infantry. And the final, successful counterattack on the southern wing was the decisive demonstration of their prowess.

The performance of the sappers and pioneers was also brilliant. After months of working on the fortifications for the infantry, in combat they repeatedly sprang to the side of the latter arm. The contributions of the communication troops, who often had to go forth under very heavy fire to restore wires that had been destroyed, also require special mention. Finally we recognize the drivers of the wagons and trucks who without rest kept bringing forward ammunition, food and water under the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

Some remarkable statistics illustrate the activity of the air units. In the 14 days in which they carried out operations (on several days during the battle the planes couldn't take off due to unfavorable weather), there were an average of 64 planes available. They carried out 711 flights against the enemy, engaged in 210 combats in the air, dropped 10 tons of bombs, and repeatedly assaulted enemy infantry with their machine guns. Furthermore they shot down 22 Italian planes and damaged many more. Their own losses, of course, weren't small.

The coastal defense forces also saw lively action during the battle. As noted above, volunteer riflemen from the defenses intervened directly in the fighting at S Giovanni. The coastal batteries repeatedly contributed by preventing Italian monitors from nearing the coast in an effort to destroy the rail line at Prosecco and Opcina. The Admiralty couldn't give in to the loudly-expressed wish that the k.u.k. navy should cooperate from the sea on the southern wing of the battlefield, because the coastal waters were completely infested with mines. But a distant naval action did take place in the southern Adriatic on 15 May. Here, where the enemy maintained a barrage against

submarines across the Otranto Strait, a k.u.k. cruiser flotilla fought Italian and English ships, winning new laurels to add to the Navy's glorious history.<sup>150</sup>

Thus all the troops and branches of the services gladly contributed to the repulse of the much larger enemy force, and the infantry in particular made great sacrifices. The upper echelon commanders' contributions to the success were first their careful preparations and then their skillful conduct of the defense, in which they had to deal with a constantly changing situation.

It wasn't easy for the high command to provide forces for the Isonzo, because they always had to bear in mind the situation on the other fronts. That was why they retained direct control for so long over two of the divisions held in readiness behind the Isonzo Army, and why they waited until the last minute to release two more divisions from the East. The restriction on using the reserves may have seemed a hindrance to Army HQ at Adelsberg, but it was lifted at the right time so there was no negative result. On the other hand, the intervention of the HQ of the Southwest front, which involved another of the reserve divisions (106 Lst ID), wasn't justified and did hinder the commander on the Isonzo from his planned reinforcement of the northern wing at a decisive moment. If this Division had been released several days earlier and deployed in reserve on the plateau north of Görz as Army HQ desired, possibly the events in the Plava area would have developed differently and some very anxious moments been avoided. Instead the Army HQ felt compelled to send far more units to the threatened area than they originally intended, which in turn substantially diminished the reserves stationed behind the southern wing.

When the enemy achieved an unexpectedly quick penetration on the southern wing, the result was one of the most serious crises that the Isonzo Army endured. But they knew how to master the situation. The Corps and Sector HQ intervened directly to dam the flood, while the Army commander brought back to the south the units which had been sent to the northern sector but not yet deployed. In coordination with the HQ of Southwest front and with the AOK, forces were brought forward which not only halted the enemy but wrested from them the laurels which they'd won in

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<sup>150</sup>Kriegsarchiv (Marinearchiv), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1929/33), p. 276). The flotilla's bold commander, Linienschiffskapitän Nikolaus Horthy de Nagybanya, was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for this operation.

the bloody struggle.

After the battle ended, the victorious field commander, GO Svetozar von Boroevic, was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Military Maria-Theresia Order for "operations on the Isonzo in the years 1915 through 1917."

## ***B. The June Battle by the Sieben Gemeinde***

### **1. Italian preparations**

The tumult of the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo had scarcely subsided in the first days of June when the Italian commanders swung into action against the bastion of south Tyrol. They now hoped to carry out plans that they had been carefully preparing for a long time.

In the assaults which the Italians renewed often in June and July 1916, they hadn't succeeded in driving the troops of Archduke Eugene's Army Group from the permanent position between the Brenta and Adige which had been established after the end of the Aus-Hung. Tyrol offensive. The enemy made their main efforts on the northern part of the Asiago plateau, where their goal was Kempel Ridge, and in the Pasubio area where they wanted to recover the Col Santo. Cadorna was convinced that only by achieving these goals would he sufficiently guard the rear of the units attacking on the Isonzo against setbacks such as the Italian Army had suffered in May 1916. Although the main attention of the Italian leadership in summer and fall 1916 focused on the Isonzo, where they tried to gain ground toward Trieste in four battles, Cadorna nevertheless was still determined to renew the attacks at the same sectors of the front in southern Tyrol when conditions were favorable. This time there would be very careful preparation.<sup>151</sup> His determination was strengthened by the substantial territory which was won in August between Görz and the sea, since the threat from the rear posed by the Aus-Hung. units in south Tyrol inevitably became greater as the Italians moved farther east from the Isonzo.

The stubborn attacks of V Italian Corps against the Pasubio position in September and October 1916 had finally won some local successes, but the attackers were still no closer to their assigned goals. G.Lt Mambretti, commanding the troops on the plateau, made careful preparations to attack between the border crest and Asiago, but had to cancel his plans when winter made an early appearance in the first half of November. Therefore the Italian leadership decided to carry out their offensives in both areas in late spring 1917, after the snow melted. The troops of XVIII Corps in the Sugana valley and those of the former "Command on the Plateau" (XX and XXII Corps) - which since 1 December 1916

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<sup>151</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (new 1934 edition), p. 379



made up the 6<sup>th</sup> Army - would make the first attack; the objective would be the Kempel Ridge. At a later point in time the troops of what was now the eastern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army would advance against the Pasubio positions.

To implement this plan, the 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Army received its first new units in mid-March - two Alpini groups from the Krn sector. But a substantial proportion of the reinforcements needed for the operation on the Asiago plateau were supposed to arrive from Friauli very shortly before the start of the offensive, taking advantage of a geographical situation which was very favorable for rapid troop transfers. This would ensure that their opponents would be taken by surprise. But these units, as well as some of the heavy assault artillery, wouldn't be available until after the end of the end of the offensive on the Isonzo, planned for the second half of May.

At the start of June ten divisions were assembled for the impending assault on the Asiago plateau, and around 1500 guns were in position.<sup>152</sup> By a mighty effort, the Italian high command had massed an enormous infantry force on an attack front that was barely 14 km wide, and made available to 6<sup>th</sup> Army a corresponding amount of artillery and equipment. In the opinion of the higher Italian HQ, the size of this force, along with the generally careful preparations for the attack, justified their expectation that they would overrun their opponents and gain wide-ranging advantages.

The offensive was to follow a very precise plan. XX Corps would deliver the main thrust along the northern edge of the Asiago

152The organization of 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Army on 10 June 1917 was:

- . XVIII Corps (15 and 51 ID) in the Val Sugana.....29 battalions
- . XX Corps (52, 29, 10 and 21 ID) on the northern part of the plateau.....61 battalions
- . XXII Corps (13, 25, 27 and 57 ID) also on the northern part of the plateau....51 battalions
- . XXVI Corps (12 and 30 ID) between Asiago and the Astico valley.....24 battalions

The total was thus 165 battalions.

The HQ of 10, 21 and 27 ID had still been in the Isonzo sector in mid-May; HQ of 57 ID, a new creation, had been in the Venetian plains. The units under 6<sup>th</sup> Army included 32 newly formed battalions (5 ½ brigades) plus 12 battalion (2 brigades) which arrived already burnt-out from the Isonzo fighting.

plateau. Their 52 ID, now composed of 20 Alpini battalions, was ordered to attack the front from Mt Ortigara to Mt Campigoletti; 29 ID would thrust forward on both sides of Mt Forno. XXII Corps, adjacent to the south, would have 13 ID attack the Aus-Hung. positions in the Mt Zebio - Cra. Zebio area while 25 ID struck toward Mt Dorole. Once holes were punched in the line, XX Corps would take possession of the entire north edge of the plateau as far as the C. Portule, while XXII Corps reached the border of the lower Val Galmarara.<sup>153</sup> To keep the thrust going, reserves were available and deployed in depth - two divisions held in readiness behind each corps. The units on both sides were to support the main attacking group with accompanying thrusts and diversionary operations - XVIII Corps in the Sugana valley south of the Brenta and XXVI Corps over the lower Assa.

## **2. Measures of FM Conrad's Army Group**

### Developments through April

For a long time, even before the melting snow made major operations possible again in the mountains, the Army Group HQ at Bozen had been dealing with the probability of new Italian attacks against Tyrol. As for the sectors of the front in south Tyrol that would be targeted, new assaults were expected above all on the northern part of the Asiago plateau, where it had been proven that the enemy was already making preparations late in the previous autumn. And at the start of April the Aus-Hung. leadership had available intelligence reports showing that the Italian preparations in this area were once more in full gear.

Shortly after FM Conrad took command in Tyrol, he became convinced that his Italian opponents certainly would sooner or later use their imposing forces on the Tyrol front - a third of their field army - for a powerful blow against Tyrol during the next offensive in the Isonzo area. To be sure that the Army Group would withstand a prolonged assault, he was convinced that they would need three more brigades. But at this point in time, still in the midst of the mountain winter, it seemed to the higher HQ at Marburg and Baden that it would be premature to transfer troops.

In mid-April it was possible to bring the 26 LW Inf [Sch] Bde to Tyrol, with Regiments # 14 and 25. But Conrad felt this was an

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<sup>153</sup>Ministero della guerra, "Le Medaglie d'oro" (Rome, 1926), Vol. III [1917], 69/17.

insufficient reinforcement and used this opportunity, as well as a visit of the Emperor to Bozen on 22 April, to renew his request. The high command still couldn't agree because of the situation on the Isonzo and the unclear developments in the East.

This difference of opinion between the generals responsible for defending Tyrol and the high command - which had to consider the entire military situation - is fully understandable. As time went on the difference became sharper because both the HQ of the Southwestern front and the AOK continued to turn down the ever more pressing demands of the Army Group HQ.

FM Conrad was sincerely engrossed in his love for the Tyrolean mountains, and in peacetime had planned far ahead to prepare their defenses. Now he felt especially responsible for retaining the area jutting far to the south between the Brenta and the Judicarien, as the most important bastion of his command. As noted earlier, he was already of the opinion that the outbreak of revolution in Russia had so quickly and basically changed the situation on the Eastern front that it should no longer stand in the way of reinforcing Tyrol. In fact, he believed that in the foreseeable future it would be time to return to the idea of an offensive from Tyrol. But Archduke Eugene, as commander of all the forces fighting Italy, was fully convinced of the overriding importance of the Isonzo area. Therefore he would have to divert the scanty forces available in other sectors to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which in any event would shortly endure a new and severe trial of strength. Finally the AOK at Baden, in agreement with the German OHL (acting as the supreme inter-allied command), was compelled to take heed of the fact that developments in the East were still unclear. Therefore for now they denied requests to have Aus-Hung. units transferred from this front.

Therefore the higher HQ at Baden and Marburg were convinced that FM Conrad's Army Group would have to make do with the troops already available for the defense of Tyrol. In fact about a third of the force in the southwestern theater was stationed in Tyrol - the same proportion as on the enemy side.<sup>154</sup> The ever-

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154As of 1 May 1917 there were 300,500 riflemen, 106,500 replacement troops, 3452 guns and 3474 machine guns in the southwest, distributed as follows:  
 . Conrad's Army Group - 112,500 riflemen, 29,000 replacements, 1448 guns, 1459 machine guns  
 . 10<sup>th</sup> Army - 32,000 riflemen, 7000 replacements, 337 guns, 250 MG  
 . 5<sup>th</sup> Army - 156,000 riflemen, 70,500 replacements, 1667 guns, 1765 MG.

increasing reports about an Italian troop concentration on the Asiago plateau did nothing to alter this judgment. Thus Army Group HQ, as previously, had to rely on their own reserves; their first concern was to be able to quickly reinforce III Corps, which seemed to be the first intended target of the impending offensive.

#### Developments in May and June

The Tenth Battle of the Isonzo opened on 12 May. But the expected simultaneous offensive against Tyrol didn't materialize; the season was still early. The situation for Army Group Conrad further relaxed when several Italian brigades hitherto deployed on the Tyrol front were now reported to be on the Isonzo. To prevent further troop transfers in this direction, the HQ at Bozen was ordered to pin the enemy down with increased activity, feint attacks and deceptive maneuvers.

Therefore local storm troop operations were carried out at numerous points along the south Tyrol front between 19 and 24 May. The largest thrusts - on the Pasubio and in the Colbricon area - were actions that had been prepared for a long time; together with smaller operations in the Vallarsa, at the Borcola Pass, Laghi and Canove, and on the Civaron (by Val Sugana), they brought in 700 prisoners, 10 machine guns and 3 trench mortars.

When the tenth Isonzo battle started, Army Group Conrad had still held back two of the battalions which were slated to be transferred. But at the end of May they had to give up units for the Isonzo Army, which was engaged in heavy fighting. Thus on 25 and 28 May they received orders to send a total of nine battalions to 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which would replace them with units worn down in the battle. To make the move quickly, it would have to involve reserves that were already standing ready.<sup>155</sup> Now the Army Group was one battalion weaker than it had been during the quiet winter months. This decrease in strength seemed dangerous to Army Group HQ because of the following developments, which could only be regarded as indicating that an attack was imminent:

- . Increased enemy activity on the Sieben Gemeinde plateau;
- . The significantly larger ration strength of the Italian 6<sup>th</sup> Army (discovered through intercepted wireless messages);
- . The identification of new radio stations and of the XXVI Corps HQ (hitherto stationed at Görz), which was also

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(Conrad's artillery included 98 infantry, 1051 light and 299 heavy guns for a total of 1448 pieces.)

<sup>155</sup>The units were IR 64 (3) and 73 (3), FJB 23, Bn III/IR 57 and Bn II/SchR 36.

provided by our intelligence monitoring service. Therefore on 3 June FM Conrad felt compelled to again point out the threatening situation by Sieben Gemeinde and to request reinforcements larger in number than the battalions he'd given up, especially since their planned replacement by worn-out units had been canceled.

The fact that Conrad's concerns were justified is proven by the positioning of the scanty reserves available in south Tyrol at this time - one battalion by 18 ID (Val Sugana), two by III Corps (Asiago plateau), six under 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ and three battalions under Army Group HQ.

Meanwhile the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo had ended. The HQ of Southwest front was now in a position to honor Conrad's requests for reinforcements, which in the last few days through 8 June became ever more persistent due to intelligence that the Italian attack was imminent. Nine battalions were shifted to Tyrol.<sup>156</sup> This increase in strength made it possible for the Field Marshal to assign an equal number of battalions to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Moreover, in case of dire need it was intended to send parts of 73 ID, which at the time was in Croatia to convalesce from typhus.

As much as possible was done to strengthen the artillery by shifting batteries from the quieter sectors to the threatened portion of the front and equipping new batteries. The pause in fighting in the parts of Tyrol that were still locked in the mountain winter made it easier to carry out the transfers.

Through 9 June, observations and intelligence reports provided a rather clear picture of the enemy's intentions. Numerous deserters stated almost unanimously that the attack would begin between the pre-war border and Asiago, at the latest on the 12<sup>th</sup>. In addition to intercepted wireless messages, there were other unmistakable signs that the offensive was imminent:

- . Extensive new tent encampments;
- . Great camp fires;
- . Very lively truck traffic behind enemy lines at night;
- . Deployment and firing of many new batteries;
- . Creation of an Italian balloon barrage on 6 June; and
- . An air raid on Trent and Bozen.

An order to attack, issued to all four corps of 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, was also intercepted and revealed the broad outline of the operation. It seemed that the primary threat was to the

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<sup>156</sup>These were the units that had earlier been transferred from Tyrol, except that IR 57 was sent to Conrad's Army Group in place of IR 73.

divisions of the k.u.k. III Corps stationed on the northern part of the Asiago plateau (6 ID and 22 Sch Div). The Italians' hopes of taking their opponents by surprise had come to nothing because they had done too little to keep their plans secret.

### **3. The battlefield and the opposing forces**

The Asiago plateau reaches its greatest height on its northern edge, called the "border crest" because it approached the international border. Where it descends to the north, in many places it appears from the Sugana valley like a rock wall more than 1000 meters high. The eastern end of the crest, which extends to the point where the border had created an Austrian salient at Barricata, had been captured in May 1916 in the Aus-Hung. offensive but soon thereafter (in June) was again evacuated after stubborn fighting. Subsequently the Italians occupied the C. Maora and made it a major bulwark and a communications center between their fronts on the plateau and in the Sugana valley.

Between the C. Maora and the C. Dieci (which rises 3 ½ km farther west), the border crest levels out to a broad basin, which is traversed and divided into two parts by Mount Ortigara. Thus there are two passes - Porta Lepozze on the west and Porta Maora on the east - which connect the plateau to the Sugana valley; the Porta Maora, however, couldn't be used because it lay between the opposing fronts.

Coming from the south, the Aus-Hung. defenses ran over Mt Campigoletti and along the eastern edge of the two summits of Mt Ortigara to the Porta Maora; then, west of the Maora valley, it extended toward the Civaron as the "Caldiera position."

The fortifications had been masterfully constructed in the Campigoletti sector. On the other hand, the position on Mt Ortigara was neither tactically nor technically on the highest level. It was overshadowed by the C. Maora and could only be reached by routes that were fully visible to the enemy and subject to interdiction. Thus it was difficult to provide the position with supplies, which had to come from the plateau through Dosso del Fine. This drawback, coupled with the need to periodically relieve the garrison, fatefully retarded construction of the defensive installations. Finally, and contrary to all tactical principles, the sector border between III Corps and 18 ID ran along the border crest, so that there was no unified command over this very important point.

During a year of fighting, the barren and chalky border heights west of the C. Maora had gradually come to appear like a field of rubble and craters. The numerous large and small cavities in the ground, some of them still full of snow, would play a very important role in the upcoming battle, similar to that played in the Karst battles by fissures. The snow, mostly on the upper elevations and tinted by picric acid, was often the only means of obtaining drinking water. Small crags did provide some cover, but also hindered movement.

The barren belt of rock which stretched from the defensive positions to the Kempel ridge prevented any traffic toward the front during nighttime. Behind the Italian positions, on the other hand, there was a broad forest zone that provided cover for the movement of their reserves, for bivouacs, and for the assembly of larger troop concentrations before the offensive.

The defenders' difficulties were increased by their numerical inferiority to the enemy forces. The 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Army entered the fighting with 112 battalions between the border crest and Asiago (although at first only a fraction were engaged). On the other side, in the evening of 9 June the defenders had just 21 battalions in the positions between the border crest and Asiago. In reserve, a total of 14 battalions was standing ready while 7 ½ more were still approaching. Thus 42 ½ battalions were available to face the attack, roughly one third of the enemy's strength.

The numerical ratio between the opposing artillery was similar. By 15 June the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army had 400 guns along the part of their front opposite 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Army; the total included 246 light, 48 medium, 17 heavy and 65 fixed pieces plus 24 anti-aircraft cannon. As mentioned above, the Italians had 1500 guns (including their numerous trench mortar batteries), giving them a 3:1 margin of superiority.

The balance of forces seems even more unfavorable to the defenders when we consider only the area where the major fighting took place, the sector between the northern slope of the border crest and Mt Campigoletti. Early on 10 June, in this part of the front there were three battalions of 6 and 18 ID deployed; they were backed up by three battalions of 6 ID in reserve. The 52 Italian ID, which attacked here, initially had 20 battalions available. The reserves of the k.u.k. III Corps consisted of three battalions for their entire front, while XX Italian Corps had more than twelve battalions of 10<sup>th</sup> Division just in the sector described above.

#### **4. The Ortigara battle (9-29 June 1917)**

##### **a. The Italian attack on 10 and 11 June**

Around 5:00 AM on 10 June, a dark and rainy day, the Italian guns and trench mortars began to pound the entire front of GdI Ritter von Krautwald's k.u.k. III Corps. The positions of 6 ID and 22 Sch Div soon were soon under very heavy destructive fire, which severely damaged the installations and barriers. But there was also an extremely vigorous bombardment of the artillery positions and areas far behind the front, including the approach routes and reserve camps as well as the HQ of the higher-ranking commanders. At some points the Italians employed gas shells.

The northern wing of 6 ID and the adjacent southern wing of 18 ID were soon in trouble. Although FJB 7 on Mt Campigoletti had well-built positions which afforded sufficient protection from the massive fire, casualties mounted up in FJB 20 on Mt Ortigara. The Italians' heavy 24 and 40 cm trench mortars were especially effective.

In the afternoon the Italian infantry began to assault III Corps' front at numerous points. But they won some success only against the northern wing. Here the attacking Alpini battalions were covered by the fog and the strong bombardment by their artillery and trench mortars as they moved through the lower ground between the opposing positions and into an area just in front of the Aus-Hung. lines where they couldn't be fired upon. At this jumping-off point they assembled strong forces around noon. After 2:00 PM they sought to penetrate the almost leveled defensive positions in the Ortigara sector. FJB 20, a unit from the coastal lands, held this part of the front with three companies; before noon the III Battalion of the Salzburg IR 59 (from the divisional reserves) was ordered to reinforce them. The latter battalion had to break up into groups which worked their way forward under the thick barrage and were exhausted when they finally reached the position in the afternoon.<sup>157</sup> They found that the Jaeger had thus far repulsed all attacks.

Meanwhile wave after waver of Italians were pushing stubbornly forward, and their significant numerical superiority was constantly becoming more of a burden. Finally the enemy managed

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<sup>157</sup>Hoen, "Geschichte des salzburgisch-oberösterreichischen k.u.k. Infanterie-Regimentes Erzherzog Rainer Nr. 59 für den Zeitraum des Weltkrieges 1914-1918" (Salzburg, 1931), pp. 549 ff.



to penetrate the lines on Heights # 2007, where the Hungarians of Reserve Battalion III/37 were stationed; their remnants were pushed to the north. Thereafter Mt Ortigara was also under attack from the northeast. After both battalion commanders in the Ortigara sector had fallen, the Italians captured the northern summit (Point 2071). But despite the heavy casualties they'd suffered, the remnants of the sector garrison still held onto the main summit of Mt Ortigara (Point 2105), preventing the enemy from gaining further ground toward the west. The unequal combat had also cost the Italians heavily, so they were content with the success they'd won.

The fact that Mt Ortigara could be held was thanks above all to the stubborn defense by the Carniola FJB 7 in the Campigoletti sector. Two Italian Alpini battalions had stormed in vain against this unit; despite receiving reinforcements, they had to cease their attacks after suffering heavy casualties.

Along the other parts of the Corps' front the Italians never attacked with the same weight as on the border crest. On 10 June the enemy made local penetrations on Mt Forno, but were thrown out in an immediate counter-thrust by the Styrian IR 27. There was also fighting west of the Cra. Zebio. In this sector, which had been hotly contested for a year, the Italian attack was supposed to be preceded by the explosion of a large mine. However, a bolt of lightning on 8 June had prematurely set off the detonation. The defenders occupied the crater and dampened the prospects of success in this area for the Italians, who'd suffered heavy officer casualties.<sup>158</sup> A smaller explosion was set off here on 10 June, after which the attackers managed to make a small penetration, but the situation was soon restored by the Austrian Schützen stationed here (the Styrian Regiments # 3 and 26).

The positions of 22 Sch Div farther south had also suffered greatly under the massive bombardment. But strong Italian attacks against Mounts Dorole and Interotto and at Camporevere were repulsed, partly by our barrage and partly in hand-to-hand combat. In the sector of Col. Vidossich's Group a local penetration into the positions of the Zillertal Standschützen near Rotzo was soon defeated.

However, the success of the Italians on the 10<sup>th</sup> had some significance. It was only possible with difficulty to close the

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158"Brigate di Fanteria", Vol. VI (Brigate Catania, p. 89). The explosion took place during an orientation about the impending assault and cost the Italians 22 officers and 100 men.

gap between 6 and 18 ID reliably. If the thrust was resumed on the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> the result could be fatal for the defenders, since there was danger that the front - so far held only by makeshift measures - might be torn apart completely. In fact the Italian divisional commander on the border ridge was determined to continue attacking on the 12<sup>th</sup>; he wanted six battalions to advance toward the C. Dieci and into the rear of the Ortigara position.<sup>159</sup> Fortunately for the defenders, however, 52 ID was ordered to first restrict their efforts to local improvements in the line. Despite these instructions, the fighting didn't die down in the following days.

The next reserves hastened toward the endangered area on the border crest. 18 ID sought to secure their southern flank by shifting Battalion X/14 to the sector northeast of the C. Dieci.<sup>160</sup> In the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> the 6 ID had already deployed Battalion IV/14 on Heights # 2015 east of the Porta Lepozze, where the enemy had been brought to a halt earlier in the day. Early on the 11<sup>th</sup>, two companies of this Battalion plus a company from FJB 20 fended off a strong Italian attack against the steep northern side of Mt Ortigara.

On 10 June FM Conrad had sent an urgent message to the high command to report that the long awaited Italian offensive had started and to state that the units available to his Army Group were sufficient only to stave off the first thrust; therefore reinforcements were needed very quickly. In their answer, the AOK noted that they still believed that the fate of the defenses against Italy would be decided in the Isonzo area. A limited attack by ten Italian divisions on the Asiago plateau wasn't a justification for significantly weakening 5<sup>th</sup> Army, and no units currently could be made available in the Northeast. On the 11<sup>th</sup> Conrad submitted his evaluation of the overall situation on the Italian front, which did nothing to change the decision of the high command.

#### **b. The counterattack of the k.u.k. III Corps (15 June)**

On 10 June the HQ of FML Edler von Mecenseffy's 6 ID had already deployed Battalion III/59 and ordered Battalion IV/4 to go to the Porta Lepozze; in addition they sent Battalion II/14 to the northern wing to relieve the burnt-out FJB 20.<sup>161</sup> Although

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159Como Dagna Sabina, "L'Ortigara" (Milan, 1934), p. 87

160Ehnl, pp. 57 ff.

161"IR. 14: Ein Buch der Erinnerung an grosse Zeiten 1914-1918"

delayed by repeated small-scale but energetic Italian thrusts, this exchange of troops took place in the night of 12-13 June. Thereafter the units were deployed as follows on the northern wing of 6 ID (12 Inf Bde). FJB 7 held the Campigoletti sector and the adjacent Battalion II/14 was on the eastern slope of Mt Ortigara. Then the front along the northern slope of this mountain bent to the west where Battalion III/9 was in position. The western face of the salient created by the loss of the Lepozze position was held by Battalion IV/14 on Point 2051. Along these lines the Italian local attacks mentioned above were defeated from 11 to 13 June; otherwise both sides were working feverishly to construct positions that would be at least somewhat defensible.

On the rest of the Corps' front, only the position between Mounts Zebio and Dorole was the target of a deeply-deployed attack in the evening of 12 June, which was easily repulsed by 43 Sch Bde.

On 11 June GdI Krautwald's III Corps HQ had already ordered 6 ID to hold onto their current positions at any price and to recover the lost terrain with a counterattack by the 14<sup>th</sup> at the latest. Also the Army Group HQ, in an order to 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ on 12 June, instructed that the planned counterattack on the border ridge should be carried out as soon as possible; they emphasized that the enemy who'd reached the Porta Lepozze should be driven back soon. Reserves were provided specifically for this operation. By the evening of 14 June (the attack had been postponed until the 15<sup>th</sup>) FJB 23 joined 12 Inf Bde; the reserves assigned to 6 ID were Battalion IV/27, two battalions sent from Col. Vidossich's Group on the Assa position (I and III/14), and the II Battalion of KJR 4 from XIV Corps.<sup>162</sup> 22 Sch Div had available two Kaiser-Schützen battalions (II and III/1 Regt). III Corps HQ had five reserve battalions, 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ five and a half, and the Army Group HQ three battalions.

On the Italian side, XX Corps HQ had ordered on the 12<sup>th</sup> that both of the Alpini groups engaged on the northern wing of 52 ID (in the Lepozze-Ortigara area) should be relieved by a brigade

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(Linz, 1919), pp. 100 ff. and 246 ff.

<sup>162</sup>Some of the units in south Tyrol had been re-designated in December 1916 and January 1917. On 9 December the former 8 ID became the "Kaiser Jaeger Division"; on 16 January its brigades (58 Mtn and 180 Inf) became the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kaiser Jaeger Brigades. At the end of January the former XX Corps (GdK Schönburg) became the "XIV Edelweiss Corps" and Roth's Corps on the Dolomite front became the new XX Corps. Later (on 2 May) the 3 ID became the "Edelweiss Division."

from 10 ID. This movement was delayed by the fighting on 12 and 13 June, and was finally under way when the Aus-Hung. counter-attack developed.

The first goal of the counter-thrust was the recapture of Point 2071; afterwards all of the original Lepozze sector would be recovered. But the time allotted for preparation was too short to allow the commanders and troops of the attacking group (a total of 3 ½ battalions) to gain sufficient knowledge of the terrain, which to most of them was unknown, and to carefully plan their cooperation with the artillery. Thus the operation, which started around 2:30 AM on 15 June after a short bombardment, gained just a temporary success. The storm patrols and the first wave of Upper Austrians and Salzburger were able to penetrate the enemy lines on Point 2071 and capture many machine guns. But the Italian battalions which had just been relieved threw themselves into the fight with determination. In a bitter melee against overwhelming numbers of Italians, the hitherto successful attackers suffered very heavy casualties; they had to give up their booty and fall back to their starting points.

At dawn the enemy artillery opened heavy fire on the Aus-Hung. Ortigara positions. Then the Italians sought to exploit their defensive success in the night by widening the area they'd penetrated on 10 June. But their stubborn attacks against Mt Ortigara and Heights # 2051 were in vain. After heavy fighting that lasted all day, both sides by a tacit agreement finally lay down their arms when evening fell so they could save the wounded lying between their positions. This day of fierce combat cost the attacking group of the k.u.k. III Corps 6000 men. It was urgently necessary to relieve the very exhausted and shaken battalions from the front line.

Thus in the night of 15-16 June Battalion III/59 on the northern front of Mt Ortigara was relieved by Bn III/4. On Point 2051, in the following night Battalion IV/14 was relieved by Bn I/14. Finally, on the eastern front of Mt Ortigara Battalion II/14 was relieved by the II Bn of KJR 4 on 18 June.<sup>163</sup>

11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ were determined to resume the counterattack as soon as possible, since the dangers to the defensive positions on the Asiago plateau as well as to the front in the Val Sugana from the enemy penetration on the border crest were all too evident. Their opinion was shared by FM Conrad, who visited III Corps HQ on 16 June for an orientation. But to him it seemed inadvisable to shift more troops to the portion of the defenses on the border

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163"IR. 14, Ein Buch der Erinnerungen", pp. 256 ff.

crest because the 6<sup>th</sup> Italian Army continued to endanger the entire front on the Asiago plateau. This threat was now increased by the Italians' evident preparations to attack the sector between the Zugna Torta and the Pasubio. And finally a setback on Tyrol's western front at this time caused considerable concern.

In the Adamello sector the Italians in April 1916 had taken possession of the extensive glacier region between the international border and the Crozzon di Lares - Crozzon di Fagorida crest. On the southern portion of this crest the Corno di Cavento (3400 meters) remained in the hands of the troops of Area III as an advanced observation post. Here a Kaiser Jaeger Streif company was stationed in June 1917. With considerable toil two mountain cannon had also been brought to the summit; they fired on the rear of the enemy positions and prevented troops from crossing the glacier during the day. This was very annoying to the Italians; on 15 June, after an extremely heavy artillery bombardment, they mounted an envelopment assault against the advanced outpost with an overwhelming force (an Alpini battalion plus ski detachments). The result was the loss of the mountain summit and the destruction of the garrison; the guns were blown up before they fell into enemy hands. Before it was determined that the Italians were content with this success, 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ brought forward Lt Col. Edler von Schönner's Bicycle Battalion from their scanty reserves to prevent any further advance of the enemy who'd taken the Corno di Cavento.

### **c. The renewal of the Italian onslaught (18-19 June)**

The Italians' success on the defensive on 15 June strengthened the determination of their leadership to renew their assault of 10 June; perhaps they could still achieve the goals they had been seeking with such a great consumption of units and military equipment on the Asiago plateau. Once more they would attack in the entire area between the border crest and the Assa ravine by Asiago; as on 10 June, the main thrust would be delivered by XX Corps on the northern wing of the attacking group. 52 ID, whose 20 Alpini and 6 infantry battalions were joined also by a Bersaglieri regiment, now had 29 battalions available. They would attack along and south of the border crest. 29 ID once more was assigned as an objective the area around Mt Forno where until now they'd been fighting in vain.

52 ID deployed for the attack in two columns.<sup>164</sup> On the right a group of four battalions were to thrust west; first they'd secure Point 2051 and the pass of the Porta Lepozze which lay behind it. The main body of this column, eleven battalions strong, would envelop and capture Mt Ortigara from the north and east. Moreover, five battalions of the southern column were also sent against the mountain from the southeast, while three battalions pinned down their opponents on Mt Campigoletti. Three mountain batteries and three sapper companies were attached to the northern column; four independent machine gun companies, three mountain batteries and one sapper company were with the southern column. Four battalions and two machine gun companies were to remain in the position that had been the Italian first line until 10 June, and the Division had two battalions in reserve. Finally, another infantry brigade was placed at the disposal of 52 ID on the 19<sup>th</sup>, and two of its battalions were already engaged on the same day.

To oppose this concentrated mass of 35 attacking battalions on the northern wing of 6 ID, the k.u.k. III Corps had deployed Battalion I/14 in the Lepozze sector, Bns III/14 and II/KJR 4 in the Ortigara sector, and - as previously - FJB 7 in the Mt Campigoletti sector. These four units held the front line; behind them were 1 ½ battalions in reserve and 3 ½ more battalions that were directly under the Division. Thus 9 Aus-Hung. battalions were facing 35 Italian, giving the enemy fourfold numerical superiority. Some additional reserves were available - 7 battalions under III Corps HQ (but 2 were completely worn-out), 3 more in the Army's reserve, and an equal number in the Army Group's reserve.

The Italian artillery preparation began around 8:00 AM on the 18<sup>th</sup> along their entire attacking front; toward noon it swelled into drumfire. Once more the positions of 6 ID, as well as those of 43 Sch Bde in the Cra. Zebio area, came under destructive artillery bombardment and severe fire from the trench mortars. Once more the Italians' heavy guns pounded targets far behind the front. But most of the enemy infantry detachments that felt their way forward during the day were frustrated. Around 7:00 PM a stronger attack against the Mt Forno sector was shattered by the concentrated fire of the defenders' artillery.

The troops on the northern wing of 6 ID suffered the most under the enemy's massive fire, which continued through the night (though with diminished intensity). The casualties were almost unbearable in the installations on Mt Ortigara, pounded and

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<sup>164</sup>Como Dagna Sabina, pp. 173 ff.

shaken by ten days of bombardment, and especially in the new lines - made up of stone walls or rudimentary trenches traced through the stony soil - on the northern slope of the mountain and reaching to the cliff north of Point 2051. Around 6:00 AM on 19 June this part of the front was the target of the advancing crowds of Italian infantry. The enemy, with overwhelming numerical superiority, first overran the Kaiser Jaeger who'd just taken over the positions on Mt Ortigara's eastern front. The Italian battalions then continued to advance; from the rear they struck Battalion III/14, which was fighting on the northern edge of the mountain and had already repulsed two earlier attacks at dawn. Soon the fate of this Battalion's three companies was sealed. The Italians reported taking 1000 prisoners plus 14 machine guns and 5 cannon.<sup>165</sup>

The Upper Austrians of Battalion I/14 held out on Point 2051, repulsing all attacks against their front, and FJB 7 stood without flinching in their positions on Mt Campigoletti and stretching from there to the southwestern slope of Mt Ortigara. But between these units a broad gap had opened. Here the Italians weren't able to advance farther to the west because of machine gun fire which was hitting them in the flank from Mt Campigoletti and in the front from the slope of the C. Dieci. The defenders' artillery also concentrated their fire on the lost Ortigara summit. The first available reserves from 6 ID hurried forward to close the gap; in terrain almost devoid of cover, very heavy trench mortar fire struck whole detachments of FJB 23, which were soon dashed to pieces, and of Battalion IV/14. But anyway the immediate danger subsided toward evening, especially when the Italians were seen to be incorporating Mt Ortigara into their chain of positions.

After the capture of Mt Ortigara, the commander of 52 Italian ID had intended to continue the attack toward Mt Campigoletti, since flanking fire from that direction had until now hindered exploitation of the success. But already in the evening of 19 June the HQ of XX Corps ordered most units to fall back to the defensive; only 52 ID would fight to obtain more favorable local positions.<sup>166</sup>

News of the loss of Mt Ortigara was received by the higher Aus-Hung. HQ in a form that had to cause them the greatest anxiety. After the first reports, they were informed on the one hand that the C. Dieci was already endangered, and on the other that FJB 7

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<sup>165</sup>According to the Aus-Hung. reports just two infantry guns were lost.

<sup>166</sup>Como Dagna Sabina, pp. 88 ff.

on Mt Campigoletti was under attack from the flank and rear. Understandably, spirits lightened when both reports were proven to be false, since the nature of the terrain made possession of Mt Campigoletti an essential precondition for any operation that might be undertaken to recover the lost positions. Therefore the unshakeable stand by FJB 7 in the net of trenches they'd prepared themselves was of decisive importance for the final outcome of the battle.<sup>167</sup>

The reserves which arrived on the border crest the following night (initially Battalions III/K-SchR II of 6 ID and X/14 of 18 ID) put an end to the danger in this sector.

On other parts of III Corps' front, there were Italian attacks on 19 June in the area of Mt Forno and also between Mounts Zebio and Dorole; they collapsed under the defenders' fire. With the solitary exception of 52 ID in the fighting on Mt Ortigara, the Italian leadership had neither the will to press their attacks nor the determination to commit all of the strong forces they had available. And even on Ortigara they failed to exploit the local success won by the sharp infantry assault, just as on 10 June.

Also on 19 June a large group of Italian airplanes operated over south Tyrol. 145 planes dropped 5½ tons of explosives. The k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army had just 26 planes (of which 3 were fighters) to oppose the enemy's aerial force, which included 61 fighters.

Based on reports from the Asiago plateau on 19 June, FM Conrad renewed his demand for more reserves. He was promised that from the 73 ID, which was coming by train from Croatia, FML Ludwig Goiginger's divisional HQ plus one brigade would go to south Tyrol. But at first they were to be left near the railroad so that they could be very quickly shifted if necessary to the Isonzo Army, where the second brigade was assigned.

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<sup>167</sup>The value of well-built positions was demonstrated by the relatively light casualties of this Battalion, despite the fact that they were holding points that in part (on the northern wing) were completely outflanked by nearby enemy troops on higher ground. Although between 10 and 26 June the FJB 7 fought all their actions without any relief, total losses were 9 officers and 340 men (including 55 killed). These figures prove the truth of the training maxim, "Streams of sweat avoid streams of blood."

Lt Col. Eugen Seydl, commanding FJB 7, received the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for this feat of arms.



The pause which began in the evening of 19 June on the blood-soaked battlefield along the border crest made it possible to relieve the battalions of 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which had been weakened during the days when they stood fast in heroic fulfillment of their duty. Thus Battalion III/KSchR II relieved the garrison of the new switch position west of Mt Ortigara, while half of Battalion X/14 relieved the First Bn of their parent Regiment on Point 2051.

#### **d. The recovery of Mt Ortigara (25 June)**

Because of the terrain that had been lost to the Italians on the border crest since 10 June was of decisive importance for the defensive front in south Tyrol, the commanders of 6 ID (FML Mecenseffy) and of III Corps (GdI Krautwald) were firmly determined on 19 June to counterattack as soon as possible.<sup>168</sup> It was clear at all levels of command that this operation would have to be carried out with fresh troops after very careful preparation, but there were differences of opinion about how many units were necessary. Under the impression of the alarming first reports at noon on 19 June, 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ believed it was essential to use a fresh division. FML Mecenseffy demanded at least six battalions; III Corps believed that this was the maximum which could be deployed because of the difficulty of bringing up supplies. Substantial ammunition shipments would have to proceed hand in hand with the approach of reinforcements, since the batteries had almost exhausted their rounds.<sup>169</sup>

#### Plans and preparations

Preparations for the counterattack were entrusted to the commander of 98 Kaiser Schützen Brigade, Col. von Sloninka; in the night of 21-22 June he took over the northern wing of 6 ID from Mt Campigoletti to the edge of the cliff north of Point 2051. It was possible to carry out all the necessary preparations without disturbance from the enemy, who on the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Sloninka, "Die Kämpfe um die Ortigara-Lepozzestellung" ["Unser Kaiser-Schützen"] (Hall i.T., 1927); this book, along with Lützow's "Die Ortigarakämpfe" (Hall i.T., 1922), describes the Ortigara battle in detail.

<sup>169</sup>The artillery group on the northern wing of 6 ID had fired 160 T of ammunition on 10 June, 196 T by noon on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 164 T on 18 June and 250 T on the 19<sup>th</sup> (Sloninka, pp. 11, 13 and 20).  
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The German "Tonne" (2200 lb) is 40 lb less than an Anglo-Saxon ton.

merely kept up a lively fire from their batteries and thereafter concentrated solely on constructing their new positions. On 22 June FML Ludwig Goiginger, who'd arrived in Tyrol as commander of 73 ID, was placed in charge of the group that, under III Corps HQ, would carry out the mission. When Goiginger reported to FM Conrad, the latter emphasized the importance of his task with the following words: "The Lepozze position must be retaken; otherwise the whole front is no longer tenable."<sup>170</sup>

The following units were available for the operation:

- . from 18 ID the Battalion X/14;
- . from 6 ID the Bns I/14, II and III/57, I/KSchR I, III/KSchR II and FJB 7 plus half of 11<sup>th</sup> Army's Storm Bn, a sapper company and three porter companies; and
- . all the batteries of 6 and 18 ID, which were instructed to bombard the area to be attacked. There was a total of 60 light guns, 31 medium and heavy guns, and 12 trench mortars.

It wasn't easy to pick a day to start the attack because the process of bringing up ammunition was lengthy. To keep the enemy from constructing substantial positions, time was pressing. Therefore it was decided to refrain from a prolonged artillery preparation, and to open the offensive with just a short hurricane of fire. Starting on 22 June the guns periodically opened fire suddenly, so that the enemy would get weary of being alarmed. For this purpose, and for the attack itself, it was judged that there would be sufficient ammunition on hand by the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup>, so that 25 June was selected as the day of the thrust.

On the Italian side, during the night of 19-20 June a brigade from 10 ID was deployed to relieve from the front the troops who'd suffered the most. Thus along the arc of the newly-won front, which was divided into three sectors, the following forces were stationed:<sup>171</sup>

- . Seven battalions in the northern sector (between Points 2007 and 2071 (Lepozze),
- . Four battalions in the center (Mt Ortigara), and
- . Seven more battalions in the southern sector.

Three mountain batteries were brought forward to Mt Ortigara. Ten battalions were in reserve; the remnants of 52 ID were recuperating in camps near the old position. This over-concentration of force was to be the Italians' undoing.

Initially the attack, which would have to be delivered frontally

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<sup>170</sup>Sloninka, p. 28

<sup>171</sup>Como Dagna Sabina, pp. 192 ff.

due to the terrain, would be carried out by small but completely reliable detachments of mountain veterans. In fact efforts were made to put all available troops matching this description into the attacking echelon. To be sure of at least holding the jumping off points in case of defeat, these positions were occupied by FJB 7 and parts of Battalions III/KSchR II and X/14.

To bring the attacking group into position, a difficult march behind Mt Campigoletti toward the enemy's flank was necessary. The troops were divided in three groups. The northern group (ten storm patrols and Battalion I/KSchR I, followed by half of III/57), were to capture Point 2071 while the middle group (seven storm patrols, 2 ½ companies of Bn III/KSchR II and the other half battalion of III/57) would take Mt Ortigara. The southern column (six storm patrols) would thrust northeast from the Campigoletti sector toward the rear of Mt Ortigara. The companies of Battalion III/57 deployed as a second wave; they would occupy the Italian lines after they were penetrated, while the first wave thrust ahead in one bound into the old Aus-Hung. positions on the eastern slopes of both of the Ortigara summits. Also, three companies of Bn II/57 followed the northern and middle groups; their assignment was to bring up ammunition and hand grenades.

After the short, concentrated bombardment against the target positions, the artillery (led by Col. Ritter von Romer of 18 FA Bde) would lay down a slow barrage - including some gas shells - over the low ground east of Mt Ortigara. They would also use gas against the most important enemy batteries.

#### The operation

After the attacking infantry were ready, the artillery opened their very effective bombardment as scheduled around 2:30 AM on 25 June. Behind the wall of fire, the waves of attackers worked their way up to the enemy's barbed wire and began to destroy it. When our artillery ceased fire at 2:40, the storm patrols broke into the Italian position on Mt Ortigara. The penetration developed less smoothly on Point 2071, where Italians with several machine guns and a flame thrower kept up a stout defense; a number of assaults were needed before the Schützen were also able to mop up the trenches here. The thrust continued into our former position on the eastern edge of the heights, where the trenches and dug-outs were full of reserve troops. These Italians had suffered substantial casualties during the recent massive artillery fire; many hundreds of them lay down their weapons, since the barrage was cutting off any possibility of

retreat.

The victors barely had time for makeshift arrangements in the battered old positions when at dawn the Italian artillery delivered very powerful retaliatory fire; casualties, which had been minimal during the assault, multiplied many times. Losses on the especially exposed Point 2071 reached 50% of authorized strength, but the Schützen nevertheless held out. In the evening the enemy sought to change their luck, with the reserves they'd assembled, by overwhelming the Kaiser-Schützen with numbers.<sup>172</sup> But this attempt was shattered, as were repeated onslaughts after 3:00 AM on 26 June. In the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> the Italian fire slackened off.

"After 24 hours of combat, the enemy also halted their fire here at daybreak. Only some guns of small caliber continued to fire until noon. [The Italians] had finally given up the game. The heroic Kaiser-Schützen, with some comrades in arms of other units in their ranks and supported brilliantly by the artillery, had withstood the worst. They had not only captured the position with *elan*, but held this almost unprotected pile of rubble - under devastating enemy fire - against all comers with exemplary defiance of death, stubbornness and discipline."<sup>173</sup>

At the Porta Maora, Summit # 2007 was still in enemy hands; a frontal assault against this small fortress collapsed with heavy losses. To ensure the connection with the Caldiera position of 181 Inf Bde, this last remnant of ground once taken by the Italians would also have to be re-conquered. After careful reconnaissance, in the night of 29-30 June an energetically led company of Battalion X/14 descended from Point 2071 in a surprise thrust; they surprised the enemy, and with slight casualties took back this summit that was so hard to approach. The Italians were pushed back toward the C. Maora.<sup>174</sup>

The attackers had seized ample prizes since 25 June. 70 officers and 2000 men were taken prisoner; the booty included 12 guns, 62 machine guns (including five of our own that were recovered), 10 trench mortars and more than 3000 rifles.

#### **e. Results and aftermath**

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<sup>172</sup>According to the Ministero della guerra, "Alpini" (Rome, 1930), at least seven Alpini battalions attacked on 25 June.

<sup>173</sup>Sloninka, p. 38

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 65

In the three weeks of fighting, the long-prepared, large-scale Italian operation aimed at recovering the Kempel Ridge at first made substantial progress. But it ended in a total defeat; along with the substantial casualties, the result had an unfavorable effect on the morale of the Italian Army. 52 ID alone had lost 660 officers and 15,000 men; the infantry of the other divisions engaged in the attack lost 350 officers and 7000 men.<sup>175</sup> Thus 1000 officers and over 22,000 men were casualties - about the same as in some of the Isonzo battles. And here, two thirds of the losses occurred on a front just 2 km wide. These facts must be borne in mind to understand the horror and pain which the word "Ortigara" causes in Italy - it represents the vain bloodshed by the Alpine troops.

The casualties of the k.u.k. III Corps in the defensive battle - 251 officers and 8577 men - were mainly borne by ten battalions in the Ortigara-Lepozze sector, which lost a large portion of their personnel with exemplary self-sacrifice. The following is an overview of the casualties of FM Conrad's Army Group during June.

. Under 11<sup>th</sup> Army, III Corps lost 376 officers (26 dead, 154 wounded, 125 ill, 71 missing) and 12,204 men (966 dead, 6167 wounded, 3627 ill, 1444 missing). The other units (18 ID, XIV Corps, Group Etschtal and Area III) lost 54 officers (2 dead, 13 wounded, 39 ill, 5 missing) and 2929 men (74 dead, 665 wounded, 2090 ill, 100 missing).

. The Army Group's other components (XX Corps plus Areas I and II) lost 42 officers (5 dead, 11 wounded, 26 ill) and 2066 men (68 dead, 361 wounded, 1634 ill, 3 missing).

. Totals thus were 477 officers (33 dead, 178 wounded, 190 ill, 76 missing) and 7351 men (1108 dead, 7193 wounded, 7351 ill, 1547 missing).

After deducting troops who were ill, the casualties (dead, wounded and presumed taken prisoner) thus were 287 officers and 9848 men.

Lost to the enemy were 25 machine guns, 6 trench mortars, 2 infantry guns<sup>176</sup> and 2 cannon.

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<sup>175</sup>Figures were assembled from "Le Medaglie d'oro", Vol. III, p. 71 and then from "Brigate di fanteria", "Alpini" and "Bersaglieri." Cabiati, in "La battaglia dell'ottobre 1917" (Milan, 1933; p. 102) agrees that Italian casualties in the Ortigara Battle totaled 22,000 men.

<sup>176</sup>As noted earlier, the Italians claimed to have taken five artillery pieces on 18 June, but per Aus-Hung. reports only two infantry guns were lost on that day.

The Ortigara Battle has significance far beyond its immediate setting because of the gallantry of the defenders, the successful counterattack carried out with scanty resources, and the importance of the area over which it was fought. Here for the first time small Aus-Hung. storm patrols won major success over much larger opposing forces. This was proof that specially-selected troops, trained for a particular mission and then carefully but gallantly led, could defeat an enemy much stronger in numbers and equipment. They only needed to use the proper tactics and have the will to conquer.

Some reasons for the Italian defeat have already been narrated. Also, the enemy was robbed of success by the same failings as in all the earlier fighting. According to the publication by General Como Dagan Sabina, this time the failure to exploit local successes was due not only to insufficient initiative on the part of the lower-level commanders; they were too closely supervised by their superiors.

Besides mistakes by his generals and unfavorable weather, Cadorna blamed the diminished spirit of the troops for the unfavorable outcome of the operation. With a few exceptions, such as the Alpini of 52 ID, they were succumbing to the destructive influence of revolutionary propaganda.<sup>177</sup>

The collapse of the Italian spring offensive on the Asiago plateau was a great relief for Army Group Conrad. Above all, it was soon obvious that the Italians had given up on the wide-ranging operation they'd envisioned against the area between the Adige valley and the Borcola Pass, even though the planning was far advanced. During the battle south of Val Sugana, the skirmishing along the subsidiary fronts in Tyrol was actually less than normal. The only actions worth mentioning were two mining attempts by the Italians in Area V. Here on 20 June they blew up a cliff on the Lagazuoi; although the attempt was renewed on 29<sup>th</sup>, neither explosion caused serious damage to our defensive position. The Italian leaders were obviously turning their attention once more to the Isonzo.

During both the Tenth Isonzo and Ortigara Battles the Italians on the Carinthian front had occasionally pretended to be ready to attack, apparently to keep units from being drawn from this front. The operations consisted mainly of increased artillery activity, but there were also local thrusts by small infantry detachments. The defenders inflicted retribution with their own batteries, and often carried out storm troop operations. Thus on

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<sup>177</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (new edition, 1934), p. 382

22 May patrols from IR 7 surprised and wiped out the Italian garrison at Plöcken Pass.

In mid-June the enemy artillery in the Plöcken area were firing for effect with such intensity that the commander of 10<sup>th</sup> Army (GO Krobotin) believed a major Italian operation was imminent. But the expected attack didn't materialize. There were merely thrusts by small detachments, easily repulsed by the alert garrisons at the front. On our side, on 17 June some storm troops of BH IR 4 made a small-scale attack on the Rombon to gain information; it led to the capture of a forward Italian position, in which two dozen prisoners were taken.

The order of battle of 10<sup>th</sup> Army was altered in this period; 4 ½ battalions were given up to the Isonzo Army and the Army Group in Tyrol (IR 28 [2], Bn III/57, FJB 20 and half a bn from IR 96), along with several batteries. At the end of June the 10<sup>th</sup> Army had 33 battalions and 11 high mountain companies; the backbone of the defenses on the Carinthian border was still made up of the Carinthian IR 7,<sup>178</sup> BH IR 4 and south Styrian Lst IR 26.

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<sup>178</sup>Bartels, "Aus der Geschichte des Khevenhüller Regimentes 1691-1918" (Graz, 1932)

## **V. The Last Russian Offensive**

### ***A. Events in May and June***

#### **1. Decline in Russia's will to attack**

##### **a. Peace propaganda continues in May**

Since April 1917 hostilities had been suspended along the entire front between Riga and the Black Sea. Industrious Aus-Hung. and German intelligence troops were sending propaganda from trench to trench, to make it clear to the war-weary *muzhiks* that the Central Powers were inclined toward peace and - simultaneously - to convince them that it was useless to continue the war. For a while it also appeared that by this route it would be possible to come to an armistice with the Russian Army and make peace with the country in general. By the end of April, soldiers' committees from more than a hundred Russian divisions had negotiated with our intelligence troops; at many points along the front Russian troops had declared they didn't want to attack any more. But their commanders had proved resistant to all attempts at an accommodation. Apparently this was a success of the Entente, which still had adherents in the Russian government and which for a long time had maintained liaison officers at all the higher Russian HQ. Also the Russian artillery and air units had from the start completely rejected our propaganda and all negotiations at the front. Despite resistance from their infantry, the Russian gunners sometimes opened fire on negotiating groups. Thus the situation on the Eastern battlefields became ever more unclear, and ever more dangerous for maintaining military discipline. Therefore at the start of May the German Eastern Command demanded that if it wasn't possible in a short time to initiate negotiations with the Russian commanders, the OHL should halt the propaganda in the trenches, which was already being regarded as a sign of weakness. At the same time the HQ of the German South Army even recommended the resumption of full combat activity.

The high commands of the allied Central Powers were by no means ignorant that this peculiar truce had its dark side, but they seemed determined not to destroy the real possibilities of reaching an understanding. At the suggestion of the German OHL,



the intelligence services had already been instructed at the end of April to tell the pacifically-inclined Russian soldiers' committees that they should demand that their commanders conclude an armistice for three to four weeks; this would allow all the front-line troops to take part in the elections of the Soviets. But the k.u.k. Chief of Staff GdI Frh. von Arz had little hope that by "unending chatter" between the trenches it would be possible to open negotiations with the higher Russian leadership. For this reason, on 1 May he suggested to GFM Hindenburg that the three principal commanders on the Eastern front - Prince Leopold of Bavaria, Archduke Joseph and GFM Mackensen - should simultaneously and officially offer the Stavka an armistice. If this were accepted, then 48 hours after the start of armistice negotiations plenipotentiaries representing the high commands and governments would also meet to initiate discussions for a general peace. GFM Hindenburg concurred, but stated that first all the allied high commands would themselves agree to the stipulations of the armistice. He also informed the AOK that the Germans would refuse any demand by Russia that no troops could be transferred from the East during an armistice.

The conditions for an armistice with Russia were drawn up by the high commands of the allied Central Powers during the first half of May. They were based on an effort to achieve an understanding with this state. The basic concept was to cease hostilities along the lines currently occupied along the entire front between the Black and Baltic Seas, as well as in the Caucasus. Naval warfare in the Black and Baltic Seas should also come to a halt. The Central Powers' high commands were willing to pledge not to reinforce their troops during the armistice and to renounce shifting large numbers of troops for an attack on the Russian front. This proposal was reviewed by the commanders of the Turkish and Bulgarian forces, who concurred after a lengthy exchange of opinions.

From a military standpoint, the German OHL felt there was no urgent necessity to immediately open official armistice negotiations with Russia regardless of conditions. They assessed the military situation confidently. The submarine campaign in April had exceeded all expectations. Toward mid-May the great French offensive on the Aisne and in Champagne had come to a halt. The OHL hoped that the new Entente attacks anticipated in the near future could also be repulsed. GdI Arz had the same hopes for the front on the Isonzo. The turmoil in Russia was making the situation easier. The OHL was convinced that the Russian Army would still remain unable to fight for a long time. The allies could speed up its disintegration, but otherwise

calmly await the development of events on the Eastern front.

To further undermine the Russian front, our intelligence troops zealously continued their peace propaganda. Regarding the guidelines for this propaganda there were still many differences of opinion between the high commands and governments of the Central Powers, above all involving war aims. To increase hostility toward the Entente, the Germans brought to the Eastern front some Russians who'd been captured in France, and released them to join their comrades. When these men returned home they had much to tell about the war-weariness of the French, who were attacking only because they were driven to do so by their commanders.

#### Allied troop movements

Powerless and hopeless, the Russian Army couldn't be rallied to fight during the general offensive of the Western Powers which started on 9 April 1917 or the tenth onslaught of the Italians on the Isonzo. The high commands at Baden and Kreuznach took advantage of the suspension of hostilities to exchange divisions that had been worn down in the Southwest and West with units from the East. Also the fourth guns of almost all German batteries and their entire artillery reserve was sent to the threatened front in France.

In April the German 195 ID left east Galicia by train for the West. At the end of this month the HQ of the k.u.k. IV Corps moved to the southwestern theater of operations. The German 15 ID, pulled from the front in Volhynia, went to Brest-Litovsk while the k.k. 26 Sch Bde left Woyrsch's Army Group so they could move to south Tyrol. In May the Germans pulled the Alpenkorps from Transylvania and their 36 and 48 Res ID from east Galicia; along with 119 ID and 10 Bav ID they went to the West. In place of 119 ID, the 24 (Saxon) Res ID from the Arras sector entered the line under South Army; 75 Res ID, hitherto behind the front, replaced 36 Res ID. 4 Ersatz ID, a reserve of the German Eastern Command, deployed behind South Army at the end of May. To replace the 195 and 10 Bav ID, during May the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army received two burnt-out divisions from the West - 12 LW and 223 ID.

In May and at the start of June the Austro-Hungarians pulled 12 ID from the Carpathians, 24 ID from the Csik, 21 Sch Div from east Galicia and 35 ID from the Szczara; all were sent to the Southwest front. The k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army sent XXIV Corps HQ to the same destination. In addition, the Army placed German 16 ID at

the disposal of the German Eastern Command, as they earlier had done with 15 ID. After both of these divisions were sent to Brest-Litovsk, two other German units were stationed on the northern wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army - 7 LW ID (which came from Brest-Litovsk) and 86 ID (which hitherto was stationed behind the front of XXII Corps). The newly-formed Saxon 45 LW ID was assigned to the Kovel Sector to replace 92 German ID; the latter became a reserve of the Eastern Command. At the start of June the German 47 LW ID arrived from the Western front at Kalusz and at the end of the month was stationed at Lublin as another reserve of the Eastern Command. Also at the start of June, the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army in Romania sent the k.u.k. 73 ID to the Southwestern front, receiving in exchange the worn-out 62 ID.

### **b. Ongoing disintegration of the Russian Army**

On 1 May the k.u.k. AOK's radio intercept service overheard a wireless message of GdI Alexeiev, in which he assured the English high command - which was concerned about plans for the stalled offensive - that they would receive the support of the entire Russian armed forces, although this wouldn't happen until the weather improved. In reality the Russian Army was completely ineffective at the end of April. The catastrophic food situation had compelled War Minister Guchkov to release soldiers who were over 40 years old (and in the replacement services) to work as farmers; on 23 April he relieved all men over 43 years of age from military service. The mass of discharged men thronged to the railroad stations and for a long time disrupted the transportation system. Only by allowing hundreds of thousands of soldiers to return to their home villages was it possible to save from starvation various units at the front which suffered from particularly difficult logistical situations.

The Russian Army continued to run down-hill. Ammunition was in short supply; for the horses there was merely a pound of oats per day. The number of deserters and slackers ran into the millions. Trains that set out with thousands of replacement troops arrived at the front with merely a few hundred men. The production of iron fell to 40% of the pre-revolutionary level because of the introduction of the eight-hour day and the refusal of the men to work overtime. War-weariness increased at the front. At Riga, representatives from the Soviets appeared in the positions of 5<sup>th</sup> Army. Sailors and workers from Kronstadt emerged in Dvinsk, on a fact-finding mission. Soldiers were encouraged to negotiate with the enemy. Delegations of workers visited the German trenches, and soldiers' committees distributed proclamations. The disciplinary power of the authorities was restricted by the

Minister of War, and the soldiers' committees received the right to negotiate with political parties. It was hoped that these measures would bolster military spirit, but the result was the opposite - a further decline in discipline.

The Bolsheviks continued their underground activity, both at the front and in the interior. In the broad mass of the population, resistance swelled against Guchkov and Miliukov, who agreed with the imperialistic war aims of the Entente. Haphazard shootings and frequent changes of location by the Soviets were daily occurrences. The Bolshevik press demanded that peace should be concluded without "annexations or reparations"; henceforth this slogan was heard often. On the other hand, Socialist leaders from the Entente countries urged the Russian people to fight against the Central Powers for the realization of democratic ideals. At the same time, in May the Entente government resorted to more effective measures. They threatened to cut off military equipment and credit unless discipline was restored in the armed forces and unless Russia proved that its Army was capable of a new, decisive offensive "toward victory."

But it wasn't possible to induce the inert Russian Army to fight. On 7 May GdK Brussilov reported to the commander-in-chief: "The condition of the armies under my command has significantly deteriorated recently due to incessant German propaganda and to the destructive introduction of politics among the troops. I must make it clear that for this reason the Army is threatened with ruin despite the measures taken by all the unit HQ."

The fading belief of the commander of the Southwest Front in a victorious future compelled Alexeiev to write to the Minister of War on 11 May: "I had calculated that by mid-May the serious moral illness which besets our armies would have been overcome to such a degree that we could attack, and that after an initial success the expiring military spirit among the troops would live again." The letter closed: "We are doing all we can to carry out an attack, but fear that the general condition of the mass of the soldiers make our good will and sincere efforts useless."

The leading generals of the Russian Army tried in vain to have the government re-write the laws governing the troops' rights and duties. Guchkov entrusted this task to a committee that consisted mainly of representatives of the workers and soldiers. Under their pressure, a draft was produced which spoke only of rights, not of duties. All men in military service were to be permitted to take part in any political, national, religious, economic or social organizations. When not on duty, every

soldier had full freedom of speech. The military salutation was abolished, and corporal punishment of soldiers by their superiors was forbidden. Several Army commanders were decidedly opposed to implementation of this "Declaration of Soldiers' Rights", which would legally recognize the state of affairs that already existed. GdI Alexeiev declared that it would be the last nail in the coffin of the Russian Army. Such great importance was attached to the declaration that on 13 May it was the subject of a conference at Mogilev, over which Alexeiev presided. Present were the commanders of the Russian fronts, plus General Shcherbachev (who on 3 May was named assistant to the commander of the Romanian Front) and the Romanian Chief of the General Staff, General Presan. With one accord, all the Russian generals spoke out against publishing the declaration. They went on to St Petersburg in order to explain the Army's desperate situation to the holders of power and to ask that the declaration be immediately withdrawn. Their meeting here took place on the 17<sup>th</sup>, but was without result. That night the generals returned to their respective HQ.

On the next day (18 May), at the urging of the English ambassador Buchanan and of the French armaments minister Albert Thomas - a Socialist who'd been sent to St Petersburg - the Russian government was reorganized. The new cabinet brought men of bourgeois origin and Socialists to the rudder. The coalition was supposed to once more harness Russia to the military wagon of the entente. Its most radical member, Kerensky, was a docile work horse in the hands of the Entente diplomats. He was named to replace Guchkov as Minister of War.<sup>179</sup>

At the Mogilev conference there had also been discussions about the general guidelines for the offensive by the Russo-Romanian armies, which was intended as a prelude to a new onslaught by the Western powers. The first blow was to be struck in east Galicia around 1 July by the Russian Southwest Front. Attacks by the Romanian and West Fronts would follow. Thus, it was believed, the simultaneous general offensive by the Entente, which had failed to develop in spring, could still be initiated.<sup>180</sup> But the

<sup>179</sup>Gurko, pp. 216 ff. "Das russische Heer von 1917 und die Revolution" (in "Wissen und Wehr", Berlin; 1922 edition, pp. 234 ff.) Spannocchi, pp. 82 ff. Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 63 ff.

<sup>180</sup>Winogradsky, "La guerre sur le front oriental en Russie - en Roumanie" (Paris, 1926), p. 334. Dabija, "Armata romana in rabioul mondial 1916-1918", Vol. IV (a manuscript, which by the kindness of the Romanian military archives was made available before its publication).

great question was whether the soldiers would follow the order to attack.

### **c. End of the peace propaganda**

The high commands of the allied Central Powers had meanwhile undertaken a major effort to open armistice negotiations with Russia. On 12 May, two days before the Russian May Day (under the old calendar), the three chief commanders on the Eastern front - Prince Leopold of Bavaria, Archduke Joseph and GFM Mackensen - issued by radio an invitation to the opposing Russian generals to begin talks. Moreover, parlementaires delivered official proposals for negotiations to the most "infected" divisions. Neither route was effective. Under Archduke Joseph's Army Group, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies sent out many parlementaires on 19 May. They did receive a friendly reception from the junior Russian officers and from the rank and file, but the enemy's higher command levels continued to resist our approaches by all possible means.<sup>181</sup> Several envoys were driven away with shots, others were captured, and one was wounded during a discussion. Only one parlementaire reached the HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, where however he received the negative reply that the conclusion of peace was a matter for the governments and not for soldiers.

In the sectors of the German Eastern Command and of GFM Mackensen the attempts to negotiate also led to the capture and wounding of some envoys. The Russians' divided response was especially evident in the battle lines near Dvinsk. A Russian officers' delegation declared that General Dragomirov was ready to negotiate an armistice. But when the German envoy arrived in front of Dragomirov at Dvinsk, he immediately gained the impression that the general was by no means disposed to negotiate. The Russian only promised to send to his government a letter in which the German Eastern Command indicated they were ready to talk about an armistice. The German parlementaire tried to bring this letter over on 14 May, but was no longer allowed behind the Russian lines. A Russian officer-candidate did accept the letter for forwarding, but no response was received.

Although the attempt to initiate discussions with high-ranking Russian commanders had failed, in many Russian divisions there were negotiations with soldiers' committees concerning a truce. Now GdI Alexeiev forbade the reception of parlementaires and any

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<sup>181</sup>Ronge, "Kriegs- und Industrie-Spionage" (Vienna, 1930), pp. 273 ff.

negotiations, stating that this constituted treason. At the same time the Russian commander offered substantial rewards for bringing in prisoners and shooting envoys. Nonetheless the number of Russian divisions which had negotiated with their opponents increased by the end of May to 165 (out of a total of 240); 38 of these units had declared they no longer wanted to attack.<sup>182</sup>

But by now the Central Powers recognized that their failure to make a clear declaration of their war aims was increasing the mistrust of those Russians who until now had been willing to negotiate. Thus on 19 May Archduke Joseph reported that in all the discussions with our negotiators the Russians expressed their fear that the Central Powers would merely use an armistice on the Eastern front to overthrow France; later they would fall upon the Russians and rob them of the freedom they'd won with such difficulty. The Entente counter-propaganda, carried out with great skill and unscrupulous methods, was visibly gaining the upper hand on the Russian front. From the end of May, the high commands at Baden and Kreuznach reckoned that the Russian Army - or perhaps at least parts of it - would regain strength and carry out a new offensive. The German Reich-Chancellor now came to the conclusion that an overly-obvious desire for peace would be self-defeating; if the Central Powers seemed to be hopelessly exhausted they would only refresh the enemy's strength.<sup>183</sup>

On 28 May GdI Arz wrote as follows to Graf Czernin, the k.u.k. Foreign Minister: "The means of the allied armies to carry out peace propaganda are now exhausted...The increased influence of the Russian commanders makes it seem advisable to now abandon the large-scale military propaganda, which has failed, and to restrict it at the front to a smaller effort."

## **2. Build-up to the summer offensive (June 1917)**

### **a. Attempts to restore Russia's military spirit**

During May, as the great offensive of the Western powers threatened to die out, the Russian HQ once more received reports from Paris that the Germans would attack St Petersburg. But GdI Alexeiev no longer believed that his opponents, who were so heavily outnumbered by his 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Armies (274 Russian

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<sup>182</sup>Ronge, p. 273

<sup>183</sup>Ludendorff, p. 353

battalions against 99 German) were in a position to carry out a large operation against the capital simultaneously by land and sea. He was more concerned that the units held ready for the defense of St Petersburg on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland were at a point that wasn't seriously threatened by the Germans. He believed an enemy attack between Riga and Smorgony was possible, and therefore decided to remove four or five divisions from 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Armies so they could assemble in the Polotsk area as a strategic reserve.

GdI Dragomirov, who'd taken Ruzsky's place as commander of the North Front at the end of May, advocated simultaneous thrusts from Dvinsk and Smorgony toward Kovno; this operation would have favorable prospects if the armies of the West Front attacked at the same time. GdI Alexeiev approved the plan. He canceled the assembly of a strategic reserve at Polotsk, and once more made available to the West Front the troops whom they'd sent to the Riga sector in March (112 and 132 ID), plus an artillery brigade. Alexeiev hoped to finally begin the offensive at the end of June or start of July. All fronts should attack. The plan was now to deliver the main blow north of the Pripyat. But the effort by Alexeiev and Guchkov to awaken the Russian Army from the lethargy into which it had fallen since the outbreak of the Revolution wasn't completed; Kerensky and Brussilov would have to carry it out.



Kerensky and his new team

Kerensky's first goal was to once more shape the Army into a useful instrument of power. Immediately after assuming office he warned that all deserters who didn't return to their units by 28 May would be severely punished. But he couldn't free himself from all the new revolutionary notions. Thus he simultaneously published the "Declaration of Soldiers' Rights" and an order concerning an "Offensive by the Army and Navy." He believed that the declaration of rights would enhance military spirit. But the encouragement which the ukase awoke among the mass of the troops was dampened by the order about the offensive. While the old officers hoped that the resumption of fighting would restore their authority, which had already fully disappeared, the soldiers - especially the infantry - objected emphatically against any eventual restriction to the freedom they'd won.

Russia's new rulers initiated many more personnel changes in the highest levels of command, which further increased unrest in an Army which was for the most part out of control. On 5 June Brussilov was named commander-in-chief in place of Alexeiev. At the same time GdK Gurko was removed from his post because he wouldn't recognize the "soldiers' rights." In June the Chief of the General Staff of the high command, Denikin, took over the West Front. Brussilov's successor in command of Southwest Front was Gutor, who hitherto had led 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Kornilov, the governor of St Petersburg, replaced Kaledin in command of 8<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>184</sup> General Belkovich took over 7<sup>th</sup> Army from Shcherbachev. A few days before the offensive began, General Erdeli received 11<sup>th</sup> Army. As already mentioned, the North Front had been led by Dragomirov since the dismissal of Ruszky.

The new commander-in-chief supported Kerensky's efforts to restore the fighting spirit of the war-weary Russian soldiers. In his first order he stated that "Our enemies will not agree with our conditions for peace - no annexations and no reparations. Therefore we have no choice and no expedient other than to force the enemy with our swords to make peace according to our moderate proposals."

Already at the start of June Kerensky let the Stavka know that he looked forward to the resumption of offensive operations with confidence. Brussilov intended to open the attack with the southwestern armies on 23 June; they would make their main effort

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<sup>184</sup>Kornilov had been taken prisoner in the Carpathians in 1915.

He subsequently escaped from captivity in Austria and returned to military service.

in east Galicia. The other Fronts would join in on 28 June. He reinforced Southwest Front with XLV Corps and V Cavalry Corps from the Romanian Front. Kerensky then inquired when he should visit the front to stir up the soldiers' fighting spirit. Brussilov reported on 15 June: "I've received a very mixed impression of the North Front. The West Front is better. Nevertheless I intend to make the decisive attack on 25 June with the Southwest Front. It can't be sooner. I believe we have a chance to succeed."<sup>185</sup> Since war-weariness was especially strong in the armies of the North and West Fronts, Kerensky decided to first turn to the troops of the Southwest Front.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> the commander of Southwest Front, GdI Gutor, issued his orders for the attack. The main effort would be made by 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies, which would burst through the opposing front along the Zloczow-Gliniany and Brzezany-Bobrka axes toward Lemberg. The Special Army would tie down as many enemy units as possible with feint attacks toward Kovel and Vladimir-Volynsky. 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the Carpathians would cover the attack, and occupy the Lomnica valley with their right wing so they could later advance through Kalusz to Bolechow. Assigned as reserves behind 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies were I and II Guard Corps, XLV Corps, and II and V Cavalry Corps. The start of the offensive by 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies was now finally set for 29 June; 8<sup>th</sup> Army would attack on 7 July.

Brussilov had to postpone the attacks of the North Front until the 18<sup>th</sup>, of the West Front until the 16<sup>th</sup>, and of the Romanian Front until the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. In a telegram to Kerensky on 26 June, he justified this measure on the grounds that the troops didn't want to attack. Finally, 22 July was fixed as the date for the North Front's offensive, and 19 July for the West Front. Meanwhile the troops should be won over for the attack, and the units deployed. The troops of 1<sup>st</sup> Army that had been sent in March and April to protect St Petersburg on the coasts of the Gulfs of Finland and Riga (I and XXXVII Corps) were shifted to Dvinsk. They were placed under 5<sup>th</sup> Army, which would strike the principal blow. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ moved to Suczawa in Bukovina, so they could take over the left wing of the Southwest Front after 8<sup>th</sup> Army's sector was extended to the Dniester.

#### Efforts to bolster morale

Meanwhile Kerensky visited the depot troops and traveled along various parts of the front. He delivered rousing speeches which were supposed to rally the masses of Russian soldiers to save

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<sup>185</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 66

their newly-won freedom, threatened by "German militarism", in an offensive to break the military might of the Central Powers. Kerensky, of whom it was said that he alone could save the country, had become the hero and idol of the new Russia. Since he was welcomed with such enthusiasm in many places, hope returned that the Russian soldiers could perhaps be rallied for new and courageous fighting. But the homage rendered to Kerensky by the masses, and the many scenes in which they solemnly swore to die for the fatherland, were mostly smoke and mirrors. The Russian soldiers - above all the peasants - didn't want to fight any more.

Thus despite dedicated efforts at all levels of the chain of command within 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies, up to the start of the attack it wasn't possible to win over all of the infantry. In VI Corps the soldiers declared that they would in fact attack, but if they were defeated they would kill the Corps' staff. In vain, Kerensky had appointed "delegates" to each Army, who were supposed to support the commanders in maintaining discipline. On 28 June the II Cavalry Corps had to be used to disarm a long-rebellious Siberian regiment which had entrenched themselves. In these days before the offensive Kerensky visited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Division, which was known to be especially unreliable. Their cries of "Bourgeois", "Down with the war" and "Down with everything" proved that even his influence on the front-line troops was not very great.

Kerensky felt it was necessary that the offensive should be supported by the first All-Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, which at this time was meeting in St Petersburg. On 25 June the Congress took up a position about the war; they demanded that the provisional government should alter the treaties with the allies and renounce the policy of conquest. But they also declared that Russian democracy was obliged to enhance the strength of the Army with all available means as long as the world-wide efforts of the democrat forces were unable to put an end to the war. The collapse of the Russian front would represent a defeat for the Russian Revolution and a severe blow to the cause of international democracy. Otherwise the Congress expressed the opinion that the question of an offensive was to be settled on purely strategic grounds.<sup>186</sup>

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186Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin" (Vienna, 1927), pp. 113 ff. Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 65 and 47. Paléologue, pp. 441 ff. Knox, Vol. II, pp. 627 ff. "Das russische Heer von 1917 und die Revolution", p. 238. For this description of the Kerensky offensive we have also used the manuscript of a very detailed study by Hofrat-Colonel a.D.

**b. The situation in east Galicia before the Russian attack**

Until the second half of May the battle fronts in the East remained quiet. Despite all difficulties, the propaganda war between the trenches continued. At this time our air units detected preparations to attack only by Kozowa and Liatyn in east Galicia. An operation which GdK Brussilov had ordered against Brzezany on 18 May wasn't carried out because the Russian infantry refused to attack. But the enemy's rapidly increasing activity in the air was a sign that a Russian offensive might be imminent. The number of their aircraft and fixed balloons continued to increase. The numerical superiority of the enemy air units was causing problems for the allies, even though their Russian opponents lagged far behind them in training and in their willingness to engage.

Analyzing the Russians' intentions

From the start of June, the Russian artillery was livelier on the entire Eastern front, especially in the area of GO Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. Many new batteries were identified. In the sector of South Army, there was also more evidence from Russian negotiators and deserters that an attack was imminent. Although the dates indicated for the offensive - 4 and then 14 June - passed quietly, there were indications of the Russians' possible intended routes of attack. They were provided by the replacement of divisions reluctant to attack by troops who were unaffected by propaganda, by artillery reinforcements, and by the construction of railroads and extensive ammunition depots as well as of bridges over the Dniester and the Bystrzyca Nadwornianska. The targets seemed to be the areas by Zborow and Brzezany and, south of the Dniester, by Stanislau and Solotwina, from all of which major roads led to the west. Also, from day to day the Russian infantry became less receptive and more hostile to our ongoing propaganda. But the increase in combat activity was at first ascribed mainly to the Russian artillery, while the infantry seemingly wanted no part in offensive operations.

The forces of Army Group Böhm-Ermolli followed Russian developments with tense alertness. On 14 June the k.u.k. high command notified the Aus-Hung. armies on the Eastern front about a re-grouping of the Russian and Romanian units. Strong reserves were appearing behind the Russian front at Riga and Smorgony, between Brody and Halicz, and at Jacobeny. These troop

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Kiszling, "Der Sommerfeldzug 1917 in Ostgalizien."

concentrations, and also the nomination of Brussilov as commander-in-chief, meant that a new Russian offensive could be expected. But it was still questionable whether the Russian infantry could really be sent forward, although War Minister Kerensky was traveling behind the front to restore discipline and spirit in his armies. It was now certain that the peace propaganda carried out between the fronts couldn't lead to an armistice with Russia and the separation of this state from the Entente. But the Russians' war-weariness was great, as proven by a report of the English ambassador Buchanan, which an Englishman in the Germans' pay made available to their ambassador in Bern; it stated that Russia could no longer be counted on for large-scale military operations. It was conceivable that parts of the Russian Army might carry out a thrust, but only in the event of an Anglo-French victory on the German Western front.

At any rate, Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ took the situation seriously, and believed it was really possible that the Russians intended to carry out a large, coordinated offensive in east Galicia. Only at Stanislau and perhaps also at Solotwina did it seem that the enemy were planning just some local efforts. This was not the case in the sectors of the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and of South Army. The enemy, who'd already doubled their strength opposing the latter Army since starting to prepare the offensive, were bringing up yet more units to carry out the attack.

At the start of June the VII Sib Corps, which had been resting around Kolomea, appeared at Podhajce. In mid-month the II Guard Corps, hitherto in reserve east of Brody, marched south through Tarnopol and on the 25<sup>th</sup> reached the area around Podhajce. Behind them I Guard Corps was coming from the north, and moving through Tarnopol to the west. Three Russian corps - VI, XLIX and XVII - were concentrated in the area on both sides of Zborow. Meanwhile VII Sib Corps was squeezed tightly into the front of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army south of Brzezany, on the western bank of the Zlota Lipa. The Siberians' place in reserve was taken by XXXIV Corps, which had come up from Kolomea to Monasterzyska and now was stationed in Podhajce and its vicinity. A reserve cavalry force (II Cavalry Corps) likewise shifted from the area south of the Dniester to the north, at first to the Buczacz area. They were followed by V Cavalry Corps from the interior.

All these movements were confirmed by Russian wireless messages plus our aerial reconnaissance reports, and numerous statements by prisoners and deserters. They left no doubt that the Russians were preparing this attack with very special care, much greater

than they'd shown in earlier offensives. This may have been due mainly to fear of the consequences of an eventual defeat. To be sure of winning the Russian infantry over for the offensive, they had even been promised that the opposing positions would be so badly damaged by artillery that they'd be able to march through them with shouldered arms.

In striking contrast to the Russians' comprehensive preparations, their combat activity was scanty in the second half of June. This was also true of the artillery, which could only mean that, despite the great amount of ammunition which the enemy had no doubt accumulated, they didn't have a superfluity; also, the enemy artillery wanted to remain undetected for as long as possible.

#### The allies' preparations

Based on the numerous indicators of the upcoming offensive, the commander of South Army (GdI Bothmer) had requested and received artillery and infantry reinforcements from the Eastern Command. During the second half of June the artillery of South Army received a total of 22 batteries - including 12 heavy - and abundant ammunition. Moreover, during June almost all the light field howitzer batteries were once again brought up to four guns. At first the only infantry reserve in South Army was the German 4 Ersatz ID, which had arrived at the end of May and was at the disposal of the Eastern Command. They had suffered severely in France and still needed to rest while restoring their full combat strength. In mid-June the 19 Turkish ID was sent to Anatolia and relieved by the newly-assigned 15 German Res ID; this decreased South Army's infantry strength by around three battalions, but did slightly increase the field artillery. By reducing the length of the especially difficult sector of 75 Res ID on the heights east of Lipica Dolna, the Res IR 250 were made available to Army HQ and stationed in readiness at Lipica Gorna. Finally, at the end of June the Saxon 241 ID, another reserve unit of the Eastern Command, arrived in South Army's sector; they were stationed at Kurzany in the Narajowka valley. As a Group HQ for the impending defensive battle, Bothmer's Army was given XXV Res Corps from the left wing of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army. As compensation, FML Fabini's k.u.k. XVII Corps HQ was re-assigned from the Isonzo to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. The HQ of XXV Res Corps arrived at Rohatyn on 27 June and on the 28<sup>th</sup> took command over the 15 and 24 Res ID in this sector. All in all, at the end of June the South Army had 6½ German, 3 Aus-Hung. and 1 Turkish divisions to defend a 65 kilometer front against the Russian onslaught.

The principal Russian attack was expected to strike the front between Lipica Dolna (on the Narajowka) and Perepelniki (east of Zloczow), and thus the center and northern wing of South Army plus the adjacent southern half of the Zloczow Sector of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (under HQ of GdI von Winckler's I German Corps). In the latter area, the concentration of VI, XLIX, XVII and I Guard Corps indicated that the Russians intended to break through on both sides of the Tarnopol-Zloczow road. It was believed that the enemy's hitherto lively skirmishing against the k.u.k. 33 ID at Zwyzyn (12 km northwest of Zalosce) was only a diversionary effort.

In expectation of the impending Russian attack, at the end of May Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ deployed the newly-arrived 223 German ID in the area between Bohutyn and Pluhow, behind the endangered IX Corps. At the end of June the 237 German ID was coming from Brest-Litovsk to Zloczow by train. The Saxon 96 ID deployed behind V Corps and the Leib Huss Bde behind XVIII Corps. The Austrian 12 Mntd Rif Div was forming at Lemberg, still under the k.u.k. high command.

The northern wing of South Army (k.u.k. XXV Corps) and the southern wing of the Zloczow Sector (k.u.k. IX Corps plus German 197 ID) had a total of five divisions at the front. They were opposed by the 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army which had 8½ divisions in the first echelon and 2 divisions in the second. At the end of June the I Guard Corps and 1 Trans-Baikal Coss Div were still encamped west of Tarnopol. Because there were plentiful reserves behind the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the Russians' numerical superiority wasn't very significant, and Army HQ hoped that they could successfully withstand the enemy onslaught.

To prepare for a possible attack against 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which seemed at the end of June to be less probable, two newly-arrived divisions deployed behind the Army's northern wing - German 83 ID and k.u.k. 16 ID. This seemed a sufficient defensive measure.

By around 25 June the South and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies had the impression that the enemy offensive was imminent. At this time, in fact, the Russian infantry had been massed and organized for the attack. Intercepted wireless messages and statements from prisoners led to the conclusion that the Russian assault, which had already been postponed so many times, would finally open on 29 June.

The best counter-measure would surely have been to anticipate the Russians with a rapid allied attack. Such a plan was devised at

Kreuznach in May, when the rise of Kerensky increased the danger that the Russian Army might be strengthened once more. At that time it would still have been possible to strike the Russians while their strength was low. But GdI Ludendorff didn't adopt the idea because he didn't want to bear the heavy responsibility of wrecking the real prospect which then existed that Russia could be compelled to seek peace without further bloodshed. However, now (at the end of June) this consideration had disappeared. Therefore Prince Leopold of Bavaria, the German Eastern commander, didn't want to stay on the defensive, but planned to answer the enemy's offensive with a counter-blow. He was contemplating a thrust from Zloczow along the upper Sereth toward Tarnopol, because here it would be possible to envelop the portions of the Russian Army stationed farther south. The success of the operation would be all the greater if the Russians massed still more troops for their attacks between Zborow and the Carpathians. But preparations for the counter-offensive wouldn't start until the enemy had actually attacked and worn themselves out on the defensive positions of Army Group Böhm-Ermolli.

The German OHL approved this plan and wanted to have enough units for a very strong counter-stroke; if possible, it would have a decisive effect and finally break Russia's resistance. For this purpose reinforcements were needed, but it wouldn't be possible to move more than six divisions from the Western front. And even this was a difficult decision, because a major enemy offensive in Flanders was expected after the successful English attack at Wytschaete on 7 June. Transportation of the units and artillery preparations were organized so that the counter-offensive could start around mid-July. This would be two weeks after the 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies did launch their last massive onslaught in east Galicia.<sup>187</sup>

### **3. Inactivity of Russia's allies**

#### **a. Events on the Western front**

Despite the agreements within the Entente that, to the extent possible, they would attack simultaneously on all fronts, in April the armies of the two Western powers had finally entered the lists on their own. At the end of June it was now the

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<sup>187</sup>Ludendorff, p. 345. Hoffmann, "Der Krieg der versäumten Gelegenheiten" (Munich, 1923), pp. 177 ff. Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, p. 106



Russians who at last were seeking a great breakthrough in eastern Galicia but were left in the lurch by their allies.

It was understandable that the Italians needed a pause to recover after the very costly Tenth Battle of the Isonzo and after their vain attacks by the Sieben Gemeinde. But the French also remained completely inactive. The reason was that morale in their Army had continued to deteriorate after the enormous casualties suffered in the fruitless onslaughts on the Aisne. Open mutinies, certainly also caused in part by the revolutionary developments in Russia, broke out on 20 May; they first affected troops stationed in reserve, then spread to the front. A total of 16 French corps were infected by the spirit of disintegration. 75 infantry, 12 artillery, 1 dragoon and 2 colonial regiments, 23 chasseur battalions and some of the Senegal rifle units were openly disobedient. Two Russian brigades stationed in France refused to follow orders; they were encircled in their camps and brought under control with artillery fire. Thus at the start of June, as the French War Minister Painlevé has written, there were no more than two reliable divisions between Soissons and Paris.<sup>188</sup>

The French high command now intervened very energetically; 150 mutineers were sentenced to death, although only 23 were actually executed.<sup>189</sup> But the new generalissimo, Pétain, also didn't fail to correct the mistakes and address the grievances which had led to the disturbances. Thus by the end of July the spirit of the French Army was markedly improving. On 7 July the War Minister Painlevé promised the legislature that there would be no more ambitious but rash and poorly-prepared offensives. The French high command were also successful in hiding the weaknesses caused by the mutinies. What might have transpired if the Germans had learned of the events in the French Army around the start of June! But strangely the normally well-informed German intelligence service learned nothing about the mutinies. They remained one of the few well-guarded secrets of the war.<sup>190</sup>

Because of the condition of the French Army, it was only natural that when the English proposed an offensive in Flanders at the start of June and asked the French to attack simultaneously, Pétain heeded the advice of his subordinates and didn't plan to attack until July. In general he was opposed to any large scale offensives until the arrival of the Americans. But he did gladly

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188Painlevé, "Comme j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain" (Paris, 1925), pp. 132 ff.

189Palat, p. 433

190Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, p. 99

agree to lengthen the French front to the north, so that the British Army could concentrate for a powerful blow. Even if this thrust didn't achieve its objective - the capture of the German submarine bases on the Belgian coast - at least the Germans would be deprived of the opportunity to pursue their own goals.

On 7 June the English attacked at Wytschaete (12 km south of Ypres) and inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans, but didn't build upon this initial success. Hereafter the situation of the 4<sup>th</sup> German Army was very tense, since in addition to defending the front on land they also had to guard the coast of Flanders and take precautions against possible landings in Holland.<sup>191</sup> The English held fast to their plan for a thrust in Flanders, but didn't intend to put their fleet at risk. The temporary inability of the French Army to attack and the further successes of the German submarine campaign (in which 869,000 tons of enemy shipping were sunk in May and 1,016,000 in June) necessitated an English offensive. But they prepared for the operation very systematically. Thus at the end of June there was a pause in fighting on the northern wing of the Western front. The French armies farther south were also unable to attack at the same time as the Russians, for the reasons explained above.

## **b. Events in the Balkans and the Near East**

In the Balkans, Italian pressure continued in the area where the Tomorica has its source. To finally solve this problem, at the start of June FML Gerhauser undertook a strong thrust to clear the enemy out of the entire sector north of Osum as far as the area beyond Gradiska. This operation was progressing well, but had to be canceled by GdI Trollmann's XIX Corps HQ due to logistical difficulties.

The increased attention which the Entente was also paying to the Albanian theater caused the k.u.k. high command, as well as the German OHL, to consider cutting the enemy's supply line through Birkliste through Korca to Santi Quaranta. An attack on Valona was also discussed. But the needs of the other fronts made it impossible to reinforce the k.u.k. XIX Corps, so in mid-June they received an order to restrict their efforts to holding the front on the Vojusa. The plans mentioned above, for which some preparations had begun, would be initiated in mid-October at the latest. XIX Corps was also ordered to deploy as much artillery as possible at the front and to bring forward the combat troops

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<sup>191</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 116

who were still stationed north of Semeni (211 Lst Inf Bde). The coastal defenses, since mid-June commanded by FML von Bekic, would just cover the ports of S. Giovanni di Medua and Durazzo as well as the supply line running directly along the coast north of Kavaja. Only some observers would be left in the other coastal sectors; they would seek new positions south of the Skumbi to guard the routes into the river's valley and to build them up as strong points.

The unsatisfactory outcome of the spring offensive by the Entente armies on the western front and in Macedonia, as well as the failure of the Russians and Romanians to carry out a simultaneous attack, now compelled the Western allies to at least settle the Greek question in their favor. They accused the royal government of Greece of failing to carry out the Entente's demands, and claimed that the Greek Army, though disarmed, was preparing for an uprising in the rear of the Army of the Orient in Macedonia. Thereupon the rival government of Venizelos exchanged messages of sympathy with Paris, offered the Entente a military alliance, and sent representatives to the capital cities of France, England and Russia.

Meanwhile the two Western powers and Italy had agreed to force Greece to change its government. King Constantine was compelled to abdicate on 12 June, after his army, interned in the Morea, was cut off from the rest of the country and after a threatening amphibious force had appeared off Athens. Since the Crown Prince was also considered to be insufficiently friendly to the Entente, the King's second-born son Prince Alexander ascended the throne.

On 25 June Venizelos returned to Athens as Greece's Prime Minister. In a proclamation he called upon the people "to be willing to fight on the side of the democratic nations for the freedom of the world" and immediately began to rebuild the Greek Army. A French military mission was standing by to help. At the end of June diplomatic relations were broken off between the Central Powers and the new Greek government.

During the first half of the year there had been significant developments in the Near East. In the night of 10-11 March the English made amends for their setback at Kut-el-Amara by conquering Bagdad from the Turks. The Turkish 6<sup>th</sup> Army were finally able to re-establish themselves 150 km north of this city. Meanwhile, on 17 March the Turkish Vice-Generalissimo Enver Pasha traveled to Kreuznach to ask for German help in recovering Bagdad. He was promised wide-ranging support. The Turkish 6<sup>th</sup> Army, along with a 7<sup>th</sup> Army to be assembled at Aleppo,

would make up Army Group "Yilderim" ("lightning"). The German OHL was sending their newly-formed Asia Corps, the k.u.k. AOK a number of mountain batteries. The operation was planned to start in October. The commander would be GdI Falkenhayn, who on 1 May relinquished command over his 9<sup>th</sup> German Army and then traveled to Turkey.<sup>192</sup> But the insufficient Turkish transportation network and developments in Syria prevented the Army Group from being deployed as scheduled in Iraq.

In Syria the Turks were stationed in a position south of Gaza which they were determined to hold under all circumstances. After the English had constructed their railroad a long distance forward, they reinforced their expeditionary corps and made two attempts to break through the Turks' Syrian front. But the English had no success in either of the Gaza battles (26-27 March and 19-20 April 1917). Two Aus-Hung. batteries (1 How Batty/Mtn AR 4 and 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 6) played a glorious role in this defensive success.

The prospect of deploying the new Greek army on the Salonika front was used by the English as a welcome excuse to reduce their own troop strength in Macedonia so they could reinforce the group in Syria. Despite an objection from the French high command, which in response to former English complaints about the logistical problems in Macedonia had initiated improvements since the subjugation of Greece, the British generals this time stuck to their plan. In July they withdrew one division, which was to be followed in August by a second. This gave the English Imperial General Staff the opportunity to seriously pursue their planned attack toward Jerusalem.

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192Zwehl, "Erich von Falkenhayn" (Berlin, 1926), pp. 266 ff.

## ***B. The double battle of Koniuchy-Zborow and Brzezany (29 June-3 July)***

### **1. The orders of battle**

#### The allies

##### PRELIMINARY NOTES

. Under the staff of each Aus-Hung. infantry regiment there was a technical company; it contained a heavy weapons platoon (with trench mortars), and usually two infantry gun platoons and a telephone platoon. Each battalion had a MG company. Independent battalions had their own MG companies plus technical, heavy weapons, infantry gun and telephone platoons.

. Each ID had several trench mortar platoons, and the corps and armies had reserves of these weapons.

. In the cavalry divisions, now dismounted, the regiments were divided into half-regiments (HaR), each of 3 or 4 squadrons plus a MG squadron. The regimental staffs had the same auxiliary troops as their infantry counterparts. In the orders of battle the number in parentheses after each cavalry regiment denotes the number of half-regiments it controlled.

. In the Field Cannon Regiments the 5<sup>th</sup> Batteries were armed with flak guns, the 6<sup>th</sup> Batteries with heavy and medium trench mortars.

. Unless otherwise noted, each German IR = 3 bns, FAR = 9 batties

The following was the order of battle of the southern portion of Prince Leopold von Bavaria's *Eastern Command* on 1 July 1917.

Commander = Prince Leopold of Bavaria

Chief of Staff = Prussian Col. Hoffmann

#### **Army Group Böhm-Ermolli**

Commander = GO von Böhm-Ermolli

C/Staff = GM Dr. Bardolff

#### 1) **Aus-Hung. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army**<sup>193</sup>

Commander = GO von Tersztyanszky

C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Salis-Samaden

Independent 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (GM von Felix)

(11,200 foot; 100 horse, 80 guns, 126 MG)

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<sup>193</sup>Each Aus-Hung. IR of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had its own storm troop command.

- . 9 Bde (Col. Trimmel) - IR 54 (4), 93 (3)
- . 10 Bde (Col. Hubinger) - IR 1 (3), 13 (4)
- . Div troops - 5 Sqdn/DR 7; 4 Comp/SB 12
- . 5 FA Bde (Col. Freih. von Wolf-Schneider) - FKR 5 (4), FHR 5 (6); 2 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 5; 3 & 4 Can Batties & 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 26; 1 Batty/Hon Mtn Arty Det 41; 1 Batty/Hon Mtn Arty Det 42

## XIII Corps

Commander = FML Edler von Schenk

C/Staff = Col. Csoban

Had 26 bns, 2 sqdns, 28 batties, 2 TM batties, 3 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon comp. 18,200 foot, 230 horse, 154 guns, 222 MG

- . 42<sup>nd</sup> Hon ID (GM Mihaljevic) - 9100 foot, 130 horse, 76 guns, 100 MG
  - . 83 Hon Bde (Col. Minnich) - Hon IR 25 (3), 26 (3)
  - . 84 Hon Bde (Col. von Novakovic) - Hon IR 27 (3), 28 (3)
  - . Div troops - 4 Sqdn/Hon HR 10, 7 Comp/SB 7, Ball Comp 14
  - . 42 Hon FA Bde (Col. Scholz) - Hon FKR 6 (1-4 & 6 Batties), HFHR 42 (5), Hvy HFAR 42 (4); 5 Batty/Hon FKR 1, 12 cm Can Batty 28
- . 36<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Nöhring) - 9100 foot, 100 horse, 70 guns, 122 MG
  - . 13 Bde (Col. Edler von Löw) - IR 52 (3), 78 (4)
  - . 72 Bde (Col. Budiner) - IR 16 (4), 53 (3)
  - . Div troops - 1 Sqdn/Hon HR 10, 3 Comp/SB 13
  - . 36 FA Bde (Col. Freih. von Bibra) - FKR 36 (6), FHR 36 (6), Hvy FAR 36 (3)
- . Corps troops - Eight trench guns; 2 Comp/PB 7; Air Comp 37

## XXVI Corps

Commander = FML von Hadfy

C/Staff = Lt Col. Stromfeld

Had 16 bns, 8 HaR, 2 sqdns, 34 batties, 2 TM batties, 3 tech comps, 1 air comp, 2 balloon comps, 1 armored train. 12,700 foot, 270 horse, 168 guns, 234 MG

- . 15<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Aust) - 7700 foot, 170 horse, 104 guns, 138 MG
  - . 29 Bde (Col. Gombos) - IR 5 (3), 66 (3)
  - . 30 Bde (Col. Markovits) - IR 60 (3), 65 (4)
  - . Div troops - 5 Sqdn/HR 11, 5 Comp/SB 11, 2 Comp/PB 9, 4 Comp/PB 15; Balloon Comp 7
  - . 15 FA Bde (Col. Viktor Edler von Primavesi) - FKR 15 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 15 (6), Hvy FAR 15 (4); 3 & 4 Batties/Res FKR 203, 4 & 5 Batties/Res FHR 203; 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 5; Hvy How Batty 54; 15 cm Mor Batty 5
- . 2<sup>nd</sup> CD (GM Freih. von Abele) - 5000 foot, 100 horse, 54 guns, 96 MG
  - . 3 Cav Bde (Col. Matz Graf von Spiegelfeld) - HR 3 (2), 6

(2), 16 (2); UR 5 (2)  
 . Div troops - 1 mounted sqdn; Balloon Comp 11  
 . Arty - Horse Arty Bn 2 (3); 1 Batty/Res FKR 203, 1 & 2 Batties/Res FHR 203; 1 & 4 Batties/Res Hvy FAR 203  
 . Attached *Germans* - One Lst IR (3 bns), two batties  
 . Corps troops (10 guns)- 3 Batty/FKR 5; 4 Batty/Hvy FAR 5; 2 TM Batty/Fort Arty Regt 6; Air Comp 26; Armored Train VI

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

. 16<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Adalbert von Kaltenborn) - 4400 foot, 100 horse, 6 guns, 80 MG  
 . 31 Bde (Col. von Spiess) - IR 2 (3); Bns III & IV/64  
 . 32 Bde (Col. Fleischmann) - IR 31 (3); Bn I/62  
 . Div troops - 2 Sqdn/HR 4, 1 Comp/SB 12  
 . 203 Res FA Bde (Col. Graf Scapinelli) - 2 & 6 Batties/Res FKR 203  
 . *German* 83<sup>rd</sup> ID (Prussian GM von Stumpff) - 7100 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 75 MG. Had IR 329, 330, 331; 2 Sqdn/92 LW Cav; FAR 249, TM Comp 83, two tech comps  
 . Also (600 foot, 6 guns, 4 MG) - 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Storm Bn; 5 Batty/Hon FKR 6; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 34; one *German* batty; Air Comp 7

TOTALS for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army = 77 bns, 8 HaR, 7 sqdns, 92 batties, 6 TM batties (comps), 10 tech comps, 3 air comps, 3 balloon comps, 1 armored train. 54,200 foot, 800 horse, 441 guns, 741 MG

### REINFORCEMENTS to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army during July

. HQ of *German* XL Res Corps (Group Litzmann), from Archduke Joseph's Army Group  
 . 8<sup>th</sup> *Bavarian* Res ID (Bav. GM Jehlin), from the same Army Group; had 9 bns, 1 bike comp, 1 sqdn, 11 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps. 7000 foot, 100 horse, 44 guns, 54 MG  
 . 16<sup>th</sup> *German* Res ID (Pruss. G.Lt Sieger), from the Western front; had 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps. 6500 foot, 100 horse, 36 guns, 36 MG  
 . 20<sup>th</sup> *German* ID (Pruss. G.Lt Wellmann), from the Western front; had 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 12 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps. 6300 foot, 150 horse, 48 guns, 81 MG  
 . *Bavarian* Cav Div (GM von Egloffstein), from Linsingen's Army Group; was reinforced by 1<sup>st</sup> *Prussian* Gd Cav Bde. Had 2 bns, 3 bike comps, 24 sqdns, 3 batties, 2 tech comps. 1700 foot, 1700 horse, 12 guns, 80 MG  
 . Hungarian 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 31, 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 37

### **German South Army**

Commander = *Bavarian* GdI Graf von Bothmer  
 C/Staff = *Bav.* Lt Col. Ritter von Hemmer

*German XXVII Reserve Corps*

Commander = Saxon GdK Krug von Nidda

C/Staff = Saxon Lt Col. von Loeben

Had 36 bns, 1 bike comp, 3 sqdns, 47 batties, 3 TM batties/comps; 4 tech comps, 2 air comps (dets), 1 zeppelin det. 28,300 foot, 300 horse, 227 guns, 352 MG

. 38<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Molnar) - 9300 foot, 100 horse, 86 guns, 108 MG (Each IR in the Division had a Storm Comp)

. 75 Hon Bde (Col. Freih. von Than) - Hon IR 21 (3), 22 (3)

. 76 Hon Bde (Col. von Karlesua) - Hon IR 23 (3), 24 (3)

. Div troops - 6 Sqdn/HHR 4; 2 Comp/SB 10; Air Comp 10

. 38 Hon FA Bde (Col. von Latka) - HFKR 5 (6), HFHR 38 (6), Hvy HFAR 38 (4); one *German* batty; 12 trench guns

. 53<sup>rd</sup> (*Saxon*) ID (G.Lt Leuthold) - 12,000 foot, 100 horse, 53 guns, 135 MG. Res IR 241, 242, 243; Res Cav Sqdn 53; Res FAR 53, 253 TM Comp, two tech comps. Attached were two *Bavarian* Lst IR (with 6 more bns), 6 batties and 11 trench guns.

. *German* 75<sup>th</sup> Res ID (GM von Eisenhart-Rothe) - 7000 foot, 10 horse, 88 guns, 99 MG. Res IR 249, 250, 251; 1 Sqdn/UR 2, 75 Bike Comp; 21 batties (incl. Res FAR 55), 275 TM Comp, 1 tech comp

. Corps troops - 1 air det, 1 zeppelin det

*Turkish XV Corps*

Commander = GM Djevad Pasha

C/Staff = Lt Col. Kadri Bey

Had just one div - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 16 batties, 1 TM batty, 4 tech comps. 10,000 foot, 80 horse, 89 guns, 63 MG

. *Turkish* 20<sup>th</sup> ID (Lt Col. Jasyn Hilmi Bey) - 10,000 foot, 80 horse, 40 guns, 63 MG. IR 61, 62, 63; a cav sqdn; FAR 20, a tech comp. Attached were Aus-Hung. 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 17, 1 & 2 Batties/Res FHR 57

. Corps troops (49 guns) - Aus-Hung. 3 Batty/RFKR 54, 5 Batty/RFKR 55, 5 & 6 Batties/RFHR 54, 1 TM Batty/Fort AR 6; 9 Comp/SB 1, 1 Comp/PB 7; also 4 *German* batties, 10 trench guns and 1 tech comp

*German XXV Reserve Corps*

Commander = Pruss. G.Lt von Heineccius

C/Staff = Pruss. Col. Freih. Schäffer von Bernstein

Had 18 bns, 2 sqdns, 34 batties, 2 TM comps, 5 tech comps, 1 air det, 2 balloon comps (dets). 14,500 foot, 200 horse, 132 guns, 162 MG

. *German* 15<sup>th</sup> Res ID (Pruss. G.Lt Limbourg) - 7100 foot, 100 horse, 49 guns, 81 MG. Res IR 17, 25, 69; 3 Sqdn/RUR 5; 14 batties (incl. RFAR 15), 215 TM Comp, two tech comps. Attached



were the Aus-Hung. 8 Comp/SB 2 and Balloon Comp 22  
 . 24<sup>th</sup> (Saxon) Res ID (GM Morgenstern-Döring) - 7400 foot, 100 horse, 83 guns, 81 MG. Res IR 104, 107, 133; 3 Sqdn/RHR 18; 18 batties (incl. RFAR 40), 224 TM Comp, two tech comps  
 . Corps troops - 1 zeppelin det

## Aus-Hung. XXV Corps

Commander = FML Hofmann

C/Staff = Col. Ferjentsik

26 bns, 2 sqdns, 29 batties, 2 TM batties, 4 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon comp. 19,900 foot, 200 horse, 184 guns, 226 MG

. 55<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Unschuld) - 8900 foot, 100 horse, 100 guns, 112 MG

. 129 Bde (Col. Baukovac) - Hon IR 309 (2), 310 (2)

. 130 Bde (Col. von Stanoilovic) - IR 103 (5), HIR 308 (2)

. Div troops - 4 Sqdn/HR 1; 3 Comp/SB 12

. 55 RFA Bde (Col. Seidl) - 3, 4 & 6 Batties/RFKR 55; RFHR 55 (6), Hvy FAR 55 (3); 5 Batty/RFKR 54; 30.5 cm Mor Batty 31; 20 trench guns; 3 German batties and 3 trench guns

. 54<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Severus) - 11,000 foot, 100 horse, 80 guns, 114 MG

. 131 Sch Bde (GM von Blum) - SchR 19 (3), 35 (3)

. 132 Inf Bde (Col. Edler von Bolzano) - IR 81 (3), 88 (4); FJB 32

. Div troops - Ukrainian Legion (1 bn); 3 Sqdn/DR 7; 1 Comp/SB 5, 7 Comp/SB 11, 2 Comp/PB 4

. 54 RFA Bde (Col. Edler von Wurzel) - 1, 2, 4 & 6 Batties/RFKR 54, 1 & 2 Batties/RFHR 54, 1 & 2 Batties/RFKR 55; 15 cm Can Batty 12; Hvy How Batties 45, 51; 10 trench guns; also two German batties and 4 trench guns

. Corps troops (4 guns) - Air Comp 9, Balloon Comp 16; one German batty

## South Army reserves

. 241<sup>st</sup> (Saxon) ID (GM Fortmüller) - 7900 foot, 130 horse, 27 guns, 54 MG. IR 472, 473, 474; 2 Sqdn/HR 18; FAR 48, 441 TM Comp, two tech comps

. German 4<sup>th</sup> Ersatz ID (Pruss. GdK von Werder) - 7000 foot, 100 horse, 30 guns, 81 MG. IR 360, 361, 362; Ers Cav Sqdn 4; FAR 90, 161 TM Comp, two tech comps

. Also (600 foot, 19 guns, 6 MG) - South Army Sturm Bn; 1 Ma Comp/PB 4; Air Comps 13, 18; Armored Trains II & IX; six German batties, 2 tech comps, 2 air dets

TOTALS for South Army = 108 bns, 1 bike comp, 10 sqdns, 150 batties, 10 TM batties (comps), 23 tech comps, 8 air comps (dets), 4 balloon comps (dets), 2 armored trains. 88,200 foot,

1010 horse, 708 guns, 944 MG

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Army<sup>194</sup>

Commander = GO von Böhm-Ermolli

C/Staff = GM Dr. Bardolff

Arty Commander = GM Werz

a) Zloczow Sector (HQ of I German Corps)

Commander = Pruss. GdI von Winckler

C/Staff = Pruss. Major Frantz

Aus-Hung. IX Corps

Commander = FML Kletter

C/Staff = Col. Edler von Ruzicic

Had 21 bns, 2 sqdn, 40 batties, 2 TM batties, 4 tech comps, 2 air comps, 2 balloon comps. 16,600 foot, 210 horse, 227 guns, 203 MG . 19<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Böltz) - 9000 foot, 120 horse, 78 guns, 103 MG

- . 37 Bde (Col. Augustin) - IR 35 (3), 75 (4)

- . 38 Bde (Col. Graf Zedtwitz) - BH IR 1 (3); FJB 5

- . Div troops - 1 Sqdn/DR 7

- . 19 FA Bde (Col. Dobringer) - FKR 19 (1-4 & 6 Batties); FHR 19 (6), Hvy FAR 19 (4); four trench guns

. 32<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Willerding) - 7600 foot, 90 horse, 84 guns, 100 MG

- . 63 Bde (Col. Brunader) - IR 23 (4) only

- . 64 Bde (Col. Gaksch) - IR 6 (3), 86 (3)

- . Div troops - 3 Sqdn/HR 1

- . 32 FA Bde (Col. Teisinger) - FKR 32 (6), FHR 32 (6), Hvy FAR 32 (4); six trench guns

. Corps troops (65 guns) - 5 Batty/RFKR 1; Auto Flak Batty 4, Hvy How Batty 66; three trench guns; 6 & 9 Comps/SB 2, 6 Comp/SB 9, 7 Comp/SB 10; Air Comps 25, 27; Balloon Comps 6, 24; 8 German batties

Independent divisions at the front

. German 197<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt Wilhelmi) - 12,600 foot, 140 horse, 102 guns, 185 MG. Jaeger Regt 7, Res IR 273, LW IR 23; 2 Sqdn/UR 14; FAR 261, 415 TM Comp, 4 tech comps; 24 trench guns. Attached k.u.k. IR 70 (3; from 32<sup>nd</sup> ID) and k.k. SchR 29 (3; from 19<sup>th</sup> ID)

. 33<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM von Iwanski) - 11,500 foot, 50 horse, 101 guns, 148 MG

- . 65 Bde (Col. Freih. von Mor-Merkl) - IR 19 (5), 26 (4)

- . 66 Bde (Col. von Magerl) - IR 12 (3), 83 (4)

- . Div troops - 3 Sqdn/HR 4; 6 Comp/SB 8; 2 & 9 Comps/SB 9

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<sup>194</sup>Each Aus-Hung. IR in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had a Sturm company, each FJB had a Sturm platoon.

. 33 FA Bde (Col. Cziharz) - FKR 33 (1-4 & 6 Batties); FHR 33 (6), Hvy FAR 33 (3); 10 cm How Batties 12, 20; 2 TM Batty of Fort Arty Bn 9; five German batties

Independent units in Sector reserve

. German 223<sup>rd</sup> ID (Pruss. GM Haevernick) - 6300 foot, 100 horse, 30 guns, 81 MG. IR 144, 173; Ers IR 29; 2 Sqdn/Res DR 3; FAR 280, 433 TM Comp, two tech comps

. 96<sup>th</sup> (Saxon) ID (GM Friedrich von der Decken) - 7300 foot, 100 horse, 36 guns, 72 MG. Res IR 244, Ers IR 40, LW IR 102; 4 Sqdn/HR 18; Res FAR 32, 416 TM Comp, one tech comp

. German 237<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Jacobi; arriving by train) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 54 MG. IR 460, 461, 462; 4 Sqdn/UR 13; FAR 83, 437 TM Comp, two tech comps

. Also (200 foot, 210 guns, 2 MG) - 5 Batty/FKR 25; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 15, 33; Air Comp 8, Balloon Comp 4; Germans: 1 Sturm comp, 2 batties, 1 air det

b) Aus-Hung. V Corps

Commander = FZM Ritter von Goglia

C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Catinelli

Had 23 bns, 8 HaR, 3 sqdns, 46 batties, 1 TM batty, 4 tech comps, 1 air comp, 2 balloon comps. 21,300 foot, 240 horse, 201 guns, 324 MG

. German 12<sup>th</sup> LW ID (Pruss. GM von Drabich-Waechter) - 6900 foot, 80 horse, 72 guns, 96 MG. LW IR 56, 87, 436; 2 Sqdn/Res DR 7; 21 batties (incl. LW FAR 12), 312 TM Comp, one tech comp

. 27<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Kosak) - 10,000 foot, 60 horse, 62 guns, 160 MG

. 53 Bde (GM von Lederer) - IR 25 (4), 34 (4)

. 54 Bde (GM von Watterich) - IR 67 (3), 85 (3)

. Div troops - 1 Sqdn/HR 11

. 27 FA Bde (Col. Seewald) - FKR 27 (5), FHR 27 (5), Hvy FAR 27 (3)

. 4<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Berndt) - 4400 foot, 100 horse, 16 guns, 24 MG

. 21 Cav Bde (Col. Graf Spannocchi) - DR 5 (2), 9 (2); UR 1 (2), 13 (2)

. One mounted sqdn

. Horse Arty Bn 4 (4); 1 TM Batty/Fort Arty Bn 15

. Corps troops (51 guns) - 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 33; 15 trench guns; 3 Comp/SB 4, 1 Comp/SB 8, 3 Comp/PB 10; Air Comp 3; Balloon Comps 20, 23; eight German batties

c) Aus-Hung. XVIII Corps

Commander = FML Czibulka

C/Staff = Lt Col. Matsvanszky

Had 19 bns, 10 sqdns, 36 batties, 1 TM comp, 5 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon comp. 14,600 foot, 990 horse, 216 guns, 178 MG

- . German 15<sup>th</sup> LW ID (Prussian G.Lt Sack) - 6800 foot, 100 horse, 36 guns, 72 MG. LW IR 12, 53, 55; 1 Sqdn/HR 5; 10 batties (incl. LW FAR 15), 315 TM Comp, one tech comp
  - . 25<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Boog) - 6900 foot, 90 horse, 74 guns, 86 MG
    - . 49 Bde (Col. Küttner) - IR 84 (4) only
    - . 50 Bde (Col. von Haas) - IR 4 (4); FJB 10
    - . Div troops - 1 Sqdn/DR 15
    - . 25 FA Bde (Col August Edler von Filz) - FKR 25 (4), FHR 25 (6), Hvy FAR 25 (4)
  - . Prussian Leib Hussar Bde (Col. Freih. von Lebedur) - 800 horse, 12 MG. Leib HR # 1 and 2 (each of 4 sqdns)
  - . Corps troops (900 foot, 66 guns, 8 MG) - FJB 6 (from 19<sup>th</sup> ID); 1 Res FA Bde [GM Hess: RFKR 1 (4), RFHR 1 (6), 1 Batty/Hvy RFAR 1, 5 Batty/FKR 33; ten trench guns]; 4 Comp/SB 4, 5 Comp/SB 6, 4 Comp/PB 2, 1 Comp/PB 4; Air Comp 14; Balloon Comp 17
- d) Independent 12<sup>th</sup> Mntd Rif Div (GM Edler von Karapancsa) - 2200 foot, 150 horse, 16 guns, 64 MG
- . 25 Mntd Rif Bde (Col. Bichelbauer) - MRR 2 (2), 4 (2), 5 (2), 6 (2)
  - . Div troops - One mounted sqdn; Horse Arty Bn 12 (4)

Directly under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (500 foot, 2 guns, 4 MG) - 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Sturm Bn; 5 Batty/FKR 19; Air Comps 20, 47

TOTALS for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - 122  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 16 HaR, 21 sqdns, 198 batties, 9 TM batties, 25 tech comps, 8 air comps, 6 balloon comps. 100,300 foot, 2080 horse, 976 guns, 1315 MG

TOTALS for Army Group Böhm-Ermolli - 307  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 1 bike comp, 24 HaR, 38 sqdns, 440 batties, 25 TM batties (comps), 58 tech comps, 19 air comps (dets), 13 balloon comps, 3 armored trains. 242,700 foot, 3890 horse, 2125 guns, 3000 MG.

### **Army Group Linsingen**

Commander = Pruss. GdI von Linsingen (with rank of a GO)  
C/Staff = Pruss. Lt Col. Keller

### **Lipa Sector** (HQ of German XXII Reserve Corps)

Commander = Pruss. GdK Eugen von Falkenhayn

- 1) k.k. 46<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (GM von Urbanski) - 15,300 foot, 100 horse, 74 guns, 138 MG
  - . 91 Sch Bde (GM Frauenberger) - SchR 15 (3), 16 (3), 32 (5)
  - . 92 Sch Bde (Col. Kandler) - SchR 13 (3), 31 (3); k.k. Lst IR 13 (2  $\frac{1}{2}$ )
  - . Div troops - 4 Sqdn/DR 15; 3 Comp/SB 1, 5 Comp/PB 4; Balloon

## Comp 2

. 46 FA Bde (Col. Exner) - FKR 46 (6), FHR 46 (6), Hvy FAR 46 (3); Hvy How Batty 60

2) Buzany Sector (HQ of *German 22<sup>nd</sup> ID*)

. *German 22<sup>nd</sup> ID* (Pruss. G.Lt Kruge) - 7700 foot, 120 horse, 39 guns, 78 MG. IR 82, 83, 167; 1 Sqdn/CR 6, 2 Bike Comp/JB 11; 12 batties (incl. FAR 11), 22 TM Comp, two tech comps; attached Aus-Hung. Balloon Comp 19

. 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Lukachich) - 12,000 foot, 80 horse, 75 guns, 122 MG

. 39 Hon Bde (GM von Stadler) - HIR 3 (3), 4 (3); Bn III/76

. 81 Hon Bde (Col. von Ledniczer) - HIR 1 (3), 17 (3); Bn II/101

. Div troops - A Sturm comp, 1 Res Sqdn/HR 3, 6 Comp/SB 14

. 20 HFA Bde (Col. von Pohl) - HFKR 8 (6), HFHR 20 (5), Hvy HFAR 20 (4); three trench guns

3) Reinforced 215<sup>th</sup> *German ID* (Pruss. GM Gronau) - 10,000 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 121 MG. Res IR 224, LW IR 71, Res Ers IR 2; 3 Sqdn/Res HR 8; FAR 274, 425 TM Comp, two tech comps; attached were four bns from 92<sup>nd</sup> ID

4) Directly under Lipa Sector (67 guns) - Aus-Hung. Air Comps 5, 22; 11 *German* batties, 1 air det

TOTALS for Lipa Sector - 55  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 1 bike comp, 4 sqdns, 61 batties, 4 TM batties (comps), 7 tech comps, 3 air comps (dets), 2 balloon comps. 45,000 foot, 400 horse, 282 guns, 459 MG

**Aus-Hung. 4<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = GO Freih. von Kirchbach

C/Staff = GM Demus

1) Luga Sector (HQ of VI *German Corps*)

Commander = Pruss. GdI Riemann

C/Staff = Pruss. Lt Col. von Lettow-Vorbeck

Had 30 $\frac{3}{4}$  bns, 2 HaR, 3 sqdns, 41 batties, 3 TM batties (comps), 5 tech comps. 23,500 foot, 400 horse, 194 guns, 303 MG

. *German 108<sup>th</sup> ID* (Pruss. G.Lt Beckmann) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 194 guns, 72 MG. IR 97, 137; Res IR 265; 6 Sqdn/HR 17; FAR 243, 108 TM Comp, two tech comps

. Reinforced 2<sup>nd</sup> *Prussian Gd Cav Bde* (Col. von Arnim) - 2000 foot, 32 MG. Gd UR 1 & 2 (dismounted) plus an attached bn

. *German 224<sup>th</sup> ID* (Pruss. GM Rüstow) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 21 guns, 72 MG. LW IR 19, 61, 429; 4 Sqdn/JPR 10; FAR 284, 434 TM Comp, one tech comp

- . Aus-Hung. 11<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Metz) - 7100 foot, 200 horse, 78 guns, 127 MG
  - . 4 Bde (Col. Ritter von Stampfer) - IR 89 (3½), 90 (2)
  - . 22 Bde (Col. Hauser) - IR 58 (3), 95 (3)
  - . Div troops - A Sturm comp, 2 Sqdn/RSR 1, 6 Comp/SB 5, 5 Comp/SB 13
  - . 11 FA Bde (Col. Christ) - FKR 11 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 11 (6), Hvy FAR 11 (4); ten trench guns
- . Independent Aus-Hung. 204 FA Bde (Col. Senkowski; 64 guns) - RFKR 204 (4), RFHR 204 (6), Hvy RFAR 204 (2)

## 2) Central Sector (Aus-Hung. X Corps)

Commander = GO Kritek

C/Staff = Col. Rasky

Had 24½ bns, 3 sqdns, 32 batties, 5 TM batties (comps), 3 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon comp. 17,500 foot, 300 horse, 155 guns, 192 MG

. German 10<sup>th</sup> LW ID (Pruss. G.Lt von Stocken) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 30 guns, 72 MG. IR 372, 373, 378; 5 Sqdn/DR 7; FAR 97; 310 TM Comp, one tech comp

. k.k. 13<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (FML Edler vo Kalser) - 4200 foot, 100 horse, 72 guns, 56 MG

. 25 Sch Bde (Col. Hromatka) - SchR 1 (3), 24 (3); South Tyrol KJB

. A Sturm comp, 3 Sqdn/DR 15, 6 Comp/SB 11

. 13 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Bogusz) - FKR 13 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 13 (6), Hvy FAR 13 (3), 6 Batty/RFKR 204; two trench guns

. Aus-Hung. 2<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Jemrich) - 6100 foot, 100 horse, 53 guns, 64 MG

. 19 Bde (Col. Schmidbacher) - IR 40 (4); Bns IV/62, V/103; FJB 4 & 29

. A Sturm comp, 5 Sqdn/RSR 3, 4 Comp/SB 10

. 2 FA Bde (GM Edler von Rosenzweig) - FKR 2 (1-4 & 6 Batties); 1, 2 & 3 Batties/FHR 2; Hvy FAR 2 (3); 1 TM Batty of Fort Arty Bn 9; six trench guns

. Corps troops - Air Comp 10, Balloon Comp 3

## 3) Reinforced VIII German Corps

Commander = Pruss. G.Lt von Schöler

C/Staff = Pruss. Col. von Fabeck

Had 33 ¼ bns, 3 bike comps, 1 HaR, 3 sqdns, 36 batties, 3 TM batties (comps), 7 tech comps. 25,000 foot, 300 horse, 153 guns, 277 MG

. German 86<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt von Wernitz) - 8400 foot, 100 horse, 60 guns, 90 MG. IR 341, 343, 344; attached Jaeger Bn # 4 plus 3 bike comps and a cavalry-rifle regt; 3 Sqdn/UR 7, FAR 86;

86 TM Comp, one tech comp; attached Aus-Hung. 4 Batty/FKR 2 and 4 to 6 Batties/FHR 2

. 7<sup>th</sup> (Württemberg) LW ID - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 81 MG. Res IR 122; LW IR 121, 126; 1 Sqdn/UR 10, LW FAR 1; 307 TM Comp, two tech comps

. Aus-Hung. 29<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Steiger) - 9400 foot, 100 horse, 66 guns, 106 MG

. 57 Bde (Col. Dörfler) - IR 42 (3), 92 (3)

. 58 Bde (Col. Novotny) - IR 74 (3), 94 (3)

. Div troops - A Sturm comp, 1 Sqdn/RSR 1, 4 Comp/SB 3, 1 Comp/PB 9

. 29 FA Bde (Col. Mazza) - FKR 29 (6), FHR 29 (6), Hvy FAR 29 (3)

. Attached - A German Landsturm bn

4) 4<sup>th</sup> Army troops (156 guns) - 5 Batty/FKR 13; 2 Comp/SB 3; Air Comp 43; Armored Train III; *German*: 30 batties, ten trench guns, 3 tech comps, 1 air det, 1 zeppelin det

TOTALS for 4<sup>th</sup> Army - 88½ bns, 3 bike comps, 3 HaR, 9 sqdns, 140 batties, 11 TM batties (comps), 19 tech comps, 3 air comps (dets), 2 balloon comps (dets), 1 armored train. 66,000 foot, 1000 horse, 791 MG, 658 guns

**Kovel Sector** (HQ of *German* LV Corps)

Commander = Pruss. GdK von Bernhardt

C/Staff = Pruss. Major von Bartenwerffer

Independent 45<sup>th</sup> (*Saxon*) LW ID (GM von Reyher) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 72 MG. LW IR 107, 133, 350; 4 Sqn/*Saxon* Gd CR; FAR 408; 345 TM Comp, one tech comp

## Aus-Hung. II Corps

Commander = FML Kaiser

C/Staff = Col. Purtscher

Had 19  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 1 TM comp, 5 tech comps; 13,200 foot, 200 horse, 112 guns, 156 MG

. *German* 107<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM Havenstein) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 32 guns, 72 MG. Res IR 52, 227, 232; 3 Sqn/UR 1; FAR 213; 107 TM Comp, two tech comps

. Aus-Hung. 4<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Pfeffer) - 5300 foot, 100 horse, 72 guns, 76 MG

. 7 Bde (Col. Hospodarz) - IR 99 (3) only

. 8 Bde (Col. von Köckh) - IR 8 (3), 49 (3)

. Div troops - 2 Sqn/DR 15, 1 Comp/SB 2

. 4 FA Bde (Col. Edler von Antony) - FKR 4 (1-4 & 6

Batties); FHR 4 (6), Hvy FAR 4 (4); 3 TM Batty/Fort Arty Bn; six trench guns

. Corps troops (700 foot, 8 guns, 8 MG) - I Bn/SchR 10 (from 26<sup>th</sup> Div), 5 Batty/FKR 11, 3 Batty/FKR 45; 5 Comp/PB 9, 2 Comp/PB 10

## Aus-Hung. XXII Corps

Commander = FML Rudolf Krauss

C/Staff = Col. Ludvig

Had 42  $\frac{3}{4}$  bns, 4 sqdns, 45 batties, 4 TM batties, 6 tech cops, 1 balloon comp; 29,700 foot, 400 horse, 236 guns, 314 MG

(NOTE: 53<sup>rd</sup> ID and *German* 91<sup>st</sup> ID made up "Group Clausius" under HQ of 91<sup>st</sup> ID)

. 26<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (GM Anton Klein) - 7100 foot, 100 horse, 72 guns, 84 MG

. 51 Sch Bde (Col. Scholze) - SchR 11 (3), 12 (3)

. 52 Sch Bde (Col. Otto Richter) - SchR 9 (3), 10 (2)

. Div troops - A Sturm comp, 2 Sqn/RSR 3, 5 Comp/SB 9

. 26 FA Bde (Col. Knötgen) - FKR 26 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 26 (6), Hvy FAR 26 (2); four trench guns

. 45<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (GM von Stöhr) - 8500 foot, 100 horse, 58 guns, 96 MG

. 89 Sch Bde (GM von Habermann) - SchR 18 (3), 33 (3)

. 90 Sch Bde (Col. Freisinger) - SchR 17 (3), 34 (3)

. Div troops - A Sturm comp, 1 Sqn/RSR 3, 5 Comp/SB 14

. 45 FA Bde (Col. Wolff) - FKR 45 (1, 2, 4 & 6 Batties), FHR



45 (5); 1 & 4 Batties of Hvy FAR 45; four trench guns  
 . Aus-Hung. 53<sup>rd</sup> ID (FML von Pongracz) - 6900 foot, 100 horse, 67 guns, 62 MG  
 . k.u. 127 Lst Bde (Col. Hajek) - k.u. Lst IR 6 (3), 19 (3)  
 . 128 Lst Bde (Col. Karpellus) - k.u. Lst IR 1 (3) plus k.k. Lst Bn 44  
 . Div troops - A Sturm comp, 6 Sqdn/HR 11, 7 Comp/SB 13  
 . 53 RFA Bde (Col. Alois Adler) - RFKR 53 (6) RFHR 53 (6); five trench guns  
 . *German* 91<sup>st</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt Clausius) - 7200 foot, 100 horse, 29 guns, 72 MG. IR 437; LW IR 37, 349; 3 Sqdn/JPR 12; nine batties (no organic FAR); 107 TM Comp, two tech comps  
 . Corps troops (10 guns) - 15 cm Mor Batties, 18, 19, 22; 2 Comp/SB 1; Balloon Comp 10

*German* units attached to Kovel Sector (1600 foot, 124 guns, 44 MG) - 2 Lst inf bns, 27 batties, 18 trench guns, 1 air det and 1 balloon det

TOTALS for Kovel Sector - 73 bns, 7 sqdns, 105 batties, 8 TM batties (comps), 12 tech comps, 1 air det, 2 balloon comps (dets). 51,700 foot, 700 horse, 499 guns, 586 MG

#### Independent **Cavalry Corps Hauer**

Commander = GdK Freih. von Hauer

C/Staff = Col. Ritter Fischer von Ledenice

Had 10 bns, 10 HaR, 2 sqdns, 15 batties, 2 TM comps, 4 tech comps, 1 balloon comp; 12,100 foot, 200 horse, 75 guns, 168 MG  
 . 9<sup>th</sup> CD (GM von Le Gay) - 3300 foot, 100 horse, 38 guns, 70 MG  
 . 9 Cav Bde (Col. Eugen Adler) - DR 1 (2), 4 (2), 13 (2); UR 6 (2)  
 . One mounted sqdn; Horse Arty Bn 9 (4); 14 trench guns  
 . *German* 1<sup>st</sup> LW ID (Pruss. GdI von Jacobi) - 4800 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 48 MG. LW IR 31, 33, 84 (but one IR was detached to Army Group reserve); 2 Sqdn/JPR 12; FAR 96; 307 TM Comp, two tech comps  
 . 4<sup>th</sup> *Bavarian* Cav Bde (GM Ritter von Poschinger) - 4000 foot, 50 MG. UR 1 (2), 2 (2); a Lst inf bn, one TM comp. Attached were k.k. SchR 30 (3; from 4<sup>th</sup> ID)  
 . Corps troops (10 guns) - 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 45, 4 Comp/SB 8, 1 Ma Comp/PB 9; Balloon comp 21, one *German* batty

#### **Directly under Linsingen**

. *German* 92<sup>nd</sup> ID (Pruss G.Lt Melior) - 4800 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 48 MG. IR 419, 432; LW IR 39 (a total of 10 bns, but 4 bns were detached to 215<sup>th</sup> ID); 4 Sqdn/Leib Gd HR; FAR 2; 92 TM Comp, one tech comp

. One regt from *German* 1<sup>st</sup> LW ID (3 bns: 2100 foot, 24 MG)  
 . Also - Half of a *German* Strum bn (400 foot); one tech comp, one air det

TOTALS for Army Group Linsingen - 236  $\frac{3}{4}$  bns, 4 bike comps, 13 HaR, 23 sqdns, 330 batties, 26 TM batties (comps, 44 tech comps, 8 air comps (dets), 7 balloon comps (dets), 1 armored train.  
 180,100 foot, 2400 horse, 1514 guns, 2076 MG

**Other Aus-Hung. units** under the German Eastern Command  
 Still under Woyrsch's Army Group was...

XII Corps

Commander = GdI Ritter von Henriquez

C/Staff = Lt Col. von Dragoni

The Corps was made up of two *German* divisions. The remaining Aus-Hung. formations attached were a total of 1800 foot and 24 MG: IR 18 (3) (plus 5 Comp/SB 12, 2 Comp/PB 2, Balloon Comp 15)

### The Russians

On 29 June the **Southwest Front** was led by G.Lt Gutor. It contained the following armies:

#### **Special Army** (GdI Baluiev)

Had the XXXI, XXXIX and XLVI Corps, I Turkestan Corps, and IV Cavalry Corps. Since the Army played no part in the offensive, a detailed order of battle isn't presented.

#### **11<sup>th</sup> Army** (G.Lt Erdeli)

VII Cavalry Corps

. 6<sup>th</sup> CD - 6<sup>th</sup> Glukhov DR, 6<sup>th</sup> Volhynia UR, 6<sup>th</sup> Klyast HR, 6<sup>th</sup> Don Coss Regt; 6<sup>th</sup> Cav Rifle Regt

. 13<sup>th</sup> CD - 13<sup>th</sup> Military Order DR, 13<sup>th</sup> Vladimir UR, 13<sup>th</sup> Narva HR, 2<sup>nd</sup> Orenburg Coss Regt; 13<sup>th</sup> Cav Rifle Regt

. 20<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 77 Tenguin, 78 Navaguin, 79 Kura, 80 Kabarda

. 73<sup>rd</sup> ID - IR 289 Korotoyav, 290 Valuiisk, 291 Trubchev, 292 New Archangel

XXXII Corps

. 101<sup>st</sup> ID - IR 401 Karachayev, 402 Ust Medvidits, 403 Volsk, 404 Kamishin

. 105<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 417 Lugan, 418 Alexandrov, 419 Atkars, 420 Serdob

. 157<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 625 Plashev, 626 Beresteczko, 627 Shuma, 628 Brody-Radziwilow

V Siberian Corps<sup>195</sup>

195TRANSLATOR's NOTE: On Beilage 12, a "58<sup>th</sup> ID" also appears

- . 6<sup>th</sup> Sib RD - Sib Rifle Regts 21, 22, 23, 24
- . 22<sup>nd</sup> Sib RD - Sib Rifle Regts 85, 86, 87, 88
- . 50<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 197 Lesnot, 198 Alexander Nevsky, 199 Kronstadt, 200 Kronshlot

## XVII Corps

- . 3<sup>rd</sup> ID - IR 9 Old Ingria, 10 New Ingria, 11 Pskov, 12 Velikiye Luki
- . 35<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 137 Nezhin, 138 Bolkhov, 139 Morshansk, 140 Sarai
- . 156<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 621 Nemirov, 622 Sotanov, 623 Kozenits, 624 Novy Korchin
- . (Attached) 82<sup>nd</sup> ID - IR 325 Tsarev Gurev, 326 Bielgerai, 327 Korsun, 328 Novo Uzen

## XLIX Corps

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Finnish RD - Finn Rif Regts 5, 6, 7, 8
- . 4<sup>th</sup> Finnish RD - Finn Rif Regts 13, 14, 15, 16
- . 6<sup>th</sup> Finnish RD - Finn Rif Regts 21, 22, 23, 24
- . Czecho-Slovak Rifle Bde - Regts 1 St Cyril, 2 St Methodius

## VI Corps

- . 4<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 13 Belosersk, 14 Olonets, 15 Schlüsselburg, 16 Ladoga
- . 16<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 61 Vladimir, 62 Suzdal, 63 Uglits, 64 Kazan
- . 155<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 617 Zborow, 618 Tarnopol, 619 Zolochev, 620 Lwow
- . (Attached) 151<sup>st</sup> ID - IR 601 Landvarov, 602 Lashchov, 603 Narotch, 604 Vislin

**7<sup>th</sup> Army** (GdI Belkovic)

## XLI Corps

- . 3<sup>rd</sup> Trans-Amur Div - Regts 7, 8, 9, 10
- . 5<sup>th</sup> Trans-Amur Div - Regts 15, 16, 17, 18
- . 74<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 293 Izhora, 294 Berezina, 295 Svirsk, 296 Grazovyets
- . (Attached) 113<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 449 Kharkov, 450 Zmiev, 451 Piryatin, 452 Krovolets

## VII Sib Corps

- . Combined Sib RD<sup>196</sup> - Combined Rif Regts 1, 2, 3, 4

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(with a question mark) under V Sib Corps. The 58<sup>th</sup> had been destroyed in 1915; the discrepancy apparently arose from the fact that 22<sup>nd</sup> Sib RD was originally called the 158<sup>th</sup> ID.

196TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Both on Beilage 12 and in the original text, VII Sib Corps is shown as still commanding 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Sib Rif Divs. In fact, however, both units had mutinied and by this time the remaining troops were formed into a Combined Rif Div as shown here. Apparently it was reliable, at least at the very start of the offensive. See Wildman, "The End of the Imperial Russian Army" (Princeton, 1987), Vol. II, p. 89.

- . 19<sup>th</sup> Sib RD - Sib Rif Regts 73, 74, 75, 76
- . (Attached) 108<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 429 Riga, 430 Valk, 431 Tikhvin, 432 Valdai

## XXXIV Corps

- . 56<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 221 Roslavl, 222 Krasnen, 223 Odoyev, 224 Yukhnov (Not engaged; moved to 8<sup>th</sup> Army by 8 July)
- . 104<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 413 Porkhov, 414 Toropets, 415 Bakhmut, 416 Verkhne Dnieprovsk
- . 153<sup>rd</sup> ID - IR 609 Krasno Ufa, 610 Menzelin, 611 Cherdin, 612 Kungur

## XXII Corps

- . 1<sup>st</sup> Finnish RD - Finn Rif Regts 1, 2, 3, 4
- . 3<sup>rd</sup> Finnish RD - Finn Rif Regts 9, 10, 11, 12
- . 5<sup>th</sup> Finnish RD - Finn Rif Regts 17, 18, 19, 20
- . (Attached) 23<sup>rd</sup> ID - IR 89 Belomorsk, 90 Onezhsk, 91 Dvina, 92 Pechersk
- . (Attached) 159<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 633 Akhalkala, 634 Sarikamis, 635 Koslin, 636 Sokal

## III Caucasian Corps

- . 21<sup>st</sup> ID - IR 81 Apsheron, 82 Dagestan, 83 Samara, 84 Shirvan
- . 52<sup>nd</sup> ID - IR 205 Chemakhin, 206 Salyan, 207 Novohaya Zetsk, 208 Loris
- . 162<sup>nd</sup> ID - IR 645 Tarnow, 646 San, 647 Senyav, 648 Dolin

**8<sup>th</sup> Army** (G.Lt Kornilov)

## XXXVIII Corps

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Trans-Amur Div - Trans-Amur Regts 5 & 6; Turkestan Rif Regts 20 & 22
- . 4<sup>th</sup> Trans-Amur Div - Trans-Amur Regts 7, 8, 9, 10

## XII Corps

- . 11<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 41 Seleguin, 42 Yakutsk, 43 Okhotsk, 44 Kamchatka
- . 19<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 73 Crimea, 74 Stavropol, 75 Sevastopol, 76 Kuban
- . 117<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 465 Yurzhum, 466 Malmizh, 467 Kinburn, 468 Narim
- . 164<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 653 Przemysl, 654 Rogatin, 655 Dragomirchen, 656 Stanislau
- . 1<sup>st</sup> Trans-Amur Div - Trans-Amur Regts 1, 2, 3, 4
- . (By 8 July the 56<sup>th</sup> ID was also attached to XII Corps)

## XVI Corps

- . 41<sup>st</sup> ID - IR 161 Alexandropol, 162 Akahltsykh, 163 Lenkovan-Nasheburg, 164 Zakatal
- . 47<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 185 Bash Kadiklaya, 186 Avlanduz, 187 Avars, 188 Kars
- . 160<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 637 Kagizman, 638 Oltin, 639 Artvin, 640

Chorokh

. (Attached) 7<sup>th</sup> CD - 7<sup>th</sup> Kinburn DR, 7<sup>th</sup> Olviopol UR, 7<sup>th</sup> Belarus HR, 11<sup>th</sup> Don Coss Regt; 7<sup>th</sup> Cav Rifle Regt

. (Attached) 9<sup>th</sup> CD - 9<sup>th</sup> Kazan DR, 9<sup>th</sup> Bug UR, 9<sup>th</sup> Kiev UR, 1<sup>st</sup> Ural Coss Regt; 9<sup>th</sup> Cav Rifle Regt

(The left wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army - XI, XXIII and XVII Corps - weren't engaged in the offensive)

### Front reserves

I Guard Corps (behind 11<sup>th</sup> Army)

. 1<sup>st</sup> Gd ID - Regts Preobrazhensk, Semenov, Ismailov, Jaeger

. 2<sup>nd</sup> Gd ID - Regts Moscow, Grenadier Gd, Pavlov, Finland

II Guard Corps (behind 7<sup>th</sup> Army)

. 3<sup>rd</sup> Gd ID - Regts Lithuania, Kexholm, St Petersburg, Volhynia

. Gd RD - Gd Rif Regts 1, 2, 3, 4

V Corps (behind 11<sup>th</sup> Army; 151<sup>st</sup> ID detached to VI Corps)

. 7<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 25 Smolensk, 26 Mogilev, 27 Vitebsk, 28 Polotsk

. 10<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 37 Ekaterinburg, 38 Tobolsk, 39 Tomsk, 40 Kolivan

XLV Corps (approaching 11<sup>th</sup> Army by train from 9<sup>th</sup> Army)

. 122<sup>nd</sup> ID - IR 485 Yelen, 486 Verkhne Nemedvidits, 487 Dubrov, 488 Ostrogosh

. 126<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 501 Sarapul, 502 Christopol, 503 Chigirin, 504 Verkhne Ural

. 194<sup>th</sup> ID - IR 773 Zaesan, 774 Kurgan, 775 Shadrin, 776 Kustanayev

II Cavalry Corps (behind 7<sup>th</sup> Army)

. 9 CD - 9<sup>th</sup> Kazan DR, 9<sup>th</sup> Bug UR, 9<sup>th</sup> Kiev HR, 1<sup>st</sup> Ural Coss Regt; 9<sup>th</sup> Cav Rifle Regt

. Combined CD - 19<sup>th</sup> Archangel DR, 16<sup>th</sup> Irkutsk HR, 1<sup>st</sup> Trans-Amur Cav Regt, 2<sup>nd</sup> Trans-Amur Cav Regt; Combined Cav Rifles

V Cavalry Corps (behind 7<sup>th</sup> Army)

. 11 CD - 11<sup>th</sup> Riga DR, 11<sup>th</sup> Chuguiev UR, 11<sup>th</sup> Izyum HR, 12<sup>th</sup> Don Coss Regt, 12<sup>th</sup> Cav Rifle Regt

. Orenburg Coss Div - Composition unknown

Independent

. Polish RD - Composition unknown (behind 7<sup>th</sup> Army)

. Caucasian Native Horse Div (behind 8<sup>th</sup> Army) - 2<sup>nd</sup> Dagestan, Kabardine Tartar, Chechen, Circassian & Ingush Horse Regts

. 3<sup>rd</sup> Caucasian Coss Div (behind 8<sup>th</sup> Army) - 1<sup>st</sup> Ekaterinodar & 1<sup>st</sup> Kizlyar Greben Coss Regts; 1<sup>st</sup> Dagestan & Ossetian Horse Regts

. Trans-Baikal Coss Div - Regts 1<sup>st</sup> Argun, 1<sup>st</sup> Chita, 1<sup>st</sup> Verkhne-Udin (and probably one more), behind 11<sup>th</sup> Army

## 2. Start of the great Russian offensive (29-30 June)

At the end of June 1917 the troops of the Russian Southwest Front were stationed on the same battlefields where their offensive had bogged down the year before, ready to once more deliver a powerful attack. The Front's new commander, GdI Gutor, was assigned the mission of breaking through the Aus-Hung. and German defensive positions in eastern Galicia and capturing Lemberg; between the upper course of the Strypa River and Narajowka, on a front of about 65 km, he had available 31 divisions with 800 light, 158 medium and 370 heavy guns.<sup>197</sup> The main effort of the southern wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army would take place between Grabkowce and Byszki, thus on both sides of Zborow and Koniuchy, in order to first reach the western bank of the upper Zlota Lipa. From here the attack would continue northwest through Zloczow-Gliniany. The northern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army would strike a second, even mightier blow between Kuropatniki and the Popielicha Heights, at Mieczyszczow and through Brzezany; these troops would also head northwest, toward Bobrka. To assist the main assault, V Sib Corps would make a secondary attack on the right on the Graberka (at Zwyzin), and XII Corps would do the same on the left along the Dniester (at Jezupol and Stanislau).

### The opposing deployments

For the main attack, 11<sup>th</sup> Army had ready the 35 ID of XVII Corps, the XLIX Corps (4 and 6 Finn RD, 82 ID, Czechoslovak Rif Bde) and VI Corps (2 Finn RD; 4, 16, 151 and 155 ID).<sup>198</sup> In reserve at Jezierna were I Guard Corps (1 and 2 Gd ID) and 1 Trans-Baikal Coss Div. Moreover by the start of July the V Corps (7 and 10 ID) were ready at Tarnopol. The XLV Corps (122, 126 and 194 ID) was arriving from 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. The 7<sup>th</sup> Army had deployed at

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<sup>197</sup>This is per Smilg-Benarion, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", p. 115.

Knox, on the other hand (Vol. II, p. 641), gives the strength of the artillery in the attacking Russian armies in east Galicia as more than 693 light and 337 heavy guns.

<sup>198</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: There are minor discrepancies between the Russian organization as shown in this section and as shown on Beilage 12 (which was used to construct the order of battle above). The inconsistencies involve the precise assignment of divisions between corps, which no doubt changed as operations developed. The only major error (in both versions) is the appearance of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Siberian RD as separate units; by this time they had been merged into a combined division, as noted earlier.

the front the XLI Corps (3 and 5 Trans-Amur Border Divs, 74 and 113 ID), VII Sib Corps (12 and 13 Sib RD, 108 ID), XXXIV Corps (19 Sib RD; 23, 103 and 153 ID) and XXII [Finnish] Corps (1, 3 and 5 Finn RD; 159 ID). Stationed in reserve, in the area of Podhajce and Buczacz, were the II Guard Corps (Gd RD, 3 Gd ID), the Polish division, two bicycle battalions, the II Cavalry Corps (9 and Combined CD) and V Cavalry Corps (11 CD and 3 Orenburg Coss Div).

The majority of the attacking Russian troops was made up of Finnish and Siberian regiments. The 11<sup>th</sup> Army had 50 airplanes, 7<sup>th</sup> Army had 70. Most of the infantry divisions contained at least one bad, unreliable regiment. The artillery and cavalry were considered dependable. As special units, 11<sup>th</sup> Army had been assigned a rifle brigade composed of Czech and Slovak deserters and ex-prisoners; 7<sup>th</sup> Army had a Polish division and two newly-formed bicycle battalions. The Czechoslovak Brigade was deployed at Zborow opposite the k.u.k. 19 ID, in which soldiers of Czech nationality were the largest contingent; this would soon prove to be a clever move on the part of the Russian leadership. Moreover, as will be explained below in further detail, the use of the Czechoslovak Brigade at the front fulfilled a wish that had long been harbored by Czech politicians working in exile; they wanted Czechoslovakia recognized as a nation in alliance with the Entente and their legions as an army engaged in a legitimate war with Austria-Hungary and Germany.

Originally the artillery preparation was supposed to last five hours, after which the infantry would start to attack. But after an objection from the French officer assigned to the Front commander as an adviser on artillery matters, it was decided that the bombardments by 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies wouldn't be simultaneous. Therefore 11<sup>th</sup> Army began their artillery preparation at dawn on 29 June and 7<sup>th</sup> Army opened fire 24 hours later. The infantry of both Armies were ordered to attack at 9:00 AM on 1 July.

On 29 June the War Minister Kerensky, who was visiting the front, issued an order in which he called the armies to battle with fiery words:

"Soldiers! The fatherland is in danger. Freedom is threatened, the Revolution is faced with collapse. It is time that the Army fulfilled its duty. Your Generalissimo [Brussilov], who has witnessed so many victories, is of the opinion that every day of further delay is advantageous to the enemy, and that a coordinated, decisive blow will ruin their plans. Therefore, in full awareness of his great responsibility, he summons the Army in the name of the free

people and of the Provisional Government to begin the offensive....I order you - Forward!"<sup>199</sup>

At the end of June the Army Group of GO Böhm-Ermolli, which would bear the brunt of the Russian onslaught, was divided into three armies. GO Tersztyanszky's k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was stationed on the right wing, from the Carpathians to the Dniester. They had four Aus-Hung. infantry divisions (5, 42, 36, 15) and the 2 CD at the front; in reserve, behind the northern wing, were the German 83 and Aus-Hung. 16 ID. GdI Bothmer's South Army stood north of the Dniester as far as Koniuchy, on the western bank of the Narajowka and on both sides of the Zlota Lipa. They covered the lines of communication from Pomorzany and Rohatyn to Lemberg. Four German (53, 75, 15 and 24 Res) and three Aus-Hung. (38 Hon, 55 and 54) divisions, plus 20 Turkish ID, were at the front; 4 Ers and 241 ID were in reserve. The k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was under the direct command of the Army Group commander on the line Koniuchy-Zborow-Presowce-Harbuszow-Batkow-Zwyzyn, in the Graberka-Luha sector, and west and northwest of Brody. With their right wing they guarded the railroad and highway from Zloczow to Lemberg. At the front were the German 197, 12 LW and 15 LW ID plus the five Aus-Hung. divisions (19, 32, 33, 27, 25) and Aus-Hung. 4 CD. Two German divisions (223 and 96 ID) made up the reserve. The German 237 ID was just coming by rail through Lemberg toward Zloczow. Finally, the k.k. 12 Mntd Rif Div was available at Lemberg. The right wing, or "Zloczow Sector", was under the commanding general of German I Corps, GdI Winckler. Preparations for the defensive fighting had long been completed; they took account of the lessons from the great defensive battles in the West. Commanders and troops waited confidently for the Russian attack.

#### 29 June

In the past few days the Russian artillery fire against South Army and the southern wing of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (Zloczow Sector) had continued to swell; on 29 June it developed into a systematic, destructive bombardment. The fire was directed principally against the positions of 24 Res and 55 ID in the Brzezany area as well as against the left wing of 54 ID, and then against 19 ID on both sides of the town of Koniuchy. Also there were reports from the k.u.k. 33 ID that strong Russian artillery fire had suddenly started at Zwyzyn. Even billets located far behind the front, such as at Brzezany and Urman, were hit by strong high-angle fire, as were the bridges over the Zlota Lipa. In the morning our air units already determined that the numerous camps located behind the Russian front were empty of troops.

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<sup>199</sup>Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 144 ff.



Apparently the Russians had brought their reserves closer to the line. The bombardment continued through the whole day, with few interruptions. In the afternoon the 54 and 55 ID, as well as the k.u.k. 19 ID, reported that drumfire was hitting the Lysonia Heights and the positions at Koniuchy. News arrived from 24 Res ID that the enemy was gassing the valley of the Zlota Lipa south of Brzezany.

Our artillery opened a strong destructive fire against the Russian guns. South of Szybalin and east of Koniuchy they were already pounding concentrations of enemy infantry. At various points the stations the allies used to intercept enemy broadcasts learned that the Russian infantry wanted to begin attacking on this day. However, the only assault was a short thrust against the northern wing of the k.u.k. 54 ID around 11:00 PM; it collapsed in front of the barricades under the defenders' artillery fire.

The fire of the enemy artillery already showed on the 29<sup>th</sup> that the Russians had many more guns and - above all - more substantial ammunition supplies than in 1916, and that their bombardment was substantially more substantial than hitherto. In particular the forward positions of 54 and 19 ID had suffered substantial damage from the fire, but during the night it was possible to repair them. Also, despite the prolonged bombardment casualties were still slight. The spirits of the infantry were lifted; although the unusual heat throughout the day made them very uncomfortable, they were confident.

On the Narajowka it remained quiet on the 29<sup>th</sup>, just as it did in the sectors south of the Dniester and west of Brody. Nevertheless, there was an unmistakable change in the enemy's behavior compared to the preceding weeks. The Russians' preparations, and statements from prisoners, proved that the long-planned offensive was now beginning. Around 8:00 AM GdI Bothmer was already reporting this conclusion to his Army Group commander (GO Böhm-Ermolli) and to the Eastern Command HQ.

Therefore GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria placed the German 241 ID and 4 Ers ID at the disposal of South Army. GdI Bothmer moved both of these reserve units nearer to the front. 4 Ers ID was to assemble in the area between Rohatyn and Bursztyn and have all components ready to march. 241 ID, stationed by Narajow Miasto, moved two regiments forward to the Zlota Lipa in the vicinity of Brzezany.

GO Böhm-Ermolli was also making ready to resist the Russian

attack. He placed German 223 ID, which had been brought behind the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, plus IR 19 of the k.u.k. 33 ID under the Zloczow Sector. By evening a battalion of 223 ID was camped in a forest south of Helenka, behind the extreme southern wing of the k.u.k. 19 ID. A battalion of German Landwehr IR 32 stood ready on the eastern edge of the Koniuchy basin. Early on the 30<sup>th</sup> all troops of 223 ID finished assembling behind the southern wing of FML Kletter's k.u.k. IX Corps.

During the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> a very secret message was sent to the HQ of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group and of South Army. It stated that plans were afoot to respond to the impending Russian offensive with a counterattack in the Zloczow Sector. This operation would involve two corps HQ, seven or eight fresh German divisions (including 237 ID which was already approaching), and 30 heavy batteries. They would strike in the general direction of Tarnopol, with their left wing on the Sereth. A final decision about this counterattack wouldn't be made until the Russian offensive in fact occurred, but in the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> GdI Bothmer reported to the Eastern Command that there could no longer be any doubt that the offensive would take place.

### 30 June

The Russian artillery almost entirely ceased fire during the night of 29-30 June. This helped keep up the strength of the defending troops and the effectiveness of their positions. Fire was renewed toward 5:00 AM; in the first hours of the morning it was already swelling into a major artillery battle south of Brzezany, by 24 Res ID. Also affected were the right wing of the k.u.k. 55 ID and the sectors of 15 Res ID and 20 Turkish ID. Surprisingly, the positions of 75 Res ID remained mostly unaffected, so that the majority of this Division's artillery could be used to counter the Russian batteries that were hammering the Turks. It was learned from Russian deserters that the 52 ID, stationed opposite 75 Res ID, had refused to take part in the attack.

Our batteries remained almost completely undamaged. Against them the Russians had only directed some lively but ineffective high-angle fire. Some of the batteries were hit by gas shells, which however had no great impact. Despite being outnumbered, the German and Aus-Hung. fighters held the enemy's air units in check, which was a great advantage for our fire control. Once again the main target of the Russian batteries was the Brzezany area, the front held by the German South Army which had offered the most stubborn resistance to the attackers during 1916. The

Russians also fired very heavy railroad guns. The bombardment was directed above all against the positions of 15 and 24 Res ID and of the k.u.k. 55 ID. Very soon it was recognized that the most likely points where the Russians would try to break through were the sectors of Obreczowa and Dzikie Lany on the western bank of the Zlota Lipa, and of Lysonia on the eastern bank. Also the crossing points over the Zlota Lipa at Brzezany once more came under very heavy high-angle fire for a while.

Already in the morning, concentrations of Russian infantry in front of their intended targets were broken up by short but destructive bursts of fire. In the Rohatyn sector (XXV German Res Corps) it seemed that the enemy were getting ready to attack around 9:00 AM, but they couldn't leave their trenches due to the devastating counter-fire of our artillery. However, there were new signs that an attack on the Lysonia was imminent. The Russian infantry, deployed in small groups, crossed the Ceniowka valley south of Szybalin.

The Russian foot soldiers became more active during the afternoon. In the Brzezany area the artillery battle swelled to a strength never before experienced in the East. After the foremost defensive positions had been reduced in places to fields of rubble, Russian infantry advanced at several points in the afternoon, but were driven back to their trenches by the defenders' fire. South of Mieczyszczow, enemy detachments repeatedly struck the Turkish positions; they were pinned down by a barrage and soon fell back in disorder, in some places all the way back toward their second position.

The Russians made stronger attempts to attack on the Lysonia Heights and in the Zlota Lipa sector of 24 Res ID, which was adjacent on the west. After very heavy drumfire and under cover of smoke shells, around 5:00 PM the enemy left their trenches in some areas and penetrated a small area south of the Lysonia. However, they were soon thrown back to their starting points. The attempt against the Lysonia Heights was renewed at 7:00 PM, but was nipped in the bud by the Germans' barrage and fire for destruction. The enemy's strong artillery fire against the Lysonia Heights continued into the night. Along the other positions on both sides of the Zlota Lipa, and between that river and the Narajowka, the Russian artillery activity significantly declined around 6:00 PM. The southern wing of Bothmer's Army had endured only a moderate bombardment, and hadn't witnessed any preparations to attack.

Under FML Hofmann's k.u.k. XXV Corps, the right wing of 55 ID was

the target of Russian efforts between the Zlota Lipa and the Brzezany-Kozowa road. Here also the Russians fired smoke shells, apparently to protect the attacks against the Lysonia Heights from flanking fire by 55 ID's artillery, which was intervening effectively to help the defenders. Developments were similar at Baranowka and Kuropatniki, where thick clouds of black smoke built up during the attack toward the Lysonia. They spread out into the Ceniowka valley, where the Russians were pretending to attack.

Early on the 30<sup>th</sup> the Russians also renewed their bombardment of the left wing of the k.u.k. XXV Corps at Koniuchy. This lasted throughout the day, and reached to the second and third lines. The fire also extended north against a large part of the positions of the k.u.k. IX Corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Around 4:00 PM several waves of Russian infantry advanced against the entrenchments of the k.u.k. IR 81 on the northern wing of 54 ID. The attack collapsed under a well-timed barrage, and the Russians fled back behind their third line. A weaker thrust was attempted around 6:00 PM and also was shattered. Thereafter the fighting at Koniuchy died down considerably.

The 30<sup>th</sup> of June was another day of oppressive heat. In the afternoon there were numerous thunderstorms, some locally heavy, which greatly curtailed the activity of the air units.

Enemy fire had a major effect on the positions of the left wing of XXV Res Corps. On the Lysonia the foremost trenches were turned into a field of rubble and the barriers disappeared. The positions of Hofmann's and Kletter's corps had suffered less, but here also the approach trenches and telephone lines were badly damaged. Casualties had mounted, although they were still bearable. The morale of the troops was good and they remained confident. Here and there the opinion was expressed that the great Russian offensive had already taken place this day and had been thwarted. But GdI Bothmer couldn't share this optimism. Masses of enemy troops, who obviously were standing ready to attack, still hadn't been engaged. Therefore it was believed that the Russians had fought in the target areas merely for purposes of reconnaissance, following the example of the English and French, and that the main assault was still to come. In the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> the Eastern Command finally decided to carry out the counterattack in the Zloczow Sector, and began the necessary troop movements.

Prior to 2:00 AM in the night of 30 June-1 July there were attacks west of the Zlota Lipa against the positions of 24 Res ID

and the left wing of 15 ID. They took place without any noticeable artillery preparation and all collapsed under the defenders' fire for destruction and barrage. Otherwise the night passed quietly except for moderate harassing fire, sometimes involving gas shells. The troops stationed in the rubble on the Lysonia Heights were able to prepare for action, and received supplies of food and ammunition. The wounded were evacuated. As the k.u.k. XXV Corps reported in the morning, most of the positions were again intact and the barriers in front of the northern wing of 54 ID at Koniuchy had been re-established; no casualties were suffered during the night.

### **3. The Russian breakthrough in the Zloczow Sector (1-3 July)**

#### 1 July

On 1 July, after two days of artillery battle, the Russians opened an attack that struck with great force against the center and left wing of South Army, and against IX Corps of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. While General Bielkovich had the bulk of his 7<sup>th</sup> Army engaged at Brzezany, on 1 July the commander of 11<sup>th</sup> Army - General Erdeli - didn't commit all of the available units on his southern wing. For the thrust between Zborow and Byszki he used at first just the 6 Finn RD (from XLIX Corps) and the VI Corps (2 Finn RD plus 4 and 16 ID). The 155 ID was held ready to join the attack in case the opposing lines were breached. Storm troop operations by 4 Finn RD at Zborow were supposed to divert the defenders' notice from the main assault directed through Koniuchy.

The Russian attack didn't surprise the defenders of Brzezany and Koniuchy. Deserters had come over at various points along the front and announced that the mass assault would occur early on 1 July. If this thrust failed, it would be repeated at mid-day. Therefore around 3:30 AM the artillery of 54, 19 and 32 ID laid down destructive fire upon the Russian trenches. Afterwards the Russian infantry didn't attack, but their guns fired gas shells against Koniuchy, several villages behind IX Corps' front, and many of 32<sup>nd</sup> Division's batteries. After 4:00 AM the enemy artillery struck the positions at Koniuchy and Zborow, and after 5:00 AM their fire suddenly increased to a frightful intensity.

Around 9:00 AM the massive attack of VI and XLIX Russian Corps broke loose against the Koniuchy positions with full fury. Despite the barrage of the Aus-Hung. artillery, south of the Koniuchy dairy farm the Russian 16 ID drove into the first

position of GM Edler von Severus' 54 ID (on the extreme northern wing of FML Hofmann's k.u.k. XXV Corps). The garrison of these trenches, IR 81, were able to drive the enemy out. But new Russian onslaughts broke the lines of this Regiment and advanced on the plateau toward the edge of the high ground where it descends steeply to Koniuchy. Now the regimental and brigade reserves (Battalion III/81, the Ukrainian Legion and the Storm Battalion of 54 ID) came up from Koniuchy to counterattack. But at this moment it was observed that other Russians were advancing from the north through the long town of Koniuchy against the northern wing of 54 ID. At the same time the Aus-Hung. batteries stationed in this area fell silent.

Strong elements of 4 Russian ID had meanwhile stormed forward on both sides of the Koniuchy dairy farm. Here they broke through the BH IR 1, stationed on the southern wing of FML Edler von Böltz's k.u.k. 19 ID, despite gallant resistance. The advancing Russians very quickly reached the center of Koniuchy town and from here pivoted to the north and south. The guns of the batteries posted near Koniuchy had to be blown up. Thus the enemy also succeeded in overrunning the northern wing of 54 ID; with the assistance of the Russians coming from the north, they struck IR 81, the Ukrainian Legion and 54 ID's Storm Battalion from two sides and took the majority of them as prisoners.

Between the troops of 54 ID who were still standing firmly at Byszki and the k.u.k. IX Corps there was now a gap in the line of several kilometers at Koniuchy; for the moment there were no troops behind the gap who could prevent the enemy's further advance. Only a few survivors occupied the edge of the woods west of the southern end of Koniuchy. The Corps' reserve (IR 88) was stationed in the woods themselves. FML Hofmann, the Corps' commander, came to the scene and set the 88<sup>th</sup> in motion to either occupy the switch-position by Byszki or join the southern wing of 19 ID in a counterattack. Meanwhile the storm columns of 4 Russian ID, which had broken through at the Koniuchy dairy farm, were also active toward the north, where they rolled up the southern wing of the k.u.k. 19 ID. The brigade and divisional reserves which had been stationed in the Koniuchy valley made some counter-thrusts, but gained no lasting success. The commander of IX Corps, FML Kletter, ordered a battalion of his own reserves to counterattack toward Koniuchy.

But part of the available reserves had to be diverted from this area to the north, where the 6 Finn RD of XLIX Russian Corps was also pushing against the center of the k.u.k. 19 ID. Therefore the planned counterattack toward Koniuchy was canceled. By the

end of the morning this principal stronghold at the junction of the South and k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies was completely in the enemy's hands. The Russians were already driving into the woods east of the Zlota Lipa. Here the k.u.k. IR 88 threw themselves upon the enemy and drove them out of the second position, which had been dug along the edge of the woods. But this one Regiment wasn't strong enough to continue the counterattack against the much larger enemy force which now held the heights dominating the Koniuchy valley. Therefore they now had to await the arrival of IR 173 of the German 223 ID, which the Zloczow Sector HQ was sending to the valley. After the arrival of the 173<sup>rd</sup> in the afternoon, an effort would be made to recover the lost positions, with the help of IR 473 (of the German 241 ID), which GdI Bothmer had sent in march from Szumlany to Dryszczow.

But the arrival of the two German regiments (# 173 and 473) was greatly delayed by the extraordinarily sultry heat around noon. Meanwhile the radius of the enemy breakthrough at Koniuchy grew ever larger. The right wing of the k.u.k. 19 ID retreated to the second position. The Russians had taken all of Koniuchy and shortly after noon were already starting to climb the slopes west of the town. In this situation the prospects for a counterattack toward the lost positions were hopeless. For now, the only goal was to check the enemy thrust. The k.u.k. IR 88, the German IR 173 (which had meanwhile arrived) and a German Landwehr battalion occupied along with the remnants of the k.u.k. 38 Inf Bde the second position, which had been prepared on the edge of the woods west of Koniuchy; here they brought the Russian attack to a halt. IR 144 of the German 223 ID arrived on the battlefield from Zabin in the afternoon, and before night fell expelled the Russians who'd penetrated the Kobyla switch line. In the evening the k.u.k. XXV Corps bent their left wing back to Byszki and built a new line east of Dryszczow; it was connected to that of the German 223 ID, most of which had now been inserted on the southern wing of the k.u.k. IX Corps.

In the morning of 1 July FML Ritter vo Willerding's k.u.k. 32 ID had successfully withstood the storm troop operations of 4 Finn RD against the Mogila Heights near Zborow. Afterwards there were noteworthy indications that a Russian attack was imminent against the adjacent left wing of the k.u.k. 19 ID. By this endangered sector there were only some relatively weak Aus-Hung. reserves. During the afternoon of the 1<sup>st</sup>, GO Böhm-Ermolli placed at the disposal of the Zloczow Sector his Army Group reserves, the German 96 ID which had been assembled behind V Corps. GdI Winckler sent Ers IR 29, the last part of 223 ID, from Rykow to Zabin. But these German troops wouldn't arrive behind the k.u.k.

IX Corps until at least the early hours of 2 July.

Although the attacking divisions of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army hadn't reached their objective for 1 July - the heights by Urman east of the Zlota Lipa - they had still won a significant initial success. When the first reports about the capture of Koniuchy arrived, Kerensky believed that a major, decisive victory had already been won. Before the end of 1 July he sent a telegram to Minister President Lwow in which he requested the government to issue red standards to the victorious regiments. Minister President Lwow agreed, and declared in an answering telegram, "1 July has proven to the entire world the strength of the revolutionary Army, which is built upon democratic principles and permeated with the ideals of the revolution."<sup>200</sup> The celebration was premature. The attacking troops had suffered heavy casualties, which would all too quickly cancel their eagerness to fight.

## 2 July

On 2 July General Erdeli, commanding 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, wanted to further exploit the success which he'd won by Koniuchy. Under XLIX Corps the 4 Finn RD would attack the Mogila Heights near Zborow, and 6 Finn RD would reach the heights south of Hodow. The Czechoslovak Rifle Bde, inserted between these divisions, would stay in place at first. Then as the attack by 4 Finn RD gained ground, the Czechoslovaks' right wing would break through the opposing position and capture the heights southeast of Jezierzanka. Similarly, the Brigade's left wing would attack in connection with 6 Finn RD in the direction of the Cecowka farmstead. Presumably the 82 Russian ID was to follow the inner wings of the Czechoslovakian Legion and the 4 Finn RD. 35 ID from XVII Russian Corps would thrust forward on both sides of the Zborow-Zloczow road. VI Corps would continue their hitherto successful assault to take the heights on the eastern bank of the Zlota Lipa.

Strong artillery fire on 2 July opened the fourth day of the battle. Since the artillery of I Guard Corps had arrived, the Russians were now using many more batteries; the defenders' dug-outs could no longer withstand the powerful fire. Many of them collapsed, burying alive the men who'd sought their shelter.

Around 4:15 AM the Russians were already advancing in thick masses out of the northern part of Koniuchy against the German 223 ID, but were repulsed. Despite several more attempts, by

200Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 115 ff.



afternoon they were unable to break through either 223 ID or 54 ID. Toward 9:00 AM the northern wing of the Budapest 32 ID, on both sides of the Zloczow-Zborow road, was also the target of two thrusts by the Russian 35 ID (XVII Corps), which both collapsed.

Meanwhile 4 Finn RD attacked the Mogila Heights, after which the Czechoslovak Brigade also stormed ahead. In the stubborn fighting which engulfed the Mogila Heights, the k.u.k. 32 ID was able to fend off the first enemy assault. But the 4 Finn RD renewed their drive; they took the village of Presowce and around 11:30 AM enveloped the Mogila Heights from the north.

The Czechoslovaks had meanwhile made a deep penetration at the junction of 32 and 19 ID. Then they advanced uphill toward Jezierzanka. While the Hungarians on the southern wing of 32 ID still barred the enemy's approach, on the northern wing of 19 ID the battalions of the Pilsen IR 35 fell back to the west. Some groups were still offering gallant resistance and some lost their composure and fled to the rear. Many others were captured.<sup>201</sup>

The only reserves stationed behind 19 ID were two half-battalions, which weren't enough to halt the oncoming enemy. To add to the misfortune, FML Böltz wasn't able to use the batteries of 19 ID that had been stationed in the sector of 223 German ID to add to the barrage on his left wing, because at the decisive moment these guns were helping to defend against a massive Russian assault from Koniuchy against the southern wing of IX Corps. Meanwhile the collapse of the k.u.k. 19 ID was assuming ever greater proportions. Toward noon the northern wing and center of the Division were in disorderly retreat to their second position. Here FML Böltz tried in vain to rally the remnants of his troops for renewed resistance.

On the southern wing of the k.u.k. 32 ID, after the loss of Presowce parts of 64 InfBde had also fallen back past the second position and to Zarudzie on the Mala Strypa. The regiments of 4 Finn RD poured into the breach by Presowce; farther south, the Czechoslovaks plus freshly-deployed troops from the Russian 82 ID pushed rapidly through the gap torn in the northern wing of 19 ID near the Mogila Heights and reached the heights of Jezierzanka. The defenders of the Mogila Heights - parts of IR 86 - were encircled; they held onto their positions and waited for relief. With rockets and other signals they demanded fire support, but received none because the batteries stationed in the Presowce area had to be pulled back to avoid falling into enemy hands when the Russians broke through. Around 1:30 PM some troops from 32

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<sup>201</sup>Klecanda, "Bitva u Zborova" (Prague, 1927), pp. 31 ff.

ID were able to drive the enemy out of Presowce. But they couldn't close the gap between this town and the troops who were fighting at Zarudzie. Around 2:00 PM the Mogila Heights, defended gallantly to the last moment, were lost. The Russians led many prisoners away, and drove in masses over the heights southwest of Zborow toward the Mala Strypa. Now Presowce once more had to be abandoned.

The situation had meanwhile also become untenable on the southern wing of 19 ID, although everything possible was being done to prevent the encirclement of the south Bohemian IR 75, stationed at Jozefowka. This Regiment pulled back past the second position to Hodow and the heights farther south. Only the German IR 144, stationed on the northern wing of 223 ID, were holding off the enemy's envelopment, and they had to withdraw to the second position (the left wing even to the third position) in order to restore their link with the battered k.u.k. 19 ID. At this very critical moment the Ers IR 29 finally arrived on the battlefield; after an exhausting night march they had moved forward from Zabin around noon. The majority of this German regiment propped up the wavering front at Hodow; one battalion drove out the enemy troops who'd already penetrated into Trawotloki and restored the connection with the right wing of the k.u.k. 32 ID (which had retreated to Zarudzie).

In the morning the HQ of the Zloczow Sector still hoped they could master the situation. For this purpose the German Ers IR 29, together with two regiments of 96 German ID, would counterattack to recover the lost positions. The latter Division was marching to Pomorzany, and its commander GM Friedrich von der Decken was to lead the counterattack. But the planned operation didn't take place. The regiments of 96 ID which were assigned by Zloczow Sector HQ to the k.u.k. IX Corps arrived at Zabin during the afternoon. The Russian attack made no further progress, so it was possible for GDI Winckler to insert the Saxons of 96 ID into the front. By the time darkness fell, all of the new position between Hodow and Zarudzie was occupied, and reliable connections established with 223 ID and the k.u.k. 32 ID.

After powerful artillery fire, in the afternoon the 35 Russian ID once again made progress against the left wing of the Hungarian 32 ID. The enemy were also able to push back the front south of the road to Zloczow, but the gallant defenders soon sealed off the penetration and recovered the lost terrain. The Russians similarly renewed their attacks in the afternoon at Koniuchy against 223 ID and the adjacent parts of 54 ID. Here they employed armored cars, but were everywhere repulsed.

In the evening of 2 July the defenses in the Zloczow Sector lay about 5 km west of the former Koniuchy-Zborow line. The k.u.k. IX Corps had lost much of its original strength. Of the more than 16,000 combat troops available at the front on 30 June, no more than 6700 were left.<sup>202</sup> The Eastern Command HQ ordered that the two badly-damaged Aus-Hung. divisions (19<sup>th</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup>) were to be relieved by German troops in the night of 2-3 July; this change was effectuated without difficulty. FML Kletter instructed that the replaced units, which had been so completely shattered, were to pull back from the front to the Dunajow area. On the 4<sup>th</sup> the HQ of IX Corps was also sent there, so that they could more easily oversee the recovery and re-training of the troops.

### 3 July

Instead of the k.u.k. IX Corps, only German troops - the 223 and 96 ID - were stationed on the right wing of the Zloczow Sector from 3 July. To support the front, GdI Winckler was also assigned the newly-arrived 237 German ID. Furthermore, the HQ of LI Corps was placed at his disposal; on 4 July they assumed command over 223 and 96 ID. The k.k. 12 Mntd Rif Div came up from Lemberg to Zloczow; GO Böhm-Ermolli shifted them to Podhorce, behind the center of the k.u.k. V Corps.

The Russians, who'd also suffered heavy casualties on 1 and 2 July, showed no inclination to continue attacking on the 3<sup>rd</sup> upon the battlefields between Koniuchy and Zborow.<sup>203</sup> They fortified the lines they'd won. General Gutor was re-grouping his troops for a new thrust to further exploit his success against the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; it would take place in the direction of Zabin after the deployment of I Guard Corps.

### The significance of the fighting

Responsibility for the severe setback which the allies suffered at Zborow was certainly borne by the two Bohemian Infantry Regiments 35 and 75. 82% of the men in IR # 75 were Czechs, mostly farmers' sons from the Neuhaus area; hitherto there had been no complaints against this Regiment, which on the contrary had fought bravely in some very critical situations. The 35<sup>th</sup> was recruited in the industrial area of Pilsen and the adjacent territory of the Bohemian Woods; it was 61% Czech and 39% German.

<sup>202</sup>The Russian 11<sup>th</sup> Army said they had taken more than 14,000 prisoners plus 31 guns.

<sup>203</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 70

The Czech industrial workers proved less resistant to anti-military and nationalistic propaganda than were their country cousins. But also in their case the official inquiry could find no evidence of a conspiracy with the Czechoslovak Brigade on the Russian side, and the extensive Czech literature about the events at Zborow confirms this conclusion. Moreover, it was determined that in both regiments there were at first many detachments that offered resistance. But their resistance dissipated when the soldiers heard the familiar sounds of their mother-tongue spoken on the enemy's side, and became aware that they were opposed by fellow Czechs. At that point the majority in both regiments gave up without further fighting. The total losses in the three battalions of IR 35 on 1 and 2 July were 59 officers and 1642 men; the four battalions of IR 75 lost 54 officers and 2821 men. Some of these casualties, of course, were already inflicted during the battle of 1 July. But prisoners made up the bulk of the losses - IR 75 alone lost 2300. The Legionnaires had 159 men killed and 1000 wounded; none of them were taken prisoner.

From a strictly military standpoint, the setback at Zborow, which was soon remedied by an allied counterattack, was just a temporary episode in the enormous total picture of the war. But politically it was a fateful turning point for Austria-Hungary and its peoples. For the first time in the Great War, citizens of the Danube Monarchy in large units entered battle against their own army as co-belligerents with the enemy. News of this spread like a wild fire through the entire world and had a great impact in every camp. Among the Entente powers the notion of liberating "the peoples oppressed by the Habsburgs" gained new adherents. Austria-Hungary's allies became more mistrustful of the powers of resistance of the Habsburg army and empire. Within the Danube Monarchy, the young Emperor was announcing his well-intentioned amnesty for political crimes (which will be discussed later) on the same day as the Zborow collapse (2 July). In conjunction, these events made a very deep impression on the peoples who were wavering in their loyalty to the state and unleashed a storm of indignation among those whose loyalty was unbroken. In the Vienna Parliament, which several weeks earlier had begun to meet for the first time during the war, there were major disputes, in the course of which the long-serving Austrian Defense Minister GO Friedrich Freiherr von Georgi resigned. The army of the post-war Czecho-Slovak Republic would celebrate the day of Zborow as its birthday. This was correct, since after the battle Russia's resistance to the demands of Masaryk and his co-workers for a large expansion of the Czech Legion completely disappeared.

#### 4. The defensive victory of South Army (1-3 July)

On 1 July the mission of General Bielkovich, commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, was to break through the center of the German South Army on both sides of Brzezany and on both banks of the Zlota Lipa. Together with the assault through Koniuchy, at the junction of the South and the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies, a mighty thrust from the south would thus destroy the portion of South Army stationed on the eastern bank of the Zlota Lipa, and batter that Army's center and northern wing. A total of about twelve divisions were deployed along the first line in the 12 km wide area between the town of Szybalin and the Popielicha Heights: XLI Corps (113 ID; 5 and 3 Trans-Amur Border Divs; 74 ID), VII Sib Corps (Combined Sib RD, 108 ID), XXIV Corps (19 Sib RD, 23 ID), XXII Corps (5, 3 and 1 Finnish RD) and III Caucasian Corps (52 ID). The five divisions which were to make the decisive assault against the Dzikie Lany and Lysonia Heights (the Trans-Amur units, 74 and 23 ID and the Combined Siberians) were deployed in depth in very small sectors. Initially the 19 Sib RD and 108 ID were behind them, and were supposed to intervene during the course of the attack. The divisions placed on the wings of the assault group, 52 and 113 ID, apparently were instructed to guard the flanks and to advance after the attack began to make progress. Standing ready in reserve were the 159 and 153 ID in the area around Troscianiec and 108 ID at Rybniki. The Army reserves were II Guard Corps in the Boyzkow area and II Cavalry Corps at Nasow and Rokow.

##### 1 July

After four hours of drumfire, the massive assault by 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army against the center of South Army opened near Brzezany around 10:00 AM. On the left wing the 52 ID refused to attack. Therefore the German 75 Res ID on the Narajowka was able to direct most of their attention to intervening in the actions of the 20 Turkish ID. The 3 and 5 Finnish RD, followed in the second line by 1 Finnish RD and 159 ID, advanced against the Turks. As in 1916, the positions southeast of the Popielicha Heights and the heights west of Mieczyszczow were the focal points of the battle. At both points the attackers were able to penetrate the foremost trenches. But the Turks defended themselves with great stubbornness and finally threw their enemies out of the positions in bitter fighting which lasted until the sun went down.

Parts of 5 Finn RD and all of 23 ID and 19 Sib RD stormed forward against 15 Res ID, but weren't able to take the Obreczowa

Heights. The Russians renewed their attempt in the afternoon and this time pushed into the German positions, which had been shot to pieces. But this massive attack was shattered by counter-thrusts from the small remnants of the reserves and by the machine gun nests that had been constructed in depth. The artillery laid down very heavy fire behind the enemy who'd broken into the lines, and thus kept the Russians from bringing reserves forward; meanwhile the divisional reserves (two German battalions) prepared a coordinated counterattack and toward evening drove the enemy from the lost positions with one blow. The Russians fled back down the slopes of the Obreczowa in disorder, suffering very severe casualties.

Even more powerful was the onslaught against the German 24 Res ID and against the right wing of their neighbors to the north, GM von Unschuld's k.u.k. 55 ID. In this area lay the two heights that were the key to a breakthrough to Brzezany - the Dzikie Lany on the western bank of the Zlota Lipa and the Lysonia on the eastern bank. Furious drumfire had turned the positions on the Dzikie Lany into heaps of rubble, which were attacked by VII Sib Corps (Combined Sib RD and 108 ID). In this small area the Russians stormed forward in numerous waves, supported by deep echelons of reserves, against the right wing of the 24<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. The foremost trench system was lost as far as the third position; here, and on the strong points that lay farther back, the impetuous thrust was halted. But toward evening the enemy, with help from the fresh 108 ID, were also able to break through the thin lines of 24 Res ID on the eastern slope of the Dzikie Lany, despite gallant resistance. From here they rolled up the positions toward the north and penetrated the village of Posuchow. The last reserves and the remnants of the trench garrisons, which had been scraped together, counterattacked and did throw the Russians out of the village, but the enemy penetration in the Zlota Lipa valley was making it very difficult to hold onto the important strong point on the Dzikie Lany.

The situation was even more serious on the Saxons' left wing and on the right wing of the k.u.k. 55 ID, adjacent to the north. For hours this part of the positions had stood under a destructive hail of fire from heavy and very heavy caliber guns. The forward trenches disappeared completely under this bombardment. The Lysonia Woods were transformed into a tangle of torn-up branches and tree trunks, in which it was no longer possible for lower-level commanders to control the action. At the same hour as on the Dzikie Lany (around 10:00 AM) the Russian infantry also stormed the Lysonia. The 74 ID and 3 Trans-Amur Border Watch Div attacked in thick masses against the greatly-

reduced ranks of the 24 Res ID. Here too the enemy penetration succeeded at the first attempt. South of the Lysonia the Russians captured the first and second trenches, and some of them reached the third line. Pivoting north and south, they rolled up the adjacent sectors. A strong counterattack by the divisional reserves of 24 Res ID restored the situation by noon.

The fighting was more stubborn on the Lysonia itself. Here the Russians penetrated the extreme left wing of 24 Res ID and the right wing of the next unit to the north, Hon IR 308 of the k.u.k. 55 ID, as far as the southern edge of the woods east of Brzezany where they were brought to a halt by the quick arrival of divisional reserves. But it wasn't possible to continue the counterattack because of the Russians' much greater numbers. The bloody and inconclusive fighting raged back and forth in the first hours of the afternoon. Toward evening the Russians undertook a new mass assault with fresh men and wrested from the Saxons the last trenches on the Lysonia Heights; from here they pushed farther to the southwest and also north toward the railroad.<sup>204</sup>

On the northern wing of the Hon IR 308 and in front of Hon IR 309, their neighbors to the left, the first Russian advance along the Ceniowka around noon was nipped in the bud under artillery fire from 55 ID. But simultaneously with the new attack against 24 Res ID (around 6:00 PM), fresh Russian units also moved against the right wing of the k.u.k. 55 ID. They broke through the first position of Hon IR 308 and drove from the southwest deep into the woods east of Brzezany. But now the enemy lost the support of their own batteries, which couldn't observe the battlefield on the western slope of the Lysonia and thus were in no position to bombard it. And at the same place they came into range of our well-directed artillery fire. This circumstance was one reason for the change in fortune during the final evening hours near Brzezany. The others were the admirable conduct of the Honved and Saxons, despite pressure from overwhelming numbers, and the well-timed intervention of the last reserves. The near breakthrough was turned into a severe Russian defeat.

On the tree-covered slopes southeast of Brzezany the remnants of Hon IR 308, some scattered Saxons, and the divisional reserve of the k.u.k. 55 ID - Honved Battalion I/31<sup>205</sup> - came together for a

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204Ansbach-Flach, "Das Kgl. Sächs. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 107" (Erinnerungs-blätter deutscher Regimenter, Book 45; Dresden, 1927), pp. 188 ff. and 199 ff.

205TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference to Honved Bn I/31 is almost certainly a misprint and should read Bn "I/310." However, I

counter-thrust. With their last strength they threw the Russians back over the third line; during the night, in bitter hand-to-hand combat, they wrested back the entire second trench-line and most of the first. Thus the situation on the right wing of the k.u.k. XXV Corps was fully restored.

On the left wing of 24 Res ID - in the Lysonia sector and on the Dzikie Lany - substantial parts of the first position were still in enemy hands in the evening of 1 July. The allied troops had suffered heavily and their units were greatly intermingled. The opposing Russians, on the other hand, still had strong reserves available that hadn't been engaged - II Guard Corps and several divisions of VII Sib and XXXIV Corps. Shortly before noon GdI Bothmer had already sent a regiment of 4 Ers ID on trucks to Brzezany. But it seemed inadvisable to pull any more units from the area behind the Turkish front, since it was possible that the Russians might also resume attacking there. In any event, one regiment alone wouldn't be enough to prevent serious consequences if there was a larger breakthrough on both sides of the Zlota Lipa. But GdI Bothmer, who trusted in the combat strength of his troops, refused to pull back the defenses to a position in the rear which had been prepared on the northern edge of the Lysonia Woods and by the villages of Posuchow and Olchowiec.

## 2 July

Although Brussilov had ordered 7<sup>th</sup> Army to continue their attacks, opposite South Army they restricted activities on 2 July basically to retaining the positions they'd captured. The severe disappointment after the bloody battle of the previous day prevented the Russians from renewing the struggle. There was no further infantry fighting for the Turkish 20 ID and the 15 Res ID. In general, the enemy artillery activity was reduced to the level of ordinary harassment fire. On the Dzikie Lany and the Lysonia, however, the situation wouldn't permit the battle to immediately die out.

Early on 2 July the German and Aus-Hung. artillery opened a systematic bombardment of the positions still held by the enemy. The battalions of 24 and 15 Res ID which had been thrown together on the Lysonia, along with troops from 241 ID, recovered from the Russians substantial parts of the first and second lines in stubborn combat in the trenches. Recovery of the lost terrain on the Dzikie Lany also began toward noon. Here it was possible to capture almost all of the second and first lines by evening; only on the the eastern slope of the hill did the enemy still retain a

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have been unable to confirm this elsewhere.



rather substantial part of the position.

Although the enemy attack against South Army had ceased on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, measures still had to be taken in case it was resumed. To relieve 24 Res ID and provide overall direction for the very difficult fighting on the Lysonia, GdI Bothmer decided in the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to place the sector between the Zlota Lipa and the Brzezany-Kozowa road under the leader of 241 ID, GM Fortmüller.

### 3 July

The night of 2-3 July passed in relative quiet. On the other hand, heavy new fighting erupted next day on the Dzikie Lany and on the Lysonia. The Germans renewed their attack on the Dzikie Lany; they collided with a counter-thrust delivered by the newly-deployed Russian 153 ID and therefore advanced only slightly along the eastern slope of the hill. But on the top of the hill the enemy were finally cleared out of the last parts of the first trench-line. The bloody, bitter melee continued in the rubble on the Lysonia. Throughout the day heavy artillery fire pounded the left wing of 24 Res ID and the right of the k.u.k. 55 ID. A strong Russian attack on the Lysonia was repulsed in the afternoon. The day ended with the restoration of a continuous front, which mostly followed the course of the original foremost defensive position.

The Battle of Brzezany can be considered over as of 3 July, since there was no more major fighting in the days that followed. Bothmer's Army had won a complete defensive victory, whose significance soon became clear. The striking power of the enemy's much larger attacking group was broken, which was an important pre-condition for the blow which Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group was already preparing.

In the fighting to date, the Russians opposite South Army had lost 13,000 men killed and 27,000 wounded. The defenders had also suffered greatly. Between 29 June and 5 July the Army's German troops had 33 officers and 834 men killed, 80 officers and 2607 men wounded; 28 officers and 1862 men were missing. Among the Aus-Hung. troops, 8 officers and 328 men had fallen, 37 officers and 1876 men were wounded, and 77 officers and 2230 men were missing. The Turks lost 8 officers and 528 men killed, 37 officers and about 1900 men wounded, and just 53 men (no officers) missing.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>By the evening of 1 July the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had captured 23 officers plus 1214 German, 577 Aus-Hung. and 191 Turkish

With complete confidence, and proud of their dearly-bought victory, the allied Aus-Hung., German and Turkish troops of the South army looked forward to new fighting.

### **5. The Russian attacks bog down (4-8 July)**

On the Brzezany battlefield the bloody hand-to-hand combat on the Dzikie Lany lasted for several more days. Above all, there were bitter but inconclusive struggles around a Russian outpost on the eastern slope. Here the Russians quickly rotated their divisions so that fresh units kept trying to advance their unfavorable position on the steep slope forward to the summit. GdI Bothmer threw parts of 4 Ers ID into the fighting, hoping to recover the last captured terrain still in enemy hands and to keep it from being used as a starting point for further operations. On 5 July the battalions of 4 Ers ID collided with a strong attack by the newly-deployed Russian 3 Gd ID; the Germans halted the Guards, but their own ability to attack was thus limited for the time being. It would take a thoroughly-prepared and coordinated assault to eliminate the Russian strong point on the Dzikie Lany. This would be the mission of 4 Ers ID, which on 7 July took over the former sector of 24 Res ID. Because of heavy losses, the 24<sup>th</sup> Division was transferred to the quiet front on the Narajowka.

Also on the Lysonia the fighting was not completely over. The Russians held onto the field of shell-holes on the wooded southern slope of the Lysonia Heights with small but gallant garrisons, who were continually relieved from the Ceniowka valley. Fighting with hand grenades and bayonets continued with few interruptions; it caused substantial casualties on both sides and, along with bad weather which had meanwhile set in, noticeably wore down the already sorely-tried troops of the 241<sup>st</sup> Division. Therefore GdI Bothmer decided to also carefully prepare an assault on the Lysonia; he wished to drive the Russians from the western bank of the Ceniowka, which had repeatedly served them as a base for successful attacks. The target date was 15 July, the day when the counter-offensive in the Zloczow Sector was supposed to start. The operation on the Lysonia, and the preparations, thus could divert the enemy's attention from the point chosen for the main attack.

Meanwhile it didn't seem that the Russians had given up plans for renewing the attack at Brzezany. Therefore on 5 July GdI Bothmer

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enlisted men.

pointed out emphatically that new defensive measures were necessary. He was convinced that the Russian high command couldn't concede defeat without seriously endangering their shaky authority. In fact there were indications that a new assault in this area was imminent:

- . The arrival of II Russian Guard Corps south of Brzezany;
- . Several sudden bombardments by the Russian artillery; and
- . A constant stream of intercepted messages about plans to attack.

Therefore emphasis was placed on neutralizing the enemy's still-powerful artillery. Heavy flat trajectory fire pounded the railroad stations of Kozowa and Krzywe. On 8 July a German 24 cm gun exploded the great ammunition dump at Kozowa; it was later determined that the dump was almost completely destroyed. Volleys of fire and clouds of smoke were clearly observed throughout the night and on the following days.

The Battle of Brzezany and the adjacent fighting had completely used up Bothmer's reserves (4 Ers ID and 241 ID). Thus it was a considerable relief for South Army when the Eastern Command announced that 8 Bav Res ID, coming by rail from Transylvania, would be available at Rohatyn in the second week of July.

At first the Russian 11<sup>th</sup> Army did everything possible to exploit their success against the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Already on 4 and 5 July troop concentrations were spotted behind the Russian front in the area north of the line Kuropatniki-Olesin. Intercepted wireless messages moreover betrayed the presence of I Russian Guard Corps, which had come up from Tarnopol, in the area of Zborow.<sup>207</sup> By committing this Corps, on 6 July the 11<sup>th</sup> Russian delivered a new blow against 2<sup>nd</sup> Army west and southwest of Zborow. The attack was shattered by the resistance of the German 223 and 96 ID, which had just deployed in the Zloczow Sector; Russian casualties were heavy.

GdI Bothmer, commanding South Army, had meanwhile decided to substantially re-group his units to be ready for the eventual new attacks, expected mainly along the line south of Brzezany. The completely fresh 75 Res ID was pulled back to the Brzezany area in the Army's reserve; from here it could either support the defenses or cooperate in the planned attack on the Lysonia, depending on how the situation developed. The sector hitherto

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207Lt. i.d.R. Emil Popper of IR 83 had carried out a successful scouting mission at Batkow, which secured important information about the impending Russian attack. For this feat, as well as for notable service as an ensign in 1916, he won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

held by 75 Res ID was taken over by 53 Res ID, which in turn had been relieved by 24 Res ID.<sup>208</sup>

While this re-grouping within South Army was being implemented, a Russian breakthrough against the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army south of the Dniester at Stanislau unexpectedly created a new and critical situation.

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<sup>208</sup>Armee-Oberkommando der Kaiserlich Deutschen Süd-Armee, "Der Feldzug in Ostgalizien 1917" (in the Ostgalizische Feldzeitung, 1918).

## **C. The Battle of Stanislau-Kalusz (6-16 July)**

### **1. The 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army starts to attack (6-7 July)**

With the severe new setback which the 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army suffered at Zborow on 6 July, the enemy's capacity to attack the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was finally broken. But the Russians still hadn't given up the offensive; they merely shifted their attention to another area.

#### The opposing forces

On 6 July, the same day when the Russians assaulted the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army for the last time, their 8<sup>th</sup> Army attacked at Stanislau. Here General Kornilov had the XII Corps of six divisions (11, 19, 56, 117, 164 ID; 1 Trans-Amur Div) plus a strong cavalry force (3 Cauc Coss and Cauc Native Cav Divs) ready to break through to Kalusz. Apparently Kornilov's plan of attack was to burst open the front of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army at Jamnica and penetrate the valley of the Pawelcze Brook so as to envelop the Jutrena gora Heights from the north. Simultaneously, a second assault group would thrust forward on both sides of the Stanislau-Majdan road to attack the Jutrena gora from the south. The main attack would be supported with limited thrusts by XXXIII Corps (2 and 4 Trans-Amur Divs) in the Dniester valley and by XVI Corps (41, 47, 160 ID; 7 and 9 CD) in the Carpathian foothills.<sup>209</sup>

For a long time the commander of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, GdK Tersztyanszky, had anticipated a Russian attack along the road and railroad between Stanislau and Kalusz. Possibly the enemy might also strike along the two roads leading from Nadworna through Krasna to Dolina, since they already had excellent sally ports on the western bank of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska at both Stanislau and Solotwina. It was expected that the main Russian blow would be delivered from Stanislau toward Kalusz. The reserves under Army Group and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ - G.Lt Stumpff's 83 German ID and GM Adalbert Kaltenborn's k.u.k. 16 ID - were stationed behind Hadfy's group (now designated XXVI Corps) in the area east of Kalusz. To also protect the routes to Dolina, most of the reserves of XIII Corps and of GM von Felix's 5 ID were

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<sup>209</sup>Martinov, "Kornilov (The Attempted Military Coup)" (in Russian; Moscow, 1927), pp. 23 ff. Knox, Vol. II, pp. 627 ff. Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", p. 117. Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 70.

assembled around Rosulna.<sup>210</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's front of around 100 kilometers four Aus-Hung. infantry divisions (5 ID, 42 Hon ID, 36 and 15 ID) plus the 2 Aus-Hung. Cav Div (the latter reinforced by a German Landsturm regiment, stood ready in the defenses.

3<sup>rd</sup> Army had an extensive system of fortifications. In the sector west of Stanislau the line of the Jutrena gora Heights provided a natural strong point on the right wing of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps, from which both the road and highway from Stanislau to Kalusz could be blocked. But this sector was also the Achilles' heel of the Army's front, because here the first position lay at the foot of the steep eastern slope of the Jutrena gora, where it could be pounded from the flank by the many enemy batteries stationed along the Scianka Heights on the eastern bank of the Bystrzyca. Many voices had been raised in warning about this problem. To enhance the strength of the sector, it was proposed that the second position should be established with two lines, one along the crest of the Jutrena gora and the other on the Dumka plateau. GO Tersztyanszky also recognized that the area was inadequately protected. Therefore at the start of May he decided to pull the foremost troops of 15 ID back to a point half way up the eastern slope of the Jutrena gora. But due to a lack of labor units construction of the new position proceeded only slowly. When the fighting began in early July it still wasn't ready. If the new position had been finished, the next task would have been to find a better site for the artillery of 15 ID, most of which currently had to be deploy directly behind the crest of the Jutrena gora. There was no suitable point to place the batteries on the eastern slope, which was unprotected and exposed to the Russians. They couldn't deploy in the valley of the Pawelcze brook west of the Jutrena gora because they would have been too far back to suppress the enemy artillery. Moreover, the flat-trajectory guns wouldn't have been able to fire over the steep western slope of the Jutrena gora. Thus, despite the obvious deficiencies the positions of 15 ID remained the same.<sup>211</sup>

While the battles of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> and German South Armies were raging, GO Tersztyanszky followed with increasing attention the Russians' preparations to attack the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were assembling forces on their northern wing. Already on 2 July their 11 ID, which had come from the

2105 ID was assigned directly to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ. Since 23 June the XIII Corps was led by FML Schenk, former commander of XXIII Corps on the Isonzo, who had exchanged positions with FML von Csicseric.

211Kiszling, "Sommerfeldzug 1917"

Carpathians, reached Stanislau. 3 Cauc Coss Div, hitherto holding a position in front of 5 ID, was relieved in the first days of July by 9 CD and shifted to the north. 7 Russian CD appeared suddenly at Delatyn on 5 July and soon moved ahead to Nadworna. All these movements were proven incontestably by intercepted wireless messages and aerial reconnaissance. Also the increasing Russian artillery fire, the construction of foot-bridges over the Bystrzyca Solotwinska and the digging of saps on both sides of the Stanislau highway left no doubt that soon the Russian attack would begin here. But when a swelling cannonade on 6 July heralded the start of the battle, neither GO Tersztianszky nor FML Hadfy had an entire reserve unit behind the most threatened sector at Stanislau, because they had sent individual regiments and battalions of the German 83 and k.u.k. 16 ID to XXVI Corps' front. Also, since 2 July two battalions of the German IR 330 had been stationed at Bursztyn under South Army and as of the 6<sup>th</sup> still weren't coming back. The majority of 83 ID's artillery (six batteries) were attached to 2 CD. The only available components of 83 ID still in the Army Group's reserve were two battalions of IR 329, stationed with the Division HQ in the area south of Sapanow. The newly-arrived k.u.k. 16 ID, which had fought in the Tenth Isonzo Battle and lost a large part of its authorized strength, consisted of just nine battalions; the artillery had stayed behind on the Karst plateau of Comen.

#### The actions of 6-7 July

In XIII Corps's sector, before dawn on 6 July the Russians fell upon the outpost line of GM Mihaljevic's Croatian 42 Hon ID near Lachowce; the sentries evacuated their positions as ordered. When the attackers pressed forward further, fire from the defending guns and machine guns struck their battalions, inflicted heavy casualties, and brought them to a halt before they reached the main positions of the Domobranzen Division. But Kornilov had concentrated his forces for a destructive blow not at Lachowce, but opposite the southern wing of XXVI Corps. Starting at 7:00 AM the Russian artillery fired on the heights west of Stanislau. The enemy gunners pounded the positions, communication trenches and batteries of GM Adolf von Aust's 15 ID until 1:00 PM. Then the Russian infantry began large-scale reconnaissance thrusts on both sides of the Stanislau highway, but they were repulsed by the defenders. At Jamnica the IR 65 suffered fairly substantial losses, so FML Hadfy strengthened the northern wing of 15 ID with a battalion from his Corps' reserves. GO Böhm-Ermolli was also concerned about the strength of the threatened sector near Stanislau. He placed both battalions of the German IR 329 at Sapanow at the disposal of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ.

Moreover he sent the rest of 83 ID (the IR 330) from Bursztyn over the Dniester to Majdan; here also IR 2 with the staff of Col. von Spiess' 31 Inf Bde (from 16 ID), which were in 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's reserve, had been sent by GO Tersztyanszky.

On 7 July detachments of the XVI Russian Corps tried in vain to attack the outposts of 5 ID from the valley where the Bystrzyca Solotwinska has its source. Their thrust was repeated around 10:00 PM, but repulsed by the gallant Silesian IR 1. In the Stanislau sector the enemy artillery once more delivered destructive fire on the positions of 15 ID. After renewed reconnaissance thrusts, the Russian XII Corps opened a larger attack in the afternoon. The fortifications by Jamnica came under the heaviest pressure. Here the Russians advanced at several points, but after a short time were thrown out of the trenches by the garrison troops (IR 65 and parts of German IR 331). However, the positions of 15 ID had suffered greatly under the bombardment. At Jamnica the foremost trenches were turned into a field of craters. Casualties were significant, and the troops were exhausted after two days of fighting. Three Russian divisions had by now been definitely identified opposite the southern wing of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps - the 19<sup>th</sup> at Jamnica, the 11<sup>th</sup> at Stanislau and the 117<sup>th</sup> at Zagwozdz. GM Aust asked for reinforcements. GO Tersztyanszky sent him a battalion of the German 330 IR, which had just arrived at Majdan from the South Army.

## **2. Loss of the Jutrena gora (8-9 July)**

### 8 July - the enemy breakthrough

In the night of 7-8 July the enemy's destructive fire against 15 ID's positions continued with only brief interruptions. At dawn storm troops of the Russian 19 ID made a surprise attack against Jamnica, but weren't able to wrest the stubbornly-defended town from IR 65. North of Jamnica part of the Corps' reserve - the German Battalion II/331 - had to be deployed to drive away Russians who'd penetrated the German trenches. While bitter combat with bayonets and hand grenades was waged at Jamnica, the attacking troops of the 11 and 117 Russian ID were deploying in their forward saps on both sides of the Stanislau highway, concentrating tightly opposite the ruined positions of Regiments 66 and 5.

Around 10:00 AM the Russian artillery fire suddenly swelled to an enormous level along 15 ID's entire front. Jamnica and Uhrynow



dl. were targets of high-angle fire; the Jutrena gora, which dominated the highway and railroad to Kalusz, was pounded by heavy shells. The assembly points of the reserves and the positions of the batteries near Pawelcze were struck by gas shells.

At 10:30 AM the attacking divisions of XII Russian Corps stormed forward under the young revolutionary General Cheremisov. In thick masses the much larger enemy force advanced against the battalions of 15 ID, which were worn down from the drumfire. The Russian 19 ID struck Jamnica in a furious assault which this time took the town in the first onset. The Russians penetrated deep into the valley of the Pawelczebach; they moved around Battalion I/60 of FML Hadfy's reserves, which he'd moved forward to a point directly behind the sector of IR 65, and overwhelmed it by weight of numbers. In the center and on the southern wing of 15 ID, where Regiments 66 and 5 were stationed, the Russian 11 and 117 ID had meanwhile also broken through when they advanced on both sides of the Stanislau highway. Here the defenders, along with parts of German IR 330, did try to drive the enemy from the lost positions. But the counterattack was checked by new throngs of Russians who came up from the south. All of Hadfy's right wing were hurled back from the first position between Jamnica and Zagwozdz and into the second position along the edge of the heights on both sides of the taller Jutrena gora. Only a gallant group from IR 60 still held out defiantly on the western bank of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska until they were completely surrounded by crowds of attackers and succumbed in unequal combat.

The Russian 19 ID was thrusting ever deeper into the low ground along the Pawelczebach. The enemy enveloped the Jutrena gora from the north, swarmed up the western slope of the Bystrzyca valley, and reached the second position on the edge of the heights. Because of the rapid Russian penetration, most of the batteries stationed in the area by the town of Pawelcze couldn't be withdrawn and fell into enemy hands.

By noon the remnants of 15 ID were making a disorderly retreat to the west through the valley of the Pawelcze Brook. The Russians controlled the first position and the first line of the second position west of Stanislau and the Jutrena gora, the main strong point of the right wing of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps. With the remnants of his Division and the reserves who'd hurried to the scene, GM Aust was trying to build a new front on the eastern edge of the woods on the Dumka plateau and to prevent the aggressive Russians from advancing any further.

8 July - the reaction

The German IR 331 was placed in a very dangerous situation by the enemy breakthrough at Jamnica. Threatened with envelopment, they had to face to the south and then retreat to the edge of the heights west of Ciezow. On the extreme left wing of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps, GM Freiherr von Abele's 2 CD had to contend with weaker Russian attacks and pulled back their sentries to the main position west of Jezupol. GM Abele assembled his reserves behind the right wing, which had to withdraw to the second position in cooperation with the German IR 331. GM Nöhring's 36 ID, the neighbors on the right of the broken 15 ID, held onto their foremost lines on the Bystrzyca Solotwinska. GM Nöhring merely bent back his left wing on the Posiecz Heights because of the enemy pressure. Around 4:00 PM, weak reserves from XIII Corps and 36 ID mounted a counterattack in an effective direction (toward Uhrynow grn.), but soon came to a halt in the area south of Rybno. Commitment of another battalion from 36 ID also failed to win success.<sup>212</sup>

If the Russians had quickly followed up their breakthrough of the first and second positions, the disordered units of 15 ID - scattered in uncoordinated groups - and the reserves which had been spread over the front as it fell back couldn't have barred the way over the Dumka plateau and through the second line of the second position which had been prepared there. But the Russians had paid a high cost in blood and were busy seizing booty on the slopes west of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska which they'd captured. Only some weak units cautiously followed their defeated opponents into the extensive woods which spread out to the north and south of Dumka.

Immediately after the breakthrough, the disorganized defenders weren't able to take advantage of the attackers' moment of weakness. Upon getting the first report of the Russian penetration FML Hadfy of XXVI Corps had assigned four battalions of the German 83 ID which GO Tersztyanszky had given him (they were the rest of the Army Group's reserve) to GM Aust with instructions to recover the lost positions. But when this order was issued, two of these battalions had already pulled back past the prepared position on the Dumka plateau to the edge of the woods west of the Pawelcze valley, where they were engaged in combat. Thus GM Aust had just two battalions of 83<sup>rd</sup> Division available. The few batteries able to save themselves from the

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<sup>212</sup>See the paper by a combatant, "Aus den Kämpfen des k.u.k. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 52 in der Schlacht bei Stanislau," in the Mil. wiss. Mitt. (Vienna, July/August 1934 edition).

debacle were for the time being unable to intervene because they had changed their positions. Therefore a counterattack toward the lost positions seemed pointless. GM Aust's current priority was only to organize a new defense with the remnants of his Division and the reserves which had arrived.

But when GO Tersztyanszky learned of the fall of the Jutrena gora, around 2:30 PM he ordered GM Aust to immediately carry out the counterattack. He gave him IR 2 of 16 ID, which had come up to Majdan, along with the HQ of 31 Inf Bde, and sent further parts of the Army's reserve into the prepared position on the Dumka plateau. Also he placed the sector north of the railroad under the leader of 83 ID, G.Lt Stumpff. The dangerous situation brought the Army commander to the fighting front. He drove to Majdan, the HQ of 15 ID, where the Corps commander FML Hadfy was also present, and even ascended in a fixed balloon to gain a view of the battlefield.

During the afternoon, three rather cohesive groups came together on Hadfy's pushed-back right wing:

- . The remnants of 15 ID plus several German companies at Hucisko under Colonel-Brigadier Gombos,
- . Parts of 83 and of 16 ID under GM Aust on the road from Stanislau, and
- . German IR 331 with remnants of the k.u.k. IR 65 under German GM Georgi.

They were preparing for a coordinated counterattack in the area north of the railroad. But meanwhile Cheremisov was getting ready for a new onslaught. He grouped strong units of his XII Corps between Jamnica and Ciezow, apparently to break through over the German-occupied Ploski Heights into the valley of the Lukowica. And in the afternoon the Russians also brought up a strong cavalry force on the road from Stanislau to pursue toward the Dumka plateau.

Col. Spiess' group at Dumka (parts of 16 and 83 ID under the commander of 31 Inf Bde) were meanwhile ready to counterattack to the Jutrena gora, but were waiting until the remnants of 15 ID's artillery (six batteries) could open fire. The lines of XXVI Corps were attacked by Russian advanced guards during the afternoon. Finally toward 8:00 PM Col. Spiess opened the counterattack, advancing along the road toward Stanislau. He pushed back the Russian advanced guards, crossed the valley of the Pawelczbach and climbed the steep, wooded western slope of the Jutrena gora. But meanwhile the northern wing of XII Russian Corps advanced against the German IR 331 north of the railroad and broke into their lines after heavy fighting. Because of this

threat from the north, Spiess' group felt their attack was pointless; they broke it off and pulled back to the Dumka plateau.

The situation was no better on the southern wing of 15 ID, where the remnants of this Division along with several companies of 83 ID made up Col. Gombos' group. Despite the great exhaustion of the troops they joined the advance of Group Spiess, but weren't able to advance past the valley of the Pawelczebach. In the further course of the action, which lasted into the night, the Germans were able to throw back the Russians who'd penetrated their trenches north of the railroad.

When Army Group commander GO Böhm-Ermolli learned of the unfortunate outcome of the fighting, he was very concerned that the Russians might drive 2 CD into the Dniester, separate the 3<sup>rd</sup> and South Armies, and outflank Bothmer from the south. So as to be able to hold onto Halicz and the important heights south of that city, late on 8 July he ordered GO Tersztyanszky to shift IR 31 of 16 ID from the area east of Kalusz to Wiktorow, and to strengthen the Army's left wing with all units still available. Tersztyanszky placed the entire sector between the railroad and the Dniester under the commander of 83 ID, G.Lt Stumpff, and sent him as reinforcements the Army's Storm Battalion as well as IR 31. Battalion I/62, the rest of the Army's reserve, moved forward to Majdan to back up XXVI Corps. To at least partially compensate for the large number of guns lost by 15 ID, the 38 Hon ID of South Army sent two batteries and XIII Corps sent four.

### 9 July

Early on 9 July GO Tersztyanszky ordered that in case it was no longer possible to hold the position on the plateau east of the Lukawica Brook<sup>213</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army should pull back to the western bank of the Lomnica and into a line running from Nowica south to the Kosmarka gora heights. But the retreat wouldn't take place until expressly authorized by Army HQ, and under cover of night. GO Tersztyanszky was still hoping that XXVI Corps could offer further resistance in the lines they now held. He believed that the enemy wouldn't resume their attack until 10 July, and therefore asked his subordinates to report their impressions of

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213TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: There is some confusion regarding the name of the brook in this area. The text refers to "Lukowica" and "Lukawica", but the map (Beilage 15) labels the same stream "Lukowica" and "Lukwica" [!] at different points. To add to the obscurity, the Lukowica/Lukwica/Lukawica joins with the Lukwa near Wiktorow to form the Lukew.

the chances of a successful defense on that day.

XIII Corps and 5 ID reported that their troops were in good condition and could with confidence be expected to repulse the enemy attacks. But the troops of XXVI Corps, especially the regiments of 15 ID, had lost almost all of their combat value. When the battle started on 3 July, the 15<sup>th</sup> Division had deployed 7700 riflemen at the front, of whom just 800 men were assembled early on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, they had lost 43 guns. The regiments of 83 German ID had also been greatly reduced. Even the units of 16 ID, which were still suffering from the effects of the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo, weren't at their full authorized strength. Furthermore, the prepared positions on the plateau east of the Lukawica weren't completed. XXVI Corps summarized their analysis of the situation by stating that they weren't sure they could resist a Russian attack carried out by superior numbers; they believed the commitment of three fresh regiments was necessary.

FML Hadfy's report, which was hardly confident, couldn't strengthen 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ in their determination to offer further resistance on the current line. Therefore on 9 July they gave serious consideration to avoiding battle on the 10<sup>th</sup> by pulling the front back during the night to the third position on the Lomnica. But then the enemy upset all the calculations.

Kornilov was encouraged by his surprisingly quick success to continue to attack toward Halicz and Kalusz. So he ordered XII Corps that they should already advance on 9 July as far as the Lukowica Brook and to Hucisko. XXXIII Corps in the Dniester valley by Halicz would cover this attack, while the right wing of XVI Corps took the heights west of Bohorodczany.<sup>214</sup>

In the afternoon troops of the XXXIII Corps advanced out of the Bystrzyca valley against 2 CD. But GM Abele with his hussar and uhlán riflemen was able to hold onto the heights south of Halicz. Local penetrations by the enemy were wiped out with counter-thrusts. Meanwhile, however, the right wing of Cheremisov's Corps assaulted IR 331 and broke into the German lines on the Ploski Heights. G.Lt Stumpff threw his reserves (the k.u.k. IR 31 of 16 ID and the Army Storm Battalion) against the enemy. At first the counterattack gained some ground, but it was no longer possible to drive the Russians from the slopes of the Ploski Heights. The advance was checked by the enemy's superior numbers.

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214Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 70 ff.

During the afternoon the Russians also began to attack on both sides of the Stanislau-Kalusz road and reached the battle lines of GM Aust's group. Since the troops of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps didn't feel they could cope with a new enemy onslaught, around 5:30 PM GO Tersztyanszky - with the permission of Army Group HQ and Eastern Command - ordered them to pull back that night to the line described above. But a large part of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, under pressure from the enemy, had to carry out a fighting retreat earlier than planned. For at 7:00 PM the left wing of XII Russian Corps captured the heights between Posiecz and Hucisko and pushed back the bent left wing of 36 ID and Col. Gombos' group. At 7:30 Gombos' troops were retreating in disorderly fashion over the Lukwa at Myslow, without occupying an intermediate position in this area as they'd been ordered. Russian pressure was particularly strong on both sides of the Stanislau-Kalusz highway and the railroad. Since the right wing of G.Lt Stumpff's group was pushed back on the Ploski Heights and threatened with envelopment from the south, there was no choice but to withdraw the entire front as far as the Dniester over the Lukawica and the Lukwa in one bound to the Lomnica.

Now the lines of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had been broken for the second time and the South Army was outflanked. GdI Bothmer therefore pulled 38 Hon ID, on his extreme right wing, back to Poplawniki. He had to anticipate Russian attacks on the Narajowka. But South Army was determined to retain their positions under all circumstances.

### **3. The Russians advance to Kalusz (10-13 July)**

Once more the allied front in Galicia faced a crisis which affected South Army and threatened to nullify the Eastern Command's plans for an offensive. Already on 9 July units had to be diverted toward Kalusz and Halicz to support the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - the 8 Bav Res ID which had been moving from the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army in Transylvania toward Rohatyn, and the 16 German Res ID which had been earmarked for the breakthrough assault in the Zloczow area. But these reinforcements wouldn't arrive for several days and then could only be deployed slowly, and meanwhile Russians were attacking sharply on both sides of the Stanislau-Kalusz road. Therefore South Army had to provide immediate help with their available reserves. Selected for this purpose were Res IR 104 of 24 Res ID, even though they had just been pulled from a battle and possessed hardly half their authorized strength, Res IR 250 of 75 Res ID, and several field and heavy batteries. They were placed under Col. Graf Wuthenau,

the commander of 48 Res Inf Bde, and sent to the lower Lomnica in trucks and by forced marches.

GO Tersztyanszky demanded that his divisions should stand fast in the prepared third position to gain time until the reserves could hurry to the scene. He decided to place Wuthenau's Brigade under G.Lt Stumpff's group. 16 Res ID would be sent to Wojnilow, and 8 Bav Res ID would detrain as close to the front as possible, near Kalusz. Thus they could either support the badly-damaged 15 ID or counterattack in case the enemy once more broke through. Tersztyanszky furthermore intended to pull 2 CD from the front and assemble them at Nowica as a reserve for XIII Corps, while 36 ID sent IR 53 to Kalusz at the disposal of XXVI Corps.

### 10 July

In the night of 9-10 July GO Tersztyanszky shifted his HQ from Kalusz to Bolechow. The tension at the front lessened a little on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The XIII Corps was able to make an orderly retreat through the large forests on the Lukwa. Their troops took up a position behind this watercourse. The severely-damaged XXVI Corps deployed, though in makeshift fashion, along the third prepared position on the western bank of the Lomnica. In the morning the Russians still hadn't discovered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's new front.

The severe setback at Stanislau had meanwhile led to a change in the chain of command. GO Tersztyanszky was relieved of his post on 10 July, and GO Kritek - hitherto commanding X Corps - was placed in charge of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. In addition, FML Hadfy changed places with GDI von Csanady, the commander of VI Corps in Transylvania. Since more German units were being sent to the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, it seemed necessary to the Eastern Command that a high-ranking German general should also be assigned. Therefore GdI Litzmann, who'd been leading a Group HQ under 1<sup>st</sup> Army, now was sent to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with his staff (the HQ of XL Res Corps).

The Russians' exhaustion after four days of battle at first kept them from continuing their attack on 10 July. Meanwhile Kerensky sent a wireless message in which he instructed Kornilov not to allow his opponents to rest or to entrench. Then Kornilov urged his Army to hasten. In the afternoon Cheremisov sent forward the 3 Cauc Coss Div, 164 ID and 117 ID, so as to open the route over the Lomnica to Kalusz. The 11 and 19 ID would thrust ahead toward Wojnilow. The situation seemed favorable for turning the success to date into a total defeat of the allies. Halicz fell to the Russians on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps a quick thrust would be

sufficient to occupy the city of Kalusz. During the afternoon some advanced scouting detachments in the sector of XVI Russian Corps caught up to their retreating opponents beyond the upper Lukwa. Toward evening, Russian advanced guards penetrated the incomplete position of the southern wing of 36 ID west of Grabowka. Although they were thrown out by a quick counter-thrust of the local reserves, the Russians recognized the weakness of this position.

Thus in the night of 10-11 July Kornilov was sending his attacking divisions toward the Lomnica, so they could enter Kalusz and open the road to Wojnilow. The Aus-Hung. and German troops holding the western bank of the Lomnica were worn down by substantial casualties and exhausted from the battle. During the 10<sup>th</sup>, shortly before his dismissal, GO Tersztyanszky ordered the formation of a group on the northern wing of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army that would be responsible directly to Army HQ, and led by G.Lt Sieger, the commander of 16 Res ID (which was just arriving). The group would consist of G.Lt Stumpff's 83 ID, 16 Res ID, Wuthenau's Brigade, and the German 1st IR 34. 2 CD in the area north of Kalusz was assigned to the Army's reserve. For now the k.u.k. XXVI Corps would consist of the remnants of 15 ID, all of 16 ID, two battalions of IR 53 (from 36 ID), the German IR 330 and the army's Storm Battalion. GM Aust's 15<sup>th</sup> ID HQ commanded the troops stationed by Kalusz, but they would soon be relieved by GM Adalbert Kaltenborn's 16<sup>th</sup> ID HQ. After reinforcements arrived, the burnt-out regiments of 15 ID plus IR 31 of 16 ID would be pulled from the front to rebuild. 8 Bav Res ID, which was to start arriving on 11 July, would assemble in the Army's reserve west of Kalusz.

### 11 July

The units, especially in this sector, were greatly intermingled and the chain of command was very complicated. The new commanders of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and XXVI Corps still hadn't arrived on 11 July. GO Tersztyanszky had given the Army temporarily to FML Schenk, who was also leading XIII Corps. GM Aust commanded XXVI Corps in addition to his own 15 ID.

Heavy fighting erupted at Kalusz in the morning of 11 July. Covered by the groups of houses and the gardens of Podmichale, the leading regiment of 164 Russian ID was able to approach Kalusz undetected. Their operation was assisted by the deficient security measures of the dead-tired garrison of the positions. Toward 7:00 AM the German IR 330 and k.u.k. IR 5 on the eastern edge of the city found themselves suddenly under attack by the



Russians. In broad waves and without any artillery preparation the attackers drove into the positions. For a while it seemed that the hastily-summoned reserves would be able to check the surprise attack. But further masses of Russian troops arrived and launched new assaults which broke through the lines of both regiments. The enemy quickly spread out in Kalusz and advanced to the heights north of the city. The wreckage of the right wing of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps pulled back toward Kropiwnik. The Russians took many prisoners and for a third time had punched a broad hole in the collapsing front of XXVI Corps. Some of the batteries stationed in the area around Kalusz were easily taken by the enemy because of the breakthrough. IR 53 of 36 ID, which was stationed behind the junction of 36 and 15 ID, tried in vain to restore the situation with a thrust from the west. When the crisis was at its peak, IR 31 (of 16 ID) and the Army's Storm Battalion counterattacked from the north; together with parts of the German IR 329 they advanced once more into Kalusz.

As soon as FML Schenk learned of the penetration, he ordered G.Lt Sieger, who arrived that morning, to send 16 Res ID to Kopanka whence they could counterattack to Kalusz. Also, around 10:30 AM an order arrived from GO Böhm-Ermolli at Lemberg, instructing that the lost positions should be recovered with the help of this Division and under the direct leadership of the Army commander. But for the moment just one battalion from 16 Res ID was available, and G.Lt Sieger didn't want to move it from Wojnilow because the enemy was also threatening to assault the lower Lomnica. Therefore G.Lt Sieger demanded time so that he could assemble 16 Res ID (the majority of which was still approaching) and organize them for the counterattack. Meanwhile the Russian breakthrough at Kalusz was assuming ever greater proportions. The group of defenders who'd forced their way back into the city were engaged in bitter fighting against a much larger Russian force; by the end of the morning they pulled back to Mosciska. Thereupon the remnants of 15 ID, fighting on the left wing of XXVI Corps, also retreated as their cohesion fell apart. Now a broad gap opened in the front between the left wing of the k.u.k. XXVI Corps and G.Lt Sieger's group. This forced the right wing of 83 ID to bend back on the Kopanka Heights (Point 365). Behind them the regiments of 16 Res ID assembled.

Meanwhile the temporary Army commander FML Schenk had hurried to the battlefield. As he ordered, the troops of XXVI Corps who'd withdrawn to Kropiwnik advanced once more toward Kalusz and took up a position between the Lomnica and the Siwka Brook. Here and at Mosciska some March formations from 42 Hon ID, 15 ID and 2 CD were thrown into the fighting. When GM Jehlin, the commander of

8 Bav Res ID, arrived FML Schenk put him in charge of this sector. But the troops on hand - the replacements who'd joined the battle along with the remnants of 16 and 15 ID which had lost almost all their combat value - were too weak to continue the counterattack. Therefore it was decided to wait for 2 CD (coming from the northern wing), a battalion of 36 ID, and the 8 Bav Res ID which was still on the way to Dolina by train. Together with 16 Res ID they would attempt to recover Kalusz on 12 July under the overall command of G.Lt Sieger.

Toward evening the Russian 117, 11 and 19 ID began to attack G.Lt Sieger's group on the lower Lomnica. The heaviest enemy pressure was directed against Wuthenau's Brigade at Slobodka and against the right wing of Sieger's group which was bent back on the Kopanka Heights. The Russians were pounded by artillery fire and fled back to their starting points. But because of concern for the southern wing of Bothmer's Army most of the troops of 2 CD were left on the Lomnica.

While fighting raged at Kalusz and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was making efforts to repair the damage, preparations had to be initiated to withdraw XIII Corps and 5 ID into the third position that had been constructed in the hilly country south of the Lomnica. During 11 July it was possible to repulse the repeated attacks of XVI Russian Corps against the unprotected defensive line on the Lukwa Brook, but almost always only by counterattacking. The fighting hindered the construction of entrenchments. Under these circumstances it seemed advisable to withdraw the Army's southern wing into the third position, with the exception of IR 1 which would stay on the heights south of Jasien. Army Group HQ concurred. The movements took place in the night of 11-12 July without any major hitch. Only 42 Hon ID had to fight to disengage from the enemy. By reducing the sector of XIII Corps it was possible to pull two battalions and seven batteries from the front and hold them ready near Nowica.

When Kornilov's right wing on 11 July drove into Kalusz and stormed the heights west of the lower Lomnica, the danger to the lines of communication of the South Army substantially increased. The Russian attack threatened the city of Stryj, the central point of the entire supply system of South Army. Since the important oilfields of Drohobycz and Boryslzw were also in peril, the Eastern Command decided that the 20 German ID (which was already moving by rail to Zloczow) and the Bav CD should be diverted toward Zurawno to support 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. But subtracting these units from the attack group that was to assemble at Zloczow put the implementation of the planned breakthrough in this sector

seriously in question. Therefore the Eastern Command considered whether they should cancel the Zloczow counter-offensive if the newly assigned reinforcements weren't sufficient to prop up 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.<sup>215</sup>

GdI Bothmer also entered this discussion. His standpoint was that they should stick to the original plan because the Russians couldn't bring up units strong enough to operationally exploit their successes to date before the German divisions already being diverted to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would intervene. Bothmer furthermore pointed out that the Russian troop movements observed in front of his southern wing in the Stanislau area significantly increased the chances of success for a breakthrough at Zloczow. Finally he opposed the idea, then under consideration, that the counter-attack should be shifted to the area south of the Dniester because the terrain, road network and logistical situation there was very unfavorable. And, above all, an attack south of the Dniester wouldn't take place in an area where success would be of decisive significance.

#### 12-13 July

Meanwhile there was no improvement in the situation of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army between 12 and 15 July.

At least the Russians weren't able to immediately advance at Kalusz on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Further exploitation toward the west was hindered by the Lomnica, which was greatly swollen by heavy gusts of rain. In the north the Germans were holding fast to the heights at Kopanka. GO Kritek, who took command of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, recognized at once that the Russians were in a difficult situation in the Kalusz salient. He believed that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had nothing more to fear as long as Jehlin's and Aust's groups, as well as the troops of 83 ID on the Kopanka Heights, reliably barred the way to the enemy. But he was under no illusion that a counterattack to Kalusz could succeed before the arrival of sufficient strong forces. Therefore he would first wait for the remaining troops of 16 Res ID and 8 Bav Res ID, as well as for the 20 German ID and Bav CD that were now coming to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army by train. Army Group HQ understood the need to further postpone the counterattack; they ordered that 20 German ID should be deployed by Kopanka as soon as possible to back up G.Lt Sieger's group, and that the Bav CD should be used to support XIII Corps' front.

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<sup>215</sup>Nowak, K.F., "Die Aufzeichnungen des Generalmajors Max Hoffmann" (Berlin, 1929), Vol. II, pp. 178 ff.

Already in the morning of 12 July several battalions of 8 Bav Res ID were inserted into the sector on both sides of the Kalusz-Dolina road. The majority of 16 Res ID were now deployed on the Kopanka Heights in place of the badly damaged 83 ID.

In the afternoon of 12 July Kornilov opened a new attack with his northern wing to break through from Kalusz into the valley of the Siwka and from Bludniki to Wojlinow [Wojnilow]. Everywhere he encountered iron resistance. Near Kalusz the Bavarian and Upper Hungarian battalions of Jehlin's group prevented any further advance.<sup>216</sup> Also the oncoming Russians couldn't penetrate the lines of the k.u.k. 2 CD because the broad valley of the Dniester was dominated by our artillery.

But south of the Lomnica the Russians succeeded once more in causing the front of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to waver. On the 12<sup>th</sup> the divisions of XVI Russian Corps (47, 160 and 141 ID), reinforced by cavalry, struck the k.u.k. XIII Corps west of the Lomnica, on the broad plain - dotted with hills - between Jasien and Nowica. Attempts by 41 Russian ID to break through over the Werch babski heights into the valley of the upper Lomnica were thwarted by the strong determination of "Kaiser" IR # 1 of 5 ID.

3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ anticipated that the strongest Russian attack would be directed against the part of 36 ID's position which jutted forward at Nowica. Therefore one battalion of 36 ID and a battalion of the 8 Bav Res ID from GM Jehlin's group were shifted behind the center of XIII Corps; also a brigade of the Bav CD, which had just arrived at Dolina, was deployed in the area south of Rozniatow.

Strong rainstorms crossed the plains, swelled the watercourses and delayed Kornilov's preparations for a new attack on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Finally around 1:00 PM his 47 ID made a surprise assault on the left wing of GM Nöhring's 36 ID after a short but very strong artillery bombardment. The Russians broke through the Croatians' positions. Counter-thrusts by weak local reserves gained no success. On the other hand a simultaneous assault against the left wing of GM Mihaljevic's 42 Hon ID on both sides of the road at Ldziany collapsed under the defending artillery fire. The Corps' reserves (three battalions) were able to limit the penetration at Nowica. But around 5:00 PM a new Russian thrust broke into the lines of 36 ID at Landestreu. Here several battalions and companies from 42 Hon ID were thrown into the fighting and restored the situation somewhat. Since new enemy

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216 Jaud and Weech, "Das K.B. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment 19" (Munich, 1933), pp. 154 ff.

thrusts against 36 ID had to be expected, GO Kritek sent the leading regiment of the German 20 ID, which had arrived at Zurawno, from Kopanka through Kropiwnik toward the threatened sector along with the Army's Storm Battalion.

After these new setbacks, the Eastern Command let Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ know that the latest fighting was giving the impression that the Aus-Hung. troops of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army no longer had a firm resolve to persevere in their duty. GO Böhm-Ermolli and GO Kritek directed a very sharp appeal to the Croatian regiments of 36 ID not to risk their hitherto glorious reputation, and exhorting them to hold out since sufficient reinforcements would be in place in the next few days. But the situation of XIII Corps wasn't secure yet, and the behavior of the troops caused fears that there would be new penetrations. Therefore Army Group HQ seemed obliged to consider an eventual withdrawal of XIII Corps behind the Lomnica. But GO Kritek was of the opinion that the heights east of this river had to be retained because the time consumed in pulling back the front wouldn't be long enough for fresh troops to arrive in numbers sufficient to noticeably improve the defense.

#### **4. End of the Russian attack in Galicia (14-16 July)**

For the Russians the penetration into the battle lines of the k.u.k. XIII Corps at Nowica on 13 July signified the high point but also the end of their offensive. On the 14<sup>th</sup> they were still repeating their thrusts in the Carpathian foothills against 5 ID (on the Lopata Heights and at Jasien) and against the left wing of 42 Hon ID (at Ldziany). Also in 36 ID's sector the fighting continued for several more days on the heights near Nowica. But all these isolated and weak Russian thrusts were soon shattered by the defenders' artillery fire. The 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army visibly began to weaken; in the offensive which had opened with such promise that had lost almost 40,000 troops.

General Kornilov had initiated a very dangerous operation when he thrust from Stanislau past Kalusz. Because their neighbors (7<sup>th</sup> Army) had been defeated, a quick advance by 8<sup>th</sup> Army could place them in a perilous situation. Commander-in-Chief General Brussilov recognized the danger and several times demanded that the the leader of the Southwest Front, General Gutor, and Kornilov should deliver the main blow not in the direction of Halicz and Kalusz, but toward Rohatyn. But Kornilov didn't heed these warnings. He had full knowledge of the situation, but was striving only for political successes and spurred on by the

enthusiasm which his victory at Stanislau had awoken in all of Russia. Therefore he continued his attack toward Halicz and Kalusz.<sup>217</sup> Meanwhile on 7 July the 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had already gone over to the defensive after their last vain attempt to break through to Zloczow. Thus the original plan had completely collapsed. 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies, which were supposed to play the major role in the offensive, had only recorded only defeats, while 8<sup>th</sup> Army had embarked on a dangerous adventure.

To be sure, in mid-July Russian troops were still being shifted to the south (in front of the right wing of Bothmer's Army). This led Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ to surmise that the Russians wanted to reinforce their original attacking group, which apparently at first had been assigned a secondary role, after their surprising success at Stanislau. But thus, on the other hand, the situation became less tense in front of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, where on 10 July it was already recognized that the enemy was taking defensive measures. Opposite South Army, Russian columns were observed on 11 and 12 July marching toward the south, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> it was confirmed that the HQ of II Russian Guard Corps had moved to Toustobody. Under these circumstances, Bothmer was able to gradually shift all of 75 Res ID to the southern bank of the Dniester; here they deployed in the sector between the Slobodka-Wojlinow road and the river and repulsed repeated enemy attacks from Halicz. The former sector of the 75<sup>th</sup> near Lipica Gorna was taken over on 13 July - as planned since 8 July - by 53 ID which in turn had been relieved by 24 Res ID.

To prepare for eventual new enemy attacks in the area south of the Dniester, on 14 July Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ ordered that within the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army the units should be regrouped and the chain of command reorganized. To ensure a unified command structure on both sides of the Dniester, an area of great importance for maintaining the connection with South Army, the sector which 75 Res ID had taken over (from the Dniester to the Slobodka-Wojnilow road) was placed under that Army. The burnt-out 15 ID entrained to move to Archduke Joseph's Army Group, which would give up 37 Hon ID to Böhm-Ermolli in exchange. In place of GM Aust, who left with his Division, the commander of the k.u.k. 16 ID GM Adalbert Kaltenborn took over the sector near Kalusz; hitherto he hadn't led a battle group of his own. The new commander of XXVI Corps, GdI Csanady, arrived on 15 July; this Corps now consisted of the k.u.k. 16 ID, German 16 Res ID and half of 2 Cavalry Division. GdI Litzmann took over a group in the center of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which contained XIII Corps plus 8 Bav

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217Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", p. 117

Res ID. The reinforcements which were still coming by train through Dolina - 20 German ID and the Bav Cav Div - were also placed under Litzmann.

On 15 July the German 16 Res ID went over to the offensive; they advanced their lines between the Siwka Brook and the Kopanka Heights somewhat toward the south. Also some wooded heights south of the Kopanka were taken, but after a hard struggle they fell back into the enemy's hands. Nevertheless, the Russians were in a difficult situation, since the Germans' pressure might throw them into the swollen waters of the Lomnica. Under these conditions the Russians evacuated the city of Kalusz in the night of 15-16 July and withdrew to Podmichale. Now the center of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army could once more establish their battle line along the third position. In 36 ID's sector by Nowica the hand-to-hand combat lasted several days longer, until here also the last Russian emplacement was mopped up.<sup>218</sup> Thus the 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had to give up all the advantages they'd gained in the Battle of Kalusz.

Meanwhile on 15 July commander-in-chief Brussilov had once more sent General Kornilov an order to make his main attack in the direction of Rohatyn.<sup>219</sup> But it was already too late. The first enthusiasm had quickly dissipated and the deterioration of the Army, which had lost faith in victory and thus their inner cohesion, could no longer be prevented.<sup>220</sup> The commander of Southwest Front implemented a final re-grouping. In his new plans, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies would make the main effort. General Kornilov was given the II Guard and II Cavalry Corps. The XLV Corps at Tarnopol and XXV Corps at Rudnia were standing ready in the Front's reserve. But all attempts to bring the new attack to fruition shattered on the resistance of the troops. Large units refused to take up new positions. When the commanders called for an offensive, revolutionary spirit couldn't make up for the loss of military discipline. Meanwhile the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was preparing for the counter-thrust at Zborow.

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218In these actions Captain Gottlieb Vojacek of IR 16 won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

219Martinov, "Kornilov", pp. 23 ff. Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin" Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 70 ff.

220TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Russian Army had already deteriorated so badly before the offensive started that even the limited initial successes proved fatal to their prospects. The reliable troops who still wanted to fight were of course the ones who suffered inevitable casualties, which increased the percentage of those who just wanted to go home (Heenan, "Russian Democracy", pp. 114 and 117).

This operation had been delayed by inclement weather and endangered by Kornilov's successes, but hadn't been abandoned by the Eastern Command or by GFM Hindenburg. The Aus-Hung. and German batteries were already starting their bombardment in the Zloczow sector on 17 July.

The grave crisis of the Galician front had been overcome.

#### ***D. Russian activities on the secondary fronts***

##### **1. Feint attacks in the border mountains of east Transylvania, the Forest Carpathians and Volhynia (late June to mid-July)**

To support the offensive toward Lemberg the commander of Southwest Front, GdI Gutor, envisioned that the Russian troops would increase their activity also in the Carpathians and in Volhynia. The parts of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army stationed in the Forest Carpathians (XI, XXIII and XVIII Corps) would cover Kornilov's attack in the Dniester area. The Special Army in Volhynia were supposed to pin down their opponent and keep them from shifting units to Lemberg.<sup>221</sup>

Also in front of the passes of east Transylvania the Romanians and Russians again began to stir. Especially they directed artillery fire on the defensive positions of Gerok's Group in the Bereczke foot hills, but occasionally also struck the lines of Litzmann's Group and of the k.u.k. XXI Corps on the eastern slopes of the Csik and Gyergyó Mountains. More serious events developed at the start of July in Group Ruiz's sector. On 5 July enemy infantry stood ready to attack opposite the left wing of the German 218 ID, but they didn't leave their trenches due to the destructive work of the German and Aus-Hung. batteries.

In the Forest Carpathians, Russian harassment fire increased at Dorna Watra, Jacobeny, Kirlibaba and also in the Ludowa area on the Czarny Czeremosz. At the start of July, small enemy detachments in these parts of the front and also at the Jablonica Pass thrust against the positions of Group Krauss, the Carpathian Corps and the k.u.k. XVII Corps; all were repulsed by the defenders. Despite the increased enemy activity, there was no sign that a large attack was impending on the left wing of Kövess' Army. The Russian artillery fire was no stronger than in

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<sup>221</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 66



the usual conditions of trench fighting, and didn't include additional heavy-caliber guns. At many points along the front the Russian infantry stayed completely quiet. Propaganda between the trenches still continued in the sector of Archduke Joseph's front.

But Army Group HQ still had to prepare for possible new Russian operations in the Dorna Watra, Jacobeny and Kirlibaba areas, where the enemy XXVI Corps had already repeatedly sought to cut the major supply line of 7<sup>th</sup> Army in the valley of the Golden Bistritz. Therefore GO Archduke Joseph sought to respond to this danger with a new deployment of the units on the right wing of Kövess' Army.

The only reserve available to the Army Group commander was 7 ID, which in mid-June arrived at Des from the southwestern theater of operations in exchange for 12 ID. They had suffered greatly in the fighting on the Isonzo and still weren't completely ready for new operations at the start of July. Therefore it was planned that the German 117 ID, assigned to the k.u.k. XVII Corps in a quiet sector, should be relieved by 7 ID and transferred to the Army's right wing; thus the cavalry of Krauss' Group stationed at Jacobeny could be replaced by stronger units. Furthermore, at the end of June Archduke Joseph asked the k.u.k. high command to send 7<sup>th</sup> Army a corps HQ to take control of 59 ID and 40 Hon ID in the Kirlibaba sector. For this purpose GdI Arz proposed to use either GdI Ritter von Henriquez's XII Corps HQ (still under Woysch's Army Group), GdK Hauer, or the IV Corps HQ of FML Horst. But on 29 June he ordered Archduke Joseph to give up artillery and some other available forces to Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. The Archduke was ready to send 13 heavy and 18 light howitzer batteries to Böhm-Ermolli, as well as an infantry and a cavalry division. On 2 July the k.u.k. high command directed that 8 Bav Res ID, except for some troops who were stationed with Group Gerok, should entrain to move to Rohatyn. Now Archduke Joseph gave up considerably fewer batteries to Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. 7 ID was assigned to 1<sup>st</sup> Army to replace the Bavarians, and thus the planned re-grouping within 7<sup>th</sup> Army became impossible. After the k.u.k. 7 CD moved from Romania to Transylvania, only Res IR 11 of the German 117 ID was shifted to the Jacobeny sector (it moved to Bereczk). 8 CD was thus relieved from the front, and in mid-July was stationed in the area northeast of Maramaros-Sziget.

In the area of Linsingen's Army Group, Russian combat activity increased at the end of June from day to day against the defensive positions of the k.u.k. 4<sup>th</sup> Army and of Bernhardi's

southern wing. Russian harassment fire was directed primarily against the German 108 ID and the k.u.k. 11 ID in the Luga sector, then against the entire front of VIII German Corps on the upper Stokhod. But enemy artillery fire was also reported by the German XXII Res Corps in the Lipa sector and by the divisions of the k.u.k. II and XXII Corps on the middle Stokhod. At Kisielin and Bol. Porsk the Russians used many gas shells, and their air units were very active. At the start of July it seemed that a serious Russian operation was possible in the Kovel sector. In the night of 2-3 July enemy infantry assembled for an attack west of the Stokhod in front of the outposts of the German 107 and k.u.k. 4 ID, but didn't move forward under the barrage of our artillery. Russian activity on the Volhynia front slackened off from mid-July, except for isolated cannonades and small-scale patrol actions; finally it ended completely. The German 92 ID which had concentrated at Vladimir-Volynsky meanwhile moved by train to Zloczow; also the German 22 ID was relieved from the Buzany sector so that they could likewise be sent to the Zloczow sector. Thus the Russians hadn't succeeded in their plan of pinning down the German units in trench fighting by pretending that an attack on Vladimir-Volynsky was imminent.

## **2. Failure of the Russian offensive toward Vilna**

North of the Pripyat Kerensky and Brussilov weren't able to unleash their planned offensive through Vilna to Kovno - which was supposed to take place at the start of July - until the great offensive toward Lemberg had already collapsed. The new commander of West Front, General Denikin, had decided to thrust with the right wing of 10<sup>th</sup> Army from the Molodieczno area through Smorgony. The neighboring force to the north, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, would support this attack. If 10<sup>th</sup> Army was successful, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would advance in the direction of Slonim. Two corps - X and XX - were assembled in the Molodieczno area as reserves for the offensive. Simultaneously with Denikin's attack the new commander of North Front, General Klembovsky, would open an assault with the left wing of his 5<sup>th</sup> Army through Dvinsk toward Vilna, while this Army's right wing carried out an auxiliary attack from the Jakobstadt bridgehead. The demoralized 12<sup>th</sup> Army by Riga could only be instructed to harass their opponents with artillery fire and pin down their forces.<sup>222</sup>

Although the thrust against the Germans north of the Pripyat was supposed to be simultaneous with the offensive in east Galicia,

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<sup>222</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 76

it had to be postponed because the troops didn't want to attack. Within North Front, the 12<sup>th</sup> Army was falling apart. Also the divisions of 5<sup>th</sup> Army were in no condition to deliver a powerful thrust. Within West Front, it was finally possible to bring 10<sup>th</sup> Army up to the starting points for the assault after extraordinary efforts by the HQ staffs. But the morale of the troops was wretched. A large portion of the men refused from the start to join the action. Three corps of this Army were supposed to strike the decisive blow. Only one of them deployed as ordered; a second delayed for two to three weeks, and most of the third corps couldn't be urged to go to their starting-points.<sup>223</sup>

After numerous delays, the high command scheduled the offensive by North Front for 22 July and that by West Front for the 19<sup>th</sup>. On the latter date the Russian artillery began to fire for destruction against the left wing of Scheffer-Boyadel's German Army Detachment and against the right wing of 10<sup>th</sup> German Army. After powerful drumfire, on 21 July eight divisions of 10<sup>th</sup> Russian Army began to attack south of Smorgony. The main effort occurred at Kriewo, against 10<sup>th</sup> Army's two southern divisional sectors. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Russians were able to penetrate the thin lines of a Landwehr division to a depth of 2 km on a front 5 km wide. The situation was serious, but the Germans were able to assemble artillery around the area of penetration and to force the Russians to give up the ground they'd conquered.

In the sector of Army Detachment "D", on 23 July - after an artillery battle that lasted almost three days - six deeply-deployed divisions of 5<sup>th</sup> Russian Army struck the German positions on both sides of the Dvinsk-Vilna railroad. The entire front remained intact except for several points where the enemy made small penetrations, which were mopped up in the next few days by the position garrisons. A weaker Russian thrust on 22 and 23 July was directed against the center of 8<sup>th</sup> German Army southwest of Jakobstadt, but was easily repulsed.

These costly and unsuccessful actions deeply depressed the attacking Russian troops. Resistance, mutinies and revolutionary demonstrations occurred throughout 10<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Armies. Thus on 23 July the high command already had to instruct the commanders of both Fronts north of the Pripyat to refrain from any further attack. In the sectors of the German 10<sup>th</sup> Army and Army Detachment "D" it was determined from prisoners' statements and aerial reconnaissance that the Russians had pulled some of their attacking troops from the front. Apparently they were being

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<sup>223</sup>Spannocchi, p. 122. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See also Wildman, Vol. II, pp. 105-111

ordered south to reinforce the front in east Galicia, which meanwhile had been battered and was coming apart.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup>Schwarte, "Der grosse Krieg 1914-1918, Vol. III, pp. 310 ff. Ludendorff, p. 346. Straube, "Die Abwehrschlacht bei Krewo-Smorgon vom 19. bis 26. Juli 1917" (in "Wissen und Wehr", Berlin, Issue 11 for 1934).

## **VI. The Re-conquest of eastern Galicia**

### ***A. The breakthrough Battle of Zborow***

#### **1. Plans and preparations for the attack**

##### Developments through the end of the Russian offensive

At the end of June, when the storm clouds of battle were already gathering between the Sereth and the Dniester, the German OHL had decided to implement the long-prepared plans of their Eastern Command to break through the Russian front in the direction of Zloczow-Tarnopol. When it occurred, the counter-thrust would finally defeat the Russian revolutionary army, which Kerensky had summoned to fight the Central Powers despite their search for peace, and thus free the latter from complications in the East. The k.u.k. high command, when informed of this scheme by their German allies, could only joyfully welcome an offensive which would liberate east Galicia and Bukovina.

GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria, the German Eastern commander, received his Emperor's order on 27 June: "If the Russians attacked Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group, this force should themselves advance with the northern part of the Zloczow Sector to Tarnopol, to defeat the Russians and to reach a line running roughly from Tarnopol to Czernowitz." For this operation Hindenburg and Ludendorff intended to send the Eastern Command a corps HQ and six divisions from the west. From Prince Leopold's northern armies other units, including a second corps HQ, strong cavalry, and some heavy artillery, were either already moving by rail or would do so shortly.

On 29 June the Eastern Command informed GO Böhm-Ermolli of their plans to answer the impending Russian assault in the Zloczow Sector with a counter-offensive. For this purpose they'd deploy seven or eight fresh German divisions (including 237 ID which was already on its way), a cavalry division and 30 heavy batteries as well as the Leib Hussar Brigade which was currently stationed in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's area. The Germans intended to make their main attack out of the sector held by the k.u.k. 33 ID, with the left wing along the Sereth. A secondary assault would take place on the heights directly north of Zborow. The parts of the Army Group farther south would join the offensive as it made progress. But

the German reinforcements wouldn't be made available until the Russians did attack Böhm-Ermolli.

On 30 June, when there could be no further doubt about the enemy's assault, GFM Hindenburg immediately initiated the troop movements. Trains came toward Lemberg from the West carrying the HQ of XXIII Res Corps, the 1 and 2 Gd ID, 5 and 6 ID, and 16 Res ID, and carrying LI Corps HQ from Lithuania. Further units were to follow - 20 ID from the West, 232 ID from Lithuania and the Bav Cav Div (reinforced by a combined cavalry brigade and two reserve Jaeger battalions) from Volhynia. Archduke Joseph's Army Group made available 22 batteries (including 13 heavy) for the offensive and in the first days of July moreover sent 8 Bav Res ID as ordered by the k.u.k. high command. At this time it seemed impossible for the AOK to send any more units, since it was necessary to hold all available strategic reserves in readiness for a new Italian onslaught along the Isonzo.

In the last days of June the Eastern Command and Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ started preparing the attack; the leader of the Zloczow Sector, GdI Winckler, was entrusted with implementing the offensive. Artillery preparations and troop deployment would take about 14 days, and therefore wouldn't be complete before mid-July. As described in the preceding chapter, the Russian offensive opened on 1 July. The enemy's success against the southern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army forced the Eastern Command to commit 237 ID, which had been earmarked for the offensive, in the Zloczow Sector and to replace the k.u.k. IX Corps HQ at the front with the HQ of LI Corps. The Russian penetration at Zborow was checked by German troops, although strong enemy attacks continued against South Army. On 3 July the Eastern Command instructed GO Böhm-Ermolli to initiate the counter-offensive as soon as enough units had arrived to carry out the first phase. He wasn't to wait for the arrival of other units that were still in transit (20 and 92 ID, plus 42 ID which had been made available in place of 232 ID). GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria chose 12 July as the first day of the counterattack at Zborow. But GO Böhm-Ermolli didn't feel it was advisable to start the offensive until the forces had fully assembled. The artillery deployment was incomplete on 12 July and ammunition for the heavy guns was still arriving. Prince Leopold had to agree that this reservation was correct, and now postponed the start of the attack until 14 July.

Preparations for the counter-offensive went quickly. But then the important developments by the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army threatened to nullify the plans of the Eastern Command. If it wasn't possible to halt the Russian attack south of the Dniester, and if 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

retreated beyond the Lomnica, both Stryj (the center of South Army's supply system) and the important oilfields at Drohobycz would be endangered. Because of this peril, 8 Bav Res ID and the Bav CD had to be diverted to the south, as were two of the divisions (16 Res and 20 ID) which Ludendorff had pulled from the heavily-engaged Western front so they could join the offensive in the East. It was especially distasteful to GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria that he was forced to employ the Bav CD to support the front of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. He had armed this Division with special care and reinforced them with a combined cavalry brigade as well as two Jaeger battalions. The plan had been to unite them with the Leib Hussar Brigade under a cavalry corps which, after the breakthrough at Zborow, would cross the Sereth and overrun the enemy east of the river during the pursuit. Now it was questionable whether the attack at Zloczow could even be carried out at all. If the German reinforcements couldn't prop up 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, then perhaps the troops assembled in the Zloczow area by 15 July would have to march south (behind the lines of South Army) so as to fall upon the flank of the Russians as they advanced past Kalusz.

Despite the severe crisis of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the Eastern Command held fast to their original plan of thrusting along the Sereth into the flank of the Russian forces stationed south of this river. On 3 July they had already selected the Beskid Corps HQ to replace LI Corps, since the latter had to take over at Zborow. When 16 Res ID was diverted south during 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's battle, the 42 ID was hastily summoned to replace them; finally the 22 ID was also ordered to march to Zloczow from the Lipa. The start of the attack had to be further postponed (to 16 July) since the first echelon of 42 ID couldn't arrive at Lemberg until the 14<sup>th</sup> at the earliest.

#### The deployment of the opposing forces

On 14 July GFM Prince Leopold and his immediate staff moved from their HQ at Brest-Litovsk to Zloczow so they could be closer to the upcoming events. Meanwhile the situation was noticeably changing. The attack of Kornilov's Army near the Dniester was weakening. At Brzezany the strong enemy assaults had ceased. The Russians were pulling back some units opposite the center of Bothmer's Army, apparently to send them to Kornilov. They had also regrouped opposite the Zloczow Sector in the wake of their vain assault on 6 July. It appeared that V Corps (with three divisions) and I Guard Corps had been inserted on the southern wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army. On the other hand, XLIX Corps with their three depleted Finnish divisions had been placed in reserve,

along with 82 ID and the Czechoslovak Brigade. Opposite the k.u.k. 33 ID, at the point selected for the principal thrust, in mid-July the 22 Sib Rif Div was replaced by fresh units of XXV Corps which had come from Volhynia. XLV Corps, called up from Romania, reached Trembowla. The Russians were already taking defensive measures near Zloczow, perhaps because they either expected a German thrust at Kalusz or wanted to concentrate their own units on the northern bank of the Dniester for a renewal of their offensive. This development made it necessary to carry out the counterattack as soon as possible so as to strike the enemy in the moment of their greatest weakness, after their own stroke had been repulsed. Then a new problem arose. Heavy rainstorms since 12 July had drenched all the highways and roads, raised the water levels, flooded the low ground along the Sereth and the Strypa, and made another postponement of the operation inevitable. When drier weather ensued on 16 July, the 19<sup>th</sup> was finally chosen for the beginning of the counteroffensive.

For the main attack, GdI von Katheren's XXIII Res Corps deployed behind the k.u.k. 33 ID in the sector between Harbuzow and Zwyzyn; they had three divisions (1 and 2 Gd ID, 6 ID). Still farther back the 5 and 22 German ID were standing ready under the LI Corps of Württ. G.Lt von Berrer. Their assignment was to follow the right wing as it attacked and then pivot to the southeast and south, rolling up the Russian position. After the assault succeeded the k.u.k. 33 ID would assemble behind the left wing and stand guard toward the north on the Sereth. A subsidiary thrust farther south would be carried out by a group led by G.Lt Wilhelmi; it consisted of his own 197 ID plus 237 ID, two regiments of the k.u.k. 32 ID, and one regiment of the k.u.k. 19 ID. Their first objective was to capture the heights north of Zborow. Still farther south, the HQ of the Beskid Corps had replaced LI Corps in command of the 96 and 223 ID. Stationed at Zloczow in the reserves of the Eastern Command were the German 42 and 92 ID as well as the reinforced Leib Hussar Brigade. Thus the principal attack would be carried out by seven German and one Aus-Hung. infantry divisions plus a cavalry brigade. Allotted for the secondary attack were two German infantry divisions plus three Aus-Hung. infantry regiments.

The k.u.k. high command noted with some regret that very few Aus-Hung. troops were stationed at the decisive point for this impending major operation, which would not only make amends for the setback at Zborow but also liberate east Galicia. Because the Russians' strength opposite the Army Groups of Linsingen and Mackensen had diminished, on 7 and 8 July GdI Arz asked the OHL to transfer further k.u.k. units for the assault. But since the



Eastern Command had already moved 22 ID from Linsingen's front and since the situation in Romania was unclear, the Germans couldn't honor this request, though it was certainly justified.

The immediate targets of the offensive near Zloczow were Zalosce [Zalozce] and the heights north of Zborow. Trench mortars would soften up the first line of the Russian positions. Our artillery would concentrate on suppressing the enemy guns and dominating the Russian lines toward the rear.<sup>225</sup> As the offensive developed, pressure would be constantly maintained on the left wing, which would proceed along the line of ponds on the Sereth (providing protection toward the northeast) and outflank the Russian right which would have been shattered by the assault. South Army would threaten to attack, thus deceiving the enemy and pinning down some of their units.

#### The order of battle

Zloczow Sector, as of 19 July 1917  
 Commander = Pruss. GdI von Winckler  
 C/Staff = Pruss. Major Frantz

NOTE: The German 1 Gd, 2 Gd, 5 and 6 ID had come from the Western front; 22 and 92 ID plus the Leib Hussar Bde were from Linsingen's Army Group, and 42 ID from the front north of the Pripjat.

#### German Beskid Corps

Commander = Pruss. G.Lt Hofmann  
 C/Staff = Pruss. Col. von Kleist

18 bns, 2 sqdns, 22 batties, 2 TM comps, 4 tech comps, 2 air comps, 2 balloon comps; 12,800 foot, 200 horse, 87 guns, 162 MG  
 . 223<sup>rd</sup> ID (Pruss. GM Haevernick) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps; 5900 foot, 100 horse, 36 guns, 81 MG  
 . 96<sup>th</sup> (Saxon) ID (GM Friedrich von der Decken) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 13 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps; 6900 foot, 100 horse, 51 guns, 81 MG

. Corps troops - Aus-Hung. Air Comps 25, 27; Balloon Comps 6, 24

#### Wilhelmi's Group

27 bns, 2 sqdns, 60 batties, 3 TM comps, 6 tech comps, 1 balloon platoon; 17,200 foot, 240 horse 309 guns, 294 MG  
 . German 197<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt Wilhelmi) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 20 batties, 2 TM comps, 4 tech comps; 5400 foot, 140 horse, 116

225Schwarte, Vol. V, pp. 391 ff. and Vol. III, pp. 304 ff.

Kiszling, "Der Sommerfeldzug 1917." Ludendorff, pp. 345 ff.

Nowak, "Generalmajor Hoffmann", Vol. II, pp. 179 ff. Kuhl, "Weltkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 105 ff.

guns, 135 MG

- . Attached from 32 Aus-Hung. ID (4300 foot, 78 guns, 54 MG):
  - . 63 Inf Bde (Col. Brunader) - IR 70 (3), 23 (3)
  - . 32 FA Bde (Col. Teisinger) - FKR 32 (4), FHR 32 (6), Hvy FAR 32 (4) and five German trench guns
- . Attached from 19 Aus-Hung. ID (2500 foot, 72 guns, 24 MG):
  - . k.k. Sch Regt 29 (3)
  - . 19 FA Bde (Col. Dobringer) - FKR 19 (4), FHR 19 (6), Hvy FAR 19 (4)
- . German 237<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM von Jacobi) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 12 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps, 1 balloon plat.; 500 foot, 100 horse, 43 guns, 81 MG

German XXIII Reserve Corps

Commander = Pruss. GdI von Kathen

C/Staff = Pruss. Col. von Tschischwitz

27 bns, 3 sqdns, 42 batties, 10 TM comps, 9 tech comps, 1 air comp, 3 balloon plats.; 21,500 foot, 300 horse, 164 guns, 243 MG

- . 1<sup>st</sup> Pruss. Gd ID (Col. Prince Eitel Friedrich) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 13 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps; 7000 foot, 10 horse, 52 guns, 81 MG

- . 2<sup>nd</sup> Pruss. Gd ID (GM von Friedeburg) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 13 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps; 7500 foot, 100 horse, 52 guns, 18 MG

- . Corps troops - German: 3 batties (just 8 guns), 4 TM comps, 10 TM plats., 3 tech comps, 3 balloon plats.; Aus-Hung. Air Comp 20

Independent 33<sup>rd</sup> Aus-Hung. ID (GM von Iwanski) = 16 bns, 1 sqdn, 20 batties; 11,000 foot, 50 horse, 96 guns, 152 MG

- . 65 Bde (Col. Freih. von Mor-Merkl) - IR 19 (5), 26 (4)
- . 66 Bde (Col von Magerl) - IR 12 (3), 83 (4)
- . 3 Sqdn/HR 4
- . 33 FA Bde (Col. Cziharz) - FKR 33 (Batties 1-4 & 6), FHR 33 (6), Hvy FAR 33 (4); 5 Batty/FKR 32; FH Batties 12, 20; two German batties
- . 6 Comp/SB 8, 2 Comp/SB 9, 1 Comp/PB 4; Balloon Comp 9

German LI Corps

Commander = Württ. G.Lt von Berrer

C/Staff = Pruss. Lt Col. von Heymann

18 bns, 1 bike comp, 2 sqdns, 24 batties, 2 TM comps, 4 tech comps, 1 balloon plat.; 15,200 foot, 220 horse, 96 guns, 153 MG

- . 5<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM von Wedel) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 12 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps, 1 Balloon plat.; 7500 foot, 100 horse, 48 guns, 81 MG

- . 22<sup>nd</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt Kruge) - 9 bns, 1 bike comp, 1 sqdn, 12 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps; 7700 foot, 120 horse, 48 guns,

72 MG

#### Reserves

- . German 42<sup>nd</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt von Estorff) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 1 TM comp, 1 tech comp; 7500 foot, 100 horse, 36 guns, 72 MG
- . German 92<sup>nd</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt Melior) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 1 TM comp, 1 tech comp; 7100 foot, 100 horse, 27 guns, 75 MG
- . Reinforced Pruss. Leib Hussar Bde (Col. von Ledebur) - 12 sqdns, 3 batties; 1180 horse, 11 guns, 20 MG
- . Smaller units (200 foot, 105 guns, 2 MG)
  - . Aus-Hung. - 5 Batty/FKR 33, 3 & 4 Batties/FHR 30, 1 & 2 Batties/FHR 34, 5 & 6 Batties/Res FHR 59, 1 Batty/Hvy FAR 2, 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 12, 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 25, 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 26, 4 Batty/Hvy FAR 29, 1 & 3 Batties/Hvy FAR 30, 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 40, 3 Batty/Hvy FAR 45, 2 Batty/Hvy FAR 46, 1 & 4 Batties/Hvy FAR 204; Hvy How Batties 6, 66; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 15, 33; 42 cm How Batty 2; Air Comps 3, 8; Balloon Comp 4; Armored Train V
  - . German - 1 Sturm comp, 4 batties, 1 tech comp, 3 air dets, 1 fighter sqdn

TOTALS for Zloczow Sector = 124  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 1 bike comp, 24 sqdns, 219 batties, 20 TM comps (batties), 29 tech comps, 10 air comps (dets), 3 balloon comps, 5 balloon plats., 1 armored train. 92,500 foot, 2390 horse, 935 guns, 1173 MG.

The Russian units opposite this force were:

- . In line - 6 Sib Rif Div (of V Sib Corps), 6 Gren Div (of XXV Corps), XVII Corps (156, 3, 35 ID), V Corps (7, 10, 151 ID); 155 ID (of VI Corps)
- . In reserve - 22 Sib Rif Div (of V Sib Corps), main body of XXV Corps (46 ID, 3 Gren Div), XLIX Corps (2, 4, 6 Finn Rif Divs), I Gd Corps (1, 2 Gd ID); 82 ID, Trans-Baikal Coss Div, Czechoslovak Bde.

## **2. Collapse of the Russian front between the Sereth and Strypa (19-21 July)**

While the German assault divisions were deploying behind the troops holding the trenches of the Zloczow Sector, the commander of the Russian Southwest Front (GdI Gutor) was carrying out his latest re-grouping. He reinforced Kornilov's Army with the II Guard and II Cavalry Corps for a new offensive which was supposed to take place on both sides of the Dniester toward Rohatyn and Zydaczow. 7<sup>th</sup> Army would bombard their opponents at Brzezany

with artillery and pin down their forces. 11<sup>th</sup> Army would renew their thrust toward Zloczow and capture the sector on the Zlota Lipa. XXV Corps was sent to 11<sup>th</sup> Army as reinforcements, while XLV Corps assembled at Trembowla in the Front's reserve. The new offensive by 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies was to begin on 13 July.<sup>226</sup> But all efforts by the Russian high command were shattered by the resistance of the troops, who refused to attack again. This was the situation leading up to 19 July.

At this time 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army held the sector between the Polanka and the area north of Kozowa with I Turkestan, VII Cav, XXXII, V Sib, XVII, XLIX, V, I Gd, VI and XXV Corps plus the Trans-Baikal Coss Div and a Caucasian Coss division.<sup>227</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army now had just four corps (XLI, VII Sib, XXXIV and the Finnish XXII) plus the Orenburg Cossack Division.

On 17 June the batteries of the German South Army began to strike the Russian artillery and the infantry positions between Lipnica Dolna and Koniuchy; on the 19<sup>th</sup> storm troops from the k.u.k. 54 ID pushed into the village of Byszki. Apparently these developments caused the Russians to believe that an attack was impending against their 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Counter-fire by the enemy artillery substantially increased. Many times it was observed that the Russians had strong garrisons in their positions and had brought up reinforcements; as a dense target for our artillery, they suffered substantial casualties. The plan for deceiving the enemy about the direction of the offensive, and to pin down their units, seems to have been fully successful.

### 19 July

Around 3:00 AM on 19 July, 600 guns as well as 180 heavy and medium trench mortars opened an overwhelming cannonade between Zborow and Zwyzyn. First they used gas shells, then fired for destruction through seven long hours against the Russian batteries and infantry positions. At 10:00 AM GdI Kathen's four divisions (German 6 ID, 1 and 2 Gd ID, k.u.k. 33 ID) attacked between Perepelniki and Zwyzyn. With one blow they broke through all of the Russian lines that lay before them. The first Russian position fell in just a few minutes and by noon the allies were already past the second position. The attackers had to contend at the start with weak artillery and rifle fire, but soon the

226Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 77 ff.

227TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original shows the Caucasian Cossack Div as the 11<sup>th</sup>, but there was no such unit. Perhaps the reference should be to 3<sup>rd</sup> Caucasian Coss Div, but this is just speculation.

Russian batteries broke off the action and withdrew. 6 German ID took Harbuzow around 10:20 and then advanced toward Troscianiec. 1 Gd ID reached the forest of Brodki. A mutinous regiment of 6 Gren Div retreated, causing the other troops of XXV Russian Corps to flee back toward Zalosce.<sup>228</sup>

Only at Zwyzyn was there stubborn resistance, by groups from the 6 Sib Rif Div; but here the left wing regiment of 2 Gd ID ("Kaiser Franz")<sup>229</sup> drove into the village from the south while the k.u.k. IR 19 of 33 ID came in from the north, mopping up with bayonets and hand grenades. In a fighting advance the 2 Gd ID reached the Sereth and in the afternoon stormed Ratyszczce. On the right of XXIII Res Corps, G.Lt Berrer's LI German Corps (5 and 22 ID) sent 5 ID southeast toward the town of Olejow, although the movement was held up by bottlenecks when the troops crossed the paths of the rearward portions of 6 ID in the very swampy Sereth valley. The enemy, whose attention had apparently been distracted by the strong artillery fire and storm troop operations initiated by South Army, were taken completely by surprise and quickly fell back in front of LI Corps. Two German regiments of G.Lt Wilhelmi's group were already moving ahead one hour after the attack by Kathen's and Berrer's corps, and wrested the heights by Zborow away from XVII Russian Corps. To support this attack and deceive the enemy, storm troops from 223 ID also advanced. They pushed into Koniuchy and drew strong Russian reserves in their direction; when the enemy began to counterattack they once more evacuated the town.

Against expectations, the attacking groups of the Zloczow Sector had quickly reached their objectives for the day. The enemy had succumbed to their first onset and withdrew in flight under the destructive fire of the allied artillery. They already seemed to be shifting their positions in front of the adjacent units on the right and the left (197 ID and 12 LW ID). The Russian reinforcements sent toward the northern wing of XXIII Res Corps hadn't intervened. An enemy counter-thrust from the south through Lopuszany was easily hurled back by parts of 5 German ID, which around 3:00 PM had won the heights north of Olejow.

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<sup>228</sup>Knox, Vol. II, pp. 653 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Stavka did in fact blame one unit, the 607<sup>th</sup> Mlynov IR of 6<sup>th</sup> Gren Div, for the debacle and the charge was repeated by Knox and others. However, the regiment apparently had been chosen as a scapegoat; neither this unit nor its division was any more responsible than the army as a whole. See Wildman (Vol. II, pp. 116 and 120).

<sup>229</sup>Rieben, "Kaiser Franz Garde Grenadier Regiment" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1929), pp. 384 ff.

In an effort to powerfully exploit the success that had been won, and to deny the enemy time to once more dig in, soon after 5:00 PM GdI Kathen ordered his divisions to continue the pursuit. The irresistible attackers pushed their wavering foes to the south and southeast. In the evening Corps Berrer's deeply-deployed 22 ID entered the woods of Hukalowce and captured the Jamny Heights as well as the rising ground around Olejow without encountering noteworthy resistance.<sup>230</sup> In night combat the 5 ID took from the enemy the stubbornly-defended village of Brzowica. Also the troops of XXIII Res Corps progressed considerably beyond their first objectives. Despite streams of rain that fell in the late afternoon, 6 ID reached the Bialokiernica area, and 1 Gd ID came up to the town of Zalosce. The 2 Gd ID and k.u.k. 33 ID pivoted toward Ratyszczce on the Sereth front.

The breakthrough was completely successful, and tore a gap 20 km wide in the enemy front. 2900 prisoners, including 2 regimental commanders and 83 officers, were taken during the day along with 10 guns.

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<sup>230</sup>Schmidt and Ahlhorn, "2. Kur-Hessisches Infanterie Regiment Nr. 82" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1922), pp. 87 ff. Clausius, "Infanterie Regiment von Wittich (3. Kur-Hessisches Nr. 83)" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1926), pp. 105 ff.

20 July

The offensive continued as planned on 20 July. Pivoting on the right wing, Wilhelmi's group and the corps of Berrer and Kathen thrust southeast; they soon broke the resistance of isolated Russian groups and south of the Sereth gained a new band of terrain 16 km deep within the collapsing Russian lines. General Erdeli, the commander of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, threw his reserves (XLIX Corps) into the fleeing masses, but could no longer control the catastrophe. A large segment of the Russian troops refused to counterattack and lost their composure as soon as their opponents' artillery opened fire. XVII Corps abandoned their positions without offering resistance. I Gd Corps was supposed to take over part of V Corps' front, but instead withdrew without authorization. Thus the V Corps, whose northern flank was threatened with envelopment, had to retreat to the line Koniuchy-Kuklince.<sup>231</sup>

In the afternoon the Beskid Corps (223 and 96 ID) attacked V Russian Corps as the latter left their trenches; when the Germans reached Augustowka and Jozefowka, GdI Bothmer ordered the k.u.k. XXV Corps to recover the old Austrian position east of the Koniuchy Brook. This would help 223 ID on the right wing of the Beskid Corps, which was heavily engaged around Koniuchy village. After a brief melee, Byszki was in the hands of the k.u.k. 54<sup>th</sup> Division around midnight. Thus the left wing of South Army was also in motion. In all the other parts of the Army's front, very active patrols still encountered trenches packed with defenders; it was also known that there was lively wagon and truck traffic behind the Russian lines. In the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> GdI Bothmer sent all his available air units toward Tarnopol. With bombs and machine gun fire the airplanes attacked the enemy troops and vehicles choking the roads, and increased the tremendous confusion. In the night of 20-21 July GdI Bothmer relieved 15 Res ID from the sector of XXV Res Corps, so that he'd have a reserve on the Army's northern wing which would be of decisive importance as the advance continued.<sup>232</sup>

GdI Winckler ordered his four corps to continue to thrust to the southwest on 21 July. The Eastern Command assigned 92 ID (from their reserves) to the Zloczow Sector to guard the flank on the Sereth. Thus the Leib Hussar Brigade, which meanwhile had been deployed on both sides of Zalosce facing northeast, was freed to pursue the beaten Russians. Prince Leopold sent 42 ID to the XXIII Res Corps as it swarmed forward. To provide a new reserve,

<sup>231</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp .78 ff.

<sup>232</sup>Oberkommando der Südarmer, "Der Feldzug in Ostgalizien 1917"

he ordered the German 20 ID to transfer immediately to Jezierna from the sector of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

The commander of the Russian Southwest Front, General Gutor, had ordered 11<sup>th</sup> Army on 20 July to counterattack along the entire front between the Sereth and Strypa. VI Corps, now placed under 7<sup>th</sup> Army, would pull their right wing back to Budyłow, and then thrust into the flank and rear of the Germans who'd broken through. Commander-in-Chief GdI Brussilov sent a telegram to the leader of his 11<sup>th</sup> Army, in which he appealed to the revolutionary soldiers to check the German counter-offensive and to keep Tarnopol from falling to their opponents. At the same time he sent Kornilov an order to attack toward Rohatyn. The Russian offensive by Smorgony and Jakobstadt, which now was beginning, would provide relief for the armies in Galicia.<sup>233</sup>

### 21 July

But in the morning of 21 July the allies continued to apply pressure between the Strypa and Sereth. The main attacking group under GdI Winckler (Group Wilhelmi, Corps Berrer and XXIII Res Corps) thrust powerfully along the road toward Tarnopol and along the southern bank of the Sereth; despite stubborn fighting with rear guards, they overcame all resistance. In front of the northern wing of the Zloczow Sector the XVII Russian Corps fled, in confused crowds and without a plan, over the Sereth. V Corps found themselves enveloped by the German columns which were hastening forward at Jezierna, and were pushed to the south. They withdrew through Kozłow to Myszkowice. On the other hand the VI Russian Corps, although their link with the retreating V Corps was lost, still stood up to the Germans by the Strypa at Budyłow.

For 21 July the k.u.k. XXV Corps of Bothmer's Army was ordered first to attack in the direction of Budyłow, in close cooperation with the Beskid Corps. But in the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> GdI Bothmer changed FML Hofmann's orders; the next task of the k.u.k. XXV Corps would be to break the Russians' resistance north of the Kozowa-Tarnopol railroad, which was of great importance to the enemy. In the afternoon the left-wing unit, GM Severus' 54 ID, occupied the heights by Ceniow and in the evening they'd already reached Olesin. GM Unschuld's 55 ID joined this advance; their leading troops reached the area southwest of Olesin. The artillery of 241 German ID supported 55 ID as they crossed the Ceniowka. The k.u.k. 129 Inf Bde, which had been placed under the left wing of the 241<sup>st</sup>, was also able to cross this brook in

<sup>233</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", p. 79



the evening. The rest of 241 ID, on the other hand, still encountered stubborn resistance, as did the other parts of Bothmer's Army. Air reconnaissance reported, though, that there was lively movement to the rear on the roads and rail lines in front of G.Lt von Heineccius' XXV Res Corps and the k.u.k. XXV Corps. Everywhere behind the Russian positions fires were burning in villages and camps, which as always was an unmistakable sign that the enemy were already starting to retreat opposite the entire northern wing of Bothmer's Army.

In the Zloczow Sector, by evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> the attacking divisions of the Beskid Corps and Group Wilhelmi, and of the corps of Berrer and Kathen, had already driven ahead to Budyłow, Kozłow and the heights west of Tarnopol. Thus the VI and XLI Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were enveloped from the north and compelled to abandon their positions between the Strypa and Złota Lipa. Under cover of rear guards both Russian corps withdrew south in the night of 21-22 July past the Kozowa-Tarnopol railroad line. V Corps assembled south of Tarnopol in the Sereth valley (near Myszkwice); between them and VI Corps on the right of 7<sup>th</sup> Army the front had been torn asunder; it wouldn't be possible to quickly and securely close this gap.

When the Russian commander-in-chief recognized on 21 July that the catastrophe was already spreading to 7<sup>th</sup> Army, he ordered that the planned resumption of the attack toward Rohatyn should be abandoned. At the same time he instructed General Kornilov to withdraw 8<sup>th</sup> Army if it too was threatened with envelopment from the north. The offensive which the Russians had begun at Smorgony would also be called off if it gained no initial success, and then X Corps would be sent from the West Front to Galicia. But after the severe defeat at Smorgony the troops of X Corps refused to go to the aid of the hard-pressed armies in Galicia. At any rate, in east Galicia there were still two corps (XLV and XXXIV) stationed in reserve behind 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Both corps were supposed to close the gap that had developed between 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies. But before they reached the battlefield the Russians were overtaken by a new calamity.

By breaking through the Russian front between the Sereth and Strypa, Prince Leopold had fully achieved the first goal of the counter-offensive. In the next phase of the operation the Russian front west of the Sereth would be rolled up toward the south; thus the enemy would be compelled to fall back in the area down to and beyond the Dniester, as far as the foothills of the Forest Carpathians.

To keep further operations rolling as desired, Prince Leopold felt it was necessary to prepare new orders. The attack to the east shouldn't go beyond Tarnopol and the heights on the eastern bank of the Sereth that were needed to ensure possession of the city. To protect the flank toward the northeast, strong positions would be constructed and sufficiently garrisoned on the western bank of the Sereth by 2 Gd ID (in the area northwest of Tarnopol), 92 ID (on both sides of Zalosce) and 33 k.u.k. ID still further to the left (between Ratyszczce and Zwyzyn). On the other hand, the attack would continue toward the southeast with a strong left wing. The South and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies would join the advance by GdI Winckler's assault group as soon as the enemy began to pull back from their fronts. The goal of the right wing of the Zloczow Sector was Strusow on the Sereth; the border line between Bothmer's and Kritek's Armies during their thrust would be the Dniester. Since the area under attack by the Zloczow Sector was expected to narrow, they were furthermore instructed to pull back reserves for the Eastern Command when this happened. Finally the 75 Res ID, stationed on Bothmer's southern wing, was relieved by the German 83 ID. The 75<sup>th</sup> had to entrain starting on 23 July to move to the sector of 10<sup>th</sup> German Army, due to the Russian penetration at Smorgony.

## ***B. The pursuit to the Zbrucz (22-25 July)***

### **1. Pursuit actions by the Zloczow Sector and South Army**

In the night of 21-22 July the corps of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army which had fled behind the Sereth - XXV, XVII, XLIX and I Guard - were assembled between Zalosce and Tarnopol for renewed resistance. The foremost troops of XLV Corps, which had been ordered forward from around Trembowla, had already reached the Tarnopol area. V Corps, which had pulled south from Kozlow to Myszkowice, halted on the eastern bank of the Sereth. But there was still a large gap in the Russian front between Mikulince and the Strypa. The divisions of VI and XLI Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were retreating hastily to the south past the railroad on both sides of Kozowa, and falling into confusion. Also the Finns of XXII Corps were starting to break up their front near Slawentyn, whereupon 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army pulled their northern wing (III Cauc Corps) back toward Nosow.<sup>234</sup>

#### 22 July

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234Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 79 ff.

When the enemy began to retreat to the Zlota Lipa and to the Narajowka, around noon the Eastern Command issued new orders for the next phase of the operations, as described above. The first goal was the destruction of as much as possible of the Russian force crammed into the area between the Sereth and Dniester. Therefore GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria ordered the attack to continue toward the southeast. The main effort would now be made by South Army, to which G.Lt Wilhelmi's Group (197 and 237 ID plus three k.u.k. infantry regiments from 19 and 32 ID), the Beskid Corps (96 and 223 ID) and the reinforced Leib Hussar Brigade were assigned from the evening of 23 July. Still under the Zloczow Sector were G.Lt Melior's Group (newly formed from the k.u.k. 33 and German 92 ID), XXIII Res Corps (6 ID, 1 and 2 Gd ID), Berrer's Corps (22 and 5 ID) and the newly-assigned 42 German ID. GdI Winckler was to reach the Sereth line between Trembowla and Tarnopol with his right wing.

Based on the new orders from the Eastern Command, GdI Bothmer of South Army instructed that on his northern wing the k.u.k. XXV Corps, which had hitherto been attacking from their old position toward the east, should shift sharply to the southeast in the direction of Burkanow. This thrust would force the enemy fleeing from Bothmer's northern wing (their VI and XLI Corps) to change their line of retreat and interfere with the communications of the corps stationed farther south. The other advantage of this line of attack would be to make it impossible for the enemy to create covering positions along the line of streams leading from north to south (the Zlota Lipa, the Koropiec Brook and the Sereth).

On 22 July the commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, General Bielkovich, sought to close the gaping hole in the line between the Sereth and Strypa with XXXIV Corps, which he moved from Podhajce on his right wing. But his pursuers were too quick. Group Wilhelmi and (further west) the Beskid Corps pivoted through Kozlow and Budylow sharply to the southeast and during this day had already crossed the Kozowa-Tarnopol rail line. As the Beskid Corps thrust after the Russians they collided with the left wing of South Army. The units' paths crossed, and the k.u.k. 54 ID wound up behind the right wing of the Beskid Corps (223 ID). The pursuing k.u.k. 55 ID, on the other hand, gained ground; on the 22<sup>nd</sup> they only had to overcome some weak resistance by Russian rear guards on the heights southwest of Kozowa; in the evening they reached the area between that town and Uwsie.

Early in the morning the Finnish XXII Corps began to evacuate

their positions on both sides of the Zlota Lipa opposite the Rohatyn Sector (XXV German Res Corps). All the divisions of the latter corps (241, 4 Ers and 20 Turkish ID) pushed ahead, although it was difficult to move through their own and the enemy's maze of trenches. The artillery of 241 ID could only move slowly along the road to Kozowa, which was clogged by the troops and supply trains of the k.u.k. XXV Corps. This failure of the batteries to move forward was the reason why XXV Res Corps still couldn't overcome enemy resistance on the chain of hills between the Zlota Lipa and the Koropiec Brook.

Opposite the German XXVII Res Corps (53 Res, 24 Res, 38 Hon and 83 ID plus German Landsturm), the III Cauc Corps evacuated their positions in the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, starting in the north. 53 Res ID immediately thrust the enemy back to the heights east of the Narajowka and thus enabled the 24 Res ID to also cross the river.<sup>235</sup> In front of 38 Hon ID and of the German 83 ID, which was south of the Dniester, the enemy still held their ground; however, in the night of 22-23 July GM von Molnar's 38 Hon ID stormed the heights east of Bolczowce.

Thus on 22 July the entire Russian front was breaking up from the Dniester to the Sereth. This was the unexpected and unwanted result of the great summer offensive which revolutionary Russia had initiated. The catastrophe which developed now as the counterattack of the Central Powers beset the Russian armies in Galicia had serious consequences for their country. Bolshevik disturbances had already erupted in Petrograd in mid-July, which had made it necessary to send troops from the West Front into the capital. Now the Bolshevik tide threatened to destroy everything. For the time being at least Kerensky was able to maintain his position. On 20 July he became Minister President of the provisional government (in place of Prince Lvov), while keeping the post of War Minister. Since revolutionary spirit alone was insufficient to successfully contest the attack by the Central Powers, Kerensky was now provided with dictatorial powers; he attempted to restore the old military obedience, self-confidence and discipline of the disorganized Army. He demanded strict accountability from the generals. Gutor paid for the defeat of 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies with his dismissal. General Kornilov, as victor over the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, was named commander of the Southwestern armies in Gutor's place. General Erdeli, hitherto the leader of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, was given command of the Special Army, changing places with General Baluiev. General

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<sup>235</sup>Winzer, "Das Kgl. Sächs. Res. Infanterie Regiment Nr. 243" (in "Erinnerungsblätter deutscher Regimenter", Dresden, 1927), pp. 193 ff.

Cheremisov took over 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

General Kornilov, the new commander of Southwest Front, immediately recognized that 7<sup>th</sup> Army was in a very difficult situation because of the German envelopment. The attempt by XXXIV Corps on the 22<sup>nd</sup> to halt their opponents' advance was a failure; XXII and III Cauc Corps both had to evacuate their positions. Therefore Kornilov decided to pull 7<sup>th</sup> Army back in the night of 22-23 July to the line Mikulince-Burkanow-Olesza-Monasterzyska. In conjunction with this movement the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, which had advanced too far, would withdraw their front from the area west of Stanislau to Monasterzyska; farther south they'd retreat to Nadworna and to Tatarow on the upper Pruth. 8<sup>th</sup> Army's corps in the Forest Carpathians (XI, XXIII and XVIII) were re-assigned on 23 July to the newly-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Army.<sup>236</sup>

### 23 July

But the retreat wouldn't stop on the new lines planned by Kornilov. In light fighting with enemy rear guards, the pursuing columns of the Zloczow Sector thrust to the Sereth south of Tarnopol on 23 July. On this day advanced troops from Berrer's Corps were already firmly established on the eastern bank near Mikulince and Strusow. The German 6 ID, fighting on the right wing of Kathen's Corps, came to the Sereth south of Tarnopol. 1 Gd ID encountered stubborn resistance, which they couldn't overcome, on the heights west of that city. The Russians had a strong garrison holding a bridgehead at Tarnopol. Therefore GdI Winckler decided to prepare a systematic assault on the city. For this purpose 42 ID deployed behind 1 Gd ID. The 2 Gd ID took up a line along the Sereth northwest of Tarnopol on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; to their left 92 ID was inserted into the front on both sides of Zalosce, and the right wing of the k.u.k. 33 ID stretched to the southeast near Ratyszczce.

While the southern wing of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was encountering increased resistance on their line facing east and northeast between Strusow and Ratyszczce, Wilhelmi's Group and the Beskid Corps farther west continued to push toward the south, so as to completely roll up the lines of the enemy as the latter fled from the continuing pressure on their right flank. Wilhelmi and the Beskid Corps came up to the enemy around noon on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. But the XXIV Russian Corps, though reinforced by 104 ID, were unable to hold off their opponents for long. Thousands of troops abandoned their trenches without fighting. XXXIV Corps, which

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<sup>236</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 82 ff. Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", p. 117

was deployed between Mikulince and Burkanow to save 7<sup>th</sup> Army's flank from encirclement, fled back to Trembowla and Brykula Str. Thereupon the other parts of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (VI, XLI, VII Sib and XXII Finnish Corps) continued their retreat from Burkanow and Podhajce to Olesza and Monasterzyska.

Thus on 23 July the South Army encountered little resistance along their entire front. On this day their northern wing, the k.u.k. XXV Corps, thrust south between the Strypa and the Koropiec Brook as far as the heights east of Podhajce. In the evening the 54 ID drove back a Russian regiment which tried to hold out west of Burkanow, stormed the town, and by 2:00 AM on 24 July was in possession of the woods to the east.

Under XXV Res Corps, the 241 ID advanced only slowly because of the soaked ground; their artillery was still far in the rear. During the day the 4 Ers and 20 Turkish ID overcame stubborn enemy resistance on the road to Podhajce; the former Division took possession of the city in the evening. 53 Res ID, along with 24 Res ID from XXVII Res Corps, reached their objective (the line Zamalow-Horozanka) in the evening without noteworthy fighting. Also 38 Hon ID were able to begin their advance on 23 July, along with 83 German ID which was engaged south of the Dniester. Thus the whole front of South Army was in motion. 38 Hon ID seized the Magsa Heights on the north bank of the Dniester. Southwest of the river, 83 ID had already reached Halicz and the lower Lukawica by noon; they were once more placed under the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. GdI Bothmer pulled back 20 Turkish ID, which was supposed to return to Turkey in August, and placed them in reserve. Group Wilhelmi, the Beskid Corps and the Leib Hussar Brigade came under command of the South Army in the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. 75 Res ID, which had been on the left wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, now left by train to join Eichhorn's Army Group, where the Russians had broken into the lines of a German Landwehr division at Smorgony.

#### 24 July

The attacks of the Russians around this time north of the Pripyat, and those of the Romanians in the Transylvania mountains and Moldavia (which will be narrated below), brought no relief to the Southwest Front. For not only were three armies in retreat, but the great defeat suffered in east Galicia had snapped the last bonds of military order. The Stavka were still making desperate efforts to halt the counter-offensive of the Central Powers. On 24 July the commander-in-chief ordered his armies north of the Pripyat to stop attacking. This would enable the

West Front to send X Corps to Galicia, while the Romanian Front sent their III Cavalry and XXIX Corps there. Kornilov was ordered to take five or six divisions from the parts of his Front that weren't under attack, and to move them to the point of the breakthrough. But the majority of the Russian troops no longer wanted to fight. They wouldn't obey orders. Thousands of soldiers deserted. In one night alone the "Death Battalion"<sup>237</sup> of 11<sup>th</sup> Army apprehended 12,000 deserters from various regiments in the Woloczysk area. During the retreat undisciplined hordes of soldiers were guilty of plundering and atrocities; they set fire to the camps which had been constructed in large numbers behind the Russian front in east Galicia.

General Kornilov, the newly-appointed commander of Southwest Front, demanded that the high command and the provisional government should immediately re-instate the death penalty in the areas where the armies were fighting. Without waiting for the concurrence of the government, he ordered that deserters would be shot. At this time mass executions were carried out. As a warning, the bodies were displayed with placards carrying the word "Deserter."<sup>238</sup>

But all the stern measures designed to restore confidence and order in the Russian Army, and to halt the advance of their opponents, were in vain. Under protection from the last units willing to fight, on 24 July the main body of 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army and the right wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army retreated south to Budzanow, Przewloka, Barysz and Nizniow. Without tiring, the columns of Bothmer's Army pressed after the fleeing enemy, hoping to destroy as many as possible of the units crowded into the area between the Sereth and Dniester. On the left wing of South Army, Wilhelmi's Group broke the enemy resistance on the heights south of Darachow on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The Beskid Corps repulsed desperate Russian counter-thrusts next to the Mogila Heights (east of Burkanow) and at Chmielowka. 96 ID reached Mogielnica; they engaged an enemy force that was also effectively assaulted from the flank and rear by the Leib Hussar Brigade, which until now had been on guard along the upper Sereth. In the evening the Prussian hussars were instructed by GdI Bothmer to thrust into the Sereth valley and to capture the bridge at Budzanow.

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237TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Russian "Death Battalions" were equivalent to the Central Powers' storm battalions - elite formations of specially-picked troops. Because of their reliability, they performed military police functions in addition to their role as shock units.

238Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 82 ff. Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", p. 118

Under the k.u.k. XXV Corps, 54 ID fended off a short thrust by two or three Russian regiments northwest of Brykula Str. in the morning, in cooperation with the German 223 ID. 55 ID encountered only weak resistance as they crossed the Strypa. The Austro-Hungarians reached the area east of Bobulince and in the night their outposts repulsed an attack by armored cars on the Buczacz-Dobropole road. Under XXV Res Corps the infantry of the Saxon 241 ID were exhausted, and their artillery had insufficient transport; therefore only the Division's advanced troops reached their day's objectives. 4 Ers ID, on the other hand, threw back the enemy rear guard which had been offering stubborn resistance west of Przewloka and Olesza, and reached the towns of Jezierzany and Przewloka, far beyond their goals.

Under XXVII Res Corps the 53 and 24 Res ID saw only light fighting. By evening the 53<sup>rd</sup> was already holding Monasterzyska and thus had considerably exceeded their objectives for the day. Only 38 Hon ID had to overcome stronger resistance, west of Byszow in the afternoon. In the evening the Hungarians encountered an enemy force which had taken up a new position east of Uscie Zielona, but the Russians withdrew before the planned attack started.

### 25 July

GdI Bothmer ordered the pursuit to continue on 25 July. He placed Wilhelmi's Group and the Leib Hussar Brigade under the Beskid Corps, which had occupied Janow and thrust ahead to the heights north of this town, so they could assist the right wing of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which meanwhile had become engaged in heavy fighting at Trembowla. The Leib Hussar Brigade was to advance toward Czortkow so as to break up the important Buczacz-Czortkow rail line.

On 25 July the Beskid Corps encountered rather heavy resistance west of Budzanow and had to repulse strong Russian thrusts from the area south of Trembowla. Parts of 197 and 237 ID crossed the Sereth and took Janow. But they couldn't capture the strongly-occupied heights north of the town. The Leib Hussar Brigade was going to attack Kossow, which was still occupied by the enemy, and asked battalions of 54 ID to give them support. But when the k.u.k. troops arrived the Russians withdrew before the attack began.

The k.u.k. XXV Corps continued their pursuit on the 25<sup>th</sup> and reached Laszkowce and the area northeast of Buczacz. The Corps



only had to fight on their right wing, at Pilawa. Because of the exhaustion of the troops, no further advance was undertaken. The XXV Res Corps was supposed to wrest Buczacz from the enemy on the 25<sup>th</sup>, but encountered heavy resistance west and northeast of the city. 4 Ers ID crossed the Strypa, intending to attack the enemy at Buczacz from the north, and thus crowded together with 241 ID. When it was reported that enemy units were advancing from the south toward Jezierzany, parts of 20 Turkish ID (which had been placed in reserve) were returned to the front. XXV Res Corps couldn't overcome Russian resistance on this day; XXVII Res Corps, on the other hand, reached the Koropiec Brook east of Monasterzyska and Nizniow without fighting.

The capture of Tarnopol

While the 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army and the right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> fought rear guard actions as they withdrew south to the line Budzanow-Buczacz-Nizniow, the southern wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army rallied for defense on the Sereth. When Berrer's Corps crossed the river on 24 July between Trembowla and Ostrow, the new commander of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (General Baluiev) threw his reserves against them - the Petrovsky (1<sup>st</sup>) Guard Brigade and 151 ID. But G.Lt Berrer, who'd deployed 42 German ID on his southern wing, captured the woods and villages on the left bank of the Sereth from the Russians in bitter fighting; on 25 July he threw back the enemy north of Trembowla past the railroad line. 6 German ID, fighting on the right wing of Kathen's Corps, now also crossed the Sereth. They pushed back troops from V Russian Corps and the Czechoslovakian Rifle Brigade and won the heights southeast of Tarnopol. When the defenders of the Tarnopol bridgehead (I Gd Corps) learned that V Corps had retreated in the Gniezna sector, they also evacuated their positions and abandoned the city to their opponents. Prince Eitel Friedrich's 1 Prussian Gd ID stayed on the heels of the retreating enemy and had already secured the city in the morning of 25 July. On the next day (the 26<sup>th</sup>) the Guard regiments took possession of the heights north and northeast of Tarnopol; they were observed by the German Emperor, who was visiting the allied troops at the front. At the same time 6 ID and the divisions of Berrer's Corps secured the Gniezna sector and the town of Trembowla. Thus the objectives of the Zloczow Sector were achieved and the necessary bridgehead established at Tarnopol.

**2. The 3<sup>rd</sup> k.u.k. Army begins to advance**

On 23 July, the day when 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army evacuated their positions on the Lomnica and in the area down to the Forest Carpathians, the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army also joined the advance. On this day GO Böhm-Ermolli instructed GO Kritek to begin the pursuit of the Russians between the Dniester and Pruth. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would first recover the positions on the Bystrzyca Solotwinska which had been lost at the start of July. In their further advance, the main effort should be made on the Army's left wing, so as to advance toward Horodenka as quickly as possible. On this wing an assault group was created under GdI Litzmann; it consisted of 8 Bav Res ID, the k.u.k. 16 ID and the German 16 Res and 83 ID, plus the k.u.k. 2 CD. The Bav CD were held in readiness so they could be sent ahead to Czernowitz. It was hoped that at least some of the Russians could be enveloped as

they withdrew from the Carpathians. But 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had to give up a substantial number of troops. Thus the German 20 ID was sent to the Zloczow group, and on 23 July 75 Res ID was ordered to join Eichhorn's Army Group. The k.u.k. XXVI Corps HQ (led by a new commander, FML Edler von Horsetzky) had become superfluous; on the same day they were sent to 7<sup>th</sup> Army, where they took over the 59 ID and 40 Hon ID in a sector near Kirlibaba.

The k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was already crossing the Lomnica on 23 July. 83 German ID, which had now been assigned once more to this Army, reached Halicz and Jezupol on the southern bank of the Dniester. Enemy rear guards encountered here and in front of Stanislau on the Jutrena Gora were driven back. In the evening the allies reached 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's old positions on the Bystrzyca Solotwinska.

8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army abandoned Stanislau and Nadworna and during 24 and 25 July hastily continued their retreat, over the Bystrzyca Nadwornianska to Tlumacz, Ottynia and Mlodiatyn so as to avoid being cut off between the Dniester and Pruth. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army followed them. Russian rear guards who sought to delay our advance on the eastern bank of the Bystrzyca Solotwinska were hurled back on the 24<sup>th</sup> by Litzmann's group. The k.u.k. 16 ID took Stanislau. Farther south the k.u.k. XIII Corps crossed the Bystrzyca Solotwinska. The k.u.k. 5 ID had already reached Nadworna on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and pushed into the valley of the Pruth on the 25<sup>th</sup>. IR 13 and parts of the Bav CD recovered Kolomea on the 26<sup>th</sup>. On this day XIII Corps and Litzmann's group fought actions with Russian rear guards and reached the towns of Chocimierz, Jezierzany and Olesza.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>Roth, "Das K.B. Reserve Infanterie Regiment Nr. 23" (Munich, 1927), pp. 128 ff. Frauenholz, "Das K.B. 2. Kürassier- und Schwere Reiter-Regiment" (Munich, 1921), pp. 279 ff. Litzmann, Vol. II, pp. 162 ff.

### ***C. Continuation of the pursuit to the end of July***

On 24 July, when the Russians continued their rapid retreat in front of South Army and even pulled back along the entire front between the Dniester and the Forest Carpathians, Hindenburg and Ludendorff recognized the possibility of continuing operations as far as the Zbrucz and thus driving the enemy from east Galicia. Therefore during this day GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria, in agreement with the German OHL, ordered GO Böhm-Ermolli to advance with the left wing of South Army as far as possible beyond the Sereth in the direction of Husiatyn and Kamenets-Podolsk. Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ asked GdI Bothmer whether South Army would be able to carry out this mission, and in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> Bothmer answered in the affirmative. The Zloczow Sector was now instructed to establish a suitable position along the line Gnila Brook - Grzymalow - Skalat - Borki Wk. and then along the Sereth north of Tarnopol, thus securing the northern flank of South Army.

Meanwhile the right wing of the Zloczow Sector had already crossed the Sereth near Tarnopol, as described above. Here and also in front of the northern wing of Bothmer's Army the beaten Russian divisions were pulling back in disorder. On the other hand it seemed that in front of Bothmer's southern wing, and also in front of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, the enemy's retreat was proceeding in relative order. Because of this development, Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group HQ was of the opinion that at least parts of the Russian corps at the front south of Buczacz - III Cauc, II Gd, XXXIII, XII and XVI - were still combat-effective. Therefore GO Böhm-Ermolli believed it possible that troops from 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army could shift north over the Dniester to check the advance of South Army toward the Zbrucz with a counter-thrust. And so on 25 July the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was ordered to energetically continue the drive by Litzmann's group toward Horodenka; firm action would defeat 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army and prevent them from throwing strong forces over the Dniester against the flank of South Army.

In an order for the continuation of the offensive issued in the morning of 26 July, GdI Bothmer established as the principal goal the destruction of as many as possible of the enemy units west of the Zbrucz. For this purpose the Beskid Corps would thrust along the Tajna toward Husiatyn with a strong left wing. The k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army wouldn't participate in this movement, but would secure the left flank of Bothmer's Army as far as Iwanowka. Beyond this town the Beskid Corps would have to make their own arrangements for guarding the flank. It was intended that eventually this

task would be allotted to 20 German ID, scheduled to arrive south of Trembowla on 27 July. This Division was now assigned to South Army. The Leib Hussar Brigade should first reach the city of Czortkow; then they would be placed directly under South Army HQ for an advance toward the Zbrucz between Germakowka and Husiatyn.

South Army's advance to the Zbrucz took place amid light actions with Russian rear guards. Tarnopol fell on 25 July and all attempts of Baluiev's Army to halt their opponents on the Sereth failed; the commander of Southwest Front, General Kornilov, ordered the retreat to continue. The center and right wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was to withdraw to the line Czernichowce-Skalat-Grzymalow. Farther south the 7<sup>th</sup> Army was to pull back behind the Gnila Brook and Zbrucz River; 8<sup>th</sup> Army would retreat to the line Skala-Krzywcze, to the Dniester west of Uscie Biskupie as far as Zaleszczyki, and south of the river to Kissileu. The right wing and center of the newly-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Army were to evacuate the positions in the Forest Carpathians so as to remain linked with 8<sup>th</sup> Army; they'd re-build their front along the line Sniatyn-Kuty, on the White Czeremosz, and on the mountain ridges of Tomnatik and Capul. Kornilov wanted to win time for the retreat behind the Zbrucz; therefore he instructed strong rear guards of infantry, cavalry and armored cars to first oppose the allied advance by the towns of Chorostkow, Czortkow, Jagielnica, Latacz, Niezwiska and Kolomea, and later at Grzymalow, Kopczynce, Jezierzany, Zaleszczyki and Horodenka. Kornilov also feared that the continuing pressure of the pursuers toward the southeast might cut off the northern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Army from the units south of the Dniester. The troops of 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies were therefore ordered to finally bring the allied advance to a halt along the border-river of the Zbrucz and along a line (described above) south of the Dniester. Otherwise Bukovina would have to be evacuated and the right wing of the Romanian Front pulled back.<sup>240</sup>

### **1. South Army from 26 to 29 July**

On 26 July Bothmer's Army resumed their pursuit to the Zbrucz. On this day the enemy opposite the Beskid Corps abandoned the eastern bank of the Sereth near Buzanow. Harassed only by cavalry and armored cars, the attacking German divisions reached the area on both sides of Kobylowloki. The k.u.k. XXV Corps also moved forward throughout the day without fighting. In the night, however, 54 ID had to attack to drive away enemy troops who were

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240Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 85 ff.

occupying the eastern bank of the Sereth at Skorodynce. In the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> the Leib Hussar Brigade fell upon a Russian rear guard west of Czortkow and pursued their fleeing enemies as far as the eastern bank of the Sereth. The planned assault on Buczacz by G.Lt Heineccius' XXV Res Corps (hitherto the "Rohatyn Sector") didn't take place because in this sector the Russians had already started to retreat in the night of 25-26 July. In minor fighting with enemy cavalry the main body of XXV Res Corps reached the Dzuryn area. The XXVII Res Corps was held up by numerous troops of Russian horsemen and by destruction of the roads; they could only advance slowly, yet in the evening they reached their goals for the day in the area west of Jazlowiec and Potok Zloty.

On 27 July the 223 and 96 ID of the Beskid Corps had to overcome enemy resistance at Kopczynce, as did 237 ID which was entrusted with guarding the left flank west and north of Chorostkow. The divisions of the k.u.k. XXV Corps found that the bridges over the Sereth at Czortkow had been burnt, so they had to ford the river. Without fighting, they reached their objectives east and southeast of Czortkow. The Leib Hussar Brigade, which had been sent ahead, could only advance slowly east of the Sereth because of resistance from enemy cavalry and Russian artillery fire. Nevertheless they were able to cross the Niezlawka near Czarnokonce Wielki. The XXV and XXVII Res Corps were bothered only by some weak cavalry, and reached their objectives. The former corps sent their advanced troops over the Sereth at Jagielnica. 20 Turkish ID was again sent to the front, and occupied the area of Bazar.

In the evening of 27 July GO Böhm-Ermolli ordered that a permanent position should be constructed on the Zbrucz. But South Army were given the option of pushing their front forward over the river. This was at the request of GdI Bothmer, since it didn't seem advisable to build works on the western bank of the Zbrucz due to the numerous bends in the river and the fact that the eastern bank was at a higher elevation. Also, an advance over the Zbrucz would ensure that the numerous villages in the valley could be fully utilized to billet the troops. Therefore on 28 July GdI Bothmer ordered his corps to advance over the Zbrucz between Germakowka and the mouth of the Gnila, but only far enough to make sure that the artillery could observe the outpost area and that the first position would be sufficiently far from the river. The part of Galicia which jutted out toward Chotin in the peninsula between the Zbrucz and the Dniester was to be mopped up by the advanced guards of XXVII Res Corps.

On 28 July the Beskid Corps overcame feeble resistance by Russian rear guards and reached the Zbrucz at Husiatyn by day's end. But the Corps' original plan to send strong forces over the river in the evening had to be abandoned because intelligence reports on the scene indicated that strong resistance could be expected from enemy troops in an old position on the eastern bank. 15 Res ID, following closely behind on the left wing of Bothmer's Army, reached Czabarowka; 20 ID meanwhile still hadn't linked up with the Beskid Corps.

East of the Niezlawa, on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Leib Hussar Brigade thrust south from Czarnokonce [Czarokonce] Wielki, and thus forced the enemy stationed along the stream to evacuate their positions. After the Prussian hussars overcame renewed enemy resistance, they pushed into Borszczow. Meanwhile in the center of South Army the divisions of the k.u.k. XXV and German XXV Res Corps crossed the Niezlawa without fighting and approached the Zbrucz.

North of Zaleszczyki, on the southern wing of XXVII Res Corps the 38 Hon ID came up to the enemy in the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup>. They learned from prisoners' statements that the Russians intended to send a corps to the north bank of the Dniester near this town. Therefore GdI Bothmer ordered that the Zaleszczyki bridgehead should be captured early on 29 July.

While the Beskid Corps thrust without stopping as far as the Zbrucz, during 26 and 27 July the right wing of the Zloczow Sector advanced only far enough past the Gniezna area to ensure that the Trembowla-Husiatyn railroad could be used. The advance of the main body (42, 22, 5 and 6 ID; 1 Gd ID) ended on 28 July along the line Hleszczawa - Borki Wk. - Czystylow (on the Sereth northwest of Tarnopol). Only some isolated detachments followed the enemy as the latter pulled behind the Gnila.

Meanwhile on 27 July GO Böhm-Ermolli had issued orders to be carried out in case the Russians also withdrew opposite the northern wing of the Zloczow Sector, and opposite the V and XVIII Corps. If the enemy did evacuate their positions here, they were to be immediately pursued as far as a line running along the pre-war border from Leszniow (north of Brody) to Gontowa and then south to the Tarnopol bridgehead. In general, this was the line which the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had held in July 1916 prior to the Battle of Brody. But it was soon apparent that the Russians were still holding strongly to their original positions behind the Sereth on both sides of Zalosce and at the other points along 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's front. The left wing of their 11<sup>th</sup> Army wasn't planning to retreat. At Hluboczek Wk. on the Sereth the new Russian front

was several kilometers distant from that of the allies, and then ran southeast from Zbaraz; finally the opposing fronts came closer together south of Touste.

## **2. Pursuit actions of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army between the Dniester and the Pruth, 26-31 July**

As narrated above, the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was advancing south of the Dniester and in the evening of 26 July took Kolomea and reached the line Chozimierz-Olesza. On the next day the Bavarian Cavalry Division were sent ahead into the Pruth valley toward Sniatyn; they pushed the Russians back to Zablotow.<sup>241</sup> The k.u.k. XIII Corps took possession of the Kulaszkowce area. Meanwhile GdI Litzmann's group had broken the enemy's resistance at Jezierzany and Olesza. Without resting, the divisions of his group pursued the retreating Russians. In the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>, after fights with rear guards, they had already reached Horodenka and Uscieczko. In his further advance, GdI Litzmann wanted to thrust with a strong left wing in the direction of Kuczurmik and Okna.<sup>242</sup> Since 23 July the enemy were also evacuating their positions opposite the northern wing of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, and so on 27 July the German Eastern Command ordered Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group to have 3<sup>rd</sup> Army cross the Pruth with strong detachments and expand the pursuit to the area south of this river.

This would ensure that operations would be coordinated with the left wing of Archduke Joseph's Army Group and that it would be easier for the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army to emerge from the valleys of the Forest Carpathians. The task was assigned to GM Felix's k.u.k. 5 ID. On the 29<sup>th</sup> they were placed under 7<sup>th</sup> Army and sent toward Storozynetz. The k.u.k. XIII Corps was ordered to support either the Bavarian horsemen (who were advancing toward Czernowitz) or 5 ID, depending on the situation.

On 28 and 29 July the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were engaged along their entire front, since rear guards from three Russian corps (XVI, XII and XXIII) were maintaining a front west of the line Sniatyn-Kissileu-Zaleszczyki. GO Kritek ordered that on 29 July the k.u.k. XIII Corps should just pin down their opponents while waiting for 8 Bav Res ID's advance to force the Russians to waver. On the 29<sup>th</sup> this Bavarian unit, as well as the k.u.k. 16

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241Hutschenreuther, "Das K.B. 1. Chevaulegers Regiment im Weltkriege 1914-19" (Munich 1922), pp. 92 ff.

242Litzmann, Vol. II, p. 168 ff.



ID, had to repulse Russian counterattacks near Kissileu. But in the night of 29-30 July the enemy, under pressure from the two northern divisions of Litzmann's group (16 Res and 83 ID), evacuated their positions between the Dniester and Pruth. Meanwhile 38 Hon ID on the right wing of Bothmer's Army had captured the Zaleszczyki bridgehead from the north. On 30 July the 16 Res and 83 ID were already on the offensive between Zaleszczyki and Zastawa. On this day Group Litzmann reached Doroschoutz and Werenczanka, and on the 31<sup>st</sup> they captured the town of Zastawa. Meanwhile the k.u.k. XIII Corps had advanced past Sniatyn. Throughout this period the enemy's resistance remained stubborn.

#### ***D. The thrust from the Carpathians***

##### **1. The k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army advances to the Moldawa and the Czeremosz, 24-30 July**

###### 7<sup>th</sup> Army order of battle on 23 July

Commander = GO von Kövess  
 Chief of Staff = GM Ritter von Steinitz  
 Artillery General = GM von Kaufmann

a) Group Krauss (HQ of I Corps)  
 Commander = FML Alfred Krauss  
 C/Staff = Col. Eduard Primavesi  
 Consisted of XI Corps plus Pichler's Group<sup>243</sup>...

###### XI Corps

Commander = FML Edler von Habermann  
 C/Staff = Col. von Jäger  
 Had 27 bns, 14 half regts, 4 sqdns, 48 ½ batties, 2 TM batties, 4 tech comps, 1 air comp; 22,100 foot, 400 horse, 242 guns, 418 MG  
 . 51<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (GM von Benke) = 6200 foot, 100 horse, 62 guns, 96 MG

- . 200 Hon Bde (Col. von Farkas) - Hon IR 301 (3), 302 (2)
- . 201 Hon Bde (Col. von Eölbey-Thyll) - HIR 300 (3), 305 (3)
- . 1 Sqdn/Hon HR 4; 4 Comp/Bridge Bn 2
- . 51 Hon FA Bde (Col. Mattanovich) - HFKR 2 (1-4 & 6 Batties), HFHR 51 (5); 1 Batty/H Mtn Arty Det 51; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 4

. 74<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Gallert) = 8000 foot, 100 horse, 98 guns, 115 MG

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<sup>243</sup>Air Company 40 was assigned directly to HQ of Group Krauss

- . Col. Papp's Hon Bde - k.u. Lst IR 5 (4); Hon Bn Russ; k.u. Lst Bn VI/3
- . Col. Savoly's Hon Bde - Hon IR 306 (3), 307 (3)
- . 2 Sqdn/Hon HR 4
- . 74 Hon Res FA Bde (Col. Basch) - HRFKR 74 (2); 5 Can Batty/HFKR 4, half of 5 Batty/FKR 26, 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 34, 5 Batty/RFHR 61; Horse Arty Bns 6 (3), 2 (3); Hvy HFAR 51 (3); 1, 2 & 4 Can Batties plus 2 & 3 How Batties/Mtn AR 4

Apor's Group (under FML Freih. von Apor of 5<sup>th</sup> Hon CD)

- . 5<sup>th</sup> Hon Cav Div (FML. von Apor) = 4800 foot, 100 horse, 79 guns, 139 MG
  - . 23 Hon Cav Bde (Col. von Vetsey) - HHR 1 (1), 6 (2), 7 (2), 8 (1)
    - . A mounted squadron
    - . 12 FA Bde (Col. Andersch) - FKR 12 (6), FHR 12 (6); 2 & 4 Batties/Hvy FAR 12, 2 How Batty/Hvy HFAR 51, 3 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 4; half of 30.5 cm Mor Batty 13
    - . Attached: I Bn/HIR 302 (from 51 Hon ID); Prussian Gren Regt # 1 (3 bns; from 1 German ID)
- . 6<sup>th</sup> Cav Div (FM Edler von Schwer) = 3100 foot, 100 horse, 68 MG
  - . 5 Cav Bde (Col. Eugen Adler) - DR 6 (2), 8 (2), 11 (2); HR 15 (2)
    - . A mounted squadron

Group Pichler

Commander = FML Pichler (of 59<sup>th</sup> ID)

Chief of Staff = Col. Keinert

- . 11<sup>th</sup> Hon Cav Div (GM von Jony) = 5800 foot, 100 horse, 60 guns, 124 MG
  - . 24 Hon Cav Bde (GM von Hegedüs) - HHR 2 (2), 3 (2), 5 (2), 9 (2)
    - . A mounted squadron; Hon Bike Comp 3; 1 March & 3 Comps of PB 7
    - . Hon Horse Arty Bn 1 (3); Horse Arty Bn 8 (4); 1 Batty/RFHR 59; 2 & 3 Can Batties plus 3 How Batty of Mtn AR 18
    - . Attached - III Bn/Hon IR 30 (from 40 Hon ID); German IR 157 (3 bns; from 117 ID)
- . 59<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Pichler) = 7100 foot, 150 horse, 75 guns, 106 MG
  - . 6 Mtn Bde (Col. Kreneis) - Bns I/6, II/38, IV/42, IV/50, IV/81
  - . 18 Mtn Bde (Col. Kemmel) - Bns III/31, II/60; FJB 3, 15, 26
  - . 6 Sqdn/Hon HR 10; one zug apiece from 1 & 2 Sqdns/Dalm. Mntd Rif Bn; 3 Comp/SB 14
  - . 59 Res FA Bde (Col. Edler von Steiner) - RFKR 59 (1-4 & 6 Batties); 2, 3 & 4 Batties/RFHR 59; 4 Batty/Hvy RFAR 59; 1,

4 & 6 Can Batties plus 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 18; 2 Batty/Hvy Hon FAR 40; half of 30.5 cm Mor Batty 13; three trench guns

b) German Carpathian Corps

Commander = Prussian G.Lt von Conta

Chief of Staff = Prussian Major von Unruh

Had 37 bns, 3 sqdns, 41 ½ batties, 3 TM batties (comps), 8 ½ tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon comp; 28,700 foot, 300 hose, 223 guns, 480 MG

. 40<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Edler von Nagy) = 8300 foot, 100 horse, 75 guns, 102 MG

. 79 Hon Bde (Col. von Mierka) - Hon IR 29 (1), 30 (2)

. 80 Hon Bde (Col. von Sreter) - Hon IR 6 (3), 9 (30)

. 5 Sqdn/HR 1; 2 Comp/SB 2

. 40 Hon FA Bde (Col. Sekulic) - HFKR 1 (1-4 & 6 Batties), HFHR 40 (5); 1 & 4 Batties/Hvy HFAR 40; Hon Mtn Arty Bn 40 (2); five trench guns

. Attached - k.u. Lst IR 20 (3)

. German 1<sup>st</sup> ID (Pruss. GM Paschen) = 6200 foot, 100 horse, 80 guns, 141 MG

. Gren Regt 3 (3), IR 43 (3); 3 Sqdn/UR 8; 13 batties (incl. FAR 16), TM Comp 1; two tech comps

. Attached - Bns II & III/Hon IR 29 (from 40 Hon ID); k.u.k. 6 Can Batty & 1 How Batty of Mtn AR 26; 20 trench guns;

k.u.k. Balloon Comp 18

. German 200<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt Boëss) = 14,200 foot, 100 horse, 68 guns, 237 MG

. Jaeger Regts 3 (4), 4 (3), 5 (3); 2 Sqdn/UR 1; 9 batties (FAR 257 plus Bav Mtn Arty Bn 2); 173 Mtn TM Comp; two tech comps

. Attached - Four German bns; Aus-Hung. FJB 28 (from 34 ID); k.k. Lst Bns 17, 153; 1, 2 & 5 Can Batties plus 3 How Batty of Mtn AR 26; ½ of 5 Batty/FKR 34; fourteen trench guns; 2 Comp/SB 5, 1 Comp/SB 10, 6 Comp/PB 2

. Corps troops (k.u.k.) - ½ 6 Comp/SB 3; Air Comp 38

c) Aus-Hung. XVII Corps

Commander = FML von Fabini

Chief of Staff = Col. Butterweck

Had 22 bns, 7 half regts, 4 sqdns, 34 ½ batties, 3 TM batties (comps), 5 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon comp; 18,600 foot, 420 horse, 160 guns, 281 MG

. 68<sup>th</sup> Inf Bde (from 34 ID; Col. von Greger; had 4000 foot, 20 guns, 48 MG) - IR 29 (3), 33 (2); 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 18; 1, 2 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 22; ½ 2 and all of 4 Batty/Hvy FAR 30; 1 March Comp of PB 2

- . 8<sup>th</sup> Cav Div (GM Edler von Dokonal) = 2400 foot, 100 horse, 68 MG
  - . 15 Cav Bde (Col. Brandmayer) - DR 2 (1), 14 (2); UR 11 (2), 12 (2)
  - . A mounted squadron
  - . Attached (from German 117<sup>th</sup> ID) - 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps
- . 34<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Luxardo) = 5100 foot, 100 horse, 78 guns, 62 MG
  - . 67 Bde (Col. Babic) - IR 101 (3); Bn IV/29; FJB 14, 18 and 24 (# 14 and 18 were attached from 30<sup>th</sup> ID)
  - . 6 Sqdn/HR 1, 2 Comp/PB 3, Balloon Comp 5
  - . 34 FA Bde (Col. Hönig) - FKR 34 (1-4, ½ of 5, and 6 Batties), 3 & 4 Batties/FHR 34; 2, 3 & 4 Batties/Hvy FAR 34; FKR 30 (1-4 & 6 Batties); ½ 15 cm Mor Batty 24; 2 trench guns
- . 30<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Jesser) = 4700 foot, 120 horse, 31 guns, 56 MG
  - . 215 Bde (Col. Fritsch) - IR 32 (3); FJB 13, 16, 27; k.k. Lst Bn 150
  - . 3 Sqdn/RSR 1; 5 Comp/SB 4
  - . 30 FA Bde (Col. Stepanescu) - 1, 2 & 6 Batties/FHR 30; ½ 2 Batty Hvy FAR 30; 1 & 2 How Batties/Mtn AR 22; ½ 15 cm Mor Batty 24; three German trench guns
- . Corps troops - Air Comp 30

d) Independent 16<sup>th</sup> Inf Bde (from 30 ID; GM Sallagar; had 4200 foot, 20 guns, 40 MG) - IR 97 (4); FJB 1; 5 Batty/FHR 30; 3, 5 & 6 Batties/Mtn AR 22; 1 Can Batty of Hon Mtn Arty Bn 74

e) Directly under 7<sup>th</sup> Army

. 117<sup>th</sup> German ID (in transit to Group Krauss; Pruss. GM Seydel) with 2400 foot, 100 horse, 36 guns, 47 MG. Res IR 22 (3), 1 Sqdn/CR 8, 9 batties (incl. FAR 233), 117 TM Comp. (Div's IR 157 was with 11<sup>th</sup> Hon CD<sup>244</sup>, Res IR 22 with Group Gerok.)

Army troops (800 foot, 80 horse, 2 guns, 8 MG) - A Storm Bn; k.k. Lst Gendarme Sqdn; 5 Batty/Hon FKR 2; 2 Comp/SB 13; 3 & 4 Comps/SB 61; Air Comps 49, 50

TOTALS for 7<sup>th</sup> Army = 108 bns, 1 bike comp, 29 half regts, 14 ½ sqdns, 155 batties, 9 TM batties (comps), 24 ½ tech comps, 5 air comps, 2 balloon comps. 87,300 foot, 1450 horse, 779 guns, 1457 MG

### Plans and deployment

244TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original text erroneously lists 5<sup>th</sup> rather than 11<sup>th</sup> Hon CD, but the entries for Krauss' Group above show the correct attachment of 157<sup>th</sup> IR.

On 24 July the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army also joined the advance, with their northern wing. Originally Archduke Joseph's Army Group HQ had intended to open the Army's offensive - after the successful breakthrough at Zloczow - with a powerful thrust toward Kutly. But the necessary forces weren't available to carry out this plan since, as will be narrated later, the Army Group's right wing had to overcome a crisis in the Bereczke Mountains. 7<sup>th</sup> Army therefore restricted their effort to an advance in echelon by their northern wing.

The thrust from the Carpathians wasn't an easy operation. It had to be carried out, mostly in stages, with separate columns advancing on both sides of the valleys that were leading in the desired direction. Great logistical problems were anticipated in wooded mountains which had few roads. 7<sup>th</sup> Army HQ asked the k.u.k. high command for trucks to supplement the horses of the supply trains. Moreover, efforts would be made to quickly restore the destroyed railroad lines as the Army advanced.

Already on 19 July, the day when the counter-offensive started at Zloczow, Archduke Joseph had ordered GO Kövess to prepare to pursue the Russians. FML Fabini's XVII Corps (30 and 34 ID, 8 CD) would thrust ahead toward Berezow and Kosmacz, G.Lt Conta's German Carpathian Corps (200 and 1 ID) toward Kutly and Wiznitz, and finally FML Horsetzky's XXVI Corps<sup>245</sup> (40 Hon and 59 ID) toward Seletin on the upper course of the Suczawa.

GO Kövess intended that the main assault should be carried out by the Carpathian Corps. Therefore he wanted to reinforce that Corps with Res IR 22 of the German 117 ID, which was still behind the front of the k.u.k. XVII Corps. The German OHL fully concurred with an attack by 7<sup>th</sup> Army toward Kutly-Wiznitz, since it promised to effectively support the operations of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group.

In the night of 21-22 July the Army Group HQ learned from an intercepted wireless message that XI Russian Corps would start to retreat opposite the k.u.k. XVII Corps on the next day. In fact, on 23 July parts of GM Sallagar's 16 Inf Bde were already able to start their advance at the Pantyr Pass. On the 24<sup>th</sup> troops from FML Jesser's 30 ID and GM Edler von Luxardo's 34 ID stormed the heights northwest of the Jablonica Pass. Then 34 ID in three

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<sup>245</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: XXVI Corps HQ doesn't appear in the order of battle above because on 23 July it had just been re-assigned to Kövess from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Horsetzky took over the 40 Hon and 59 ID by 27 July.

columns climbed out of the upper Pruth valley over the mountains toward the northeast; they pushed through Zabie and Kosmarz into the Pistynka valley. Meanwhile 30 ID thrust past Tatarow, Mikuliczyn and Berezow toward Pistyn.

Meanwhile on 25 July GO Kövess issued orders that the offensive should proceed with the main effort on the Army's left wing in the direction of Czernowitz. The objectives were the area south of Kolomea (XVII Corps), Wiznitz-Kuty (Carpathian Corps), Czudin (southwest of Storozynez; XXVI Corps), and Suczawa and Radautz (FML Alfred Krauss' Group). The latter Group, stationed on 7<sup>th</sup> Army's right wing, consisted of FML Freih. von Apor's cavalry group (11 Hon CD, 6 CD, 5 Hon CD plus two German regiments) and FML Habermann's XI Corps (74 and 51 Hon ID).

Army Group HQ intended to have the offensive open toward the northeast, even though they realized that as soon as 7<sup>th</sup> Army neared the outlets from the mountains they would have to turn sharply to the east. Archduke Joseph wanted to deliver a decisive thrust from the Jacobeny area in the shortest direction through Kimpolung toward Czernowitz in conjunction with South Army's offensive toward the confluence of the Dniester and the Zbrucz.<sup>246</sup> With determined, quick and ruthless advances in these two directions (which were of great operational importance) large parts of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army might be cut off between the Dniester and Pruth. Since the Archduke lacked the necessary forces - at least three fresh divisions - on 24 July he asked the k.u.k. high command to send reinforcements to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Because of the extremely tense situation on the Isonzo, however, his wish couldn't be fulfilled. In fact, Archduke Joseph had to weaken the striking power of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army by removing some of their troops. For on 22 July the Romanians and Russians advanced against the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, and caused considerable trouble for Gerok's Group. Therefore starting on 23 July the following were sent to Transylvania - 8 CD (which had been deployed at the front by XVII Corps), Res IR 22 of 117 ID, Gren Regt 3 of 1 ID, the Army Group Storm Battalion, several batteries and also 7 CD. The continuing difficulties of Group Gerok even made it necessary by the end of the month to send the majority of 117 ID to the Army Group's southern wing.

#### Operations from 25 to 30 July

Meanwhile, on 25 July G.Lt Boëss' 200 German ID of the Carpathian Corps began to move. They wrested the Baba Ludowa from the rear guards of the retreating XXIII Russian Corps, climbed the chain

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246Kiszling, "Sommerfeldzug 1917"

of peaks, occupied the Czeremosz valley, and on the 28<sup>th</sup> thrust through Zabie to Uscie Putilla.<sup>247</sup> In front of 1 German ID, stationed on the southern wing of the Carpathian Corps, and farther south the Russians stayed put for the time being. At Kirlibaba (in the sector of 59 ID) and Jacobeny (on the left wing of Krauss' Group) the enemy still engaged in very lively skirmishing.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Russian Army pulled their right wing (XI Corps) and center (XXIII Corps) back from the Carpathian wall to the line Sniatyn-Kuty and behind the White Czeremosz. Their left wing (XVIII Corps) stayed in the positions on the summits of the Tomnatik Ridge and on the massif of the Capul, so that the flank of 9<sup>th</sup> Army wouldn't be exposed. But on 26 July GM Edler von Nagy's 40 Hon ID captured the positions on the Capul heights from the Russian 43 ID. Now the enemy also tore down their front in the Moldawa area. The German 1 ID and k.u.k. XXVI Corps began to advance on the 27<sup>th</sup>. But FML Horsetzky's divisions (40 Hon and 59 ID) and the East Prussians of 1 ID encountered Russian resistance, and could only move slowly over the broad mountain ridge, covered by primaeval forests, that lies between the Golden Bistritz and the Moldawa.

On 27 July Army Group HQ ordered GO Kövess to shift the attacking divisions of 7<sup>th</sup> Army sharply to the east; the front was to be advanced toward Suczawa and Czernowitz.

The commander of the Russian Southwest Front, General Kornilov, ordered his 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 28 July that only in case of dire need should they withdraw their left wing to the Moldawa and their center to the Putilla. At the same time the Stavka shifted XXIX Corps, which originally had been supposed to move from the Romanian Front as a reinforcement for east Galicia, to a reserve position behind 9<sup>th</sup> Army's left wing. 43 ID, which was slowly retreating in the Moldawa valley, was placed under that Army's XXVI Corps.<sup>248</sup>

On 30 July the right wing of XXVI Russian Corps at Czokanestie withdrew to Valeputna; therefore the three cavalry divisions of Apor's Group (5 Hon, 6, 11 Hon) pivoted east from their right wing toward the Putna valley. Meanwhile FML Pichler's 59 ID and the 40 Hon ID fought to open the way over the barren mountains into the Moldawa valley, toward Breaza and the town of Moldawa. The 1 German ID drove 37 Russian ID from the Tomnatik Ridge and

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247Ehrenforth, "Die Geschichte des Res. Jäger Bataillons 17"  
(Berlin, 1926), pp. 51 ff.

248Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 90 ff.

descended into the Suczawa valley near the village of Schipoth.

Although undefeated, the 1<sup>st</sup> Russian Army's center (XXIII Corps) and right wing (XI Corps) were hard pressed as they withdrew from the Carpathian wall to the Czeremosz in the last days of July. On the 28<sup>th</sup> the k.u.k. 5 ID, led by GM Felix, crossed the Pruth at Zablotow. On the next day they reached the east bank of the Czeremosz at Russisch Banilla. The k.u.k. XVII Corps meanwhile drove forward through the Pistynka valley to Kutu. The 200 German ID thrust down the valley through Uscie Putilla. On the 29<sup>th</sup> they overcame resistance from parts of XXIII Russian Corps at Rostoki and on the next day struck the southern flank of XI Corps at Wiznitz. The Russians were outflanked on the lower course of the Czeremosz and feared they'd be cut off; they retreated east in the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup>. FML Fabini stayed on the enemy's heels with his corps, to which 5 ID had now been attached.

## **2. Actions up to the recovery of Czernowitz, 31 July-5 August**

On 29 July Kerensky held a conference with the commanders of the Fronts at Stavka's HQ in Mogilev. The leaders of the Russian Army asked Kerensky to abolish all the soldiers' committees and to restore the unrestricted authority of the officers. But no decision was reached, because the representatives of the government present at Mogilev rejected the suggestions for restoring confidence and the will to fight.<sup>249</sup> Three days after this conference General Brussilov was relieved from his post; Kornilov, who'd become prominent thanks to his activities in the recent operations, was named commander-in-chief. After this change at the highest level, Generals Baluiev, Denikin and Volodchenko held command of the Southwest Front in rapid succession.

But Russia's military situation didn't improve, and the developments on the Southwest Front continued their fateful course. At least the defeated 7<sup>th</sup> Army under Selivachev and 8<sup>th</sup> Army under Cheremisov rallied for new resistance along the Zbrucz border river. However, south of the Dniester the XXXIII, XVI and XII Corps of 8<sup>th</sup> Army, which were supposed to halt their opponents' advance at Napolokoutz, Werenczanka and Doroschoutz, failed to do so.

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<sup>249</sup>Knox, Vol. II, pp. 667 ff. Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 87 ff. Spannocchi, pp. 115 ff.



On 30 and 31 July the extreme southern wing of Cheremisov's Army halted the pursuing k.u.k. XIII Corps on the heights east of Sniatyn, while the units fighting south of the Dniester continued to fall back under strong pressure from Litzmann's group. On the 31<sup>st</sup> the Transylvanians of GM Adalbert Kaltenborn's 16 ID and the Germans of G.Lt Sieger's 16 Res ID had already reached Zastawna [Zastawa]. While fighting continuously and launching desperate counter-thrusts against 8 Bav Res ID, the Russians now fell back step by step all along the front of Kritek's Army, toward the city of Czernowitz.

Shoulder to shoulder with the southern wing of Cheremisov's Army, XI Corps of 1<sup>st</sup> Army stood fast on the southern bank of the Pruth; on 31 July they resisted FML Fabini's divisions near Lower-Stanestie. But after their neighbors to the right pulled back to the edge of the heights of Kuczurmik, in the night of 31 July-1 August the XI Russian Corps also evacuated their positions and retreated into the area northwest of Storozynetz. Farther south the XXIII Corps was withdrawing slowly and still offering resistance to the 200 German ID in the forested sector by the source of the Sereth River; they blocked the outlet into the wider part of the valley.

In their relentless pursuit the Aus-Hung. and German units of the armies of Bothmer, Kritek and Kövess had already moved as much as 100 kilometers beyond the railheads of their supply lines. In the broad plains of east Galicia the fields had been untended for a long time due to the Russian occupation so the horses, who were weak to begin with, found hardly any nourishment. Supplies began to run out. Because many bridges had been destroyed, the rail lines couldn't be brought nearer to the front. The supply columns, which had assigned the poorest horses, couldn't keep up with the advance.

Nevertheless the attacking divisions of Kritek's Army and Fabini's group pushed forward on all the roads to Czernowitz. On 1 August and the following day, heavy fighting raged on both sides of the Pruth and farther north as far as the Dniester.<sup>250</sup> The new Russian commander-in-chief Kornilov ordered 8<sup>th</sup> Army to hold Czernowitz for at least six days, regardless of circumstances, so that the enormous stock of military supplies assembled in the city could be evacuated. Cheremisov concentrated all divisions still capable of fighting in the area,

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<sup>250</sup>For these actions - and for the storm of the Jablonica Pass on 24 July - Lt Col. Otto Redlich von Redensbruck, commanding IR 32, was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

so that the attackers could be kept away from the capital of Bukovina for as long as possible.

Under GdI Litzmann's group, the k.u.k. 16 ID was already attacking toward the strongly-defended western slopes of the wooded hills east of Kuczurmik on 1 August. The Germans of 16 Res ID supported GM Adalbert Kaltenborn's Division with a thrust against the enemy's northern flank. Still farther north, on the Dniester the German 83 ID put the Russian XXXIII Corps in serious trouble. A burning sun scorched the combatants. Despite the unusually great heat and the enemy's stubbornness, in the evening the assault waves of Litzmann's Group reached Walawa, at the edge of the heights that lie in front of Kuczurmik and Okna. Combat resumed early on 2 August. The Russians could not longer withstand the powerful pressure from GdI Litzmann's divisions. In the afternoon the enemy started to evacuate their positions. Group Litzmann pushed the Russians sharply back through Walawa, Kuczurmik and Pohorloutz. Meanwhile XIII Corps was still engaged at Schipenitz and unable to break the enemy's resistance.

GdI Litzmann now created a shock group from the k.u.k. 16 ID and 16 Res ID; they would break through south toward Czernowitz. He entrusted 83 ID with guarding the flank toward the east.

While strenuous fighting raged between the Dniester and the Pruth, on 2 August Group Fabini pushed into the Russian position northwest of Storozynetz with powerful artillery support. The commander of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had no means available with which he could fend off his opponents' strong blows. Enveloped in the north by Group Litzmann, he abandoned Czernowitz and ordered a retreat to the line Chotin-Bojan.

Before dawn on 3 August the advanced troops of GM Mihaljevic's 42 Hon ID entered Czernowitz from the north, as did those of Group Fabini from the east. 5 ID of this Group advanced along the southern bank of the Pruth; in the morning they entered the capital of Bukovina, which had been liberated for the third time during the war, with the Army Group commander at their head. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and Group Fabini continued to thrust after the retreating Russians during the day. Group Litzmann reached a line which ran from Toporoutz along the Bessarabian border to the Dniester, while XIII Corps advanced past Rarancze and Mahala.

The advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army continued on 4 August. GO Kritek wanted to conclude the offensive on this day and establish a permanent position between the Dniester and the Pruth, from Raszkow through Szylowcy to Bojan. While Group Litzmann crossed the pre-war

border and occupied Bessarabian soil without encountering noteworthy resistance, XIII Corps came upon a Russian front held by substantial forces between Kalinkowcy and Bojan.

But on the next day, early on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Russians unleashed a powerful counter-thrust. The Dolzok Heights were lost again. The k.u.k. 36 ID fell back and exposed the right flank of the adjacent 8 Bav Res ID, which then was enveloped by the Russians. Some reserves - the two Jaeger battalions attached to the Bav CD, which meanwhile had returned to Group Litzmann - hastened to the scene and halted the enemy.<sup>251</sup>

### **3. The liberation of Bukovina (late July to mid-August)**

#### **a. Plans and orders**

While South Army thrust forward to the Zbrucz and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army advanced on Czernowitz, the allied high commands were thinking of further exploiting the victory they'd won. It was hoped that units could drive over the Sereth and out of Bukovina into Moldavia and conquer this last part of Romania. But on 31 July the German OHL advised the k.u.k. AOK that this promising and significant operation could be carried out only if all the troops were committed to a powerful and ruthless advance on the Pruth. Apparently Ludendorff's doubts were directed at the Aus-Hung. units, several of which had displayed little staying power at Zborow and Stanislau. The General Quartermaster also had to address the question of whether such an advance would take the allies too far from their railroads, many of which had been essentially destroyed and would have to be rebuilt.<sup>252</sup>

The OHL had advised GM Seeckt that they were instructing GFM Mackensen to attack over the lower Sereth into Moldavia with the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army. For the moment the intention of Archduke Joseph's Army Group HQ was that as soon as the main body of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army reached the outlets from the mountains they would pivot sharply to the southeast through Radautz toward Suczawa; supported by the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, they would continue their offensive as far as the Sereth. Thus the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, which was still stationed deep in the mountains, would be rolled up.

To implement this plan, on 27 July Army Group HQ had already

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<sup>251</sup>Hutschenreuther, p. 95

<sup>252</sup>Ludendorff, pp. 347 ff.  Arz, p. 163

ordered GO Kövess that the continuing pursuit by 7<sup>th</sup> Army should be directed toward Czernowitz and Suczawa. The units of the Army's left wing which became available as they wound up behind the right wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were to be shifted to the south. Instructions issued by GO Kövess on 29 July designated the area between the Pruth and Sereth as the goal of the k.u.k. XVII Corps and of the attached 5 ID. The Carpathian Corps, on the other hand, should send 200 ID through Berhometh, Moldauisch Banilla and Petrouitz to the town of Sereth, and 1 ID through Schipoth, Seletin and Oberwikow to Radautz. The k.u.k. XXVI Corps would thrust through Russisch Moldawitza to Solka, while the left wing of Group Krauss moved through Kimpolung and Gurahumora.

Then the k.u.k. high command demanded that Archduke Joseph should make his main effort on the northern wing of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, since the allies planned to carry out a great offensive between the Dniester and Sereth into Moldavia through Dorohoiu. For this purpose the South Army would help 3<sup>rd</sup> Army forward with an attack directed south from the mouth of the Zbrucz. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, on the other hand, would make it impossible for the enemy to make a stand on the eastern bank of the Sereth by thrusting with a strong north wing between that river and the Pruth. To some degree the AOK envisioned a repetition of the breakthrough at Zloczow, in which the left flank would now be protected along the Pruth. Archduke Joseph's HQ did want to invade Moldavia, but only south of the Sereth; they would push the enemy southeast, thus enveloping them from the north. But unlike GO Böhm-Ermolli during the counter-offensive at Zloczow they couldn't count on plentiful reinforcements and time for careful preparation. Moreover, the flow of supplies was already slowing down. Therefore Army Group HQ wished to thrust directly against the flank of the enemy confronting the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, and to be content with reaching the Sereth.<sup>253</sup>

On 31 July the k.u.k. high command ordered Army Group HQ to advance with the XVII and Carpathian Corps in the area between the Sereth and Pruth, and to have XXVI Corps and Group Krauss move in the direction of the cities of Sereth and Suczawa. In response the Army Group requested their superiors at Baden to allow 7<sup>th</sup> Army to rather adhere to the instructions already in place. They pointed out that a quick attack along all the roads south of the Sereth with six infantry and three cavalry divisions toward the line Folticeni-Leorda would achieve their goals sooner than a thrust with just five infantry divisions, tightly crammed together, from the area south of Czernowitz. But the k.u.k. high command wouldn't agree. In their opinion an advance against the

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253Kiszling, "Sommerfeldzug 1917"

enemy in front of 1<sup>st</sup> Army was less urgent than the need to support the k.u.k. XVII Corps; on 1 August they ordered Archduke Joseph once more to advance with a strong left wing between the Sereth and Pruth. Therefore GO Kövess was instructed to be ready to shift the groups of 7<sup>th</sup> Army more toward the north, so that the Carpathian Corps could wheel north of Sereth city.

## **b. The fighting advance by the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army**

### The thrust to the border

In front of the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army the Russians were standing fast on the Czeremosz and the Moldawa until 30 July. When they had to give up this sector, and when XI Corps of their 1<sup>st</sup> Army fell back east between the Sereth and Pruth as far as the pre-war border, the XXIII and XVIII Corps offered new resistance along the line Czudyn [Czudin] - Frassin - Russisch Moldawitza - Kimpolung and finally between the towns of Sereth, Radautz and Gurahumora. 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army pulled back their right wing (XXVI and II Corps) from ridge to ridge toward Kimpolung and Gurahumora, where they protected the northern flank of the Romanian Front.

Thus the k.u.k. 7<sup>th</sup> Army was engaged in numerous actions during their advance. The divisions of G.Lt Conta's group (newly-formed on 29 July from the Carpathian and k.u.k. XXVI Corps) came forward only slowly in the barren, thinly-settled forests and mountains. In these days the scorching July sun burned down into the narrow valleys, which were hemmed in by steep slopes and thick woods; this greatly increased the strain on the troops, who after the long trench war weren't used to marching. The daily fighting always forced them to make difficult detours into the trackless forests.

200 ID advanced through the extensive forests of the Little Sereth. On 30 July they passed Berhometh, on the 31<sup>st</sup> they reached Mihowa after difficult actions with rear guards, and on 1 August were again engaged near Moldauisch Banilla. 1 ID, which pushed forward from Schipoth into the Suczawa valley, moved past Seltin on 30 July and then encountered stubborn resistance in front of Frassin. Meanwhile 40 Hon ID pushed the enemy back in the Brodina valley and on 2 August intervened in 1 ID's action near Falkeu; this town was captured. With difficulty the k.u.k. 59 ID opened the way from Breaza through the mountains to Russisch Moldawitza. After difficult fighting here, on 2 August the Division forced their way over the Moldawitza.

On the left wing of Group Krauss, GM von Jony's 11 Hon CD penetrated the Moldawa valley southeast of Breaza on 29 July. From here the Honved rifle squadrons gained ground slowly over the heights northeast of Fundul Moldowi; on 1 August they reached the vicinity of Sadowa, where they again met stubborn resistance. 6 CD and 5 Hon CD had begun their advance from the Mestecanesci sector on 29 July, and on the next day secured Valeputna and the forested heights southeast of the town. Under the command of GM Edler von Schwer, both cavalry divisions then forced their way east through Pozoritta and over the heights south of the Moldawa valley. On 2 August the 5 Hon CD pushed into Kimpolung.

Meanwhile on 30 July the Russians had also given up their positions opposite GM von Grallert's 74 Hon ID, stationed on the left wing of XI Corps. But the Division had to fight for three days before they threw the enemy rear guards back from Mt Gruiu into the Bistritz valley. In front of the southern wing of XI Corps (51 Hon ID) the Russian front began to break up on 31 July. But when GM von Benke's 51<sup>st</sup> Division thrust forward the Russians defended the entry into the Bistritz valley on the heights west and south of Holda.

While Krauss' Group and Horsetzky's Corps were still fighting in the mountains, on 3 August the main body of the Carpathian Corps emerged out of the forested hills into the plains by Bilka and Petrouitz. Now Army Group HQ wanted 1 and 200 ID to pivot to the southeast. A report had arrived on 2 August from the Eastern Command that 3<sup>rd</sup> Army lacked the strength to continue the offensive into Moldavia. Anyway, the minimum necessary logistical support was unavailable because for the time being the railroad behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was in service only as far as Stanislau. Therefore this Army was forced to halt its offensive and to construct a permanent position with its right wing near Bojan.

Because of the situation of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Archduke Joseph's Army Group HQ felt that the attack they'd been instructed to carry out north of the Sereth toward Dorohoiu no longer promised any success. Archduke Joseph found himself compelled to again consider thrusting with the main body of 7<sup>th</sup> Army to the southeast, from the line Sereth (city)-Gurahumora toward Folticeni and Leorda. GFM Mackensen now intended (as will be explained below) to thrust north along the Sereth with the left wing of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army from the Focsani area. This simultaneous attack from north and south should at least push the enemy opposite 1<sup>st</sup> Army back behind the Sereth. Therefore on 3 August GO Kövess was ordered to send the inner wings of Krauss'

and Conta's groups toward Suczawa; meanwhile XVII Corps would be in echelon behind the northern wing to maintain the link with the k.u.k. XIII Corps at Bojan and to protect the left flank of Group Conta.

Archduke Joseph's HQ now felt that a quick thrust through Suczawa was urgently necessary, since they'd determined that the Russians were shifting reinforcements in this direction. This meant that the enemy either intended to counterattack or to protect their northern flank so they could continue to hold their present front in the Gyergyo and Csik Mountains.

On 2 August GM Seeckt approached the German OHL with a request that they should have the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army advance, thus enhancing the thrust by Kövess' Army and better ensuring that Czernowitz could be held. The OHL approved this suggestion, so on 3 August GO Böhm-Ermolli ordered GO Kritek to move the front of his 3<sup>rd</sup> Army forward to the line Kliszkowcy-Nowosielica. This would protect the left flank of 7<sup>th</sup> Army and support their efforts to secure the Czernowitz-Suczawa rail line, of such great importance for further operations.

But in spite of GM Seeckt's intention of thrusting in the area south of the Sereth (to Folticeni and Leorda), the k.u.k. high command held fast to their belief that the mission of the Carpathian Corps should be above all to help XVII Corps forward; the former command should always stay linked with the latter while thrusting from the area north of Sereth city toward the southeast. To implement this demand, which the AOK expressed ever more forcefully, the Carpathian Corps was finally ordered to first drive the enemy from the vicinity of Sereth (city), Mihaileni and Oprisoheny; then, in cooperation with the k.u.k. XVII Corps, they would thrust ahead north of the Sereth River in the direction of Bucea and Leorda.

#### The advance bogs down

To carry out this order the Carpathian Corps advanced from Bilka and Petrouitz to Sereth, where the Russians had established a bridgehead.<sup>254</sup> In the evening of 6 August, after bitter fighting, the 1 German ID wrested the town of St Onufry from the enemy, but couldn't achieve any further success when they resumed the attack the next day. The Russians maintained their bridgehead around Sereth city. 200 ID, which was supposed to fall upon the rear of the enemy who were opposing 1 ID, came to a halt southwest of

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<sup>254</sup>Dorndorf, "Infanterie Regiment Herzog Karl von Mecklenburg-Strelitz Nr. 43" (Oldenburg-Berlin, 1923), pp. 129 ff.

Tereblestie. On 7 August their left wing intervened in the fighting at Oprischeny to assist the k.u.k. XVII Corps.

After taking Czernowitz the XVII Corps was confronted by a continuous Russian position which ran south from Bojan through Mamornita-Terescheny to Oprischeny-Tereblestie. FML Fabini originally intended to attack this Russian front on the 6<sup>th</sup>, but had to postpone the operation until 9 August due to lack of ammunition. The k.u.k. XIII Corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army at first was supposed to advance to a line between Ryngacz and the eastern edge of Bojan, but after the loss of the Dolzok Heights they also were compelled to halt; they would have to systematically prepare an assault to recover this dominating high ground.

Shortage of ammunition was becoming increasingly apparent everywhere. In particular the units fighting in the thinly-settled mountains were suffering from logistical difficulties. Nevertheless 40 Hon ID, engaged behind 1 ID at Bilka and farther south in the hills at Mardzina, were able on 5 August to storm an enemy position northwest of Radautz. Also the town of Radautz fell into the hands of this Division, which on 6 and 7 August were still able to advance up to Hadikfalva.

59 ID, advancing from Russisch Moldawitza through the mountains, meanwhile thrust toward Solka and Glitt. On 7 August FML Horsetzky instructed the Division to attack Solka and the Ciota Heights. After difficult fighting, this line was also taken on 8 August, but the Ciota Heights were soon lost again.

The k.u.k. XXVI Corps had meanwhile been placed once more directly under 7<sup>th</sup> Army. On 6 August they reached the open, hilly terrain near Radautz and Arbora, first with 40 Hon ID and then with 59 ID. Meanwhile the divisions of Group Krauss remained deep in the mountains. On 3 August the 11 Hon CD and GM Schwer's group (6 CD and 5 hon CD) were still engaged near Kimpolung. Next day the 11 Hon CD reached Frumossa in the Moldawitza valley and pushed the enemy from the heights of Afinetul and Bobecia north of Wama. GM Schwer's cavalry group captured the heights of Mgr. Cailor and Mgr. batrina on 6 August, and the town of Wama on the 8<sup>th</sup>. But in the Gurahumora area the Russians' XXVI Corps, on the right of their 9<sup>th</sup> Army, stood fast and maintained a link with XVIII Corps, fighting on the left wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

In the first week of August, 74 Hon ID of the k.u.k. XI Corps again worked their way forward in the forested mountains north and east of the Bistritza; finally they took the line of heights



Vacarai-Sturzul-Hrebin, south of Slatiora and near Crucea. South of the 74<sup>th</sup>, the left wing of 51 Hon ID advanced to the heights running east of the Bistritza after heavy fighting at the town of Holda. The right wing of the 51<sup>st</sup> mopped up the enemy in the Neagra valley and threw Russian rear guards from the Arsita Heights and from Vrf. Ganei. But after these hard-won successes, Krauss' group couldn't capture any other parts of the enemy front. The right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army clung fast to the heights west of Gurahumora and kept the attackers out of the valleys which lead out of the mountains into the Folticeni basin.

## ***E. The end of the fighting in east Galicia***

### **1. South Army's actions along the Zbrucz line, 29 July to mid-August**

As mentioned previously, GdI Bothmer had ordered that on 29 July the corps of South Army were to force their way across the Zbrucz between the mouth of the Gnila and Skala. But Russian resistance proved to be stronger than expected. Therefore under the Beskid Corps only 197 ID was able to cross the river at Husiatyn, after hard fighting. Continuation of the attack had to be postponed until 30 July so that the necessary ammunition could be brought forward. Meanwhile the 237 and 20 ID, in cooperation with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, guarded the left flank of Bothmer's Army.<sup>255</sup>

On 29 July the k.u.k. XXV Corps had to force their way to the Zbrucz against an enemy force which was still defending the western bank west of Skala. GM Severus' k.u.k. 54 ID captured part of the Russian village of Zbrzyz, which lies on the eastern bank of the river where it forms a loop. Since the Russian positions on this bank of the Zbrucz were strong, the Division was content with this local penetration.

In the sector of G.Lt Heineccius' XXV Res Corps, on 29 July the 241 ID and 4 Ers ID overcame stubborn enemy resistance at Turylcze. In the evening both divisions reached the heights on the western bank of the Zbrucz. The 20 Turkish ID, in conjunction with the Leib Hussar Brigade advancing from the north, attacked the Russians stationed near Wolkowce and drove them back. XXVII Res Corps reached the line Korolowka-Grodek on the 29<sup>th</sup> without fighting. GM Molnar's 38 Hon ID captured Zaleszczyki.

The stubborn resistance which South Army encountered along the Zbrucz on 29 July led to the conclusion that the Russians were nearing the end of their retreat. Apparently the enemy had inserted a large cavalry force in the front to support the infantry of their 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Armies. From intercepted wireless messages and prisoners' statements it was possible at this time to identify 13 to 15 Russian cavalry divisions in the area between the Tarnopol-Woloczysk railroad line and Kamenets-Podolsk, opposite the center of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. They hadn't been reduced by the fighting, since most of them had

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<sup>255</sup>HQ of South Army, "Der Feldzug in Ostgalizien 1917"

hitherto been stationed behind the line.

Also the stern measures introduced by the new commander-in-chief (General Kornilov) to restore military discipline were having some success. The Russian soldiers had been induced to hold out in the new defensive positions on the frontier of Old Russia. The retreating divisions of 7<sup>th</sup> Army rallied behind the Zbrucz along an extended front and prepared to confront their pursuers with determination. The remnants of XII Corps and III Cauc Corps of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were still resisting desperately in the tongue of land between the Zbrucz and Dniester. Here General Baron Wrangel's Cavalry Corps was also deployed to repel the thrust to the southeast, which was a direct threat to the rear of the units fighting south of the Dniester.<sup>256</sup>

Heavy fighting raged along South Army's entire front on 30 July. In the Beskid Corps' sector it was necessary to repulse Russian counter-thrusts directed against the left wing of 237 ID. The attack of this Division toward the heights south of Holeniszczow had to be canceled because the artillery preparation was insufficient. North of Husiatyn the 197 ID were unable to exploit their success of the day before, but did hold the position they'd won against strong enemy counterattacks. The 96 and 223 ID were able to establish themselves on the eastern bank of the river at Zielona. GdI Bothmer placed his Army's reserve, 15 Res ID, at the disposal of the Beskid Corps. They were deployed between 237 and 197 ID.

On 30 July the k.u.k. XXV Corps just scouted the enemy positions and prepared for the attack planned for the next day. Under Heineccius' Corps the 241 ID was finally able in the evening to throw several battalions over the river south of Skala. A further advance was shattered by stubborn enemy resistance. After a difficult struggle the 20 Turkish ID stormed the village of Niwra on the eastern bank, but in the night were thrown out by a counter-thrust.

53 Res ID of XXVII Res Corps reached Krzywczce on 30 July. They thrust against the Russians on the Bilki Brook and with help from 24 Res ID were able to drive them from the western bank that evening. 38 Hon ID pushed enemy units over the Dniester. Like 24 Res ID, they could only advance slowly along bad roads.

GdI Bothmer issued an Army order to provide for the continuation of the attack on 31 July. Advanced troops of the corps were supposed to move ahead to the next parallel river, the Zwaniec

256Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 90 ff.

[Zwanczyk]. But there wasn't enough artillery ammunition to soften up the Russian entrenchments. Therefore the attack of the Beskid Corps faltered on the heights north of Husiatyn and in front of the Szydlowce-Zielona line, without gaining any substantial success. The k.u.k. XXV Corps had no better luck on 31 July. Troops from GM Unschuld's 55 ID who'd thrust over to the eastern bank encountered fierce resistance north of the village of Skala; in the night of 31 July-1 August they had to pull back. On the eastern bank only the village of Zbrzyz was retained by 54 ID.

Because of the enemy's strength, which was also confirmed by air units, and the shortage of artillery ammunition the XXV Res Corps refrained from carrying out any major assault. However, 241 ID and 4 Ers ID were able to somewhat extend their bridgehead positions south of Skala. In the night of 30-31 July the 20 Turkish ID had already once more taken possession of Niwra.

After substantial artillery preparation, in the morning of 31 July GdK von Krug's XXVII Res Corps attacked the position held by Wrangel's Russian Cavalry Corps on the Bilki Brook. The thrust was successful.<sup>257</sup> The enemy's center was broken and their right flank was enveloped at Germakowka, so they hastily retreated. The divisions of XXVII Res Corps followed them closely; after new fighting the Germans reached the line Zalesie-Milenica at the mouth of the Zbrucz.

Because success was so limited and the casualties suffered in the failed attacks of the center of South Army had been substantial, GdI Bothmer meanwhile decided to postpone any further thrusts over the Zbrucz until the arrival of sufficient ammunition. XXVII Res Corps would still clear the enemy out of the land between the Dniester and the Zbrucz, and as soon as possible would place a German division at Germakowka in the Army's reserves. At the same time the Beskid Corps would pull 197 ID from the front to also join these reserves. The Leib Hussar Brigade was placed under XXV Res Corps.

The German Eastern command considered that the task of South Army was accomplished when the Zbrucz border-river was reached. Therefore on 2 August they ordered GdI Bothmer to stop attacking over the Zbrucz and to prepare a permanent position on the western bank. Outposts were to be left in the areas captured east of the river.

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<sup>257</sup>Winzer, pp .198 ff.

## 2. The return to trench warfare on the Zbrucz

The 7<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was apparently trying to throw the detachments of Bothmer's Army which had pushed to the eastern bank of the Zbrucz back over the river. In the nights of 1-2 and 2-3 August the Beskid Corps was heavily assaulted by the enemy at Husiatyn. The first Russian thrust failed completely and the second gained little ground. In both cases the attackers had substantial casualties. After the second enemy thrust was repulsed the Germans systematically evacuated the Husiatyn bridgehead. But they held onto their other two outposts over the river south and north of Zielona.

Meanwhile in the sector of the k.u.k. XXV Corps the creation of a permanent position unfolded without fighting. But for the troops of XXV Res Corps stationed on the eastern bank of the Zbrucz near Turylcze there was heavy fighting in the night of 4-5 August; the enemy gained ground, some of which however was recovered on 5 August. Based on the orders which defined the location of the planned permanent position, the only troops whom XXV Res Corps decided to leave on the eastern bank of the Zbrucz were those east of Turylcze; in the night of 5-6 August they evacuated their other bridgeheads.

In the first days of August the XXVII Res Corps continued to mop up the land between the Zbrucz and Dniester. Despite stubborn fighting, by the evening of 3 August they took the villages of Mlynowka, Czarnokozince, Kudrynce and Zawale which lie between the river bends on the Zbrucz near its mouth. Moreover, some of XXVII Res Corps' artillery intervened with flanking fire to support the actions of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on the south bank of the Dniester. In the afternoon of 7 August a much larger Russian force launched a surprise attack against the detachments of 38 Hon ID which had moved forward to Wygoda and pushed them back to the Division's main position.

In the next few days the Russian artillery still maintained lively harassment fire along most of the Zbrucz. But soon the fighting died down to the level of trench actions or stopped altogether.

In an order issued on 5 August GdI Bothmer indicated the line that was to become the permanent position. The connection on the right with the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was established at Dzwiniograd on the Dniester. From the area south of Paniowce to a point south of Husiatyn the position would run along the western bank of the Zbrucz. On the river's eastern bank the only bridgeheads were at

Puhlaki and on both sides of Zielona; these were weakly-held forward outposts that would be evacuated in the event of a major Russian attack. The town of Husiatyn was a similar outpost on the western bank. From Husiatyn the new defensive position ran through Wasylkowce, Nizborg Str., Soroka and Kluwince up to the junction with the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. South Army's left wing wouldn't pull back from their current locations to this new line until progress was made on its construction.

The new organization of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group

GdI Bothmer had ordered that three front sectors were to be established within South Army:

- . the right wing under XXVII Res Corps with 38 Hon ID, 24 and 53 Res ID,
- . the center under the k.u.k. XXV Corps with 55 and 54 ID, and
- . the left wing under the Beskid Corps with 223 ID, 15 Res ID, and 241, 96 and 237 ID.

For now the Beskid Corps also still commanded parts of the k.u.k. 19 and 32 ID. These units (IR 23 and 70, SchR 29) plus the artillery brigades of 19 and 32 ID made up a combined division under FML Willerding and his staff (the HQ of 32 ID).

The 20 Turkish ID left XXV Res Corps on 10 August, so that they could entrain for Constantinople. GdI Bothmer had to re-assign 197 ID to the Zloczow Sector. Furthermore the German 20 ID, the Leib Hussar Brigade, the HQ of XXV Res Corps and the majority of the heavy artillery also left the front so they could be employed elsewhere. 4 Ers ID, as the Army's reserve, was at first deployed behind XXVII Res Corps; after the departure of 20 German ID the Ersatz Division was placed behind the Beskid Corps.

The Eastern Command ordered that another German division should be given up to the Army Group's reserve, but GdI Bothmer objected. He stated that if the front was further weakened he couldn't guarantee the security of the conquered territory, but declared he was ready to give up the Aus-Hung. troops attached to the Beskid Corps. Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group agreed to this proposal. In place of the combined 32 ID the 241 ID, which originally was supposed to relieve 197 ID, was deployed on the left wing of the Beskid Corps. And on 8 August the Eastern Command canceled the order that HQ of XXV Res Corps should be re-assigned. Therefore it was possible for Bothmer to divide his Army's front into four sectors. This organization was accomplished on 12 August when the divisions stationed on the right wing of the Beskid Corps (223 ID and 15 Res ID) became the "Czortkow Sector" under XXV Res Corps HQ.

During the counter-offensive Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group had several times suggested that the troops of the k.u.k. IX Corps, who'd suffered the severe defeat at Zborow but were somewhat battle-ready again, should be returned to the front; this would give them an opportunity to prove themselves. But the German Eastern Command wouldn't agree. Therefore 19 ID stayed in reserve behind XVIII Corps and 64 Inf Bde behind V Corps. The IX

Corps HQ had no assignment. When GdI Edler von Koennen-Horak became the new commander of IX Corps, on 15 August the HQ finally took over the "Zalosse Sector", held by the k.u.k. 33 and German 92 ID.

The k.u.k. 11 ID had come from 4<sup>th</sup> Army to Zborow to join Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group at the start of August; now they relieved 2 Gd ID. This unit and the newly-arrived 232 ID served for the time being as the reserves of the Zloczow Sector. Toward the middle of August the 2 Gd ID and LI Corps HQ moved back through Cholm toward the north. They were soon followed by 1 Gd ID and the HQ of XXIII Res Corps. All of these troops had been chosen for an operation against Riga, to be described later.

After the allied counter-offensive had reached the Zbrucz border-river and recovered most of Bukovina, their energy was essentially exhausted. The main reason was the difficulty of bringing up supplies, especially ammunition. But the unexpectedly strong resistance of the Russians, who stubbornly defended the border of their own country, also played a part. Nevertheless the units in Bukovina would soon be asked once more to attack, hoping to drive southeast into Moldavia; bitter fighting had already been raging in the southern part of the latter province since the last week of July.

## **VII. The Last Battles in the Romanian Theater of Operations**

### ***A. The offensive of the rebuilt Romanian Army***

#### **1. The Russo-Romanian plan of operations; counter-measures of the Central Powers**

##### The enemy plans

In the Stavka's overall planning for the year 1917 King Ferdinand's Romanian Front played an important role; the general spring offensive in the East was supposed to open with an attack to recover Dobruja. But when the Russian Empire was shaken by revolution in mid-March the Chief of Staff of the Romanian Front, General Sakharov, scaled back the goals of the attack; on 21 March he stated that the immediate objective was to pin down the



enemy and keep them from transferring forces by mounting small-scale thrusts. The three Russian armies were to bear the main burden, while a supporting role was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army. The commander of this Army, General Averescu, complained to his King that his troops were capable of accomplishing more than just this secondary assignment. The reconstruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army was complete, and like the neighboring Russian armies it was numerically superior to its opponents; therefore the General requested that he should now be given the opportunity to launch a powerful attack to liberate the homeland.<sup>258</sup>

But the military spirit of the Russian divisions on the Romanian Front sank as quickly as on the other Fronts, and the spring offensive was therefore canceled. At the commanders' conference at Mogilev in mid-May, they once more considered the plan to break through the wall of the Central Powers in the south, along the Danube, and to recover Dobruja. But the Romanian high command expected that little would be gained by this operation; Presan, their Chief of the General Staff, proposed to the Stavka that the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army should be attacked at Namoloasa so that as much of Wallachia as possible could be liberated.<sup>259</sup> As a result, on 30 May General Shcherbachev - who'd succeeded General Sakharov as the leading Russian leader on the Romanian Front - issued the orders from King Ferdinand. Attacks were to be undertaken throughout the theater of operations, so as to weaken the Central Powers' forces everywhere; in particular their units in the Namoloasa-Focsani area were to be destroyed. This principal task was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, which would enter the front between 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies and break through the German defensive positions in the direction of Romnicu-Sarat. 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, their neighbors to the south, would attack with their western wing to the lower course of the Buzeu, protecting the Romanians' left flank, and if possible would later thrust to Braila. To the right of the Romanian attacking group the 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was to capture the Mgr. Odobesci and advance to the Milcovbach, which would make the German position at Focsani untenable. The left wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army would overcome the resistance of Gerok's Group and then thrust south into the Putna valley. Finally the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army would pin down the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army with local attacks and prevent them from shifting reserves. After two postponements, 22 July was chosen as the date to start the offensive.<sup>260</sup>

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258Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 31 ff.

259Kiritzesco, p. 290

260Kiritzesco, pp. 305 ff. Vinogradsky, pp. 134 ff. Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 19 ff.

Meanwhile vigorous preparations were under way. General Berthelot's French military mission had rebuilt the Romanian Army and trained them, using lessons learned in the West, to use the latest equipment and tactics, including cooperation between the various arms. Russian officers had also helped train the artillery. France provided the majority of the necessary military equipment. Thus the armed forces of the Kingdom, shattered in 1916, had again become a reliable instrument of war. The Romanian soldiers hadn't been affected at all by the weakening of the neighboring Russians. Their restored Army was in the best of spirits and desired to employ their new skills to recover their fatherland.<sup>261</sup> By summer 1917 ten of the 15 infantry divisions were ready for battle, and would be used by the Romanian high command in the offensive. General Averescu's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (1, 3, 6 and 8 ID; 2 Calarasi Bde) had stayed at the front during the reorganization. Around the start of July General Cristescu's Army also entered the front. It consisted of the 5, 9, 12, 13 and 14 ID, the Border Brigade, both cavalry divisions, and the 1 Calarasi Bde; the units were deployed on the Sereth line between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies, taking over the sector near Namoloasa. The 7 Romanian ID was in the strategic reserves. The troops of I Corps (2, 4 and 11 ID) were greatly weakened by wartime epidemics; the Corps was still not at full strength and was being rebuilt. The two divisions of V Corps (10 and 15 ID) were also held back.

#### The Central Powers' analysis of enemy intentions

The Central Powers' army commanders weren't finding it easy to penetrate the enemy's intentions. On 27 June the German OHL had judged that in the current situation between the Carpathians and the Black Sea an onslaught against Mackensen's Army Group wasn't imminent, but eventually was to be expected. They anticipated that the main attack would occur in the Romanian plains between Braila and Namoloasa, accompanied by smaller-scale operations toward Dobruja and Focsani. It remained questionable whether the enemy would also attack the Trotusu and Oituzu sector; it was possible they would thrust forward in the Carpathians near Kirlibaba.

In the first week of July GFM Mackensen was also receiving more definite intelligence. There was lively artillery fire in the

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<sup>261</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 281 ff. Vinogradsky, pp. 279 ff., 309 ff. and 328 ff. Bujac, "Campagnes de l'armée roumaine" (Paris, 1933), pp. 100 ff. Pétain, "Le drama roumain" (Paris, 1932), pp. 140 ff.

area held by 9<sup>th</sup> Army (now commanded by GdI Eben after GdI Falkenhayn was sent to Turkey). This involved the sector of GdI Kosch's LII Corps (the former Danube Army), held by Turks, Bulgarians and the k.u.k. 145 Inf Bde, as well as Schaer's group (German 109 and Aus-Hung. 92 ID) in the center. There was also brisk fighting in the air. At the forward part of the enemy's front where it extended to the western bank of the Sereth in front of Namoloasa, they were building new bridges over the river. There was heavy road and rail traffic behind the Russian and Romanian lines. But on 8 July the Aus-Hung. Chief of the General Staff, GdI Arz, still didn't believe there would be a major Russian operation against the Sereth line, because the XXIX Corps with three divisions had pulled back from the area, and apparently XLVII Corps had gone also. Arz suggested to Hindenburg that units should be taken from Romania and sent to east Galicia. But Ludendorff responded for the OHL that the enemy's situation was still unclear; they would have to wait to make sure that Russian units were really being called away.

In the next few days Mackensen became more convinced that the enemy was preparing to deliver a serious blow. The Germans initiated counter-measures. The Army Group's reserve, 76 Res ID, was deployed by Eben's Army behind the junction of GdI Kosch's Corps and the 115 ID. Around mid-July GM von Brunswik's k.u.k. 62 ID, which had joined 9<sup>th</sup> Army from the Isonzo front, replaced the German 212 ID in Group Gallwitz; thus the main body of the 212<sup>th</sup> became available to back up the Turks on the Army's right wing. As many troops as possible were taken from the less-menaced I Res Corps and shifted to the endangered front. On the left wing of the group led by Prussian GM von Gallwitz, a mixed detachment (2 battalions, 3 squadrons and 1 battery) was created in cooperation with Archduke Joseph's Army Group. Meanwhile the enemy continued to prepare for the attack without interruption; in front of the target area they dug an extensive trench network and diligently fired their guns. The allies made the obvious response, firing on the enemy assembly points that had been identified; they also sought to set on fire the Romanians' and Russians' crossing points on the river. After 20 July Mackensen's Army Group HQ were certain that the enemy would attack in the area Voinesti-Namoloasa.

#### Measures taken by Archduke Joseph's Army Group

Under Archduke Joseph's Army Group the old pressure points along the front of GO Kövess' 7<sup>th</sup> Army had been the targets of stronger artillery fire since the start of July, apparently in connection with the offensive which opened in east Galicia. But it was

recognized that this enemy activity, as well as their weak, local infantry thrusts, were diversionary operations. Also by GO Freih. von Rohr's 1<sup>st</sup> Army the actions were restricted to harassment fire by the batteries of both sides. Army Group HQ weren't prevented from replacing 8 Bav Res ID (in Litzmann's Group of 1<sup>st</sup> Army) with 7 ID from Kövess' Army and then making the Bavarians available to Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. When GdI Litzmann and his staff also left for Galicia, FML Liposcak took command over 7 ID, the k.u. 16 Lst Inf Bde and 10 CD. VI Corps, whose commander GdI Csanady changed posts with FML Hadfy of XXVI Corps as ordered by the AOK, was placed directly under 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ.

With great diligence the Army Group assembled reports that might provide information about the enemy's morale and their immediate plans. Deserters and spies had much to tell about the war-weariness in the Russians' ranks and their unwillingness to attack. It was also believed that the Romanian soldiers were depressed. To further weaken the enemy's morale and to keep them inactive, Army Group HQ spread the word in their trenches that by attacking in Galicia the Russians had broken the calm on the Eastern front and thus spurned the Central Powers' peace efforts. But it was soon recognized that this propaganda was ineffective, as was the assertion that the new Russia was engaged in further senseless bloodletting merely in the interest of the Entente. Therefore more attention was paid to the measures of the enemy commanders. Around the middle of the month the artillery opposite Gerok's Group was reinforced and began to open sudden bombardments against the German 218 ID. Large-scale Russian and Romanian troop movements were detected behind the front. The Russians had pulled back XLV Corps, which apparently was disintegrating, from the line on the left wing of their 9<sup>th</sup> Army and sent them to the rear; however, the troops that stayed at the front - including those opposite the k.u.k. XXI Corps - displayed more hostile behavior.

Thus on 13 July the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army came to the conclusion that an attack was planned against all of Gerok's group and probably also against VI Corps. The k.u.k. AOK informed Army Group HQ that they would receive the burnt-out 15 and 16 ID (without artillery). They ordered that both divisions should be brought back to strength with replacement troops from 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies and placed in quiet parts of the front; then a battle-ready division should be given up to the Eastern Command. At this point GO Archduke Joseph raised objections with the Chief of the General Staff GdI Arz.<sup>262</sup> The Archduke pointed out that until now

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262FM Archduke Joseph, "The World War as I Saw It" (in Hungarian;

he'd always willingly surrendered units, whenever feasible, to other endangered fronts; thus he had recently sent 8 Bav Res ID and some batteries to Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group, as well as 19,000 trained replacement troops to the Isonzo Army. Besides, front-line strength had been reduced because troops were detached to help with the harvest. The ammunition supply was insufficient for large-scale operations, since much time was consumed in bringing it forward from the railroads to the batteries in the mountains, where roads were few. It was almost certain that the enemy would attack the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. All possible measures had been taken to prepare for the defense. But if there were simultaneous assaults at several points, the Army Group HQ would have to rely "solely on the steadfastness of the garrisons themselves at the front" since both armies lacked sufficient reserves. The order to build up the newly assigned divisions as well as 7 ID from the Army Group's own personnel meant that the battle line would be weakened, since it was necessary to adhere to the principle that only fully-trained replacements should be engaged. Thus it would take a long time to build up the three divisions, at the cost of other formations. Combat strength had already declined to, "or possibly dropped below", the lowest possible level at which the commander could feel responsible for maintaining the front.

In the answer from Baden, the Archduke was told that now in July he was facing the enemy with proportionately more units and weaponry, and in better prepared positions, than had been the case in December 1916. Also he was reminded that if there was an eleventh battle of the Isonzo it might "become imperative" that he give up all of the replacement troops who were ready to fight (11,000 men). Only on 10<sup>th</sup> Army's Carinthian front was the ratio of forces between our units and the enemy's as favorable as it was in Transylvania; elsewhere it was substantially unfavorable. The Central Powers' commanders at all levels, and their troops, had to adjust to these facts. "They are unaltered. We must take chances and must carry on our actions with confidence."

On 15 July the Army Group commander felt it was time to give Group Gerok authority over IR 157 (from German 117 ID), which had moved from the northern part of 7<sup>th</sup> Army to Bereczk. He also removed all restrictions over GdI Gerok's deployment of his troops, so that he could take all necessary measures in response to the enemy's preparations to attack. Gerok expected thrusts in the Susita and Casinu sectors, as well as in the Oituzu and

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Budapest, 1931), Vol. V, pp. 70 ff. This comprehensive work includes almost all of the official correspondence of the Army Group HQ (translated into Hungarian).

Slanic valleys; deserters indicated the assault would start on 18 July. As many troops as possible were drawn from the divisions of Group Ruiz and VIII Corps to serve as sector reserves; they were held ready behind the extended defensive line. Two battalions of IR 157 were sent to the Soveja basin, and one to Sosmezö in the Ojtoz Pass. Also available were the 1300 riflemen of 7 CD, who'd come from Wallachia to Kezdivasarhely where their regiments were being reorganized for purely infantry service.

Archduke Joseph was concerned about the right wing of his forces. Therefore on the 16<sup>th</sup> he instructed Kövess' Army to relieve the remaining troops of German 117 ID from XVII Corps (Res IR 22), along with GM Seydel's divisional staff, as soon as possible. They would be replaced by 8 CD, which had been in reserve. Depending on how the situation developed, the 117<sup>th</sup> Division would either assemble near Group Krauss (as had long been planned), or its final parts would be sent through Des to Bereczk to join 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Both XVII Corps HQ and GO Kövess objected strongly to this measure, which further weakened their front. Army Group HQ couldn't argue with their reasoning, but was unable to offer them any help.

For Group Gerok the 18<sup>th</sup> of July passed without fighting, apparently because the Russians couldn't be induced to attack, but the Group still expected an assault in the next few days. The AOK at Baden, however, believed that the Russians had been withdrawing units from the Romanian Front for some time and that a major enemy offensive was unlikely. They also believed that because of the condition of the Romanian divisions - "evaluated as barely ready for combat" - there couldn't be any "large-scale attacks", although local thrusts by isolated divisions against Group Gerok were possible. The high command also refused to recall to the front the troops of VIII Corps and 1 CD who were working as harvesters.

On 19 July Archduke Joseph ordered 7<sup>th</sup> Army to prepare to make local attacks in case the mighty thrust against the Russians in Galicia, which had opened, spread to the Carpathian front. It was possible that a sharp pursuit would be possible; if so, it was to be conducted quickly and ruthlessly, even if it was necessary to draw troops from less important parts of the front. Meanwhile the first elements of 15 ID, including their March companies, had arrived by 1<sup>st</sup> Army; as soon as the units had been sufficiently rebuilt they were to deploy under XXI Corps, which would initially free up six battalions of 37 Hon ID. On 21 July Army Group HQ believed that Gerok's sector had been sufficiently strengthened by the advent of these reinforcements and the

presence of reserves behind their border with 9<sup>th</sup> Army. It was still uncertain whether the Russian command would be able to rally their troops for an offensive in the next few days. But this question was answered by the enemy artillerists, who opened lively fire upon Gerok's positions as well as those of 31 ID and 3 CD (of XXI Corps) farther north.

Thus the eve of the Russo-Romanian offensive had arrived. This was the last in a series of powerful blows resulting from the Stavka's attempts to carry out a "general offensive on the entire front" against the Central Powers since 1916. The Russians had never been able in fact to attack with all their fronts simultaneously. Now once more, in the high summer of 1917, Kerensky's Provisional Government, the heirs of the Tsar of All the Russias, saw their Southwest, West and finally Romanian Fronts strike one after the other.

The orders of battle on 23 July 1917

## I. Central Powers units opposite the Romanian Front

## A. Mackensen's Army Group (under the German OHL)

Commander = Pruss. GFM von Mackensen

C/Staff = Pruss. GM Hell

**Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army**

Commander = G.Lt Neryezov

Had 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> ID plus reinforced 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Div**German 9<sup>th</sup> Army**

Commander = Pruss. GdI von Eben

C/Staff = Pruss. Lt Col. Bronsart von Schellendorf

## a) LII General Command HQ [Danube Army]

Commander = Pruss. GdI Kosch

C/Staff = Pruss. Col von Werder

. Goltz's Sector - One German Lst IR

. VI Turkish Corps (GM Hilmi Pasha) - 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> ID. Aus-Hung. 145<sup>th</sup> Inf Bde (GM von Hranilovic; 4500 foot, 25

horse, 30 guns, 68 MG) - Bns VI/48, V/69, V/76, VI/BH 1; FJB 19;

k.u. Lst Bn I/28; a Sturm comp. ¼ 3 Sqdn/HHR 10. 3 & 4 Batties/  
RFKR 73; 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 16; Hvy How Batties 24, 26; two trench  
guns. 3 Comp/PB 8. Bulgarian Combined (6<sup>th</sup>) ID

## b) Independent German divisions

115<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM von Kleist)76<sup>th</sup> Res ID (Pruss. G.Lt von Elstermann)

## c) Behr's Group

. German 109<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. G.Lt von Behr). Aus-Hung. 92<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM Edler von Krasel) - 7000 foot, 50 horse  
62 guns, 108 MG. 144 Hon Bde (Col. Bacsilla) - Bn V/71; Hon IR 34 (3); k.u.  
Lst IR 1 (2)

. 203 Sch Bde (Col. Glasner) - SchR 5 (2); k.k. Lst IR 9 (2)

. ¼ 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; ¼ 3 Sqdn/HHR 10

. Horse Arty Bn 7 (4); 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 8; 3 & 4 Batties/  
RFHR 73; 10.4 cm Can Batty 9; Hvy How Batty 65; ten trench  
guns

. 9 Comp/SB 7, 1 Ma Comp/PB 5

## e) German I Reserve Corps

216<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM Vett)



12<sup>th</sup> Bav ID (Bav GM Freiherr von Nagel)  
 89<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM Melms)

f) Gallwitz's Group

. Aus-Hung 62<sup>nd</sup> ID (GM von Brunswik) - 6700 foot, 80 horse, 41 guns, 104 MG  
 . k.k. 24 Lst Bde (Col. Edler von Zuzzi) - k.k. Lst IR 11 (2), 27 (3)  
 . k.k. 121 Lst Bde (Col. Kouff) - k.k. Lst IR 409 (3); k.k. Lst Bn 37; k.u. Lst Bn III/5  
 . A Sturm comp; 4 Sqdn/HR 11  
 . 73 Res FA Bde (Col. Moc) - 1, 2 & 6 Batties/RFKR 73; 1 & 2 Batties/RFHR 73; 4 Batty/Hvy RFAR 73; 3, 4 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 16; seven trench guns  
 . German 217<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM von Gallwitz gennant Dreyling)

g) Directly under 9<sup>th</sup> Army - 2, 3 & 4 Can Batty plus 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 25. 3 Comp/SB 9, 5 Comp/PB 3, 2 Comp/PB 5. 36 Air Comp

**Directly under Mackensen's Army Group** - 12 cm Can Batty 3; 1, 2 & 4 River Mine Platoons; 1, 3 & 4 Comps/Bridging Bn 1. Also the Aus-Hung. Danube Flotilla (under L.Sch-Kapt. Lucich)

B. Archduke Joseph's Army Group (under the k.u.k. AOK)  
 Commander = GO Archduke Joseph  
 C/Staff = Pruss. GM von Seeckt

**Aus-Hung. 1<sup>st</sup> Army**

Commander = GO Freiherr von Rohr  
 C/Staff = Col. Joseph Huber  
 Artillery General = GM Edler von Zwiedinek

a) Gerok's Group (HQ of German XXIV Res Corps)  
 Commander = Württemberg GdI von Gerok  
 C/Staff = Pruss. Major Heinrich von dem Hagen

1) Ruiz's Group

Commander = FML Chevalier de Ruiz  
 C/Staff = Major Freiherr von Mirbach  
 Had 12  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 10 half regts, 2 sqdns, 19 batties, 1 TM comp, 3 tech comps. 12,500 foot, 250 horse, 84 guns, 158 MG  
 . German 218<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss GM von Nostitz; 7500 foot, 100 horse, 56 guns, 54 MG) - 9 bns (Res IR 204 & 256; LW IR 5), 4 Sqdn/Gd DR 1; 9 batties (FAR 85); 428 TM Comp  
 . Aus-Hung. 1<sup>st</sup> CD (FML Chevalier de Ruiz) - 3200 foot, 150 horse, 28 guns, 84 MG

- . 6 Cav Bde (GM von Pongracz) - HR 7 (2), 14 (2)
- . 7 Cav Bde (GM Edler von Pollet) - HR 2 (2), 5 (2), 12 (2)
- . A Sturm sqdn, a mounted sqdn; 9 Comp/SB 12
- . Horse Arty Bn 1 (4); 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 12
- . Group units (1800 foot, 20 MG) - Bn III/Hon IR 315 (from 70<sup>th</sup> ID); two bns of German IR 373 (from 225<sup>th</sup> ID)

## 2) VIII Corps

Commander = FZM Ritter von Benigni

C/Staff = Lt Col. Max Freih. von Pitreich

Had 30 bns, 2 sqdns, 37 batties, 2 TM batties, 5 tech comps.

19,800 foot, 200 horse, 166 guns, 266 MG

- . 71<sup>st</sup> ID (GM Edler von Goldbach) - 12,500 foot, 120 horse, 76 guns, 154 MG
  - . 142 Bde (Col. Wanek) - IR 82 (4); BH IR 5 (4)
  - . 8 Mtn Bde (Col. Paul Rath) - Bns I/15, IV/24, III/35, IV/58; BH FJB 5; Hon IR 33 (3 bns; from 70<sup>th</sup> ID)
  - .  $\frac{3}{4}$  2 Sqdn/Dalm. Mntd Rif Bn;  $\frac{1}{4}$  3 Sqdn/HHR 10
  - . 71 HRFA Bde (Col. Falbrecht) - 2, 3 & 6 Batties/HRFKR 71; HRFHR 71 (5); 4 Batty/Hvy HFAR 71; 5 Can Batty/HFKR 2; Mtn AR 12 (six can and 3 how batties); 1 & 4 Can Batties and 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 15
  - . 2 Comp/SB 8, 2 Ma Comp/PB 5
- . 70<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (FML von Sorsich) - 7300 foot, 80 horse, 84 guns, 112 MG
  - . 207 Hon Bde (Col. Guilleaume) - Hon IR 313 (3), 314 (3), 315 (2)
  - . Attached 15 Bav Res Bde - Bav Res IR 18 (3), German Lst IR 36 (3); II Bn/Bav Res FAR 8 (3), 1 tech comp
  - . 4 Sqdn/HHR 4; 7 Comp/SB 5, 4 Comp/SB 9
  - . 70 HRFA Bde (Col. Skotak) - HRFKR 70 (1-4 & 6 Batties), HRFHR 70 (5); 4 Batty/Hvy HRFAR 70; 1 & 4 Batties/HRFKR 71; 2 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 15; 15 cm Can Batty 8
- . Corps troops - 6 trench guns

## 3) Directly under Group Gerok

. 7<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Graf Marenzi) - 1400 foot, 32 MG. (The Division was still being reorganized as foot, thus only four half regiments were available. The horse batteries were still back with Mackensen's Army Group.)

- . 11 Cav Bde (GM von Mold) - DR 10 (1), UR 12 (1)
- . 20 Cav Bde (Col. Freih. Regner von Bleyleben) - DR 12 (1), UR 3 (1)
- . IR 157 (3 bns) of German 117<sup>th</sup> ID - 2200 foot, 45 MG
- . Also (62 guns) - 5 Batty/FKR 4, 5 Batty/RFKR 61, 5 Batty/HRFKR 70, 5 Batty/HRFKR 71; 30.5 cm Mor Batties 16, 30. 2 Ma Comp/PB 10. Air Comps 29, 44; Balloon Comps 12, 25. Nine German

batties. 14 fixed guns

b) VI Corps

Commander = FML von Hadfy

C/Staff = Col. von Balassa

Had 21 bns, 2 sqdns, 32 batties, 2 TM batties (comps), 4 tech comps; 14,200 foot, 200 horse, 146 guns, 176 MG

. German 225<sup>th</sup> ID (Pruss. GM von Woyna; 6900 foot, 80 horse, 72 guns, 64 MG) - 7 bns (Res IR 8 & 217; one bn of IR 373); 3 Sqdn/UR 13; 11 batties (FAR 47); 413 TM Comp. Attached - Bns II & III of Hon IR 11 (from 39<sup>th</sup> Div); 3 & 4 Batties/HFKR 3, 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 9; 1 & 5 Can Batties plus 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 25

. 39<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM von Breit) - 7300 foot, 120 horse, 74 guns, 112 MG

. 77 Hon Bde (Col. Lengerer) - HIR 9 (3), 11 (2);

Transylvania Vol. Bn

. 78 Hon Bde (GM Daubner) - HIR 10 (3), 16 (3)

. 1 Sqdn/HR 11; 3 Comp/SB 5

. 39 Hon FA Bde (Col. Riedl) - 1, 2 & 6 Batties/HFKR 3; HFKR 39 (6); Hvy HFAR 39 (3); 1 Batty/Hon Mtn Arty Det 39; 3 & 4 Can Batties plus 1 How Batty of Mtn AR 9

. Corps troops - 2 Ma Comp/PB 7, 4 Comp/PB 9

c) Liposcak's Group

Commander = FML Liposcak

C/Staff = Col. Freiherr von Gyurits

Had 15 ½ bns, 10 half regts, 3 sqdns, 31 batties, 2 TM batties, 3 tech comps; 14,400 foot, 240 horse, 137 guns, 216 MG

. 7<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Schmid) - 5100 foot, 65 horse, 68 guns, 72 MG

. 14 Bde (Col. von Falkhausen) - IR 38 (1 ½), 68 (2)

. 71 Bde (Col. Vitzthum) - IR 37 (3); Hon IR 15 (3 bns; from the 37<sup>th</sup> Div)

. 4 Sqdn/HR 4; 9 Comp/SB 4

. 2 Batty/FKR 31, 4 Batty/RFKR 61, 3 & 4 Batties/HFKR 4, 1 Batty/Horse Arty Bn 3, 2 Batty/RFHR 61, 1 Batty/HFHR 37, 6 Batty/HRFHR 72; 1, 2 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 9; 2 & 6 Batties plus 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 16

. 16<sup>th</sup> k.u. Lst Bde (Col. von Paleta; had 5000 foot, 50 horse, 50 MG) - k.u. Lst IR 17 (3), 29 (3); 2 Sqdn/HR 1; 6 Comp/SB 7

. 10<sup>th</sup> CD (GM Viktor von Bauer) - 4300 foot, 125 horse, 48 guns, 94 MG

. 4 Cav Bde (Col. von Horthy) - HR 9 (2), 10 (2), 13 (2); UR 8 (2); k.u. Lst HR 1 (2)

. One mounted sqdn; 1 Ma Comp/PB 8

. 61 Hon FA Bde (Col. von Dobner) - 1, 2, 3 & 6 Batties/RFKR 61; 1, 3, 4 & 6 Batties/RFHR 61; Horse Arty Bn 10 (4);

1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 16, 2 Batty/Hon Mtn Arty Bn 39; 15 cm Can Batty 11; 2 TM Batty/Fort Arty Bn 3  
 . Group units (21 guns) - 5 Batty/FKR 21; five German batteries

## d) XXI Corps

Commander = FML Freiherr von Lütgendorf

C/Staff = Col Höger

Had 28  $\frac{1}{4}$  bns, 1 bike comp, 8 half regts, 4 sqdns, 44 batties, 3 TM batties, 5 tech comps, 1 air comp; 22,150 foot, 550 horse, 220 guns, 339 MG

- . 72<sup>nd</sup> ID (FML Bandian) - 6800 foot, 120 horse, 50 guns, 102 MG
  - . 143 Bde (Col. Edler von Barwik) - IR 105 (3), 106 (3), 107 (3)
    - . 3 Sqdn/HHR 4, 8 Comp/SB 9
    - . 72 Hon FA Bde (Col. Braun) - HRFKR 72 (2-4 & 6 Batties); HRFHR 72 (5); 3 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 23 4 Batty/Hvy FAR 31; Hvy How Batty 64
- . 31<sup>st</sup> ID (GM Leib) - 5900 foot, 150 horse, 68 guns, 83 MG
  - . 61 Bde (Col. Johann von Wolf) - IR 69 (4) only
  - . 62 Bde (Col. Rehwald) - IR 44 (3); BH IR 3 (3)
  - . 1 Sqdn/HR 1; 4 Comp/PB 3
  - . 31 FA Bde (Col. Benesch) - FKR 31 (1, 3, 4 & 6 Batties); FHR 31 (6); 1 & 2 Batties/Hvy FAR 31; 1 Batty/HRFKR 72; 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 23
- . 37<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Haber) - 6200 foot, 180 horse, 66 guns, 82 MG
  - . 73 Hon Bde (Col. Hodula) - HIR 13 (3), 18 (3)
  - . 74 Hon Bde (Col. Pogany) - HIR 14 (3) only
  - . 5 Sqdn/HR 4, 4 Comp/SB 5
  - . 37 Hon FA Bde (Col. Seh) - 1, 2 & 6 Batties/HFKR 4; HFHR 37 (5); 1, 2 & 4 Batties/Hvy HFAR 37; 1 & 2 Can Batties/Mtn AR 23; one fixed batty
- . 3<sup>rd</sup> CD (GM Kopecek) - 3100 foot, 100 horse, 32 guns, 70 MG
  - . 17 Cav Bde (Col. Edler von Kirsch) - DR 3 (2), HR 8 (2); UR 4 (2), 7 (2)
    - . One mounted sqdn
    - . Horse Arty Bn 3 (3); 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 23; Hon Mtn Arty Bn 37 (2); two trench guns
- . Corps troops (150 foot, 4 trench guns, 2 MG) - Hon Bike Comp 4; 8 Comp/SB 1, 5 Comp/PB 5; Air Comp 33

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

. The burnt-out 15<sup>th</sup> ID (without artillery) was coming by train from 3<sup>rd</sup> Army

. Also (800 foot, 14 guns, 6 MG) - Army Sturm Bn; 5<sup>th</sup> Batties of FKR 31 and of HFKR 3, 4 and 5; 6 Can Batty/Mtn AR 23; 2 TM Batty/Fort AR 3; 2 Comp/Bridge Bn 1; 3 Comp/Bridge Bn 2; Air Comps 31 & 39; Armored Train I

TOTALS for 1<sup>st</sup> Army - 111 bns, 1 bike comp, 32 half regts, 13 sqdns, 183 batties, 11 TM batties (comps); 24 tech comps, 5 air comps, 2 balloon comps, 1 armored train. 37, 450 foot, 1440 horse, 829 guns, 1138 MG

### **Aus-Hung. 7<sup>th</sup> Army**

The order of battle is already recorded above in connection with the Bukovina campaign

TOTALS for Archduke Joseph's Army Group (1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armies) - 219 bns, 2 bike comps, 61 half regts, 27 ½ sqdns, 38 batties, 20 TM batties (comps), 48 ½ tech comps, 10 air comps, 4 balloon comps, 1 armored train. 174,750 foot, 2890 horse, 1608 guns, 2595 MG

II. Outline order of battle for the Entente units on the Romanian front

. Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army - XXVI Corps (65, 78, 189 ID; 12 CD), II Corps (26, 84, 193 ID), XXXVI Corps (25, 68, 191 ID), XXIV Corps (2, 48, 49, 188 ID), XL Corps (2, 4 & 6 Rif Divs). (The XIV Corps was leaving the sector by train)

. Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - IV Corps (8 & 6 ID), II Corps (1 & 3 ID); 2 Calarasi Bde

. Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Army - VIII Corps (14 & 15 ID; 3 Turkestan Rif Div), VII Corps (13 & 34 ID; Trans-Amur Cav Div), XXX Corps (71 & 103 ID)

. Romanian 1<sup>st</sup> Army - VI Corps (9 ID; 80 Russian ID), III Corps (13 & 14 ID); reserves - 5 & 12 ID; Border Bde; 1 & 2 Cav Divs; 1 Calarasi Bde

. Russian 6<sup>th</sup> Army - IV Corps (30 & 40 ID), XLVII Corps (3 & 8 Rif Divs), IV Sib Corps (9 & 10 Sib RD); independent (guarding the Danube) - 115 ID, 1 Naval Div; reserves - VI Cav Corps (3 & 8 CD, 3 Don Coss Div); 61 & 124 RD

. Front reserves - XXIX Corps (1 & 7 Rif Divs; 3 Cauc Rif Div); III Cav Corps (10 CD; 1 Don & 1 Terek Coss Divs); 7 Romanian ID

. Romanian units still re-building - I Corps (2, 4, 11 ID), V Corps (10 & 15 ID)

## **2. The attacks over the Sereth and against the eastern border of Transylvania**

### **a. The artillery battle at Namoloasa, 22-25 July**

King Ferdinand of Romania had numerical superiority for the

fighting in Wallachia. The five armies of his Front commanded 47 infantry and 11 cavalry divisions (not counting the five Romanian divisions that weren't yet fit for service). The sector of the Romanian Front extended from the Black Sea into the Forest Carpathians, where it ended in front of 11 Hon CD on the Mestecanesci Pass on the right wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. On the other side, Mackensen and Archduke Joseph had just 28 infantry and 8 cavalry divisions. It's true that most of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had no particular part to play in the offensive, and that many other Russian units had no desire to fight. Nonetheless, the attackers still could rely on substantial forces and assemble a considerable superiority at the points chosen for the assault. On the line as far as Crangeni, General Neryezov's 3<sup>rd</sup> Bulgarian Army and the right wing of Eben's Army (LII General Command and 115 ID) were opposed by General Zurikov's 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, which was concentrated along the lower Sereth. To the right of Zurikov, General Cristescu's 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was deployed to attack at the bend in the front opposite Namoloasa; their III Corps (13 and 14 ID) was in the first line, with 5 ID in support. The newly-formed VI Corps (9 ID, 1 Calarasi Brigade and Russian 80 ID) held the front between Namoloasa and Movileni. Behind his two corps Cristescu held 12 ID, the Border Guard Brigade and both cavalry divisions to exploit the hoped-for success.

The allies opposed this large force mainly with Behr's group<sup>263</sup> (German 109 and Aus-Hung. 92 ID) plus 115 ID, their neighbors on the right. The defenders' reserves were scanty. Each of the two German divisions plus the combined Bulgarian division in Kosch's Corps were backed up by a regiment from 76 Res ID; two battalions of I Res Corps were attached to GM Edler von Krasel's k.u.k. 92 ID. The reserves of the Romanian Front were XXIX Russian Corps (1 and 7 Rif Divs plus 3 Cauc Rif Div) and III Cavalry Corps (10 CD, 1 Don and Terek Coss Divs) behind 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, and 7 Romanian ID behind 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. General Ragosa's 4<sup>th</sup> Army with eight infantry and one cavalry divisions was stationed opposite G.Lt von Morgen's I Res Corps and Group Gallwitz. Ragosa's right wing extended to a point opposite the center of 218 ID (in Group Gerok of the 1<sup>st</sup> k.u.k. Army).

On 22 July the enemy artillery fire swelled greatly opposite many points held by Mackensen's Army Group, especially against the center of 9<sup>th</sup> Army. The Army commander therefore alerted the German IR 42, still stationed north of Romnicu-Sarat; they moved by truck to Group Behr. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the enemy began to fire for effect. Their batteries hammered the center and right wing of

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<sup>263</sup>Schaer's former group was now led by the newly-appointed commander of 109 ID, Prussian G.Lt von Behr.

Eben's Army; the bombardments of Neryezov's Army, Morgen's Corps and Gallwitz's sector were obviously just diversionary. This preparatory fire reached an intensity never before achieved on the Romanian Front. 600 guns were employed opposite the point chosen for the attack near Namoloasa; they expended 170,000 rounds with a total weight of 2000 tons.<sup>264</sup> The defenders responded with powerful, destructive fire on the assembly points of the attackers. When the enemy infantry failed to advance after 25 July, the allies believed their own artillery had broken their opponents' will. But in reality Kerensky had suddenly crossed up the plans of the King of Romania. The Russian government was deeply alarmed by the collapse of their front in Galicia, so on the 25<sup>th</sup> they canceled the offensive which their armies were about to begin in the Romanian theater of operations. With a heavy heart, the Romanian high command had to abandon the assault in which they had placed such great hopes. Thus, despite an enormous expenditure of ammunition the battle of Namoloasa was never fought. The order which General Shcherbachev issued to the Russian armies spoke only of a "temporary" lull in the offensive, so that his forces could be certain they'd be strong enough for fighting in the future. All necessary measures would be taken to produce "iron" discipline.<sup>265</sup>

#### **b. Averescu's Army advances in the Soveja basin, 22-29 July**

General Averescu had long been preparing carefully for the attack by 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, which was stationed opposite Rohr's Aus-Hung. Army between the Susita and Casinu valleys with 56 battalions, 16 squadrons and 66 batteries (316 guns). The weak right wing, IV Romanian Corps (8 ID and half of 6 ID), were supposed to pin down their opponents - the k.u.k. 8 Mtn Bde and 1 CD - in the Casinu area; the main blow would be struck on the left by II Romanian Corps (half of 6 ID and all of 3 ID, with 1 ID and 2 Calarasi Bde in reserve). They would destroy the defensive position of 218 German ID at Marasti and then advance to Campurile and Gaurile. Opposite the southern half of 218 ID, whose lines stretched for 28 km, the veteran VIII Russian Corps of 4<sup>th</sup> Army (15 and 14 ID plus parts of 3 Turkestan Rif Div) was deployed between Racoasa and Iresci; they would support the Romanian attack by reaching the line Gaurile-Iresci. After these initial goals were achieved Averescu intended to move the artillery forward and to bring IV Corps (which would have been

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<sup>264</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 308 ff. Vinogradsky, pp. 361 ff.

<sup>265</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, p. 104

holding back) up to the same level as the main body; then the attack would continue, pivoting to the left, toward the upper Putna.<sup>266</sup>

GdI Gerok's southern sector, held by Group Ruiz (1 CD and German 218 ID), was badly outnumbered by the Romanian-Russian force of six divisions and a cavalry brigade. The front surrounding the Soveja basin was thinly held, and consisted mostly of strong points; it was backed up by just five battalions, which would be of little help in the difficult mountain terrain. Eben's neighboring Army had a reserve of 2 battalions, 3 squadrons and 1 battery stationed behind the border between the commands (in the Putna valley near Colacu). The ratio of forces was somewhat more favorable in the Casinu and Oituzu areas held by the k.u.k. VIII Corps, whose two reinforced divisions were opposed by three or four enemy divisions. Gerok's reserve at the Ojtoz Pass consisted of just one battalion of the German IR 157.

The allies' defensive front had been established where the offensive had stalled in winter; it ran through high forested mountains that were difficult to access. With their limited forces, the defenders had only been able to build up their first line during the half-year pause in the fighting through July. 218 ID had no second position at all. 1 CD had constructed a short line northwest of the bend in the Susita, but it wasn't linked with the defenses of VIII Corps, where works created during the fighting in autumn 1916 could serve as a second position between Runcul mare (# 1108) and N. Sandor (# 1640). In addition, there was a position blocking the pass between the towns of Ojtoz and Bereczk. It was very difficult to bring up supplies and reserves through the broad mountain range. VIII Corps could use only one road through the Ojtoz Pass; it reached the standard-gage railroad at Bereczk. There were hardly any reliable routes leading from the Haromszek to 8 Mtn Bde (of 71 ID) or to Group Ruiz. The lifeline of the troops in the Soveja basin was a route that had been created from a narrow-gage rail line through the woods and an overhead cable railway, which crossed the 30 km wide wall of the Bereczke Mountains and then branched out several times toward the front.

After midnight on 22 July the Romanian cannoneers suddenly opened a destructive bombardment against Group Ruiz, especially against the area on both sides of the Susita valley. The batteries of

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<sup>266</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 61 ff. Kiritzesco, pp. 311 ff.

Vinogradsky, pp. 352 ff. Stoenescu, "Batalia de la Marasti" (Bucharest, 1930). Kiszling, "Die Kämpfe der k.u.k. 1. Armee im Sommer 1917" (an unpublished study).



VIII Russian Corps joined the cannonade, which continued without interruption into the evening hours. The 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army directed powerful artillery fire only against FZM Benigni's VIII Aus-Hung. Corps in the Oituzu and Slanica sector, although some guns did bombard the entire front of Rohr's army as far as the center of FML Lütgendorf's XXI Corps. The enemy infantry only made some isolated and cautious exploratory thrusts, all of which were repulsed without difficulty. Army Group HQ still didn't anticipate any danger and ordered 1<sup>st</sup> Army to send 7 CD by rail to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Here GO Kövess would have them relieve Gren Regt 3 of the 1 German ID, which in turn could return to Conta's Corps for their thrust to the north. The high command urged Archduke Joseph to make 37 Hon ID available as soon as possible for Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group.

As ordered by General Averescu, his artillery kept up harassment fire during the night of 22-23 July; during the day they increased the intensity of their fire for effect. On the left wing they were excellently supported by their Russian neighbors. And the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army also carried out their mission of pinning down their opponents. In the morning the k.u.k. 10 CD of Liposcak's group had to expel Russian intruders from some of their positions. Under Gerok, Benigni's Corps repulsed all the Russian thrusts. Similarly GM von Nostitz's 218 ID fended off Romanian attacks in four places. In the evening Averescu decided that the German defenses were sufficiently damaged and ordered his men to storm them on the following day.<sup>267</sup>

#### 24 July

The enemy batteries in front of Gerok kept firing through the night; at 3:00 AM on 24 July they once more delivered a powerful bombardment - which included poison gas - against the positions and the terrain behind them. The infantry began to attack around 4:00 AM. On the southern wing the 14 and 15 ID of VIII Russian Corps, with great numerical superiority, broke through the opposing German regiment of Nostitz's division after hard fighting. The batteries in this sector performed gallantly; they missed their opportunity to withdraw and thus most of them fell into the enemy's hands. The 3 Romanian ID stormed the fortified village of Marasti at 6:30 AM; then together with half of 6 ID they took the heights stretching to the northwest despite all the Germans' defensive efforts. Here also the defending regiment had to pull back. But on the northern wing the remaining regiment of 218 ID held onto their dominating position on the heights against thrusts by parts of 6 Romanian ID.

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<sup>267</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 88 ff.

At first it wasn't possible to assess the extent of the enemy penetration. By noon the right wing and center of 218 ID had withdrawn to a line running roughly from Vidra through Gaurile to a point east of Campurile. From this point there was only a tentative link with the northern wing, which was still standing fast. Counterattacks initiated south of the Susita couldn't break through, since they lacked the necessary artillery support after the batteries were lost; the enemy guns, on the other hand, effectively dominated the battlefield. Similarly a contemplated counter-thrust north of the valley had to be canceled because the enemy themselves were attacking, and because the defenders had to use their available units to plug gaps in the line and repulse their opponents' assaults.

Gerok didn't believe that his battered troops at Campurile would be able to withstand the renewed onslaught by the larger Romanian force which he anticipated; although the northern wing of 218 ID were holding on, it would be difficult to guard their eastern flank. The reserves couldn't be brought up in time and - above all - didn't have sufficient strength anyway. With a successful thrust along the Susita the Romanians might be able to fall upon the rear of the parts of Group Ruiz still at the original front and to capture 1 CD's artillery. Therefore GdI Gerok intended to withdraw the hitherto-stationary western part of Group Ruiz, pivoting on their left wing. They would build a new front facing east and extending from Rotilesci (in the Susita valley) to D. Arsitei (Point 513). This retreat was to begin in the evening.

But the enemy were already attacking again in the afternoon; they broke through the very porous center of 218 ID north of Gaurile. To save the Division from destruction, Gerok decided to have all of Group Ruiz disengage from the enemy during the night and withdraw to the west. 1 CD would pull back to the line described above while 218 ID retreated to the last of the chain of heights which encircle the Soveja basin on the east. Most of this line was part of the planned but never completed second position. German 9<sup>th</sup> Army undertook the task of occupying the heights northwest of Colacu to maintain contact with Gerok; to protect their own left flank they'd build a switch position on the Putna between Bura and Colacu using the reserves stationed under Group Gallwitz.

Under VIII Corps Col. Rath's 8 Mtn Bde came under strong retaliatory fire from the Romanians and were unable to carry out their planned diversionary operation. On the Mgr. Casinului (Point 1167) IR 82 defeated a surprise Russian attack in the

evening. At other points Roth's Army maintained vigorous artillery fire. 31 ID of Lütgendorf's Corps were temporarily able to capture a small forward position. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ was forced to give up their reserve (Battalion II/44) to XXI Corps and to shift to them a battalion of the German 225 ID.

It was extremely difficult to help the hard-pressed 218 ID because no reserves were on hand and the roads leading to the isolated Soveja basin were so poor. Gerok sent Group Ruiz a battalion of German IR 157 from Sosmezö and Battalion IV/24 from 8 Mtn Bde. Since 7 CD was already entrained for Kövess' Army, the Army Group had available just Res IR 22 of the German 117 ID, which Kövess had relieved by 8 CD so it could join the Carpathian Corps. For the time being this Regiment, plus the Army Group's newly-formed Storm Battalion and six batteries, were the only troops whom Archduke Joseph could send to Gerok's group. And at the same time he was supposed to reinforce 7<sup>th</sup> Army, whose left wing was now joining the pursuit of the Russians by Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group, so they could mount a powerful thrust. For several weeks these two conflicting demands - to defend in the south while attacking in the north - were to bedevil the Army Group, which had such severely limited resources. Furthermore the victorious advance in east Galicia was now causing the German OHL and Aus-Hung. AOK to devise sweeping new plans involving cooperation by the Archduke's Army Group with Böhm-Ermolli; they will be discussed in the next section.

Gerok couldn't count on the arrival of the reinforcements until 29 July. Until then Group Ruiz would have to delay the enemy advance for as long as possible with an elastic defense using their own weak forces. It would be important to maintain their connection on the right wing with the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army.

### 25 July

Group Ruiz were able to occupy their new position without interference from the enemy. Battalion IV/24 and four squadrons, serving as a rear guard at Rotilesci to block the Susita valley, covered the withdrawal of 1 CD. The Romanians followed cautiously, bringing up their artillery; several times they lost contact with their opponents and were uncertain about the location of the new line of resistance. General Averescu deployed 1 ID, hitherto in the Army reserves, between 6 and 3 ID. The only serious fighting on 25 July took place at the junction of the old and new defensive lines, where the Romanians attacked HR 14 and the neighboring Battalion I/15 of 8 Mtn Bde; their assault failed.

In the afternoon General Averescu received the completely unexpected order from the Romanian high command that the offensive should be suspended. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were to make sure the conquered area was well fortified and to group their units so they could resist an assault with favorable prospects. Averescu immediately objected. The excellent morale of the troops would decline if they now fell back to the defensive right after winning a costly victory; moreover, the terrain wasn't suitable for construction of a permanent position. His opponents would be left in possession of a strong and dominating series of heights, behind which they had a useful road network in the Soveja basin. The Romanian high command heeded the words of their Army commander and permitted him to continue to attack until he reached a good line of resistance. But only his 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army would still be advancing on the Moldavian front. Because of the restrictive orders of the Kerensky government, they couldn't even count on much help from VIII Russian Corps.

Averescu ordered his divisions to pursue their opponents. VIII Russian Corps seems to have received instructions to advance to the Putna between Iresci and Valea Sari, thus protecting the Romanians' left flank. It wasn't clear whether the Russians still intended to capture the Mgr. Odobesci, but after the most recent developments the Romanians could hardly expect this. At least the Russians did keep the German 217 ID under heavy fire on 25 July, and GdI Eben had to reckon with the threat to the north

flank of his army by the enemy advance toward the switch position on the Putna. His HQ expected an assault on 217 ID, and to help GM Gallwitz support his left wing they sent him by truck a regiment which hitherto had been stationed in the Army's reserve behind the Aus-Hung. 92 ID. The k.u.k. 62 ID was reassigned from Group Gallwitz to I Res Corps. Archduke Joseph also felt compelled to make still more units available for the southern wing. 7<sup>th</sup> Army would send 8 CD from Group Gerok, and 1<sup>st</sup> Army the 74 Hon Inf Bde (with the HQ of GM Haber's 37 Hon ID), which had been relieved by 15 ID. The high command at Baden agreed that for now all available units of the Army Group should be sent to Gerok, even though the XVII Corps of 7<sup>th</sup> Army would thus be weakened during their pursuit of the Russians.

### 26 July

Early on 26 July the Romanians again assaulted the weakened 218 ID and drove them from the crest line between D. Gheigheleu # 850 and D. Rachitasu me. # 892. Therefore at 8:45 AM Gerok told the divisional commander to make sure he stayed linked with the units on his right and to occupy the heights south of Barsesci. The southern wing of the 218<sup>th</sup>, which was already losing contact with the troops to their left, was supposed to keep the enemy from advancing against the flank of Eben's Army. The Division's center would guard the upper Putna valley on both sides of Tulnici and the left wing would block the Lepsa-Soveja road. 1 CD would hold onto the western edge of the Susita valley until evening to protect 8 Mtn Bde.

After this withdrawal under enemy pressure to a new and totally-unprepared position, there was no guarantee that the new front wouldn't also be broken the same day, further endangering the retreat of 1 CD. There were no satisfactory places to station the batteries on the western edge of the Soveja basin, and 8 Mtn Bde was being left in an exposed position. Therefore at noon Gerok had already decided to move the line of resistance of Group Ruiz back to the eastern crest of the Bereczke Mountains; this would make it necessary for 8 Mtn Bde to also retreat, to a line running from the Mgr. Casinului straight through the Casinu valley to Mt Resboiului (# 1014). Farther south, 1 CD had one group occupy Mt Chinusu (# 981) and another the La Prafarie Heights (# 1042). During the day Nostitz's Division set foot on the chain of heights from Tiua Neagra (# 1165) to Tulnici, without interference from the enemy. The group originally on the right wing was placed under 9<sup>th</sup> Army to lengthen the line guarding their flank. Gerok took 218 ID and 1 CD under his direct authority, doing away with Ruiz's group command.

After this latest setback to Group Gerok the Chief of the General Staff GdI Arz intervened. He told the Archduke's Army Group that in addition to the reinforcements already on their way (Res IR 22 of 117 ID, half of 37 Hon ID, 8 CD), they should also send 7 CD and as many German troops as possible from 7<sup>th</sup> Army; parts of these forces would cooperate with Mackensen, whose units were to advance from Focsani through Mera against the left flank of VIII Russian Corps. Meanwhile Archduke Joseph had already called back 7 CD from 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Next he planned to send Gren Regt 3 from 1 German ID and the last regiment of 117 ID (Res IR 11) from the sector of Group Krauss. The AOK informed the German OHL, which had urged that 218 ID be supported, about these measures and suggested that half of 13 Sch Div, which was moving by rail from Linsingen's Army Group to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, should be sent ahead to Transylvania. Finally they offered to send the mountain-trained 73 ID, the only reserves of the southwestern front, to the Romanian theater of operations - but only in exchange for another battle-ready division, which GdI Arz believed could most easily be taken from Linsingen's Army Group. Because an eleventh battle was imminent on the Isonzo he couldn't leave Archduke Eugene without a reserve division. The German OHL decided to have 13 Sch Div move ahead to their 9<sup>th</sup> Army. Since the Russians were still pulling back their lines in front of Kövess' Army, GO Rohr also was given contingency orders to advance, beginning with XXI Corps on the left wing, in case the enemy retreat extended to their forces on the Transylvania border.

King Ferdinand of Romania thanked and honored his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army for recovering some of the territory of their homeland; he told General Averescu to advance the right wing onto the Mgr. Casinului and to select a defensive line for the Army that would deprive their opponents in the Soveja basin of all their freedom of movement.<sup>268</sup> Therefore Averescu ordered that to secure the conquered area his men should next day take possession of the chain of mountains extending south from the Mgr. Casinului as well as the heights south of Negrilesci on the left bank of the Putna as far as the right wing of Ragosa's neighboring Army. The 2 Calarasi Brigade was to scout ahead through Soveja with armored cars.<sup>269</sup>

### 27-28 July

In the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> the IV Romanian Corps occupied the

<sup>268</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 115 ff.

<sup>269</sup>Scarisoreanu, "Fragmente din razboiul 1916-1918" (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition; Tiparul Cavalierei, 1934), pp. 223 ff.

positions which had been evacuated by 8 Mtn Bde and 1 CD and felt their way ahead toward the new Aus-Hung. front. Under II Corps the 1 Romanian ID attacked the heights southwest of Soveja in the afternoon and forced the already badly-damaged 218 ID to withdraw to the fork of the Lepsa and Putna valleys. 1 CD, which along with the two attached battalions from 8 Mtn Bde still had over 4000 riflemen, was instructed by Gerok to carry out a supporting thrust the next morning from the Sboina Neagra (# 1374) toward the southeast. The Romanian south wing (3 ID) advanced at Barsesci and forced Eben's Army to bend back the group on their southernmost wing still further in order to maintain their link with Group Gerok. To help keep the line unbroken, 9<sup>th</sup> Army sent three squadrons to the Haulisca area. But from here a gap developed as far as the Putna railroad station, where the right wing of 218 ID was covering the valley.

The Romanian high command saw that most of their goals had been reached, and in the evening ordered that the offensive should halt due to the general situation on the Eastern front (particularly in Galicia). But 2<sup>nd</sup> Army still didn't get to rest. General Averescu had achieved most of his objectives, but his northern wing were still holding back because they'd received little help from their Russian neighbors. Therefore IV Romanian Corps was ordered to capture the line of peaks from Mgr. Casinului to Mt Resboiului on 28 July. 8 ID was to try to capture the Mgr. Casinului itself, along with the ridge to the southeast. While the Romanians attacked from the east, XL Russian Corps had agreed to have a picked shock group, a so-called "Death Battalion", approach the mountain from the north. However, the Russian enlisted men refused to move. In the afternoon a Romanian regiment, singing and with their drums beating, made several assaults against the k.u.k. IR 82, but found that the Szekels - who were defending their own homeland - were unbeatable opponents.<sup>270</sup>

Also the 6 Romanian ID attacked Ruiz's Cavalry Division. An assault group from 1 CD started their own advance against the Tiua Neagra at 5:00 AM (as ordered the day before), but soon collided with a larger enemy force; although the k.u.k. troops put up a fight, they were pushed back. The other parts of 1 CD were stricken, and toward 7:00 AM the northern sector was dented. The divisional commander felt compelled to order a retreat to the highest crest, between Mounts Sboina Neagra (# 1374) and Limba

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270 "The History of the k.u.k. Szekel Infantry Regiment Nr. 82, 1883-1919" (in Magyar; Budapest, 1931), pp. 237 ff. Kiszling, "Die Verteidigung der Höhe Magura Casinului" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt., Vienna, 1927 edition), pp. 554 ff.

Vecina (# 1257). But the Romanians, advancing without pause, reached this crest simultaneously with the hussars and drove several squadrons back toward 8 Mtn Bde. FML Ruiz thereupon ordered his troops to assemble on both sides of the Sboina Verde summit (# 1376), which they were able to do under cover of rear guards. 8 Mtn Bde now had to bend back and extend their right wing from Mt Resboiului to the west as far as the cable railway. The German 218 ID, as well as the opposing 1 Romanian ID stayed in their positions. Averescu's southern wing (parts of 3 ID) pushed the troops on the left flank of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army who were still fighting north of the Putna back toward the river.

Gerok's situation was very serious. Aerial reconnaissance reported that strong enemy columns were moving through Soveja to the west and heading for Mt Resboiului; a large cavalry force was near Rotilesci. The allies had to reckon that both of Gerok's shaken divisions might be pushed farther to the west before the arriving reinforcements could parry the next stroke. Thus the gap that already existed between 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies would grow broader and the enemy's chances of pivoting to the south would increase. GdI Eben beefed up his flank guards on the Putna with a regiment of 76 Res ID, which he could pull from the no longer-threatened Sereth front. But the enemy opposite Rohr's Army might also be planning to continue their pressure to the north and west so as to unhinge the position of Benigni's Corps in the Ojtoz sector. Although the Russians here weren't showing any eagerness to attack, GdI Gerok was very concerned about the road through the Ojtoz Pass; he was striving to quickly deploy units on the Clabucul (# 1364). III Battalion of Hon IR 13 had already arrived and was posted on these heights; the Army Group's Storm Battalion was sent to Sboina Verde. To avoid shipping the other troops on the railroad on a long detour through Sepsi Szt. György, they were detrained at Sepsibükszad and then moved by truck through Kezdivasarhely to Gelencze and Bereczk. 1<sup>st</sup> Army reinforced Group Gerok with a German battalion which was temporarily attached to XXI Corps plus Battalion I/69 from 31 ID and Hon IR 18 from 37<sup>th</sup> Honved Division. Archduke Joseph pulled the HQ and batteries of 117 ID from 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Thus it would be possible to assemble the main body of the 117<sup>th</sup>, as well as of the 37 Hon ID, on the right wing of his forces. The commander of the latter unit, GM Haber, took control of the sector between the Casinu and Lepsa valleys (including 1 CD). Until Haber's arrival the 1 CD, now led by GM Edler von Pollet of 7 Cav Bde, was placed directly under VIII Corps HQ.

FZM Benigni intended to strengthen the brittle defensive line, including the hook-shaped position of 8 Mtn Bde which now was



extended greatly to the west, with his own resources. His Corps reserves (half a battalion of German Landsturm and three half battalions from the 70 Hon and 71 ID) were hastily brought up and provided useful support to the front on 29 July. Enemy action was restricted to harassment fire until late afternoon; then they mounted probing attacks on both sides of the Casinu valley, which were repulsed by 8 Mtn Bde. GdI Gerok planned to improve his defenses with part of the reinforcements, while their main body counterattacked from the Ojtoz sector.

### **3. The Central Powers' new plan of attack**

While the thunder of artillery heralded the Romanian-Russian offensive along the mountains bordering Transylvania and in Moldavia, the Austro-Hungarian and German high commands were already developing their own far-reaching plans. On 24 July GFM Hindenburg proposed to the AOK at Baden that the success which Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group in the East had won against the Russians should be expanded into a decisive blow; Archduke Joseph's Army Group would also attack and drive the enemy back to the Sereth. At the same time the German OHL ordered GFM Mackensen that after he repulsed the enemy onslaught on his front he should pummel the enemy, "in particular the Romanians," along the lower Sereth. It was hoped that the enemy's entire front in the Carpathians would waver, that the advance would continue if possible to the Putna, and that the Russians' and Romanians' will to resist would finally be broken. As described above, on 24 July Archduke Joseph responded to the orders of the k.u.k. high command by instructing 7<sup>th</sup> Army to join the attack of their neighbors to the left; 1<sup>st</sup> Army would take similar action as soon as they'd repulsed the enemy thrust against their right wing.

Mackensen planned to have the center of 9<sup>th</sup> Army break through over the Sereth with strong units near Namoloasa and then to thrust ahead between this river and the Pruth. On 26 July GdI Eben issued general orders for the preparation of the attacking group. In the next few days there was a lively exchange of opinions between the German and Aus-Hung. HQ regarding the way in which the planned operations of Mackensen and Archduke Joseph would be coordinated. On 27 July Archduke Joseph announced that after 7<sup>th</sup> Army left the Forest Carpathians he intended to have them advance onto Romanian soil between Suczawa and Czernowitz while 1<sup>st</sup> Army pushed toward Bacau. In response, the German OHL pointed out to GM Seeckt, the Chief of Staff of the Archduke's Army Group HQ, that 1<sup>st</sup> Army should thrust sharply to the east so they could more effectively work together with Mackensen. The

task of both armies should be "to occupy Moldavia, if our strength is sufficient."

Because of the tense situation on the southern wing of Rohr's Army, on 28 July GdI Arz approached the German OHL with a request to have the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army attack as soon as possible. Haste was all the more necessary because the reinforcements flowing to Group Gerok required considerable time to arrive. To help Gerok directly, it was proposed that the thrust should be directed through Panciu toward the railroad junction at Agiudu-nuou, thus cutting the Romanians' supply line into the Soveja basin. At the same time Mackensen's staff were re-evaluating the situation. Their neighbors on the left were finding it difficult to resist the enemy's ongoing pressure. The switch position which 9<sup>th</sup> Army had established on the Putna to guard their flank was growing ever longer; it was already using up 12 battalions, 3 squadrons and 9 batteries, not counting the regiment from 1 German ID which Kövess' Army had given up and which was approaching the Putna. Now Mackensen's staff at Bucharest learned that Archduke Joseph's measures to prop up his right wing would take at least five days to implement. There was concern that the enemy would be able to solidify their position toward the west with about two divisions, so that a large force (estimated as 3 Romanian and 2 Russian divisions) would be available either to capture the Mgr. Odobesci or thrust to the south. In either scenario it would be unavoidable that Mackensen's strategic reserve, which was being assembled around Romnicu-Sarat for the attack over the lower Sereth, would be diverted to the north. Thus there was no choice but to shift these units to the area around Focsani, so Mackensen decided to attack from here along the west bank of the Sereth and to the northeast. He had to abandon the original plan of opening the attack at a point farther to the east.

For these reasons the OHL also on 29 July ordered Mackensen's Army Group to thrust toward the line Baltaretu-Panciu and to reach Agiudu-nuou, so that a destructive blow could be launched against the enemy in the Soveja basin. Moreover, a bridgehead over the Sereth would be secured in the direction of Tecuciu so that a campaign could be waged on the flat plains of Moldavia. Archduke Joseph's Army Group decided to take part in this offensive with the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Army; Group Gerok with the Aus-Hung. VIII Corps would attack from the Ojtoz valley toward Onesci. This thrust, along with the advance by Eben's Army, would provide relief for 218 ID and 1 CD. A reason for choosing this direction for the attack was the hope that it would be effective against the mutinous troops of the three rifle divisions of XL Russian Corps stationed opposite Benigni. The

terrain was relatively favorable, and would become more open as the offensive moved east; the attackers held the higher ground on the battlefield. If they could advance quickly into the lower Trutusu valley they could also cut the supply line of the XXIV Russian Corps.

In summary, the entire operation which the Central Powers conceived to drive the Romanians from the last remaining portion of their homeland can be regarded as a pincers attack. The right arm would reach from Focsani to the north, and the left would be provided by allied units from Bukovina pivoting to the southeast. On a smaller scale, Gerok's thrust from the Ojtoz sector along with Mackensen's would press the enemy who'd penetrated the Soveja basin between the arms of another pincers. In order to give Group Gerok the necessary relief the allies willingly accepted the drawback of this plan, which was that the main attack from Wallachia would have to develop in a narrow area between the rivers and the mountains. Thus the terrain would be less favorable than if the advance had been directed into the flat lands between the Sereth and the Pruth. If the planners had known that Averescu had already reached his objectives on the southern wing and now wanted only to seize a few strong points to ensure the security of his permanent position, they presumably would have instructed Mackensen to adhere to his original concept.

#### Situation of the Entente forces at the end of July

On 27 July, when the Romanian high command ordered the offensive to stop and told both their armies to conduct a vigorous defense, they assigned to Averescu the 7 and 12 ID, which hitherto had stood in readiness behind 1<sup>st</sup> Army. This would enable him to extend his northern wing into the Daftena valley and to relieve the XL Russian Corps. The Russians were supposed to be out of the line by 4 August. Cristescu's Army would ensure that their line along the Sereth was secure. They gave the 80<sup>th</sup> Russian Division back to Ragosa's Army.

Meanwhile the HQ of the Romanian Front was facing another danger. They feared that the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Aus-Hung. Armies, which were making daily progress in Bukovina, wouldn't stop at the frontier but instead would invade northern Moldavia. As a contingency, King Ferdinand wanted to assemble a strong "mass of maneuver" in the northern part of the province that could fall upon the flank of an enemy invasion. The King held a council of war in Jassy on 3 August; Minister President Bratianu was among the participants. They decided that if enemy pressure continued, the highest

government officials and the military HQ would evacuate to southern Russia. The most important national asset - the gold reserves which had been taken from Bucharest in 1916 - had already been sent to Moscow along with the archives and the treasures of the museums.<sup>271</sup>

A major reorganization of the Front would be necessary to create the battle group in northern Moldavia, to consist of three Russian corps plus one Russian and one Romanian cavalry division. The implementing orders were issued between 1 and 5 August.<sup>272</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army would extend their lines to the right as far as Liesci to include all of the current sector of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army. Thus all of General Cristescu's units would be made available; along with 10 Romanian ID (from the strategic reserves) they would relieve the XXX and VII Russian Corps between Liesci and Clipicesci. These Russians would be sent north along with 1 Romanian CD. The remaining Russians in the area (the three divisions of VIII Corps plus the Trans-Amur Cavalry Division) would come under Cristescu's command. When the re-grouping was complete (by 10 August) both of the King of Romania's Armies would occupy the center of his Front, between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies.

At the start of August Mackensen's staff noted that the enemy pressure from the Soveja basin against the northern flank of their Army Group was ending. They presumed that the VIII Russian Corps was being pulled out of the line north of the switch position along the Putna, to be replaced by Romanians. Therefore the Army Group HQ was once more inclined to revert to the original plan of attacking from the Wallachian plains between the Sereth and the Pruth. They also felt it was desirable to pursue this more promising direction because the OHL promised to send as reinforcements to Eben's Army the German Alpenkorps in addition to half of the k.k. 13 Sch Div. But it would take time for these two units to detrain, so that the operation couldn't start before 9 August. GFM Hindenburg emphasized that the offensive had to start as planned on 6 August, apparently so that it could take place simultaneously with the new thrust from Bukovina. Moreover, the reserves were already assembled at Focsani and the necessary preparations in this area were far advanced. Therefore the attack would start as scheduled, in the direction of Agiudu-nuou.

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271Kiritzesco, pp. 328 ff.

272Dabija, Vol. IV, "Marasesti" (in manuscript)

#### 4. The final days before the Central Powers' offensive

##### Last actions of the Romanian offensive

While the higher-ranking leaders on both sides directed their gaze toward the future, at the front fighting still raged for local advantages. On the Romanian side, General Averescu began to implement the orders of his high command in the night of 29-30 July when he relieved the first two Russian regiments of 6 Russian Rif Div with troops of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; the additional Romanian divisions coming up for this purpose still hadn't arrived. The commander of IV Corps directed all his efforts toward taking the heights on the northern wing which he'd been given as an objective. Here a brigade of 8 ID was still stationed in front of the Mgr. Casinului. The Division's other brigade worked their way forward on the 29<sup>th</sup> toward the lines of the k.u.k. 8 Mtn Bde south of the Casinu valley; on the next day they pushed through a weak point in the defenders' position and in the afternoon captured Mt Resboiului. Col. Rath had to withdraw his troops toward the Clabucul and onto the left slope of the Casinu valley. This success inspired the enemy to also attempt the capture of the Mgr. Casinului, which dominated the surrounding terrain. The 16 Romanian Inf Bde assaulted the defenders several times into the night, but were always thrown back. But the attackers were able to secure the lower summits around the principal massif. In the sector of 1 CD, the Corps commander FZM Benigni had sent the Army Group's Storm Battalion to recover Mt Sboina Neagra. Halfway to their objective, however, the storm troops collided with an advanced detachment of 6 Romanian ID; they drove the enemy back to their main position but finally had to be called back to their own starting points when they came under fire from many batteries.

On 31 July the Romanians concentrated all their energy on the conquest of the Casinului summit, the only one of their objectives still to be achieved. The day started with strong thrusts against the northeastern side of the hotly-contested mountain. IR # 82 drove the attackers back with hand grenades. Since all direct assaults on the dominant peak had failed, in the afternoon the enemy attempted to roll up the southern flank of the Szekel regiment, who were beset on three sides, from the Casinu valley. Quickly deployed reserves once again threw the Romanians back; the position, which had just slightly contracted, was held. FZM Benigni assigned Battalion I/69 to the sector; on the next day, when the enemy once more attacked in the Casinu valley, this Battalion counterattacked along with the neighboring Battalion III/35 (of 8 Mtn Bde). They pushed into the Romanians'

own position and restored the situation.

In the evening of 1 August General Averescu halted the hopeless struggle to secure the mountain massif. Thus the offensive by 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army came to an end. They had thrown their opponents back around 20 km, inflicted substantial casualties, and captured about 500 square km of territory.<sup>273</sup> More important than this success on the battlefield was the boost to morale. The troops regained confidence in their own strength. The Central Powers also had to recognize that their opponents had displayed considerable tactical skill. But the most important result for the future was that Averescu's thrust into the Soveja basin (by Romanian reckoning the "Battle of Marasti") had significantly crossed up the plans of the Central Powers for their next offensive.

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<sup>273</sup>The German 218 ID and k.u.k. 1 CD had suffered severely. 43 guns plus stores of equipment had fallen into enemy hands; Romanian and Russian sources claim that they took more than 3000 prisoners. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army had lost about 7000 men (per Stoenescu, p. 175).

Troop movements by both sides

In the next few days General Averescu shifted his units as he'd been ordered. 7 Romanian ID took over the sector as far as the Daftena valley from the southern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army. In the center of 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army the 12 ID freed up 6 ID, which then was inserted between 7 and 8 ID south of the Ojtoz Brook. Henceforth each Romanian corps (II and IV) commanded three divisions; the 2 Calarasi Brigade was once more pulled behind the front.

Group Gerok made good use of this period to strengthen the front and to make their units ready. In the afternoon of 1 August the commander of 37 Hon ID, GM Haber, took over the sector between the Lepsa and Casinu valleys. Stationed here - in addition to the five hussar regiments of 1 CD placed under his command - were four battalions from 74 Hon Inf Bde, one and a half from 8 Mtn Bde, a Storm Battalion, two German companies and ten batteries. Two battalions of Hon IR 14 came up to support 8 Mtn Bde. To the extent possible the intermingled units (including those of 218 ID) were placed back in order and the small detachments returned to their parent formations.

The allies soon noticed that the enemy had changed the composition of the troops in the front-line garrisons. Gerok now expected to meet stiffer resistance when he began to attack. The Russians opposite Rohr's Army had stayed on the defensive except for some retaliatory actions, while the Romanians displayed a fuller and more intense range of military activity. And once the enemy had finished relieving most of the Russian troops, they renewed their attacks in the Casinu sector on 3 August. There was a consistent pattern of strong artillery fire against the position on the summit and its caverns and against the ridge sloping toward the southeast, followed by onslaughts of deeply-deployed infantry on the northern slope of the Casinu valley. The defenders - IR 82, Battalion III/35 and Hon IR 14 - were still able to frustrate all the enemy's attempts, often in hand-to-hand combat. Thanks in considerable part to the retention of the Mgr. Casinului, the bulwark of Benigni's Corps, Group Gerok were able to prepare for their offensive. Storm troops felt out the enemy positions.

At the request of the OHL, the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army would send the Alpenkorps - then arriving by train - from Focsani northwest toward Racoasa without waiting for all its components to detrain. This would make it easier for Group Gerok to leave the mountains that form a wall around the border of Transylvania. The German

mountain troops could be engaged by 8 or 9 August, which was fixed as the starting point for the attack in the Ojtoz valley. This thrust would be directed by the HQ of VIII k.u.k. Corps, and would involve 70 Hon and 71 ID plus a newly-formed battle group between them under the commander of the German 117 ID, GM Seydel. A motley mixture of troops from both armies came together under Seydel. Already in the sector were two battalions of Hon IR 313 (70 Hon ID) and the Bav 15 Res Inf Bde (Res IR 18 and the German 1st IR 36); they were joined by German Res IR 11, the Württemberg Mountain Battalion (which had come from the Vosges) and a strong artillery group. The parts of 218 ID which had been pushed back in July from Group Gerok onto the left wing of Eben's Army were reinforced by a brigade HQ and Gren Regt 3; simultaneously with Benigni's Corps they would thrust toward Tulnici and Negrilesci, thus restoring a link with the main body of 218 ID. Then the 218 ID and 37 Hon ID would join the general advance to the east. (8 Mtn Bde was placed under 37 Hon ID on 5 August.)

As soon as the units in the Ojtoz area realized that more bellicose Romanians had taken the place of the Russians, the Aust-Hung. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Divisions were also placed under VIII Corps. To simplify the command structure, the troops of each Division were brigaded just as if they were infantry regiments. The two battalions formed by 7 CD joined 70 Hon ID and the four battalions from 8 CD were assigned to 71 ID.

Archduke Joseph emphasized that GdI Gerok should definitely attack on 8 August, even if all his troops and equipment weren't in place; units that came up later would serve as reserves. Since it was hoped that the offensive by Eben's Army and Gerok's Group would cause the enemy's entire front in the mountains to waver, 1<sup>st</sup> Army ordered their other corps to immediately advance if the Russians pulled back. But most of Rohr's Army was too weak to attack fully-manned positions, since all available units had been diverted to Gerok. Starting on 5 August, at least the extreme northern wing (3 CD and 15 ID) were able to move forward somewhat in conjunction with the pursuit by Kövess' neighboring Army.<sup>274</sup>

GdI Eben had greatly thinned out the center and right wing of his 9<sup>th</sup> Army. To the left of the k.u.k. 92 ID of Behr's sector (which was now designated "Group Rimnic"), the 216 ID of I Res Corps was relieved at the front by Landsturm troops brought up from the lines of communication. Thus a total of four divisions

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274 Sacken, "Geschichte des k.u.k. Dragoner Regimentes Friedrich August König von Sachsen Nr. 3", Vol. II (Vienna, 1927), pp. 475 ff.



were assembled around Focsani. G.Lt Morgen strengthened his first-line attacking group by inserting 76 Res ID between 12 Bav and 89 ID. Behind them were deployed the 212, 216 and 115 ID, which would add further weight to the assault. Most of the combat troops of FML Edler von Kalser's k.k. 13 Sch Div (which consisted of 25 Sch Bde and 13 FA Bde) arrived in the area around Urechesci on 5 August; the batteries were distributed among the three attacking divisions of Morgen's Corps. The first elements of G.Lt Sontag's division-sized Alpenkorps were getting off their trains in Focsani.

## ***B. The Central Powers' counter-offensive***

### **1. The Battle of Focsani, 6-13 August**

The overall offensive by 9<sup>th</sup> German Army would develop in two phases. The first thrust was directed north, aiming to reach the line Baltaretu (with a bridgehead on the left bank of the Sereth) - Marasesti - Panciu. Then the Army's left wing would wrest from the enemy the outlets from the mountains and with two divisions continue the pressure toward the north, while a strong attacking group of five divisions, deployed in echelon to the right, would widen the bridgehead over the Sereth and the Birlat to the east as far as the line Movileni-Matca-Negrilesci. The German commanders believed that thus they would force the enemy to withdraw from the lower Sereth out of concern for their lines of communication. Even if - contrary to expectations - this threat to the flank didn't have the desired effect, it would be possible to strike the enemy's rear from the sally port at Tecuciu. It was hoped that units from the northern wing would also be available as soon as the Russians and Romanians opposing the southern part of Rohr's Army had been forced to retreat by the advance of Group Gerok into the Trotusu valley.

Eben's Army had ten divisions available for the attack. They were opposed by 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army which had VII and VIII Corps at the front (with a total of five divisions), backed up by 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (left behind by XXX Corps) and the Trans-Amur Cavalry Division. But also available as a reserve was the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, which early on 6 August had deployed a reinforced cavalry division in the southern part of their newly-assigned sector and were marching toward Tecuciu with their main body (four divisions). 5 ID, the leading unit, had reached Baltaretu; in the evening they were supposed to start relieving VII Russian

Corps.<sup>275</sup> With these Romanian forces the defenders, like their opponents, had ten divisions available, and in a few days they would have more than eleven. Moreover, it should be remembered that the Entente units had 12 to 14 battalions apiece, while most German divisions were just 9 battalions strong.

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<sup>275</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 325 ff. Dabija, Vol. IV, "Marasesti" (in manuscript)

6-7 August

With his attacking group, soon reinforced to four divisions, on 6 August G.Lt Morgen punched a hole 10 km wide in the Russian front; his center moved about 3 km forward.<sup>276</sup> The parts of 34 Russian ID deployed on the Sereth had fled, but set the bridges on fire so that the attackers weren't able to storm over the river. 5 ID, the foremost Romanian unit, sprang to the aid of their allies; on the left bank of the Sereth they deployed batteries which intervened in the fighting with oblique fire. And Romanian infantry crossed to the western bank where by evening they had established a line of resistance in place of the defeated Russians. The Romanian high command ordered General Cristescu to provide all possible aid to his neighbors; during the night he deployed another division next to the sector on the eastern bank of the Sereth (as far as Cosmesti) which was strengthened by cavalry. They backed up the Russian wing fighting on the other side of the river, which was already wavering. Also sent to this sector, which was higher than the battlefield and provided an excellent base for guns to deliver flanking fire, were the heavy batteries of the Romanian reserve artillery. The Russians brought their 71 ID up to Marasesti.

The left wing of the German phalanx, 89 ID, were still stuck in their permanent positions. Here the pressure was to be increased on 7 August, for which purpose GdI Eben sent G.Lt Morgen a division from the Army's reserves. The k.u.k. 62 ID, which hitherto had only supported their German neighbors with batteries, was prepared to join the advance of 89 ID on the next day. This Aus-Hung. Division and the German 217 ID, which both held the line of the Putna, were placed under Bavarian G.Lt Ritter von Wenninger, who'd arrived with the HQ of XVIII Res Corps. The k.k. 13 Sch Div came up to Focsani.

After the attempt to cross the Sereth by surprise had failed, the OHL instructed that on 7 August Morgen's Corps should refrain from assaulting over the river; instead they would simply continue to thrust north. While one division provided protection on the right, the attacking phalanx pushed forward and threatened to penetrate between the inner wings of the Russians and Romanians. The enemy responded with counter-thrusts, but were unable to keep the Germans from setting foot on the northern bank of the Susita. New Romanian troops filled the ranks of the defenders as they were pushed back. Farther to the left the

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<sup>276</sup>Morgen, "Meiner Truppen Heldenkämpfe" (Berlin, 1920), pp. 123 ff. Ortlepp, "Die Kämpfe in der Moldau im Sommer 1917" (in Nachrichtenblatt der 76. Reserve-Division; Hanau, 1930-35)

attackers, helped by a fresh division, gained ground toward the northwest against the stubborn Russians of VII Corps, but the advance didn't yet reach the sector of the Aus-Hung. 62 ID.

The strong resistance of the enemy, who were bringing up fresh forces each day, forced GFM Mackensen to make a new decision. He abandoned the idea of attacking through Tecuciu into Moldavia as the second phase of the offensive. GdI Eben was instructed to entrust the defense of the Sereth to two divisions. To spare the units making the main thrust from the destructive flanking fire of the Romanian batteries, they would advance northwest toward the line Deocheti-Clipicesci, with three divisions in the first line and one in the second. The main effort would be made on the left wing of the attacking group. Therefore a strong force of artillery was assembled on the southern bank of the Putna; it would also include the batteries of the Alpenkorps. The altered plan of attack was designed to defeat the Russians, so that afterward the retreat of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army from the Soveja basin through the Susita and Zabraut valleys could be hindered. Thus in cooperation with Group Gerok, which would advance from the Ojtoz sector on 8 August, it would be possible to destroy the enemy units stuck in the mountains.

The Romanian high command urged General Cristescu to restore the situation as soon as possible in cooperation with the Russian Army commander Ragosa, so that the planned assembly of units in northern Moldavia wouldn't be hindered. Cristescu deployed his last two divisions on the Sereth and was given control of the strategic reserve, the Border Brigade. Late that night the high command was already considering whether to withdraw the inner wings of the 4<sup>th</sup> Russian and 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Armies from the Soveja basin, so that troops could be made available from the shortened front.

#### 8-9 August

On 8 August both the center of Morgen's Corps and the troops guarding the right flank suffered under the concentrated fire of the Romanian batteries on the Sereth. Against determined Romanian resistance, the center was unable to reach the bend in the railroad south of Marasesti. The Russians, who'd also been reinforced, stoutly resisted the Germans who were advancing between the Susita and the Putna. Nevertheless the attackers finally gained the upper hand and their northern wing captured Batinesti. Now the majority of FML Brunswik's Aus-Hung. 62 ID were also able to fight their way over the Putna.

Thus the penetration had expanded to a width of 20 km and to a maximum depth of 6 km at some points. 3300 prisoners and 17 guns had been taken. But these successes, which had been paid for with very heavy casualties in difficult fighting with an unexpectedly stubborn enemy, couldn't disguise from the German leadership the fact that the progress of their attacking group hadn't met their expectations. Mackensen's staff even developed the idea that the thrust on the western bank of the Sereth, where they now were certain that the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was deploying, should only continue up to the current objectives; then the attacking troops would quickly re-group and force their way over the river at Namoloasa as originally planned. But before such a thrust in a more promising direction could be undertaken, for now the current operation would have to continue because of the arrangements with Group Gerok, whose assault was already starting. Perhaps the pincers attack could still develop as planned.

The enemy commanders weren't idle in opposing the persistent German efforts. Thus on 8 August Averescu's Army were instructed to extend their left wing as far as Iresci so as to make the 14 and 15 ID of VIII Russian Corps available in the next few days. The commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, General Cristescu, was preparing to counterattack with his own units.

On 9 August the German divisions pushed the stubborn enemy back step by step and reached the road north of the Susita which ran from Baltaretu through Tisita to Satul Nou. Initially the Aus-Hung. 62 ID also made good progress, along with the neighboring 115 ID. The left wing of Brunswik's Division advanced along the Putna and had already taken Tifesti when they were struck by a strong Russian counterattack. The Landsturm troops, unaccustomed to a war of movement, suffered substantial casualties (including men taken prisoner) and fell back. They rallied at some points along their old position on the Putna, but on the other side of the river were only loosely linked with the left wing of I Res Corps. To ensure that the setback didn't become serious, G.Lt Wenninger (commanding XVIII Res Corps) hastily sent G.Lt Sontag's Alpenkorps, which had deployed northwest of Focsani, to back up the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division. But the employment of these elite troops had anyway already been decided. G.Lt Sontag was supposed to thrust on the next day through the lines held by the Austro-Hungarians, through Satul Nou to Muncelu; then he would cooperate with neighboring units to roll the Russians up toward the northwest. During the day the I Res Corps also came under strong pressure from the Russians, so in the evening the 12 Bav ID (which meanwhile had been relieved from guard duty on the Sereth) was

sent to G.Lt Morgen's left wing. The k.k. 13 Sch Div moved up to Faurei.

10-11 August

On 10 August the enemy tried to seize the initiative with a wide-ranging counterattack. Romanian massed assaults between the Sereth and the stretch of railroad running from north to south provided a difficult test of the Germans' steadfastness. The Russians also heavily assaulted Morgen's left wing west of the railroad. The allies, driven onto the defensive, held onto their lines in fighting that surged back and forth. From the XVIII Res Corps, adjacent on the left, the leading troops of the Alpenkorps helped out the defenders. This unit also helped stabilize the situation in the sector of the k.u.k. 62 ID; it was possible to once more occupy Tifesti. But the Alpenkorps' own attack was delayed by a day.

After the enemy's costly onslaught was everywhere repulsed, GdI Eben was determined to immediately exploit their momentary weakness. Therefore for 11 August he ordered two attacks, which would be carried out simultaneously in different directions. With the Alpenkorps, which had been inserted between the 115 and the k.u.k. 62 ID, the XVIII Res Corps would thrust toward Panciu; I Res Corps would drive toward Marasesti to provide relief for the northern front of 12 Bav ID. But General Cristescu hadn't given up hope that he could reverse the situation with the counterattack he'd begun. He had enough fresh troops available, and ordered that on the 11<sup>th</sup> his units should at least capture positions favorable for later launching the major thrust he was planning. The Border Brigade received urgent instructions from the high command that night, and were sent by truck to join Averescu's hard-pressed Army. The Russians pulled from the front of VIII Corps the greatly-reduced 34 ID, which was no longer willing to fight. The two divisions of the Corps which had been relieved earlier (14 and 15 ID) had reached the area around Panciu.

Under furious pressure from I Res Corps, which on 1 August thrust along the railroad and highway, the Russians fled and exposed the right flank of the Romanians. But the latter bent back their wing and held onto the Marasesti railroad station; they continued to resist the attackers with the courage of desperation. Under XVIII Corps, Sontag's group (the Alpenkorps plus the subordinated Aus-Hung. 62 ID) began to attack in the morning. The Germans were temporarily delayed by a Russian counter-thrust, but then drove the enemy back to the northern bank of the Susita and advanced almost as far as Satul Nou. FML Brunswik and his weak battalions advanced in the narrow area left of the Putna; moving

up the river, they reached Vitanesti.<sup>277</sup>

In the evening of 11 August the Romanian high command removed General Cristescu from his position; they entrusted 1<sup>st</sup> Army to General Grigorescu, who'd distinguished himself the year before as a Corps commander while defending the Ojtoz area and in subsequent operations. The newly-named Army commander was to restore the situation by striking back, together with the Russians and with the 10 ID which would arrive the next day. Further reinforcements were promised. General Grigorescu issued the necessary orders to his newly-reorganized forces - the V Corps west of the Sereth would be the attacking group while III Corps held firmly to a line on the river running downstream from the Baltaretu bridgehead. Then around midnight new instructions arrived from General Shcherbachev at the HQ of the Romanian Front. The 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was subordinated to General Ragosa. To assist this newly-formed army group, the 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army would attack in the Namoloasa bridgehead to pin down opposing units. General Ragosa believed the primary and most important mission of the Russo-Romanian troops under his command was to immediately put an end to the constant German advance; only afterwards would they try to recover their lost lines. The Russian front at Panciu was strengthened by 15 ID. The Trans-Amur cavalry were split up all along the fronts of both corps (VII and VIII). Grigorescu was instructed to hold a brigade in reserve behind the junction of the two armies.

#### 12-13 August

On 12 August G.Lt Morgen's rather exhausted divisions restricted their efforts to improving the trenches north of the Susita, which in general followed the railroad track from the bend in the line south of Marasesti. 216 ID was preparing to strike the Romanian bridgehead in front of Baltaretu. Now the main effort was to be made entirely by XVIII Res Corps. G.Lt Wenninger was instructed to keep up the pressure on the enemy in the direction that would cause them the greatest danger. Therefore G.Lt Sontag launched a powerful thrust with the Alpenkorps through Panciu, regardless of the Russian defenses. This advance also helped the German 115 ID on the right and the Aus-Hung. 62 ID on the left to move forward. The latter Division drove back the Russians between the Susita and the Putna (parts of 103 ID) and captured

<sup>277</sup>After losing 2400 men on 8 and 9 August, the 62 ID still had 3000 riflemen. One of the battalions was with 217 ID in the Putna switch position; to replace them, a German battalion was assigned on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Another 1 ½ battalions of the 62<sup>nd</sup> had been detached to 115 ID on 9 August and still hadn't returned.



Clipicesti. The Landsturm troops brought back 600 prisoners, but themselves lost 1000 men. The right wing of the German 217 ID were able to cross the Putna. The Russians, in particular the shaken VII Corps, withdrew north. The Romanian commander once more had to extend his western wing to avoid becoming separated from his neighbor.

Early on 13 August General Ragosa wanted the Romanians to pull back to Modruzeni (on the right bank of the Sereth) so as to link up with the Russian-held line Iresci-Deocheti. But Grigorescu objected to giving up a strip of ground 3 to 6 km wide which had been defended at great cost, and which included Marasesti, in broad daylight in full sight of their opponents. He declared confidently to both Presan (the Romanian Chief of the General Staff) and to Shcherbachev (the technical assistant to the Front commander) that the Royal Army could hold their positions. Shcherbachev thereupon entrusted General Grigorescu with the entire sector as far as Iresci, thus also including VIII Russian Corps. The completely burnt-out VII Russian Corps was to be relieved by Romanians. The front would first be reliably fortified. For this purpose Grigorescu was supported by fresh reinforcements (15 Romanian ID, two dismounted cavalry brigades and 124 Russian ID) and would assemble all available troops for a concentrated counterattack. Averescu's Army was to place a division in the upper Zabrait valley. General Ragosa was recalled and took command over several corps of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army at Bacau. General Zurikov's 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was once more instructed to make a strong attack at Namoloasa.

Already on 11 August the Russians on the lower Sereth had opened lively artillery fire on Eben's Army (Group Rimnic plus the Bulgarian Combined ID and k.u.k. 145 Inf Bde), which in the following days they expanded to include the Danube line where the Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, now commanded by General Savov, stood guard. The Bulgarians and Turks of Kosch's Corps engaged in lively skirmishes in no-man's land. But the enemy was unable to divert the attention of the German commanders to this area.

Like the Russians and Romanians, the allies on the battlefield in front of Focsani used 13 August to arm themselves for fresh fighting. XVIII Res Corps retained primary responsibility for the attack. G.Lt Wenninger was given 13 Sch Div, which would follow the right wing of the Alpenkorps in echelon. In the evening Sch Regt 1 and the KJB "South Tyrol" (made up of Tyroleans of Italian nationality) reached Batinesti. 24 Sch Regt stayed in the area around Faurei. 62 ID was now placed under Prussian GM von Gallwitz (commander of 217 ID); in the morning

their right wing captured Valeni. Together with 217 ID the 62<sup>nd</sup> cleared the Russians out of the area between the Putna and the Susita north of Clipicesci.

Friend and foe had already been engaged for a full week of bitter fighting and had suffered heavy casualties. On both sides the generals were seeking to force a decision. Thus on 14 August the battle would flame up with new intensity.

## 2. The Battle of the Ojtoz area, 8-13 August

While GFM Mackensen thrust north from Focsani, Archduke Joseph was supposed to have Group Gerok break over the Transylvania border toward the east. The task of FZM Benigni's VIII Corps was to tear open the enemy front as quickly as possible in the direction of Ocna and Onesci. The first goal of the Corps' commander was to get past the narrow part of the Ojtoz valley (where the mountains came close together) and to reach Grozesci.<sup>278</sup> Because of the terrain and the limited forces available, the area chosen for the attack was opposite the position of 71 ID south of the road through the pass, where broad ridges slope toward the east. Here FML Edler von Goldbach with the reinforced 71 ID was to advance in the first onslaught to the crest-line of the D. Lesuntului (between Curita and Ojtuzu). The neighboring 117 German ID (GM Seydel) would advance on both sides of the Ojtoz valley, making their main effort along the chain of hills on the northern side. The 37 and 70 Hon ID, to the right and left of these attackers, were to divert the enemy with storm troop operations. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ instructed that VI Corps was to carry out similar actions farther north. GO Rohr moved his HQ from Szekely Udvarhely to Cziki Szereda so he'd be closer to the scene of the impending struggle.

The organization of VIII Corps was as follows:

- . 71<sup>st</sup> ID (11,000 riflemen; 80 light and 8 heavy guns; 34 medium and heavy trench mortars):
  - . 142 Inf Bde - BH IR 5 (4); Foot Regt of the 8<sup>th</sup> CD (4)
  - . 73 Hon Inf Bde - Bns II/82; I & III/Hon IR 18; II/Hon IR 33; III/Hon IR 314; III/Hon IR 315
  - . Detached group - Hon IR 33 (2 ½); the Army Group's Storm Bn
- . German 117<sup>th</sup> ID (8200 riflemen; 64 light and 8 heavy guns; 22 medium and heavy trench mortars):
  - . 15 Bav Res Inf Bde - Bav Res IR 18 (3); Bns I/Res IR 11, Württemberg Mtn, II/Lst IR 36; II & III Bns/Hon IR 313
  - . Detached group - Bns II/Res IR 11, I & III/Lst IR 36

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<sup>278</sup>This is based on an unpublished study by Max Pitreich on the actions of VIII Corps, and on Kiszling's "Die Kämpfer der k.u.k. 1. Armee."

. 70<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (5100 riflemen, 50 light guns): All infantry were under the 207 Hon Inf Bde - Bns I/Hon IR 313, I & II/Hon IR 314, I & II/Hon IR 315; Foot Regt of the 7<sup>th</sup> CD (2)  
. Under Corps HQ - 33 heavy guns  
VIII Corps' total strength was 24,300 riflemen, 194 light and 49 heavy guns, and 56 trench mortars. 1900 more riflemen were still coming up (Bn II/Hon IR 18, half of DR 14, Bn III/German Res IR 11).

The attack by Benigni's Corps was directed against the 6 and 7 ID of IV Romanian Corps, which were linked toward the northwest with 2 ID of XXIV Russian Corps (on the left wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army).<sup>279</sup>

### 8-9 August

After several hours of artillery preparation, the attack began around 10:00 AM on 8 August. Col. Wanek's 142 Inf Bde of 71 ID, observed by Army Group commander GO Archduke Joseph, pushed into the enemy's first position. As the advance continued, fighting surged back and forth around the wooded summits as the Romanians struck back. The divisional commander FML Goldbach didn't want to prematurely commit Col. Hodula's 73 Hon Inf Bde, which was standing ready behind 142 Bde; the Army Group Chief of Staff GM Seeckt, who was present, concurred. 71 ID depended on the fire of the heavy batteries, but these guns were supposed to also open the way for the main body of 117 ID, which was ready to strike on the other side of the Ojtuzu as soon as the Austro-Hungarians had broken through. In the afternoon, when the attackers were approaching the bottom of the valley of the Lesuntu Brook and the adjacent German detachment (from 117 ID) was also making progress, 73 Hon Inf Bde finally received the order to advance. Instead of following Wanek's Brigade, they were inserted between this unit and Goldbach's regiment-sized southern group so they could launch a thrust to the right against the flank of the D. Lesuntului (Point 677). Both brigades paused on the western edge of the Lesuntu to bring order to their units, which had become confused in the tangled forests; this gave the enemy enough time to prepare for renewed resistance in strength on the opposite bank. Hodula's Brigade tried to capture one of the heights in front of the D. Lesuntului that evening, but couldn't break through. 71 ID had to be content with reaching the line along the Lesuntu Brook; on the northern wing BH IR 5 reached the western edge of Herestrau. In the afternoon it was high time to have the artillery cooperate with 117 ID so GM Seydel's attack could keep rolling. Toward evening German battalions stormed the Vrf. Ungureana # 979.

<sup>279</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 346 ff.

In the secondary sectors the 70 Hon ID pinned down enemy units on the Vrf. Pravila. GdI Hadfy's VI Corps undertook four operations, but only one was successful - on his right wing GM von Woyna's 225 German ID were able to incorporate some Russian trenches in the Mt Cleja area into their own defensive line. In the sector of 37 Hon ID there was lively fighting around the Mgr. Casinului, just as in the preceding days. At several points the German 218 ID felt their way forward against the Romanians, who were rather passive; here the enemy II Corps were sending troops from 1 and 3 ID to relieve the Russians on the Putna, as instructed by their high command.<sup>280</sup> The Romanian Army commander General Averescu had appeared on the battle field of his embattled IV Corps during the day and brought up reserves. On the next day his 6 and 7 ID were supposed to recover their lost positions with a counter-thrust.<sup>281</sup>

FZM Benigni let the offensive continue on 9 August. FML Goldbach was to throw the enemy off the Lesuntului ridge, GM Seydel to advance toward Heights D. Cosna # 788. The inner wings of both divisions were supposed to reach Grozesci and thus move past the last narrow portion of the Ojtoz valley. Their neighbors were to guard the flanks of the attacking wedge.

Early on the 9<sup>th</sup> the Romanians were quicker to move, and started their counterattack. They drove back 71 ID, which lost almost all the ground they'd gained the day before. New preparations were needed for the attack by VIII Corps. From the reserves FML Goldbach received 1 ½ Honved battalions plus half of DR 14, and GM Seydel was assigned a German battalion. Success was won late in the afternoon. 73 Hon Inf Bde, now led by Col. Lörinczy, broke through the Romanians north of the D. Chiosurilor (Point 843)<sup>282</sup>; leaving a weak force opposite this summit, they had a battalion advance toward the glass factory at the edge of the Curitabach valley while the main body rolled up the enemy position toward the D. Lesuntului. Wanek's Brigade made a frontal assault on the chain of heights. When darkness fell, most of the troops had reached the western edge of the forested zone between the glass factory and Herestrau. North of the Oituzu the German 117 ID was also pushing the enemy back to the east. Nevertheless, as the second day of fighting ended the attacking groups still hadn't reached their first objectives.

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280Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 169 ff.

281*Ibid.*, pp. 177 and 182

282TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This point is also referred to as the "D. Chiosurilor" or the "D. Chiosliror."

The onslaught of Benigni's Corps had greatly shaken the Romanians. In addition to men killed or wounded, the latter had lost more than 1000 prisoners on 8-9 August. The numerous gaps torn in the defensive position made it untenable; the commander of IV Corps was forced to pull back his front, starting from the upper Daftena valley, to a line running from the Vrf. Ciresoaia straight over the Ungureana ridge and the D. Lesuntului to the heights northwest of the Mgr. Casinului. The retreat was to take place during the night, but meanwhile the front west of the glass factory was already penetrated by the Austrians. IV Corps had just the March battalions of their divisions as reserves, so General Averescu scraped together all available forces to support them. 2 Calarasi Brigade moved up to Onesci; II Corps, although it was supposed to take over the right wing of Ragosa's Army, also had to give up troops and send them north.<sup>283</sup>

#### 10-11 August

But the troops of Benigni's Corps had also been weakened, and were very tired. No fresh forces were on hand, so the allies weren't able to take advantage of the enemy's critical situation. GdI Gerok ordered that on 10 August the pursuers should stay on the heels of the withdrawing Romanians. At first Benigni's Corps exploited the success they had won within a restricted area. The narrow stretch of road between Herestrau and Grozesci, stubbornly defended by the Romanians, was mopped up. Gradually overcoming enemy resistance, 73 Hon Inf Bde advanced to the glass factory. The southern part of 71 ID gained ground on the ridge-line which stretched to the position of 8 Mtn Bde. Therefore 8 Mtn Bde tried to extend a hand to their neighbors to the north of the Mgr. Casinului, but they were only able to widen their position on the summit to the nearest hilltops. The German 117 ID threw the enemy back from the D. Cosna and entered the Ojtoz valley as far as the western edge of Grozesci. Since the Romanians had willingly withdrawn in front of 70 Hon ID, FML Sorsich began to pursue. A group in the Slanic valley (the reinforced 20 Cav Bde) reached the homonymous village. 207 Hon Inf Bde captured the Pravila Heights (# 875), but encountered resistance in front of the Vrf. Ciresoaia. In the adjacent VI Corps sector the Russians in front of 225 German ID evacuated the entire Mt Cleja massif.

In the southern sector of Group Gerok (in front of 218 ID) the

283The 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Romanian Divisions each had 14 battalions (four infantry regiments of 3 battalions plus a Vanatori regiment of 2 battalions), so they were very strong in comparison to their opponents.

Romanians were still in place, but the Army Group commander got the impression that their supply trains were already leaving the Soveja basin. The Romanians' simultaneous heavy counterattacks against the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army made it seem possible that the enemy wanted to leave their exposed position in the Soveja area through the Susita valley and therefore were trying to gain some breathing room toward the south. The attack toward the northeast which XVIII Res Corps had scheduled for 11 August should cross up this operation.

The Romanian high command had been forced onto the defensive on two sides by the Central Powers' assault; now they diverted 1 CD, which had been moving toward northern Moldavia, to the aid of Averescu's hard-pressed Army. They also shifted the Border Brigade, hitherto stationed as a strategic reserve behind 1<sup>st</sup> Army, as well as several Russian units. At the same time they warned 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's commander that these units, taken from their original missions, were the last ones available; they should be employed appropriately, and the March troops shouldn't be sent to fight prematurely. A few days earlier Averescu had advised his high command against evacuating the Soveja basin, so the time for this measure was now left to his discretion. Because of the general situation it wouldn't be long before the front would have to be shortened so that the southern half of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could withdraw in time from their exposed position. Averescu had concerns about the withdrawal of II Corps. The commander of IV corps was ordered to concentrate all reinforcements as they arrived for a well-prepared counterattack.<sup>284</sup>

On 11 August Goldbach's Division was supposed to capture the heights northwest of Mon. Casin while Seydel's took the Cosna summit. But the 6<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division struck before 71 ID. Wanek's Brigade, and especially Lörinczy's, had to repulse repeated and heavy assaults. The bitter fighting near the glass factory, where Hon IR "Sopron" # 18 held on with determination, lasted until evening.

Meanwhile the 117 ID, with the Württemberg Mountain Battalion as their spearhead, conquered the Cosna Heights (Point 788) shortly after noon.<sup>285</sup> GM Seydel was ordered to push on with his right wing into the Ojtoz valley to help 71 ID. In the afternoon the Germans captured the secondary summits of the Cosna; Hon IR 313, placed under GM Seydel, advanced into the long village of Grozesci. Now the adjacent wing of 71 ID could also work their

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<sup>284</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 191 ff.

<sup>285</sup>Sproesser, "Die Geschichte der Württembergischen Gebirgsschützen" (Stuttgart, 1936), pp. 196 ff.

way forward. FML Sorsich's 70 Hon ID was equally successful. The foot regiment from 7 CD (under Brigadier-Colonel Freih. Regner von Bleyleben), with the Cracow UR # 2 in the van, forced their way through the exit from the Slanic valley; then they occupied the high ground west of Gura Slanicului which dominates the Trotusu valley opposite Ocna. Col. Guilleaume's 207 Hon Inf Bde had captured the Vrf. Ciresoaia (Point 772) with Hon IR 314 and in the evening climbed ahead northeast toward Mesurilor. Half a battalion guarded the broad area of the advance on the left, in the direction of the Daftena valley. Machine guns already had the road on the Trotusu in range. Parts of the right brigade of 7 Romanian ID had already withdrawn on the northeastern bank of the river. The attackers hoped they'd reach Ocna, which was already in sight, and soon Onesci as well. Hadfy's neighboring Corps was instructed to have 225 ID advance northeast against the Russians on the Plaiul Ciunget.

The successful thrust by Sorsich's and Seydel's divisions had greatly intensified the crisis of IV Romanian Corps. The enemy's heavy batteries had already pulled back to Onesci, and the other batteries were also taking up positions further back. In this moment of greatest danger the reserves hastily arrived. A dismounted battalion from 1 CD was thrown into the gap which had opened between 7 and 6 ID and retarded the onslaught of the German division. Other fresh troops were sent against Grozesci, and pushed Hon IR 313 out of the village.

Late in the night the Romanian high command admonished General Averescu to restore the situation regardless of the cost. The Army commander's staff felt that their relative strength was increasing because reinforcements were arriving while the attacks of their opponents were becoming less powerful. Averescu decided to counterattack on 13 August. But it seemed urgent to the General that the Trotusu valley, where important lines of communication were already threatened, should be protected. Therefore a preliminary thrust would be undertaken on the 12<sup>th</sup>, together with the Russians, from the area Daftena-Ocna toward the southwest. On the other side, GdI Gerok placed under VIII Corps the Res IR 22<sup>286</sup>, and ordered that the next task would be to secure the crossing points over the Trotusu at Ocna and Mesurilor.

#### 12-13 August

On 12 August Sorsich's Division moved closer to the Trotusu. 20

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<sup>286</sup>Res IR 22 was an organic part of 117<sup>th</sup> ID, but had been detached to 218<sup>th</sup> German ID.



Cav Bde was soon engaged in fighting on both sides of the Slanic Brook and was halted there. The Landsturm troops of 207 Hon Inf Bde reached Mesurilor and were instructed to blow up the stretch of railroad on the opposite bank of the river. Then in the afternoon the reinforced 7 Romanian ID counterattacked, as did 2 Russian ID. The weak Honved Brigade (of four battalions) was thrown back through the extensive forests to the Ciresoaia Heights, suffering heavy casualties. In the evening the 20 Cav Bde pulled back to the center of the village of Slanic and here sought to restore their links with the neighboring sectors. The German 117 ID saw heavy defensive fighting on the Cosna. Under Goldbach's Division, 73 Hon Inf Bde - and especially the depleted Hon IR 18, had great difficulty in fending off Romanian assaults west of the glass factory. The setback to 70 Hon ID might endanger the left flank of VIII Corps' attacking group. FZM Benigni therefore committed some of his own reserves - Res IR 22 (which was just arriving) plus two battalions from 117 ID and one from 70 Hon ID. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ meanwhile had made available Hon IR 15 of 37 Hon ID (which hitherto had stayed with Group Liposcak) and Army Group HQ sent a newly-formed Storm battalion.

Besides using IV Corps to keep his opponents from leaving the mountains, the Romanian Army commander Averescu also was concerned about the southern wing of II Corps. Here the German pressure threatened to sever the link with the crumbling lines of the Russians. Therefore he instructed 3 ID to keep an eye out for any withdrawal by his neighbors and to maintain a strong reserve behind his junction with the Russians.<sup>287</sup>

On 13 August General Averescu counterattacked with the entire IV Corps. The right wing of 7 ID, along with the Russians, sought to exploit their success of the day before. The weakened battalions of 70 Hon ID, helped by a German battalion, were able with difficulty to hold out in the Ciresoaia valley. Because of the uncertain situation, VI Corps shifted reserves from the Uz valley to their right wing on the Mt Cleja, and had to cancel their planned thrust to the west. The cavalry riflemen at Slanic, mixed with several Honved companies, were also hard-pressed. The German 117 ID had to bend back their left wing. The Romanians stormed toward the Cosna position with parts of 7 ID and with 1 CD (the latter reinforced by Vanatori and Border battalions), enveloping it from three sides. The defenders finally had to abandon the summit to the enemy and to dig in on the heights behind it. At the same time, Goldbach's Division was engaged in heavy battle with 6 Romanian ID. A penetration south of the Lesuntului was sealed off by an extraordinary effort. On

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<sup>287</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 217 ff.

the right wing the elite troops of the Romanian Border Brigade (four battalions) sought to capture the D. Chiosurilor # 843 from Hon IR 33, but found that these Croats were invincible opponents.

Although the ground which General Averescu gained on the Cosna and farther north was limited, his counterattack had prevented his opponents from taking the Trotusu valley. The Aus-Hung. VIII Corps were forced for the time being to merely bring order to their units and to hold fast to their own positions. As Hon IR 15 arrived, their leading battalion was sent to 70 Hon ID. When the next Honved battalion came up they were sent, along with Battalion I/69 which had been drawn from 8 Mtn Bde, to 71 ID. Here they relieved parts of 73 Hon Inf Bde - Hon IR 18 which was completely exhausted by the heavy fighting near the glass factory and the equally worn-out Battalions III/Hon IR 314 and III/Hon IR 315.

### **3. Decisions and plans of the high commands**

Meanwhile both of the Central Powers' high commands, and the Army Group commanders, had come to an agreement about new guidelines for continuing the offensive against Romania. The left wing of Eben's Army was to take advantage of the advance of XVIII Corps; on 14 August they were to capture the heights near Muncelu. If the Romanians nevertheless continued to hold the Soveja basin in front of Group Gerok, the thrust would continue northeast to Racoasa. The primary mission of Archduke Joseph's Army Group would be cooperate with German 9<sup>th</sup> Army in still catching the enemy south of the Trotusu sector, even if the Romanians withdrew.

Therefore Group Gerok were given specific directions for their attack. 218 ID and 1 CD would follow the withdrawing enemy to Soveja. 37 Hon ID, with 8 Mtn Bde, would advance between the lines Mt Resboiului - Gura Vai and Mgr. Casinului - Mon. Casin. Farther north, under VIII Corps the left wing of 71 ID would thrust from Grozesci to Casinu village and the left of 117 ID from the D. Cosna to Onesci. 70 Hon ID would guard their flank. If the attackers reached the area around Mon. Casin, it was planned that the units stationed farther south would shift to the northeast to bypass the forested zone and to reach the Trotusu in force as quickly as possible. There was also some discussion about how the offensive would continue if - on the one hand - the Russians and Romanians were driven back over the river and - on the other - the German attack proceeded to Agiudu-nuou. In this case the Army Group HQ intended to have parts of VIII Corps plus

225 ID guard the line Trotu (village) - Vrf. Ciresoiaia - Plaiul Ciunget toward the north. Gerok's main body (37 Hon ID, 71 and 117 ID, 8 CD) would push from the lower Casinu valley toward the north and cross the Trotusu between Cijuta and Onesci. 218 ID and 1 CD would be pulled back to reserve through the Casinu valley. Then on the other side of the Trotusu a line would be established in the hills from the Sereth to the mouth of the Tazlau; this would enable Eben's Army to carry out an operation on the eastern bank of the Sereth. Army Group HQ believed that after reaching the line described above they'd be able to contribute one or two divisions to Eben's operation.

To implement this ambitious plan for the future, the allies again would have to trust to their luck in battle.

On the enemy's side, General Averescu had learned early on 13 August that his neighbor Ragosa, under pressure from Eben, wanted to withdraw his entire front between the Sereth and the mountains. Now it was high time to evacuate the Soveja basin, since the lines of communication through the Susita and Zabraud valley were no longer free. Therefore in the night of 13-14 August the II Romanian Corps was to carry out the retreat already prepared to the line Mt Resboiului - D. Rachitasu mc. - Vizantia - Iresci, a position making up the chord of the arc which was the current line. Then 1 ID would be placed in reserve and could assemble at the end of the Zabraud valley under the high command. IV Corps was to maintain an active defense; the Border Brigade, which had diminished to half strength, was to be relieved by the 2 Calarasi Brigade.<sup>288</sup>

#### **4. Further actions on the approaches to western Moldavia**

##### **a. The new thrust by Eben's Army and the withdrawal of the Romanians from the Soveja basin, 14-18 August**

###### 14 August

The pace of the battle north of Focsani once more increased on 14 August. The 9<sup>th</sup> German Army attacked in two directions. 216 ID of I Res Corps captured the bridgehead position in front of Baltaretu from the Romanians with a well-delivered blow. Only some small remnants of the enemy's 5 ID were able to find safety

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<sup>288</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 225 ff. Kiritzesco, pp. 353 ff.

on the eastern bank of the Sereth.<sup>289</sup> The task of XVII Res Corps was to thrust sharply into the Susita and Zabraut valleys. The Alpenkorps gained ground from the Russians through Panciu. But 10 Romanian ID, which was standing ready in reserve, slowed down the Germans' onslaught.<sup>290</sup> As the Alpenkorps moved forward they were becoming separated from the left wing of I Res Corps, so overnight the k.k. 13 Sch Div was inserted into the developing gap. FML Kalser was also supposed to cover G.Lt Sontag's flank, since it was reported that the enemy was assembling a large force northwest of Panciu - apparently for a counterattack. To the Alpenkorps' left, Brunswik's weak 62 ID was also able to advance somewhat. The German 217 ID encountered stiff resistance near Iresci. Here General Averescu had withdrawn the neighboring II Corps from the Soveja basin during the night, and was being careful to ensure the security of the junction between his Army and the VIII Russian Corps of Grigorescu's Army.<sup>291</sup> The Central Powers' commanders had been anticipating the Romanian withdrawal for some time. GdI Eben had already taken a substantial number of troops from the force stationed on the Putna switch position (Col. Graf Keller's group); now the rest of the force immediately followed the retreating enemy and also sought to reach out to 218 German ID of Group Gerok.

On the next day the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army wanted to complete the victory of I Res Corps and to have XVIII Corps advance on the heights by Muncelu and Iresci, and also if possible to Racoasa. 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army tried to provide some relief by firing gas shells along the lower course of the Sereth near the mouth of the Buzeu and against Group Rimnic (German 109 and k.u.k. 92 ID), while once more harassing Savov's Bulgarian Army on the Danube. But these operations didn't succeed in fooling GFM Mackensen into diverting units from his northern wing.

GdI Gerok wasn't surprised at all when the Romanians withdrew from the Soveja basin. In the last few days, storm troops of 218 ID scouting ahead had determined that the counter-bombardment by the enemy artillery was diminishing. GM Nostitz's 218 ID and GM Haber's 37 Hon ID were therefore ordered to be ready for the apparently imminent Romanian retreat. On 14 August they were able to immediately follow the enemy. The Germans drove back Romanian rear guards and in the evening reached Soveja town. 37

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289Morgen, pp. 124 ff. Ortlepp, "Die Kämpfe in der Moldau", 1935, 4<sup>th</sup> Issue.

290Dabija, Vol. IV, "Marasesti" (in manuscript). Kiritzesco, pp. 337 ff.

291Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 233 ff.

Hon ID began to move forward from their mountain positions at the same time. 1 CD advanced over Mt Sboina Neagra, and 74 Hon Inf Bde toward Mt Resboiului. But an attempt by 8 Mtn Bde to take a peak north of the Mgr. Casinului was unsuccessful; therefore it was determined that the enemy wasn't willing to also withdraw north of the Casinu valley.

After several days of heavy fighting, the situation in VIII Corps' sector was relatively quiet. Only by 70 Hon ID was there a minor penetration by the enemy west of the Ciresoaia Heights; the situation was restored with the help of several companies from the neighboring 225 ID.

The Romanian high command recognized clearly that their opponents' push toward the north was threatening to penetrate between Grigorescu's and Averescu's Armies. Therefore they instructed 1<sup>st</sup> Army to guard the way to the north "at any cost" and to prepare to counterattack with the arriving reinforcements plus the 1 ID, which had been re-assigned from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The shaken units of VIII Russian Corps were to be replaced by Romanians. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would restore the situation on their right wing as soon as possible. Averescu instructed IV Corps to conduct an active defense and II Corps to support their Russian neighbors (103 ID) with a strong reserve behind the junction of the two forces.

#### 15-16 August

On 15 August the I Res Corps mopped up the last of the Romanians in the narrow area between the Susita and Sereth near the mouth of the former stream; in the Baltaretu bridgehead the enemy had lost 3500 prisoners and 16 guns. They had to pull back their 5 ID, almost wiped out, to rebuild. But the Romanians kept the Germans from pushing forward by blowing up the iron railway and road bridge. The Viennese 13<sup>th</sup> Schützen Division deployed in the sector in front of Panciu and were given back their batteries, hitherto attached to the German divisions. The Alpenkorps worked their way forward north of the Susita toward the Muncelu Heights; but at points where the Russians wavered, both Army commanders (Grigorescu and Averescu) threw strong Romanian units against the attackers. The enemy also offered stiff resistance in their old defensive position Iresci-Racoasa to the German 217 ID.

The southern part of Group Gerok advanced with the intention of regaining the permanent position they'd held until July. Romanian rear guards sought to stop their columns. Serious fighting developed in the afternoon along the enemy's new line of

resistance. 12 Romanian ID kept the 218 German ID from occupying the D. Rachitasu mc. (north of Soveja). The Germans were again unable to break through on the next day because their heavy batteries, checked by destruction of the bridges, couldn't come forward. Therefore they initiated preparations for a systematic assault on the peak. Under 37 Hon ID the 74 Hon Inf Bde captured Mt Resboiului from 8 Romanian ID by 16 August, but when the attackers tried to continue their advance they encountered stubborn resistance everywhere. Moreover, GM Haber's force was weakened by the departure of 1 CD, which Archduke Joseph was sending to XXI Corps. (Here they would relieve 31 ID so that unit could reinforce 7<sup>th</sup> Army). Three regiments of 1 CD left the front immediately.

The partial successes won by 9<sup>th</sup> German Army on the 14<sup>th</sup> and the retreat of the Romanians from the Soveja basin encouraged GdI Eben to continue the operation. It was planned that I Res Corps would first reach the line Marasesti-Deocheti, while XVIII Res Corps took the high ground by Iresci and Muncelu. The latter command would then continue to thrust northwest toward the village of Pralea, which would make it easier for Group Gerok to reach the lower Trotusu. Thus it was hoped that large parts of 9<sup>th</sup> Army would become available so they could break into Moldavia near Namoloasa. Archduke Joseph and Mackensen agreed that the attack, in which Benigni's Corps of Group Gerok would also participate, should start on 19 August. By then I Res Corps would receive the heavy batteries they were expecting and VIII Aus-Hung. Corps their newly-assigned reinforcements (German IR 157 from 117 ID and Battalion II/373 of 225 ID, both of which had hitherto been attached to 218 ID, as well as Battalion I/Hon IR 11 from 39 Hon ID).

On the enemy side, in the evening of 15 August the Romanian Chief of the General Staff Presan asked General Grigorescu (commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Army) when he planned to counterattack. When the latter did strike, he'd be able to count on getting 1 ID from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Presan wanted to first conduct a counter-thrust in the principal area of operations by Marasesti, and thereafter shift units to the Ojtoz sector. But Grigorescu declared that he'd have to stay on the defensive. His casualties had been heavy and his reserves insufficient. It wouldn't be advisable to prematurely commit the last available troops for a counterattack, because then the Germans might also fall upon the neighboring 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army on the lower Sereth. Presan had to agree with his Army commander, whom he merely advised to pay special attention to the right wing, where parts of VIII Russian Corps were still at the front. He told Grigorescu that although it had been possible to rebuild

the Romanian divisions with March regiments, these represented the country's last personnel reserves. In the next few days General Grigorescu intended to have the Romanian divisions on the western bank of the Sereth carry out some local thrusts. He divided the fresh 15 ID and deployed their troops behind both wings of his front. General Averescu created a battle group from half of 1 ID and some additional troops, and placed it behind his left wing so it could support the neighboring 1<sup>st</sup> Army if needed. He sent the other brigade of 1 ID to Onesci.

At Jassy, where the Supreme HQ and the government were situated, the greatest concern about the future of Romania had meanwhile subsided since it had been possible thus far to hold the Central Powers' offensive in check. The transfer of government property to Russia was halted.<sup>292</sup>

#### Troop movements on both sides

The German 9<sup>th</sup> Army regrouped their units prior to resuming the offensive. Under XVIII Res Corps, G.Lt Wenninger inserted 217 ID between the k.k. 13 Sch Div and the Alpenkorps. South of the Susita the burnt-out Aus-Hung. 62 ID was relieved by German troops from the former Putna switch position (Group Keller); these troops, along with the battalions from 218 ID of Gerok's sector, were once more placed under their correct HQ on 18 August. Gren Regt # 3, which had come from 1 German ID, began their return to Kövess' Army. In the next few days 9<sup>th</sup> Army planned to deploy 62 ID on the right wing of Morgen's Corps (next to its Landsturm group), where they'd relieve 212 German ID in guarding the Sereth near Ciuslea.

In Group Gerok, Benigni's Corps intended above all to recover the D. Cosna Heights on 19 August. But to divert the enemy's attention from this area and simultaneously provide 71 ID with a more favorable starting point for a future advance, both of FML Goldbach's brigades carried out a limited assault on the 16<sup>th</sup> between Grozesci and the glass factory. The objective was the edge of the woods east of the Lesuntului ridge and north of the factory. After two hours of artillery preparation the attackers broke through the enemy, throwing back 6 Romanian ID and 2 Calarasi Brigade. The objective line was reached around 9:00 AM and successfully held against repeated Romanian counter-thrusts with concentrated forces. This success was won by Hon IR 15 plus squadrons of the foot regiment of 8 CD (from DR 14 and UR 12)<sup>293</sup>.

<sup>292</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, "Marasesti" (in manuscript), and p. 247.

Kiritzesco, p. 339. Vinogradsky, p. 372.

<sup>293</sup>Foerster-Seyffertitz, "Geschichte des k.u.k. Dragoner

The victors took 1600 prisoners, who came from nine different regiments and March formations of three divisions. This was evidence that after just a week of defensive fighting the enemy was able to survive only by scraping up detachments from a variety of units.

## **b. The double attack by Eben's Army and Gerok's Group, 19-22 August**

### 19 August

On 19 August the I Res Corps of Eben's Army attacked with three divisions on the Marasesti-Deocheti front. By afternoon they had almost reached their objectives when reserves from V Romanian Corps counterattacked the weakened German troops. The enemy broke through 12 Bav ID and thus threatened the flank of the adjacent unit on the left (115 ID); the Germans were forced to return to their starting points. FML Kalser's 13 Sch Div (of XVIII Res Corps) had joined the advance of 115 ID toward Deocheti, opposed by parts of 10 Romanian ID. Heavy fighting developed in hilly terrain covered with vineyards and cornfields. Finally both of the Schützen Regiments (# 1 and 24), which had lost 1000 men, fell back into the trenches they'd left in the morning.<sup>294</sup> The day ended in defeat; only the railroad station of Marasesti, which 76 Res ID had captured in the morning, was retained.

Group Gerok had somewhat more success. The main assault force of Corps Benigni (71 Aus-Hung. and 117 German ID) had been reinforced by four German battalions (IR 157 and Battalion II/373). Both divisions attacked to the east, FML Goldbach in the direction of Piscu Purgaretu (Point 453) and GM Seydel over the D. Cosna toward D. Buhociu (# 413). 70 Hon ID was to guard the northern flank of the attacking group; two battalions of Hon IR 313 had meanwhile returned from 117 ID to the 70<sup>th</sup>, and Battalion I/Hon IR 11 had been attached. To carry out his mission, FML Sorsich was supposed to capture the plateau north of Vrf. Ciresoaia and the heights north of the lower Slanic Brook (which he'd reached on 11 August, but then lost). The available artillery, in particular the heavy batteries directly under VIII Corps HQ, wasn't sufficient to open the way for all three

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Regimentes Fürst zu Windisch-graetz Nr. 14 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918" (Vienna, 1922), pp. 285 ff.

<sup>294</sup>Sichelstiel, "Geschichte des k.k. Schützen Regimentes 'Wien' Nr. 24" (Vienna, 1925), pp .141 ff.



divisions simultaneously. Therefore in the morning they'd support the two sectors on the wings (Goldbach's and Sorsich's). In the center, as soon as enough batteries became available to bombard the double summits of the Cosna, 117 ID would attack around noon.

The first objective of 71 ID was the D. Malaiului Heights (Point 493). In the morning the inner wings of both divisions broke through the enemy's forward position, but came to a halt in front of the principal fortifications when the heavy batteries ceased firing here so they could lay down fire in front of 117 ID. The latter Division wrested the entire Cosna position from the Romanians after noon, and also pushed forward their right wing north of Grozesci.<sup>295</sup> The impetuous onslaught had badly shaken the Romanian 1 CD, whose power of resistance threatened to dissipate. For their immediate aid, General Averescu brought 2 Calarasi Brigade over from the neighboring 6 ID, as well as several battalions from Onesci, so that it was possible to halt the Germans.<sup>296</sup> In the afternoon the 71 ID resumed their interrupted attack, but couldn't make any noteworthy process against the stubborn resistance of the Romanians, who'd moved Border battalions up to the front by truck. The fighting surged back and forth all day in the sector of 70 Hon ID. The end result was that the Hungarians straightened the bulge in the front near the junction with 117 ID (between Slanic village and the Vrf. Ciresoaia) and improved their position on the summit itself. During the fighting on the mountain the advance of the 207 Hon Inf Bde had stalled temporarily, but they got help from the left wing of 20 Cav Bde (DR # 12) and brought the advance to a successful conclusion.

South of the Casinu valley the 37 Hon ID tried in vain to recover some high ground north of Mt. Resboiului that had been lost the day before. At all other points their storm troops also found that the enemy lines were held in force.

Thus Benigni's Corps was once more in possession of the Cosna massif, from which they could constantly threaten the Trotusu valley. But they hadn't managed to tear a hole in the enemy front. On the next day FML Goldbach was supposed to continue to attack in the direction of Mon. Casin while GM Seydel took the eastern offshoots of the Cosna ridge.

#### 20-22 August

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<sup>295</sup>Sproesser, pp. 211 ff.

<sup>296</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 259 ff.

For now the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army had to restrict themselves to re-ordering the units of both their attacking corps. But despite the setback on the 19<sup>th</sup> the leadership was determined to continue the operation. Although for a week the 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had been vigorously pestering the Bulgarians and Turks, and had temporarily penetrated the lines of 109 German ID in the Rimnic sector, GFM Mackensen didn't believe that they were planning any serious attack. Because of the enemy's stubborn resistance opposite the northern wing of Eben's Army and their transfer of units to the area, it was evident that here the thrust of XVIII Res Corps was threatening the Romanians at a very sensitive point. Therefore Mackensen's HQ planned that after they had reorganized their units as necessary and received the heavy batteries that were on the way, as a minimum I Res Corps would capture Marasesti while XVIII Res Corps reached the line Movilita-Muncelu, thus developing a threat to the II Romanian Corps in the mountains. To carry out an operation with these restricted goals, GFM Mackensen also felt it was necessary to keep the enemy from believing that their local success was having any significant influence on the Germans' decision-making. The offensive could continue beyond this limited sector only if the OHL sent Mackensen the reinforcements which he'd requested.

Morgen's Corps began to re-group on 20 August. They'd been joined by FML Brunswik's Aus-Hung. 62 ID, which took up its assigned sector on the Sereth east of Faurei. The enemy were remarkably inactive, except for cannonades. They also were shifting troops; on the right wing of VIII Russian Corps the depleted 103 ID was replaced by the fresh 124 ID. The Trans-Amur cavalry marched to the north. The Romanian high command brought 11 ID up from their training area to Tecuciu; parts of the Division deployed behind the stationary eastern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army, which was held by cavalry. General Grigorescu ordered the commander in this area to be alert to any German preparations to cross the Sereth between Radulesti and Liesci.

Group Gerok engaged in heavy fighting until 22 August. North of Soveja, on the 20<sup>th</sup> GM Nostitz's 218 German ID captured the D. Rachitasu mc. heights, which dominate the Susita valley; in hand-to-hand combat they held this ground, as well as the blocking position in the valley, against all Romanian onslaughts. South of the Ojtoz valley the enemy wanted to regain the ground lost to 71 ID the day before, but were unable to advance. General Averescu assembled a strike force from the reserves still available (parts of 1 ID and of the Border Brigade) for an attempt to reconquer the Cosna; on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> they stormed forward in deep ranks, regardless of casualties, against the

positions on the heights held by Seydel's Division. But all their efforts collapsed in front of the unshaken defenders.

### **c. The last thrust by Eben's Army and the end of the offensive, 22 August to the start of September**

On 22 August GFM Mackensen received important orders from the OHL: the offensive was "for the time being" to come to an end. Because of the heavy fighting in the Western theater of operations and the lack of replacement troops in the homeland, in the foreseeable future 9<sup>th</sup> Army couldn't be allowed to incur significant casualties. They shouldn't try to capture Marasesti, since possession of the town would neither gain any vital strategic advantage nor allow the line to be held with fewer troops. Only Muncelu and the foothills farther north should be captured, so as to dominate the road toward Racoasa. All available infantry and artillery should be concentrated for this attack. If the Romanians, thus threatened on two sides by Eben's Army and Gerok's Group, subsequently evacuated the mountains the OHL would then decide whether to continue pressure in the foothills or finally conclude the operation.

1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ had already chosen to reinforce Group Gerok from their own resources to that they could resume attacking in coordination with 9<sup>th</sup> Army. The next assistance was given to VIII Corps, because IR 82 and BH IR 5, as well as Battalion I/69 (from 31<sup>st</sup> ID) had suffered very heavy losses. Therefore 71 ID was given k.u. Lst IR 17 (from 16 Lst Inf Bde) plus the Battalion III/76 which had come from Linsingen's Army Group. Battalion II/101, which arrived at the same time, was sent to 16 Lst Inf Bde so that the latter could more easily bear the loss of their 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment.<sup>297</sup> The additional 2000 riflemen joining Group Gerok seemed to be sufficient to carry out an attack from the glass factory toward Mon. Casin. When Mackensen reported to Archduke Joseph on 23 August that the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army intended to thrust past Muncelu on the 28<sup>th</sup>, Gerok was ordered to also be ready to attack on this day. As the next goal of 117 ID, Gerok named some high ground directly north of Grozesci, where the Romanian artillery observers could look into the narrow part of the valley as far as Herestrau. 71 ID was supposed to capture the Malaiului Ridge. Gerok promised that if given abundant reinforcements he could win a greater success and push deep into

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<sup>297</sup>Battalions III/76 and II/101 had been attached to 20 Hon ID under Linsingen's Army Group, but were staying in the East while 20 Hon ID prepared to move to the Isonzo front.

enemy territory.

But on 24 August the OHL wired Mackensen and GM Seeckt (the Chief of Staff to Archduke Joseph's Army Group) that the situation on the Isonzo made it necessary to cease their operations and to make the Alpenkorps available. 117 ID and the Württemberg Mountain Battalion were also to be pulled from the front. The OHL still wanted the limited attack to go forward as planned on 28 August, but also asked to be told where the permanent defensive position would be established. GM Seeckt replied that in general the defensive line of Group Gerok would be on the front he'd already reached. It should be advanced somewhat only between the Curita and Ojtoz valleys, which was consistent with the plan of attack of VIII Corps. Based on the instructions from the OHL, on 25 August Army Group HQ instructed 1<sup>st</sup> Army that after the next offensive was over the Württembergers should be placed in reserve, and 117 ID relieved by 39 Hon ID. Archduke Joseph intended that 117 ID should move to 7<sup>th</sup> Army, in front of which the Russians were assembling strong forces in northern Moldavia. Finally, his Army Group HQ wanted to exchange 37 Hon ID for either 51 or 74 Hon ID of 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

But the Archduke's plans could no longer be implemented. The Aus-Hung. high command had to concentrate entirely upon the Isonzo front, which was in great danger; operations in the East which were intended merely to smooth out the front had to take second place. On 25 August GdI Arz asked the German OHL to give him the half of 13 Sch Div in 9<sup>th</sup> Army so it could move to the Southwestern theater of operations. On the next day the Chief of the General Staff wired Archduke Joseph that the thrust toward Muncelu which Eben's Army planned for 28 August could have only a local effect; therefore the Archduke should cancel the simultaneous assault by Group Gerok. This order wasn't unwelcome to Army Group HQ, since it gave them an opportunity to quickly shift 117 ID to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. 1<sup>st</sup> Army was therefore instructed to create a permanent position along the line they'd reached. Only minor improvements to the front were still permissible. GO Rohr provided for the relief of 117 ID plus the Württemberg Mountain Battalion. Their sector, as well as that of 70 Hon ID - which seemed to be no longer battle-worthy - were to be taken over by GM Woyna's neighboring German 225 ID. The 225<sup>th</sup> received back two of their own battalions which had been attached to 218 ID (Group Keller) since July, and moreover were given command over the Bavarian 15 Res Inf Bde. Gerok gave up Battalion I/Hon IR 11 and the k.u. Lst IR 17 to VI Corps, which also received 70 Hon ID in exchange for 225 ID. The foot regiments of 7 CD plus the German Lst IR 36 were attached to 218 ID so they could reinforce

that Division's still weak southern wing. These numerous troop transfers, which naturally took some time, also restored the normal chains of command within the divisions, which had become badly intermingled. Only 37 Hon ID remained split up. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Army Group HQ was ordered to hold 117 ID in readiness to move to another theater of operations. Until the Division left they were to rest behind Gerok's front and train for their future assignment.

On 28 August, before 17 ID were relieved, their right wing was still able to capture the small summit on the ridge north of Grozesci. At the same time, storm troops from BH IR 5 took several dozen prisoners from a Romanian position south of the town. The last thrust by 9<sup>th</sup> German Army began as planned. The attackers were the Alpenkorps and 216 ID (stationed to their left as far as Gerok's southern wing); G.Lt Wenninger, commanding XVIII Res Corps, sent them toward Muncelu and Iresci. The Viennese Schützen Division and 115 ID covered the right flank of the attacking phalanx. The new fighting lasted for several days, since both 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army and the adjacent parts of Averescu's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army made powerful counter-thrusts. The Romanian high command were determined to avoid having the front disrupted, regardless of the cost.<sup>298</sup> The operation gained the Germans considerable ground, as far as the heights east of the two towns; they also took more than 1500 prisoners. However, their success didn't have the wide-ranging impact on the enemy which they'd been seeking. The half of FML Kalser's 13<sup>th</sup> Schützen Division were gradually leaving the front while their neighbors on the left were engaged in heavy fighting; the first troop trains were already heading for the Southwestern front on 30 August. As directed by the high command, they left behind the South Tyrol KJB for the k.u.k. 92 ID. In exchange for k.u. Lst IR # 1, the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division also received Lst Inf Bn 44 from 53 ID, which now was being sent from Volhynia to the Isonzo.<sup>299</sup> Hitherto the artillery of 92 ID consisted of just some miscellaneous attached batteries, but around this time the Division received the former 94 Res FA Bde, which had come from the Aus-Hung. 10<sup>th</sup> Army.

On 3 September GdI Eben ordered his I and XVIII Res Corps to cease their attacks and to build up the lines they'd captured as a permanent position. On the same day the Romanian 1<sup>st</sup> Army commander General Grigorescu issued a similar order. The bloody double battle of Focsani and the Ojtoz Sector, which had lasted

298Dabija, Vol. IV, "Marasesti" (in manuscript), and pp. 282 ff. Kiritzesco, pp. 360 ff.

299TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The k.u. Lst IR # 1 joined 53 Hon ID in September after both units arrived on the Italian front.

for almost a month, came to an end. The German OHL's plan of crossing the Sereth to invade Romania had been checked by the Romanians' resistance. The end result of the campaign which the Romanians called the "Defensive Battle of Marasesti" was that they had prevented the Central Powers from completing the defeat and conquest of their Kingdom.<sup>300</sup>

## **5. Attempts to thrust from Bukovina during August**

### **a. Actions by Kövess' Army and plans of the leadership**

#### Actions through mid-August

On 6 August Emperor Charles visited Czernowitz, which had been liberated from the Russians, and promoted GO Kövess, the commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Aus-Hung. Army, to Field Marshal. After the recovery of Bukovina Kövess' Army were given a new assignment. In cooperation with Mackensen's campaign, they were to invade upper Moldavia.

After numerous delays, Fabini's group on the Army's left wing (30, 34 and 5 ID) began to attack on 9 August; first they needed to break through the Russians' strongly-occupied front between Oprischeny and Mamornitza. Lack of ammunition for the batteries limited the artillery preparation. And so the enemy (Russian XI Corps and parts of XXIII Corps), with their own plentiful artillery and machine guns, were able to prevent the northern wing of Fabini's group from breaking through. But the thrust at Terescheny, where the Russians retreated, seemed to have succeeded. Here FML Jesser's 30 ID pursued the fleeing enemy energetically past Preworokie. Then strong Russian reserves counterattacked and after bitter fighting once more pushed back 30 ID. Finally the entire XVII Corps, under heavy Russian pressure, had to be pulled back to their starting points. Casualties in this ineffectual attack totaled more than 3500 dead, wounded and missing. About half of the losses were suffered by 30 ID.

Next to the right wing of XVII Corps, G.Lt Conta had already attacked with three battalions of 200 ID on 5 August. But this group was too weak to help Fabini' divisions move forward, and remained pinned down in front of the towns of Oprischeny and Tereblestie, which had strong Russian garrisons. Now, when 30 ID

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300Kiritzesco, pp. 370 ff.

had to fall back from the Russians on 9 August, G.Lt Conta sent all the troops of 200 ID into the area west of Oprischeny so they could counterattack if the enemy opened a new assault.

On the southern wing of the Carpathian Corps the German 1 ID was meanwhile striving in vain to take the enemy bridgehead to the west of the town of Sereth. Under XXVI Corps, FML Pichler's 59 ID captured the heights between Solka and Glitt on 9 August after a long and difficult action; on the next day they advanced to Arbora and Burla. FML Nagy's 49 Hon ID turned back Russian thrusts over the Suczawa at Hadikfalva. FML Horsetzky now wanted to capture the Ciota Heights southeast of Burla; later the main body of his Corps would advance to Kalafindestie (east of Hadikfalva) and finally southeast between the Sereth and Suczawa Rivers toward Hantesti and the town of Suczawa. In an order issued by 7<sup>th</sup> Army on 10 August, the Corps commander was told to build up strong reserves behind his left wing. The planned attack on the Ciota Heights should take place only if there were good prospects of success. But if the enemy weakened the lines in front of XXVI Corps, they should immediately be attacked. The main task of FML Horsetzky was still to assist Krauss' group in their difficult advance out of the mountains.

On Krauss' left wing, GM Jony's 11 Hon CD wrested the Bobeica Heights (southwest of Solka) from the enemy on 8 August. FML Schwer's cavalry group (5 Hon CD and 6 CD) took the heights east of Wama and the Mgr. batrina.<sup>301</sup> But on the 9<sup>th</sup> a captured strong point south of the Mgr. batrina already had to be abandoned again to the enemy. During this day the 11 Hon CD was still fighting around the Stermnina mountain ridge north of Wama. Here in the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> the Russians made three assaults against the foot detachments of the Honved Hussars, all without success. On the 12<sup>th</sup> the southern wing of 59 ID also repulsed an enemy thrust near Solka.

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<sup>301</sup>During 6 CD's actions near Wama, Quirin Freih. Duval von Dampierre, colonel and commander of DR # 11, won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

In the sector of the Aus-Hung. XI Corps, the northern wing of GM Benke's 51 Hon ID gained a little ground east of Madeiu on 8 August. On the next day GM Grallert's 74 Hon ID took an enemy strong point north of Mt Mazanaiu after bitter fighting and threw back attacking Russians in the valley north of the Hrebin Heights. In GO Rohr's neighboring 1<sup>st</sup> Army, the 3 CD (adjacent to 51 Hon ID) sent HR 8 forward on 6 August toward Borca in the Bistritz valley. Similarly GM Aust's 15 ID were able on the next day to move their positions on the heights northeast of Belbor forward onto Romanian soil; they were supported by the other regiments of 3 CD. But on the line Mt Stejaru - Mt Grientiesul nr., and on the border ridge stretching from Mt Stege to the Tölgyes Pass, the inner wings of both Aus-Hung. armies were still encountering determined Russian resistance. In mid-August the XXI Corps HQ reorganized the units here - 15 ID held the northern wing with 3 CD, to their right, deployed on both sides of the Tölgyes Pass. Farther south the 1 CD, coming from Group Gerok, relieved 31 ID.

#### Formulating further plans

Meanwhile there was a pause in the operations of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, caused by the logistical problems which have already been mentioned several times, and by the increasing Russian resistance. On 9 August GM Seeckt reported to the German OHL that it wouldn't be possible to continue the attack up to and over the Sereth because of insufficient supplies. Railroad traffic through Kalusz to Stanislau wouldn't be restored until 16 August, and it was unclear when trains would be able to reach Czernowitz. GM Seeckt therefore asked the OHL to have supplies brought up by columns of trucks.

Meanwhile on 9 August the Aus-Hung. high command again instructed Archduke Joseph's Army Group HQ to reinforce the northern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, engaged in heavy fighting, with the Carpathian Corps so that a decisive success could be won between the Pruth and the Sereth. GO Archduke Joseph, on the other hand, felt it was necessary to once more make the unit that had been sent to the northern bank of the Sereth (200 ID) available as soon as possible, so that they could join the Carpathian Corps to increase the pressure south of the river. He hoped that this would also cause the Russians in front of Krauss' group to waver. But there were also concerns that XVII Corps might succumb to a new Russian onslaught if the enemy once more thrust along the Pruth, so an urgent request was sent to Baden to provide reinforcements for the northern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. This would ensure the safety of Czernowitz and make it possible to resume



the offensive.

On 12 August GdI Arz replied to Archduke Joseph that the overall situation prevented him from sending the requested fresh units to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Now GM Seeckt, in a telegram to Baden, asserted that in fact it would be possible to assist the left wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army (Fabini's Corps) by using the 1 German ID, even though it only had two regiments. But then XXVI Corps would have to defend a 40 km front, since Krauss' weak group couldn't stretch toward the north. If XXVI Corps took over the sector of 1 German ID they would be opposed by five Russian divisions, which could be further reinforced by XL Corps which had arrived at Folticeni. The measures initiated by the King of Romania to protect the northern part of his country were becoming ever more effective. II Cavalry Corps had been identified at Dorohoiu and might also intervene. Therefore GM Seeckt's belief that Horsetzky's Corps was hardly in a position to stand up to an attack by such strong enemy forces is understandable. He reported to the Aus-Hung. high command that 1 German ID couldn't be moved to the northern bank of the Sereth until the defensive positions of XXVI Corps had been better prepared.

On 10 August GdI Ludendorff had asked Archduke Joseph to have Fabini's and Conta's Corps break off their attacks for the time being and to be satisfied with defending the territory they'd won. For the OHL were looking at a new objective far away at the northern end of the long front that cut through eastern Europe, where they planned to deliver an especially heavy blow to the Russians. On 4 August they'd already ordered 8<sup>th</sup> German Army to prepare to cross the Dvina and capture Riga. Ludendorff expected the thrust to be very effective because it would cause the Russians concern about the threat to St Petersburg. Therefore this operation had priority when the available first-line German units were being deployed. Meanwhile the railroads south of the Dniester could be rebuilt. After the offensive to Riga Ludendorff intended to shift the troops which thus became available back to the south and to conquer Moldavia.<sup>302</sup>

But despite all hindrances Archduke Joseph's Army Group HQ held fast to their intention to push farther east from Bukovina. The easternmost tip of the province was still in enemy hands. The Archduke decided to shift 31 ID from XXI Corps in Transylvania to the north wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army so as to give fresh impetus to the stalled offensive. Here also the Gren Regt 3 of 1 German ID would be sent as soon as it returned from 9<sup>th</sup> German Army. Furthermore GM Seeckt asked the OHL to send German railroad

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<sup>302</sup>Ludendorff, pp. 379 ff.

troops to increase the strength of the labor force behind the front; thus the destroyed tracks to Czernowitz could be restored more quickly. Kövess' Army would carry out local operations to create a more favorable starting-point for the eventual general advance. After a request from the Aus-Hung. high command to the Archduke, on 16 August GdI Krauss took control of the northern wing of 7<sup>th</sup> Army (XVII and Carpathian Corps), while the southern group which he'd previously led (XI Corps, Schwer's cavalry group and 11 Hon CD) was placed under FML Habermann of XI Corps.

#### Actions in the second half of August

In the second half of August there was lively fighting at several points along 7<sup>th</sup> Army's front, such as on the left wing of Group Habermann (now under FML Graf Herberstein, with 6 CD, 5 and 11 Hon CD) and also in 59 ID's sector on the Ciota Heights. But this fighting ended without any significant results. Meanwhile GdI Krauss was preparing a new attack on the Russian front between the Sereth and Pruth Rivers. Lack of artillery ammunition would make it impossible to push with one blow through the Russian positions threatening Czernowitz, which were already strong thanks to the terrain. First it would be necessary to take from the enemy the dominant Czardaki Heights northeast of Terescheny.

Reinforcements reached 7<sup>th</sup> Army only slowly. Gren Regt 3 arrived at Fratautz at the end of August and was inserted in the front by Hadikfalva (between 40 Hon ID and the parent 1 German ID). Around this time 31 ID was coming by train through Körösmezö to Zablutow.

On 25 August GM Seeckt reported to the OHL his general plans for the intended major offensive into upper Moldavia. The main blow would be launched from the present front of XVII Corps in the direction of Dorohoiu. The first objective was the line Herta-Mihaileni. Then the thrust would continue along the Sereth, rolling up the Russians in front of 7<sup>th</sup> Army from the north so as to open for XI Corps the way to Folticeni. For the main assault between the Pruth and Sereth, Army Group HQ intended to use the k.u.k. Divisions 5, 34, 30 and 31 as well as the German 200 and 117 ID (the latter to come from 1<sup>st</sup> Army). GM Seeckt asked the OHL to make four more German divisions available, since he estimated that at least ten divisions (counting the four Aus-Hung. units) would be needed to win a decisive success. The offensive would start as soon as the railroad to Czernowitz was restored, which couldn't be expected before mid-September. By then 1<sup>st</sup> Army would give up 14 batteries to 1<sup>st</sup> Army.

The commander of the Russian Southwest Front reorganized his armies in the second half of August. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ, which had taken over the southern part of 8<sup>th</sup> Army on 23 July, were moved once again. Most of their corps were given back to 8<sup>th</sup> Army, so that the latter along with the northern wing of 9<sup>th</sup> Army were guarding the Moldavian border against Kövess' and Kritek's Aus-Hung. Armies. Behind this front the Russians continued to assemble strong forces. The HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Army were shifted north to Dubno, and took over the right wing of the overly-large 11<sup>th</sup> Army (I Turkestan, XXXII, V Sib and VII Cavalry Corps).

### **b. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army captures the Dolzok Heights, 27 August**

In the neighboring sector of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group (held by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army), the days after 6 August passed with only cannonades fired by both sides. On 10 August the German Eastern Command instructed the Army's commander, GO Kritek, to recapture the Dolzok Heights, where a strong Russian garrison were threatening Czernowitz. The attack would be carried out, under GdI Csanady the new commander of the Aus-Hung. XIII Corps, by G.Lt Sieger's group consisting of 8 Bav Res and 16 Res ID. To replace these units the XIII Corps re-assigned the k.u.k. 36 ID, minus their artillery, to Litzmann's group (now called the "Zastawna Group").

After careful preparation the attack on the Dolzok took place on 27 August. The operation was completely successful. Under the leadership of G.Lt Sieger the 16 Res and 8 Bav Res ID broke through the strong position on the heights.<sup>303</sup> After the Dolzok was captured, 16 Res ID turned to the right and rolled up the Russian lines toward the south where GM Mihaljevic's 42 Hon ID, stationed on the right wing of XIII Corps, now joined the advance. Toward evening the 8 Bav Res ID on the left thrust to the north to take some additional high ground north of the Dolzok; then GM Abele's 2 CD on the northern wing of XIII Corps also attacked. Finally the Russians were pushed back to a depth of 3 km on a front 5 km wide. The terrain which was desired for the permanent position was now firmly in the attackers' hands. The victors' booty included 1000 prisoners, 6 guns and considerable military equipment. The enemy also lost many troops dead or wounded; the attackers' casualties, on the other hand, were comparatively light thanks to the well-orchestrated cooperation of their abundant artillery and trench mortars.

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303Jaud and Weech, pp. 170 ff. Roth, "Das K.B. Reserve Infanterie Regiment Nr. 23" (Munich, 1927), pp. 142 ff.

Otherwise the armies of Böhm-Ermolli as well as those of Linsingen remained strictly on the defensive. After the Russians' defeat in east Galicia, by all estimates there was nothing more to fear from them along the long front between the Dniester and the Pripyat. Both high commands of the Central Powers therefore pulled as many battle-ready divisions as they could from this now quiet battlefield. The German units which the Eastern Command had already sent north during August were followed at the end of the month by 20 and 42 ID as well as 20 heavy batteries. From Linsingen's Army Group the HQ of VI German Corps, which hitherto led the southern wing of the Aus-Hung. 4<sup>th</sup> Army in the Luga sector, moved to Courland. On 4<sup>th</sup> Army's northern wing, now called the "Turya Sector", the HQ of VIII German Corps (which had come from the West) changed places with HQ of XII Res Corps on 30 August. The Aus-Hung. 19 ID left 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and 53 ID left the Kovel Sector (HQ of GdK Bernhardi's LV Corps); both units went to the Southwestern front.

### ***C. Conclusion of the summer battles in the East***

#### **1. Final actions by Archduke Joseph's Army group on the Moldavian front (September 1917)**

##### **a. Averescu's Army thrusts against Group Gerok**

After the end of the offensive in September, Mackensen's Army Group was involved in just the usual trench warfare but Archduke Joseph's Army Group still engaged in low-intensity fighting. Particular attention was paid to the changes which were detected on the Russian front between the Daftena valley and the Dniester. In the last week of August the 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, on a wider line, was exchanging wireless messages with the Romanian high command. XXIX Corps of 6<sup>th</sup> Army was broadcasting from the Dorohoiu-Suczawa area, and X Corps had come from the Russian West Front. XL Corps, relieved from the Ojtoz sector, assembled around Folticeni. The HQ of 9<sup>th</sup> Army moved north to Botosani, and thus was stationed opposite Kövess' Army.

While the Russian Southwest Front reorganized, there were simultaneous changes in the chain of command of the Romanian Front, adjacent to the south. General Ragosa took over a new 4<sup>th</sup> Army. Stationed next to Averescu's Army from the Daftena valley

to a point south of the Moldawa, it consisted of parts of the former 9<sup>th</sup> Army - XXIV, XXXVI and II Corps plus the Trans-Amur Border Cavalry Division. Because of the thrust by Group Gerok the XXX Corps, which at the start of August had been sent north to the "Army of Maneuver", now came back to the Bacau-Ocna area. The new 9<sup>th</sup> Army, between the Moldawa and the Sereth, had XXVI, XVIII, XL, XXIX and X Corps; the latter three units as well as VI Cavalry Corps were fresh reinforcements. The next Army to the north (8<sup>th</sup> Russian) was also placed under the Romanian Front; thus the units between the Black Sea and the Dniester made up six armies, all now united under King Ferdinand. As of 4 September he had 70 infantry and 12 cavalry divisions in the Front.<sup>304</sup> In the same area the allied Central Powers had available 44 infantry and 11 cavalry divisions.

After the counter-offensive by 9<sup>th</sup> German Army and Group Gerok the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army had abandoned most of the terrain they'd captured in July; the bulge in the front in the Soveja basin had been flattened. At the same time Benigni's Corps had advanced toward Ocna and Onesci and captured the heights which dominate the Ojtoz and Slanic area. When further units became available it would therefore be possible to advance again toward the Trotusu and Sereth valleys. The former was already in range of artillery fire from the Vrf. Ciresoaia and the D. Cosna, although it wasn't possible to completely stop railroad traffic by Ocna. But the forward movement had lengthened the front of the Aus-Hung. VIII Corps; the corner where it jutted ahead was an invitation to the enemy to make envelopment attacks. Thus the overall situation on the southern wing of Rohr's Army was no better than it had been prior to the Romanian offensive. The weak link, as previously, was the sector of 218 German ID. They had just three regiments to defend 26 km of front. Therefore the Division was reinforced by 7 CD and the German 1st IR 36. This Regiment was to switch places in the second week of September with 8 CD, which would leave 71 ID.

The Romanian high command didn't fail to note the weakness of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. They decided to have Averescu's Army strike another blow. The area to be selected for the attack would be one where success would have more than just a local effect. The Ciresoaia Heights were chosen because if they fell the Romanians would also inevitably possess the entire mountain chain north of the Slanic valley. And then it would be difficult for their opponents to hold onto the second goal of the attack, the Cosna massif.<sup>305</sup> By the end of August General Averescu had already

<sup>304</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, "Marasesti" (Manuscript)

<sup>305</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 367 ff.

planned a combined operation with the neighboring 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army against the Ciresoaia Heights, to unfold in the near future.<sup>306</sup> 9 September was chosen as the date to attack. The 49 ID of XXIV Russian Corps would advance from the north along with numerous storm battalions, while the right wing of IV Corps with 1 ID (which meanwhile would be reunited) struck from the east. Artillery fire on the front as far as the Casinu valley and feint attacks between D. Cosna and the glass factory would deceive the Austrians and Germans.

The northern wing of Benigni's Corps from the Daftena valley to the Slanic Brook was covered by GM Woyna's 225 German ID, which had recently arrived in this position. IR # 82 was stationed on the D. Cosna, which now was in the sector of 71 ID. The regiments of 8 CD had just been relieved. Early on 9 September the Romanians opened the assault, under observation from King Ferdinand, with three hours of artillery fire upon the point to be attacked. Grozesci and Herestrau were hit with teargas. GM Woyna soon recognized that a serious attack was imminent and immediately brought forward his sparse reserves. At the same time VIII Corps HQ advanced some units and received back the recently-relieved regiments of 8 CD, which had been on their way to 218 ID.

Since the defenders had soon identified the positions where the attackers had assembled, they could pound them with concentrated artillery fire even before the assault developed. Thus the attack against the Ciresoaia started with diminished strength and could be fended off with hand grenades and machine gun fire. The Russian "death battalions" temporarily penetrated the Pravila position, but were soon driven back. New attempts to strike 225 ID stalled under the Germans' fire. The Romanians heavily bombarded the Cosna position. In the afternoon they ran in several waves against the inner wings of Regiments 82 and BH 5, seeking to capture the small summit north of Grozesci. But here the Szekels prevailed against all the Romanians' efforts, just as they had earlier on the Mgr. Casinului. The enemy's diversionary thrusts south of the Ojtoz valley accomplished even less. The Russians were only able to gain a slight advantage against 70 Hon ID (adjacent to 225 ID); here they established themselves on some heights south of the Vrf. Baba Rea (Point 968). There was no attempt to recover this position.

There were lively cannonades by both sides throughout 10 September. On the next day the Romanians again charged furiously forward and broke into the front on a width of 100 meters east of

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<sup>306</sup>Dabija, Vol. IV, pp. 279 ff. and 298 ff.

Heights # 772. A counter-thrust forced the attackers to fall back. The Russians were active only with their batteries and scouting patrols. When the Russian Army commander Ragosa reported that his XXIV Corps had ceased attacking, General Averescu also halted the operation he'd started. As soon as FZM Benigni saw that this part of the front was no longer in danger, he had the half of 8 CD move into the Soveja basin. Here these troops, together with those of 7 CD, concentrated on the right wing of the German 218 ID. The commander of 7 CD, FML Marenzi, took charge of the sector on 24 September.

Friend and foe alike were very tired after the heavy summer actions; the only lively fighting now flared up in the sector of Group Gerok. Thus on 17 September Romanian storm troops tried to penetrate the positions of 218 ID and 37 Hon ID at various points, but were everywhere repulsed. On the next day the 6 Romanian ID, which Averescu had ordered to improve their front, suddenly had their guns open heavy fire against the sector of 71 ID east of the D. Lesuntului. Then several battalions overran a weakly-held part of the trenches of Hon IR 15. The attackers pushed ahead to Heights # 677, but some small reserve units sealed off the penetration. The divisional commander FML Goldbach now could call upon the II Battalion of k.u. Lst IR 17, which was standing by to begin their march back to 16 Lst Inf Bde. Although these Landsturm troops had little experience, with their help it was possible to completely recover the lost part of the position.

#### **b. Cancellation of the Moldavian offensive**

Under the Aus-Hung. 7<sup>th</sup> Army, in the first days of September FML Lieb's 31 ID came up from Zablotow to Storozynetz to reinforce FML Fabini's XVII Corps. Now the batteries from 1<sup>st</sup> Army also arrived. GM Luxardo's 34 ID of XVII Corps was able on 3 September to surprise the Russians and to capture the Czardaki Heights northeast of Terescheny. Then the attackers also seized the crest on the border north of the Heights. Several hundred prisoners were brought back. But early on the 4<sup>th</sup> the 34 ID already was hit by Russian counter-thrusts and had to fall back to their starting points; most of the captured trenches were abandoned.

The high-ranking commanders were now concerned for Horsetzky's k.u.k. XXVI Corps. The Russian artillery was suddenly opening strong harassment fire on the Corps' positions. Intercepted Russian wireless messages, our reconnaissance flights and

statements from deserters made it certain that behind the front between the Sereth and the Moldawa the enemy had massed three corps (X, XXIX and XXX). A strong reserve cavalry force (VI Cav Corps) was assembled near Suczawa. Army Group HQ anticipated a serious attack on Horsetzky's Corps. To ensure the safety of liberated Bukovina, the German Eastern Command made 8 Bav Res ID and the Bav CD (minus the two Jaeger battalions) available to Archduke Joseph. These two units shifted south over the Pruth behind the threatened XXVI Corps. The main body of 31 ID also came to this area; only one of their regiments stayed in the sector of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division. As a further reinforcement GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria sent 4 Ers ID from the northern wing of South Army to Czortkow, whence they would march to Czernowitz.

Archduke Joseph meanwhile had to recognize, from the orders which he and GFM Mackensen received since the end of August, that the Central Powers' high command were gradually abandoning the plan for the conquest of Moldavia. But the Archduke didn't favor giving up this operation, which he considered necessary to ensure the defense of Transylvania and Bukovina. On 1 September he even declared in a conversation with the Chief of the General Staff GdI Arz that he was willing to place himself under the German Eastern Command if this were necessary to procure units for the conquest of Moldavia.<sup>307</sup> But after Mackensen's Army Group went over to the defensive on 3 September, the Archduke had to tell FM Kövess on 5 September that all plans for an offensive were being canceled due to the general military situation. To defend against the expected Russian assault on Bukovina the XXVI Corps was placed under Group Krauss, whose authority now extended from the Pruth to the Moldawa.

On the Aus-Hung. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's southern wing, on 6 September GdI Litzmann took over the Czernowitz sector; placed under him were the k.u.k. 5 ID south of the Pruth and 83 German ID, 16 Res ID, and k.u.k. 2 CD north of the river. GO Kritek's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was re-assigned from Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group to Archduke Joseph's. The latter thus extended north to the Dniester so that they could coordinate the defense of all of Bukovina. Army Group HQ moved in the second half of the month from Maros Vasarhely to Klausenburg.

Lively Russian artillery activity continued in front of Group Krauss until mid-September, but the enemy infantry didn't attack XXVI Corps. Apparently the Russians had concentrated so many troops opposite 7<sup>th</sup> Army merely to hinder any advance by their opponents into northern Moldavia. Army Group HQ still wanted to

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307Archduke Joseph, Vol. V, p. 446



have 34 and 5 ID move their disadvantageous lines south of the Pruth forward somewhat (currently they were on lower ground than the Russian positions). Preparations began in mid-September. The planned attack was to open with a breakthrough in 34 ID's sector, after which the Russian position would be rolled up toward the Pruth. GdI Litzmann, who was entrusted with carrying out this difficult operation, demanded two divisions as reinforcements, since he was supposed to give 16 Res ID up to the Eastern Command. But the Army Group had no reserves for the attack on the Pruth.

After the "Kerensky Offensive" the brilliant counterattack by the allied Central Powers to Tarnopol in July and at the start of August had liberated almost all of Galicia and Bukovina from the Russians. The victors had taken more than 42,00 prisoners plus 257 guns, 546 machine guns, 191 trench mortars and 50,000 rifles. For his outstanding leadership of this operation the commander of the victorious Army Group, GO Eduard von Böhm-Ermolli, was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

But after these great successes the strength of the Aus-Hung. and German troops diminished due to their efforts and to logistical problems. It was necessary to halt the units on the border of Moldavia. The allies didn't have available the fresh forces they needed to give new impetus to the offensive. Moreover the lines of communication had extended far beyond the railheads, causing the supply shortage.

Meanwhile at the northern end of the Eastern front the OHL were carrying out the attack on Riga. On 3 September, just two days after crossing the Dvina, the 8<sup>th</sup> German Army captured the Russian bridgehead and city of Riga. The 12<sup>th</sup> Russian Army was shattered. To keep the Russians from regaining their breath, the OHL then intended to strike against Jakobstadt. This German operation was also successful (on 21 and 22 September).<sup>308</sup>

## **2. Return of trench warfare in the East**

Despite the intentions of the OHL, the Riga offensive had been greatly delayed, which was one of the reasons why the attack from

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<sup>308</sup>Schwartz, "Der deutsche Landkrieg", Vol. III, pp. 315 ff.  
Kuhl, "Der Weltkrieg", Vol. II, pp. 140 ff. Ludendorff, pp. 383 ff.

Bukovina could no longer be carried out.<sup>309</sup> But the primary reason was that the very tense situation on the Southwestern front, which became even more pressing during the eleventh Isonzo battle (to be described shortly), forced the Central Powers' commanders to a new decision. Instead of continuing the exhausting defensive operations they'd improve the situation with a powerful blow against Italy. All other plans took second place to this important new concept. Since the hard fighting on the Western front was a continuing and heavy burden to the German Army, men and equipment for Italy could only be taken from the East, where operations would therefore come to an end. The front between the Black Sea and the Pripyat now represented a large reservoir of units which could be sent to the Isonzo front or used to replace divisions that had been badly worn down, mostly from the West. The troop movements, which had already started in August, lasted until the start of October.

From 9<sup>th</sup> German Army the Alpenkorps followed the k.k. 13 Sch Div to the southwestern theater of operations in September. First to leave Archduke Joseph's Army Group was the Württemberg Mountain Battalion; then GdI Krauss' I Corps HQ were summoned from Bukovina on 14 September. They were followed at month's end by the two Jaeger battalions from the Bavarian CD and the mountain-trained 200 ID; they were replaced in the Carpathian Corps by the Aus-Hung. 31 ID. The last to leave were 117 ID (from Group Gerok). 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had already given up many German units for the Riga operation, received other German formations to replace them in the Zloczow Sector (6 Res, 33 Res, 14 Bav and Bav Ers ID). On the other hand, the Army's 5 German and 33 Aus-Hung. ID left by train for the Isonzo. Linsingen's Army Group sent 20 Hon ID to Italy; they were replaced in the Lipa Sector (under HQ of XXII Res Corps) by 32 ID which came from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. 29 ID from the northern wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army also departed for Italy; their place was taken by 12 Reit Sch Div and the German 2 CD. Finally the Kovel Sector also made FML Kalser's II Corps HQ and 4 ID available for the Southwestern front; the Eastern Command sent German 22 Landwehr ID to the Sector.

The three commanders - Prince Leopold of Bavaria, Archduke Joseph and Mackensen - continued to stand guard in the East. The interior of Russia was shaken by heavy new convulsions. Military activity was considerably cut back, and the Central Powers resumed their propaganda campaign.

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<sup>309</sup>Ludendorff, pp. 382 ff.

***D. An analysis of the war in the East in summer 1917***

The plan for operations in spring 1917 which the Russians proposed at various conferences - a primary thrust toward Lemberg with secondary attacks toward Mitau, Sokal, Maramaros-Sziget and Bulgaria - couldn't be implemented, primarily because of the fall of the Tsar and the resultant slackening of the Russian Army's will to fight. By the time it was possible to rally the war-weary mujiks thanks to the eloquence of the new leader of revolutionary Russia (Minister President and War Minister Kerensky), July had already arrived. Meanwhile back in April the armies of the Western Powers, especially the French, had bled themselves for no purpose at Arras and on the Aisne. In the Southwest the tenth assault of the Italians along the Isonzo in mid-May, and the smaller-scale attacks in Tyrol which followed (at Ortigara) hadn't changed the situation significantly. In the Balkans the Entente countries were mostly content to hold onto the areas they occupied. The general and simultaneous offensives on all fronts, which had been ordered at the Chantilly Conference of November 1916, had failed to materialize in 1917, just as had been the case the year previously.

When the Russians burst forward at the start of July, as did the Romanians three weeks later, their strokes were followed by counter-strokes. For the commanders of the Central Powers' armies had also planned offensives, the implementation of which depended in part on the Russians' moving first. Thus in summer 1917 there was wild fighting, full of surprises, on the blood-soaked fields of eastern Galicia, Bukovina and southern Moldavia.

Among the surprises was the fluctuating attitude of the Russian soldiers. After a brief period when they were willing to attack their effectiveness declined rapidly, only to increase when they were called upon to defend the borders of their own country. On the other hand the Romanian troops, who'd been reorganized and trained in the latest offensive tactics, fought unexpectedly well. And the k.u.k. Army displayed new weaknesses. At Zborow and Stanislau individual regiments with Czech, Slovak, Ruthenian and Serbo-Croatian personnel failed once more. This was new evidence that the employment of units with mainly Slavic soldiers against Russia was becoming ever more difficult as the war dragged on and as national tensions increased within the Danube Monarchy, where almost half of the citizens were Slavs.

In the offensive toward Lemberg, the right-central Army of the Russian Southwest Front was able to penetrate the defensive position of the k.u.k. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 1 July, but was soon halted by

German reserves who hurried to the scene. And the massive assault by the left-central Army at Brzezany was shattered by the allies' firm stand. The military spirit of this Russian Army, which had been skillfully nurtured, disappeared all too quickly because of the heavy casualties suffered in the fighting.

Even before the Russian attack was unleashed as expected, the Central Powers had decided they would counterattack as soon as the enemy onslaught had been checked. Since this condition had been met, they now intended to break through the weakened Russian front in the direction of Tarnopol with German divisions which had quickly arrived. The left wing of the attacking group would advance along the line of ponds on the upper course of the Sereth, which would provide excellent flank protection toward the north.

But while the allies were in the midst of preparations for the breakthrough attack, the commander of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (Kornilov) captured the key point of the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's position west of Stanislau; then with a speed never before exhibited by the Russians he pursued the allies past Kalusz. The situation now seemed so critical that consideration was even given to canceling the offensive at Zloczow so that the striking group could rush south and halt the Russians pursuing the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with a flank attack. Meanwhile Kornilov's Army came to a halt on their own, mainly due to logistical problems. Now nothing stood in the way of implementing the breakthrough at Zloczow.

The attacking group deployed in depth on a narrow 20 km front; they threw the Russians back without much difficulty. The tactical breakthrough was already achieved on the first day (19 July); Tarnopol fell six days later. Pressure was maintained against the Russian front in a diagonal direction, with the main effort inclining constantly toward the south. This soon forced the Russian corps opposite South Army to also abandon their positions. Now the recent withdrawal by the k.u.k. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army even became an advantage, because after advancing to Kalusz the northern wing of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army were endangered on their right flank. This Army was also forced to quickly retreat.<sup>310</sup> And so the entire Russian front collapsed as far as the wall of the Carpathians.

Although the allies had driven the Russians from east Galicia, the enemy began to attack in southern Moldavia. The initiative for the offensive here came from the newly-strengthened Romanian

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310Kiszling, "Der strategische Durchbruch" (Mil. wiss. Mitt., 1933 issue, pp. 89 ff.)

forces, which were eager to break through the lines of Mackensen's Army Group in cooperation with the Russians and then recover Wallachia and Dobruja if possible. The 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was to strike the main blow at Namoloasa. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army would penetrate the Soveja basin and then pivot to the south to roll up the front of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army. The three Russian armies under the command of King Ferdinand's Romanian Front were given secondary operational assignments.

The attack of 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was to start on 25 July, and was preceded by a powerful cannonade. But just before the infantry moved forward Kerensky, who was concerned about the collapse of the Russian Southwest Front in Galicia, forbade his armies in Moldavia to attack in conjunction with the Romanians. Thus he kept the offensive of the King of Romania's forces from developing. On the previous day, however, General Averescu with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army had broken through the weak southern wing of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army and penetrated the Soveja basin as planned. The King now also canceled Averescu's further advance.

The Central Powers in Moldavia were preparing a counter-blow. They wanted to conquer Moldavia with a pincers attack from the lower course of the Sereth and from Bukovina. The goal of this operation was to completely drive the Romanians from the field and to possess the agricultural resources of their fruitful country.

Because of the Romanian incursion into the Soveja basin the principal thrust, which originally would have been directed through Namoloasa, was shifted farther west to Focsani. An assault from here to the north could on the one hand force the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army to abandon the dangerous flanking position they'd occupied and on the other make it easier to cooperate with the southern wing of the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which now was to attack simultaneously.

The onslaught of 9<sup>th</sup> German Army was unleashed on 6 August; they did gain a significant initial success against 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, which didn't resist very strongly. But the planned crossing to the eastern bank of the Sereth, which was supposed to make it possible to roll up the entire enemy front as far as the river's mouth, didn't succeed. Moreover the 1<sup>st</sup> Romanian Army was available; they'd been relieved from the line to move west and replace the Russians in the front north of Focsani. Now they advanced from Namoloasa and kept the fight going. In costly actions the Romanians permanently barred the allies' path into the Sereth valley. For the Romanians the "Battle of Marasesti"

(as they named it) remains a glorious page in the history of the World War. In the Ojtoz sector the allies had to be content with gaining only a little ground, just as was the case near Focsani.

Meanwhile the allies had cleared the Russians from Bukovina, and on 3 August they entered Czernowitz. But efforts by South Army to cross the Zbrucz failed. Also unsuccessful were attempts to advance toward Dorohoiu so as to conquer northern Moldavia as part of the planned combined operation with Mackensen. Despite all expectations, the Russians offered insurmountable resistance on the borders of their country, making it impossible to advance further toward Bessarabia and Podolia. Moreover the attacks by the allies in Bukovina and at Focsani were 300 km apart, far too great a distance for them to assist each other. After these battles the war in the East, which had flared up again after a long pause, once more died down.

The Central Powers, and particularly the k.u.k. high command which was directly affected by developments in the east and southeast, could be content with the outcome of the summer campaigns against Russia and Romania. Although they hadn't conquered Moldavia, they'd liberated east Galicia (except for a tiny part of the border area between Brody and Husiatyn) and Bukovina (except for its farthest southeastern corner). The Russian Army had meanwhile shown so many obvious signs of disintegration that there could hardly be any fear of further attacks. Finally the attacks of the Romanians, who now were much more formidable opponents, had been checked decisively.

On 3 September the Germans captured Riga and established a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Dvina. Thus they ended any danger from the Russians in this area and created a sally port for a possible advance toward St Petersburg. Thereafter divisions were sent to the West and Southwest as they became available. Although enormous forces were still stationed on the 1850 km Eastern front, the Russo-Romanian theater of operations lost its importance. The focus of attention shifted for good to the French and Italian theaters.

## **VIII. The World Military and Political Situation in Spring and Summer 1917**

### ***A. The United States of North America break with the Central Powers***

A glance at world political events is necessary before we resume the narrative of military developments. The spring months of 1917 were crowded with decisive changes. Leading figures in Austria-Hungary, with Emperor Charles at their head, had warned that Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare would have dire consequences; in fact the United States of America under their authoritarian President Woodrow Wilson did break diplomatic relations with the Central Powers on 3 February.<sup>311</sup> Because the American capitalists had a strong economic interest in the victory of the Entente, the two Empires in the long run could hardly have avoided this development but could have postponed it instead of hastening it.

Six weeks after America's diplomatic break with the Central Powers it seemed that the eventual disadvantages of American enmity might be canceled by the first Russian revolution. The groups that came to power in Russia were still under the influence of the Western powers and their representatives, but the Russian Army was so badly shaken that it was hardly likely that it would fully regain its old fighting strength. This judgement by the leaders of the Central Powers was substantially correct. It is true that the battle spirit of the mujiks, fanned by Kerensky's demagogical skill, temporarily flared up again in the hills and mountains of east Galicia in early summer of 1917. But the Russians' will to attack collapsed a few hours after Prince Leopold of Bavaria opened the counterattack at Zloczow. As narrated in the preceding chapters, the enemy hastily evacuated the parts of east Galicia and Bukovina they'd still been holding, although they rallied somewhat to offer new resistance behind the border, on the soil of their homeland.

Thus American assistance was of even greater importance for the Western powers. As already mentioned, the United States declared war on Germany on 6 April, two months after the rupture of diplomatic relations.<sup>312</sup> This act served as an example in the following weeks to most other American countries; except for Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Paraguay, Argentina and Chile they all officially entered the war, although this had no more than an

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311The diplomatic representatives of the Union in Turkey and Bulgaria continued to serve in the capitals of these countries.

312The North American Union didn't declare war on Austria-Hungary until 7 December 1917.

economic significance. Moreover, in this period it was finally possible to overcome Japan's resistance to China entering the war. Around the start of the year Great Britain, greatly concerned about the situation in the Mediterranean, started negotiations to bring a Japanese naval squadron into European waters. On 16 February Japan agreed to England's proposal; the east Asian empire was promised in return the German Pacific islands north of the Equator (the southern islands would be given to Australia). On 1 March France concurred with this treaty, in exchange for Japan's agreement that China could participate in the war. Japanese vessels soon appeared in the south Atlantic and the Mediterranean. China broke off relations with Germany on 14 March and declared war on the Central Powers on 14 August. Siam had joined the Entente two weeks earlier.

On 30 June, a few weeks after the Western powers forced King Constantine to abdicate, Greece also broke off relations with the Central Powers. King Alexander was the nominal ruler, but the country was actually led by the scheming Venizelos. Thus 25 countries were now arrayed against the beleaguered fortress held by the Quadruple Alliance.

Since the eventual collapse of Russia would sooner or later be made good by their new American ally, the Entente welcomed the Americans with jubilation. They sent special delegations over the Atlantic. The United States didn't yet have an army that was ready for battle, but they made gigantic strides in arming for combat on land and sea. They introduced universal conscription on 29 April and decided on 6 May to create a force of well-equipped troops that would initially number a million men but eventually would contain many more. The Congress authorized the expenditure of enormous sums. A nation of 90 million people, hitherto completely untouched by the war, were now relentlessly determined to devote all their military, economic and moral strength to the fight against Germany!

Measures were needed to ensure that this assistance became a reality on the battlefield. On 15 June Wilson's military representative General Pershing arrived in Paris to discuss the military intervention of the United States with the Western powers. Pershing let his allies know that his government didn't intend to intervene until they had armies in France that were completely equipped and ready to fight. By 1 July 1918 the Union intended to have one million combatants available, plus a million more in the following months.



***B. Emperor Charles' peace initiatives***

To a limited extent, Pershing's declarations proved that the civilian and military leaders of Germany were correct in their belief that in the beginning the Entente would receive little additional military strength from the United States. Because of the simultaneous disturbances in Russia, the calculation of relative strength was even favorable to the Central Powers, especially considering their hopes for the submarine campaign. But right from the start there were unfavorable psychological consequences of the coincidental American declaration of war and the Russian revolution. The Western powers could triumphantly declare that now the world was arrayed in two distinct camps - on one side all the democracies of the earth, on the other the half-feudal monarchies of central Europe and the Turkish theocracy! Wilson preached a crusade against the "military-autocratic" forces in Germany and hurled his anathemas over the ocean.<sup>313</sup> In Russia the holy teachings of the bourgeois revolution of 1789 were invoked, while representatives of the broad masses arose to recall the lessons of Marx and the Paris Commune. These glistening and tempting ideas flowed from the West and the East to the hungry, even starving peoples of the Quadruple Alliance and were favorably received in thousand and later in millions of hearts.

Dissent within Germany

Germany's national unity, which had already been weakening for some time, was further shaken by this surge of ideas. The "Hindenburg Program" and the "Fatherland Auxiliary Service" had considerably enhanced the material strength of the Army, but had

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313TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: With hindsight, it seems incredible that educated public opinion in central Europe could be so naive as to fall for the lying rhetoric of the Entente. Perhaps Wilson himself, who was becoming emotionally unstable, believed all the slogans about "making the world safe for democracy" and about "national self-determination." But the principle of national self-determination, if sincerely applied to German-speaking Europe, would have made the German Empire stronger after the war than it had been in 1914! The English and French governments, of course, went along with Wilson's program with cynical reservations that they kept to themselves. At any rate, the slogans were enormously successful. A true expert, Adolf Hitler, later declared that the Entente propaganda campaign was a masterpiece of deception.

done nothing to alleviate the great social and economic problems. The costs of the war continued to swell thanks to government management of the economy. Suddenly-wealthy individuals lived in luxury in the midst of general poverty. Day by day the hatred of the armaments workers mounted against the "satisfied bourgeoisie"; it was aimed at persons whose wealth was long established as well as the recent war profiteers. The workers were also concerned about the uncertain futures of their wives and children. In spring 1917, while heavy fighting raged on the Western front, there were large-scale strikes in Berlin and other cities. Afterwards smaller demonstrations continued to break out here and there. Even the spirit of the armed forces was in great danger, as proven in July by the discovery of a naval conspiracy in which representatives of the "Independent Social Democrats" had played a part. These radical Marxists were organizing the "Spartacus" movement.<sup>314</sup>

Leading political figures in the Reichstag discussed the issues of reforming the Prussian electoral system, formulating war goals and drafting peace resolutions. The Imperial Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg had to make way for the candidate of the high command, George Michaelis. On 19 July the majority parties of the Reichstag (the Center, Democrats and mainstream Social Democrats) passed a peace resolution in which they proclaimed to the enemy in the West and East that they supported a negotiated settlement without compulsory transfer of territories and without monetary indemnities. The bitter arguments for and against this resolution revealed clearly how deeply the German people had been divided by problems stemming from the war. Their leaders were quite unsuccessful in devising counter-arguments to the deceptive propaganda emanating from the enemy camp, which entered the country through thousands of channels. No one spoke clearly to the German people regarding the real situation, its menaces and possibilities. Neither the advocates of a "greater fatherland" or the spokesmen for a "defensive war" possessed the demagogic skills of a Lloyd George or a Clemenceau. The war threatened to lose all meaning in the eyes of the broad masses and the intellectual circles. Some even paid heed to exiles who'd fled from Germany and now were proclaiming from neutral soil that all the guilt stemming from the war, in word and deed, was due to their betrayed fatherland. Enemy subversives didn't fail to take advantage of the pronouncements of these emigres. Countless Germans doubted the good faith of their government.

#### Dissent within Austria-Hungary

<sup>314</sup>Among other sources, see Volkmann, "Der Marxismus und das deutsche Heer im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1925), pp. 129 ff.

Among the peoples of Germany's allies the war had similar economic and social consequences, in varying degrees. And in Austria-Hungary the possibility of national revolution was also looming larger. It is true that in the first months of Emperor Charles' reign the leaders of the Slavs - in part for political expediency - in general remained true to the Monarchy and dynasty. This was still the case after the Entente's response on 12 January 1917 to the Central Powers' official peace proposals. But the Slavs' attitude shifted after the Tsar fell and Wilson broke with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The influence of these events became evident in Austria at the end of May, when Parliament was summoned to meet for the first time during the war. The Czech deputies hastened to demand their own Czecho-Slovak state. On the one hand, this would include three million Germans who were part of the Bohemian state complex based on the rights of the Crown of St Wenceslaus. On the other, it would include the Slovaks of upper Hungary based on "natural right" and regardless of the Hungarian coronation oath.<sup>315</sup> The change in the Polish leaders' attitude was hardly less striking. The new rulers of Russia had immediately recognized the Poles' right of self-determination after the fall of the Tsar. Now their nation could expect a far better future if the Entente were victorious rather than the Central Powers. Inevitably this influenced the parties of the Austrian Poles.

The Slovenes and Dalmatians in the Vienna parliament issued declarations similar to that of the Czechs, in which their acknowledgment of the Monarchy and ruling house was little more than lip-service. Austria's South Slavs developed their program in cooperation with their brothers from Hungary, Croatia-Slavonia and Bosnia. Important to the development of sentiment in these territories was a pact concluded on Corfu on 20 July 1917 between the Serbian Minister-President Trumbic and the leaders of the South Slavic emigration, regarding foundation of a united state

<sup>315</sup>At the insistence of Hungarian Minister-President Tisza, Emperor Charles had already been crowned Apostolic King of Hungary in Budapest on 30 December 1916.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The issue here was that the Emperor had sworn, as customary during coronations, to never separate any of the lands of the Crown of St Stephen. Therefore he would have violated his oath if he had joined part of his Hungarian lands to those of Bohemia or any other segment of the Austrian half of the realm. It must be borne in mind that at least technically the Czech demands was not aimed against the Habsburgs, and that their new Czecho-Slovak state was supposed to remain under Charles' rule.

of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Among both the northern and southern Slavs the hitherto tenuous relationship between political leaders within the Monarchy and the emigres became much closer in the next few months; eventually the former acted only on the orders of their compatriots in the "national committees" on foreign soil which were working for the destruction of the Habsburg realm.

The Germans of Austria - inhabitants of the Lower Austrian and Styrian industrial areas, the Alpine lands and the mountains that surround Bohemia - suffered as much as any of the Monarchy's other peoples from shortage of food. In this respect the Magyars in the plains of Hungary were quite well off compared with other groups. But here social unrest was increasing, just as everywhere else. The poorer peasants and agricultural laborers railed against the owners of large estates and demanded land. The industrial proletariat, swollen by the arms industry, agitated for a higher standard of living and political rights.

Emperor and King Charles devoted all his strength to reconciling the dissatisfied nationalities and classes; he curbed the application of military justice and tried to ameliorate hardships and inequalities. He fought sincerely against various forms of inappropriate government behavior and strove to have all groups share the burdens of war in equal measure. The same good intentions lay behind the amnesty he issued on 2 July for all political criminals in the lands of cis-Leithania, which allowed the Czech leader Kramar, among others, to return to political life. This measure may have also been immediately prompted by a desire to avoid a parliamentary debate about the real and perceived excesses of military justice. But the leaders of the dissatisfied nationalities didn't thank the Emperor for his good intentions. And the Germans in the armed forces and at home were greatly upset; their devotion to the Monarch received its first substantial blow.

In Hungary the King dismissed Tisza's cabinet in May 1917 because of their stubborn resistance to electoral reform.<sup>316</sup> They were first replaced by a ministry under Moritz Esterhazy, which was followed already in August by a government under Alexander Wekerle. The latter brought his nation, as a concession from the King, a promise in principal to divide the common armed forces with Hungary after the war.

#### The diplomatic initiatives

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316Erenyi, "Graf Stefan Tisza" (Vienna, 1935), pp. 323 ff.

While the young Emperor sought to get his own subjects to live together in harmony, he was trying with equal fervor to restore international peace. In this policy he was of one mind with his Foreign Minister Count Czernin, who in December 1916 had replaced Baron Burian. Both men apparently believed that Austria-Hungary would have to take the initiative on the road to peace since the rift between Germany and the opposing world had substantially widened because of the submarine war.

Already long before the war some enemies, and even some friends, of Austria-Hungary had stated that in the long run its collapse could hardly be averted. In the last decade before 1914 the greed of the Monarchy's neighbors for Austrian and Hungarian territory had been a great help to the encirclement policy of the Entente. The treaties negotiated when Italy and Romania joined the opposing camp also greatly complicated the task of restoring peace. But neither at the outbreak of the war nor in its first years was there any serious intent on the side of the Entente (particularly the Western powers and even Italy) to seek or even advocate the total elimination of the Danube Monarchy.<sup>317</sup> This was a constant obstacle to the leaders of the emigres, including Masaryk. Although a sentence in the Entente note of 12 January 1917 was directed against Austria-Hungary, it was correctly characterized a year later by the Boer General Smuts (a close confidant of the British Prime Minister) as a bluff. Leading circles in Paris, London and Rome opposed the "Balkanization" of the Danube area. For a very long time the official policy in these states was to prevent the destruction of the Habsburg Monarchy. (The Italians were a partial exception, but only because they wanted the Great Power on the Danube to be replaced by a medium-sized state.)

But the Entente did demand that Austria-Hungary should break with Germany; simultaneously the Monarchy should be largely federalized and its Slavs should be strengthened *vis a vis* its Germans and Magyars. And the Western powers inevitably warmed to the idea of eliminating the Habsburgs as they recognized that Vienna couldn't be separated from the German Empire, and that the defeat of the latter would be hastened by a blow to the heart of their allies. Thus Austria-Hungary's alliance policy led to a tragic dilemma. On the one hand the Monarchy's existence became ever more dependent on German bayonets; on the other, each German victory which still failed to decide the war drove Austria's many remaining friends in the West farther toward the position of its enemies. As a result the Western powers were gradually won over to the destructive program of the emigrants.

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<sup>317</sup>Glaise-Horstenau, "Die Katastrophe", pp. 114 ff.

The government at Vienna approached France as the most suitable negotiating partner in the enemy camp.<sup>318</sup> The effort to win the French over for peace negotiations was carried on initially through Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma, a brother of Empress and Queen Zita who was serving in the Belgian Army because of his pro-French sentiments (February to May 1917). Several weeks later there were talks between the Aus-Hung. diplomat Count Revertera and French Major Count Armand at the suggestion of the French General Staff (August 1917). So that France could be won over, Czernin meanwhile was busy negotiating with his German allies. To convince the Germans to give up land on their western border (in Alsace-Lorraine) the Austrians were willing to agree to their territorial demands in Congress Poland, and to abandon the "Austro-Polish" proposal. In a memorandum to the Emperor, to be used in discussions with Berlin, Czernin depicted the situation of the Monarchy in the darkest colors. Unfortunately his note was later published in the Entente press, due to either carelessness or a breach of faith. He also played a small part in preparing the peace resolution of the German Reichstag. In August Emperor Charles sent a letter to the German Crown Prince, trying to gain his adherence to the peace plans.

Meanwhile the fact that negotiations were being carried out through Prince Sixtus was shared with our German ally, although not the name of the intermediary.<sup>319</sup> But the discussion foundered, principally due to stiff resistance by the Italians; although their territorial aspirations had been recognized by the London Treaty, the Austrian Emperor was at most willing to give them the Italian-speaking parts of Tyrol. The conversations between Revertera and Armand, concerning which the Germans were fully informed, also had no result because the Entente set conditions for a general peace that weren't acceptable to Germany. If the Austro-Hungarians had made a separate peace, they would have received much less severe conditions from the Entente, which promised to compensate the Monarchy for any losses with chunks of Imperial German territory. But for many reasons, the Austrians realistically couldn't break with their allies; any attempt to turn on Germany while the latter was still loyal would

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318 See, among other sources, Werkmann pp. 170 ff. Polzer-Hoditz, "Kaiser Karl" (Vienna, 1929), pp. 302 ff. Fester, "Die Politik Kaiser Karls und der Wendepunkt des Welt-krieges" (Munich, 1925), pp. 46 ff. Further sources are listed on pp. X to XV of the latter work.

319 See the notes of a meeting between Czernin and Bethmann-Hollweg in Vienna on 16 March 1917 (in the Haus-, Hof- and Staats-Archiv).

have led to severe internal disturbances that would have brought down the regime.

There were other peace initiatives besides these, although all were unsuccessful. Most noteworthy was an effort by Pope Benedict XV in August and September 1917, motivated by his sense of serious responsibility.<sup>320</sup> On 9 October the German Secretary for External Affairs Kühlmann put an end to any possibility that the Germans might make sacrifices in the West by declaring in the Reichstag "No! No! Never!" The German government also wouldn't make any declamation regarding the future of Belgium, as requested by the Pope and others. They were backed up by the high command, which didn't want to prematurely give up their Belgian bargaining chip.

### ***C. Austria-Hungary in Entente military planning***

Austria-Hungary's peculiar international situation also played a role which the Monarchy played at this time in the military calculations of the Entente. At the end of the Rome conference in December 1916 Lloyd George had already argued forcefully that strong Entente forces should be committed to a combined offensive on the Isonzo. He was convinced that such an attack would strike the opposing phalanx at an especially sensitive point. The British Premier had a very low opinion of the military power of the Danube Monarchy, based on many false assumptions; thus he imagined that the Italians' infantry had better morale than their opponents but that their artillery was numerically inferior to the Austrians'.<sup>321</sup> Naturally the Italian Chief of the General Staff appreciated the attention which Lloyd George was paying to the Isonzo front. But when he requested Entente help for the Venetian theater in these weeks he was less concerned about attacking himself than about defending against a joint offensive by the Central Powers, which at the time appeared very probable. But the entire concept never developed beyond staff discussions, since the English and French military leaders were planning instead to win victory with a great offensive in France.

Hindenburg crossed up the preparations for this offensive by his surprising retreat into the Siegfried position. Nevertheless the double battle by Arras and in Champagne flared up three weeks

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<sup>320</sup>See, among other sources, Lama, "Die Friedensvermittlung Papst Benedikt XV. und ihre Vereitlung durch den deutschen Reichskanzler Michaelis" (Munich 1932), and the counter-assertions of Montgelas in "Ein Schlusswort" (Berliner Monatshefte for 1932, pp. 1152 ff.)

<sup>321</sup>Lloyd-George, "Mein Anteil am Weltkrieg" (German translation; Berlin, 1934), Vol. II, pp. 182 and 195.



later. Meanwhile Cadorna stopped fearing a joint Central Powers' offensive against the Italian Army. Therefore on 12 May, when the battles in the West were already dying out, the Italians began their tenth attack on the Isonzo. After many local successes, this battle ended with the triumphant counter-thrust of the Aus-Hung. troops on 3, 4 and 7 June at Selo on the Karst.

Meanwhile the serious disturbances in the French Army, as well as the dangers threatening England through the submarine war, renewed the British Prime Minister's interest in Austria-Hungary as a target. His attitude was reinforced on the one hand by many conversations he had with Prince Sixtus, and on the other by the resistance of Italy and Austria-Hungary to reaching agreement in the territorial question. Sir Rennel Rodd, the British ambassador to Rome, had written in April to his government that the Danube Monarchy wasn't willing to surrender any land to Italy. But a combined Entente offensive against the Austro-Hungarians might force them to make the necessary concessions and create a situation where they had to make a separate peace. Lloyd George agreed with these ideas; he added that Austria-Hungary's departure from the war would force Turkey and Bulgaria to take the same step, making it possible to strike at completely-isolated Germany.<sup>322</sup>

But the British Chief of the General Staff Robertson and the commander of the English forces in France Field Marshal Haig had for a long time been staring as if hypnotized at the German positions near Ypres, which covered the extremely important submarine base at Zeebrugge. In their opinion the decision must be sought in this direction. The French high command naturally had no reason to quarrel with these English plans; in fact, their implementation would provide more direct relief for the French front, which had been shaken by the crisis within the Army, than would a joint offensive on the Isonzo. The opening of the bloody battle in Flanders was preceded on 7 June by the explosion of a gigantic English mine at Wytschaete, in which the Germans suffered substantial losses in personnel and equipment.

But Foch wasn't completely opposed to the British Prime Minister's ideas regarding the Italian front, as he explained in a conference with General Robertson at the start of June.<sup>323</sup> If

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322Robertson, pp. 433 ff. Callwell, "Die Tagebücher des Feldmarschalls Sir Henry Wilson" (in German translation; Stuttgart, Berlin & Leipzig, 1930), p. 221. Churchill, Vol. II, pp. 49 ff.

323Foch, "Mémoires pour servir a l'histoire de la guerre de 1914-1918" (Paris, 1931), Vol. II, pp. XXIX ff.

the Italians were provided heavy guns and substantial ammunition they might indeed be able - together with the Russians who at that time were preparing for their last attack - to force the war-weary Danube Monarchy to abandon their alliance with Germany.

In fact even before the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo Cadorna had many time approached the two Western powers with requests for heavy artillery. He demanded at least 100 guns with sufficient ammunition. On 16 July he wrote to Foch that his Army otherwise would hardly be able to resume attacking until the end of August because of a critical ammunition shortage. Foch believed that the Italians should strike while the iron was hot, especially since Austria-Hungary still wasn't ready to seek a separate peace.<sup>324</sup> Pétain sent several batteries to Venetia.

A few days later, however, the Central Powers at Zloczow struck back with a vengeance against the Russian hosts who'd been rallied with so much difficulty for an offensive; after several more days passed Foch had the impression that Russia could no longer be considered a reliable military ally. On 24 July, when the Entente statesmen came together in Paris for another conference, Foch expressed his conviction that it was now time to assemble all forces not needed on other fronts for the defense of France, and to keep them there until the Americans arrived. The energetic Welshman Lloyd George, on the other hand, refused to concede that the collapse of Russia was final as yet, and returned once more to his *idée fixe* that an inter-alleged force should fall upon Austria-Hungary, whose elimination would compensate for the eventual loss of Russia.

General Cadorna eagerly supported the suggestion of the British Prime Minister; he emphasized the numerous opportunities which a combined Isonzo offensive would make available to his allies. To make sure that this operation would decide the war, he needed to be reinforced with 10 infantry divisions and 400 guns.<sup>325</sup> Now Robertson did agree in principle to implement the plan, but only after the conclusion of the imminent offensive in Flanders, which in his opinion wouldn't be earlier than the end of November. Sonnino reported that a new Isonzo offensive was imminent, but that it wouldn't be decisive due to shortages of military equipment. Lloyd George once more advocated the intervention of British and French forces in Venetia. General nob. Albricci,

<sup>324</sup>Lloyd George, pp. 557 ff.

<sup>325</sup>Alberti, pp. 81 ff. Lloyd George, p. 558. Cadorna reports in "La guerra" (new edition of 1934; p. 386) that in these conversations his allies demanded that he attack in August and again in October.

Cadorna's representative, declared that the latest date on which such a combined offensive could be undertaken would be the end of August. If the campaign wasn't initiated by then, the next realistic date would be mid-May 1918. The heads of government asked the general staffs to begin preparations for a spring offensive in Venetia. Foch and Robertson decided that each of their armies would furnish five divisions and 200 guns. In a letter to General Cadorna dated 21 August, when the Italians were already striking for the eleventh time on the Isonzo front, Foch referred again to this agreement, and emphasized that both of the armies supplied by the Western allies would come under the Italian high command.

With these assurances the Western powers had promised future aid to Italy; the promise was to be carried out, although in a far different fashion than planned.

Meanwhile the "hundred day's battle" had begun on the blood-soaked plains of Flanders; in horror and suffering it would even outdo Verdun and the Somme. It was preceded by the fire of 2300 guns, which opened on 22 July and reached an earth-shaking crescendo early on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Then around 6:50 AM one French and two British armies attacked on a 40 kilometer front on both sides of Ypres; initially three German corps were assaulted by 15 divisions (14 British, 1 French). For three days the defenders were pushed back somewhat at several points, but then the impetus of the assault died out. At another point of the front (by Arras) four Canadian divisions succeeded in making a small penetration on the 15<sup>th</sup>; then there were two further days of major fighting in Flanders (16 and 22 August).<sup>326</sup> But the bravery and new defensive tactics of the Germans once again didn't fail. When the first phase of the Flanders battle came to an end at the close of August the English had gained a little ground along 20 km of the front at the cost of enormous casualties.

Far from this battlefield, on 20 August the French poilus, after a long period of inactivity, stormed forward anew from their trenches on the northern front of Verdun as requested by their allies. North of the fortress they pushed back the German positions on both banks of the Meuse around 2 to 4 km. The event was significant not because of this local success, but because the French Army had recovered after its severe fever in late spring.

Simultaneous with these actions the English were very

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<sup>326</sup>Montgelas in the "Propyläen-Weltgeschichte", Vol X (Berlin, 1933), pp. 427 ff.

energetically carrying measures to counter the unrestricted submarine campaign. They utilized radical means - rationing, a ban on the import of all unnecessary items, confiscation of neutral ships (half of which eventually were employable by the British), construction of wooden ships, basic alterations to the agricultural and mining industries, and very rapid production of technical gear to defend against the submarines. Moreover the United States provided immediate help - starting in June they shipped all their surplus grain to England while also building a large number of wooden ships.

While waiting for the Americans to arrive, the Entente countries increased to the highest levels the production in their factories of heavy guns, poison gas shells, airplanes and tanks. Although in recent months there had been moments of real despondency, they now had been overcome thanks in large measure to the stubborn determination of men like Ribot, Painlevé, Foch and Pétain in France, and Lloyd George and Robertson in England. And one other factor shouldn't be forgotten: German scholars were computing the minimum number of calories on which their troops in Flanders could survive while fighting in the flooded plains and water-filled craters, while the English and French - as well as the Italians on the Isonzo - were still entering battle while fully fed and dressed in excellent uniforms. Compared to the soldiers of the Quadruple Alliance they were living in luxury. The psychological warfare which the Entente was waging with increasing strength shouldn't obscure the fact that in the struggle for victory material strength was ever more important than spiritual values and ethics.

## **IX. The High Summer of 1917 on the Southwestern Front**

### ***A. The eleventh battle of the Isonzo***

#### **1. Build-up to the new actions**

##### **a. The Italian plan of attack**

The refusal of the Western powers to provide reinforcing units compelled the Italian high command in August 1917 to once more

open the bloody combat on the Isonzo by themselves. The numerical balance of forces was still quite favorable to the attackers; in the pause since the last battle they'd even formed six new infantry divisions (# 64 to 69) and many heavy batteries, well supplied with ammunition.

For the new offensive the Italian high command didn't issue extremely specific written orders; when they did so in the tenth Isonzo battle their instructions had only hampered the officers at the scene, and had to be very quickly altered. This time General Cadorna restricted himself to issuing general guidelines. The next operation was to be carried out simultaneously by 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies. The assignment of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was to conquer the Karst terrain around Comen. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would capture the Ternova plateau; to make this task easier, they'd first secure the Bainsizza plateau. Diversionary attacks could be directed against the Tolmein bridgehead. Otherwise the subordinate commanders were given a free hand. In contrast to the tenth battle, when the high command feared that lack of activity in the center (in the Görz basin) could endanger the unity of the operation, this time they explicitly intended that no important attack should take place initially between the Wippach and Salcano.

Apparently these guidelines of the high command were contrary to the opinions of the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, General Capello; at any rate, they were quite arbitrarily interpreted and altered by this General. He directed his gaze toward the Tolmein bridgehead, the capture of which he regarded as a "primary" objective. Thus the area to be attacked expanded considerably toward the north. At the end of July Capello issued specific orders for 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to prepare their attack. The instructions of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were not very different from those of the tenth battle and therefore can be omitted here. It's noteworthy that General Capello's orders provided that II, XXIV and XXVII Corps would carry out the main attack "in increasing force from the south to the north." On the Army's right wing VI Corps was to just pretend to attack at Grazigna.<sup>327</sup> The Army's left wing, the reinforced IV Corps, was to capture the Mrzli vrh; otherwise they'd pin down the opponents with local attacks on their entire front.

The great offensive of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was to take place in three phases:

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327TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Actually VIII Corps held Capello's extreme right wing (to the right of VI Corps); as instructed by the high command, they would remain completely inactive.

. First the XXVII Corps was to reach the line from St Luzia through Lom and Hoje to Levpa. XXIV and II Corps were to take the edge of the heights running through Vrh, Jelenik and Kobilek to Mt Santo.

. In the second phase the II and XXIV Corps would continue east for about three kilometers, while XXVII Corps captured the Tolmein bridgehead with a frontal assault accompanied by a simultaneous envelopment from the south. IV Corps would help achieve this objective by pushing forward from Mrzli vrh on the line of crests to the south; meanwhile fresh units which Capello intended to insert between IV and XXVII Corps would conquer the Schlossberg and penetrate the Tolmein basin. IV Corps would participate in this phase by attacking with determination toward Mt S Gabriele.

. The third phase would involve the capture of the Ternova plateau. Although in the original concept of the high command this was the principal goal of the operation, it's noteworthy that General Capello mentioned it only at the close of his orders. Here he stated: "After reaching the assigned objectives [the Army] will strive to completely control the low ground by Idria and Chiapovano and conquer the Ternova plateau."<sup>328</sup>

The Army commander furthermore remarked that the actual conduct of the fighting shouldn't be rigidly determined by his outline; instead his subordinates should improvise as the situation developed. Every success should be rapidly exploited by the deployment of fresh units. For this purpose plentiful reserves were available, especially numerous groups of mobile artillery.

Initially the high command had on hand for the battle 46 divisions, supported by 1700 medium and heavy guns. 20 divisions and 700 guns were assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, and 18 divisions plus 850 guns to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The center by Görz had 4 divisions backed up by 150 medium and heavy guns; 4 further divisions made up the strategic reserve. But the high command soon decided to increase the forces on the Julian front to a total of 51 divisions (600 of the 887 battalions in the entire Army), with 2400 medium and heavy guns plus 1700 trench mortars. Including 1200 field and mountain guns, the total artillery was thus 5200 pieces. Finally two and a half cavalry divisions were stationed in the area.

#### The order of battle

**2<sup>nd</sup> Army** (General Capello) - 315 battalions; 700 light and 1370 medium and heavy guns; 996 trench mortars

. IV Corps

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<sup>328</sup>Capello, Vol. II, pp. 100 ff.

- . 50<sup>th</sup> ID - Bde Friuli plus three Alpini bns
  - . 43<sup>rd</sup> ID - Bdes Genova, Etna
  - . 46<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Caltanissetta, Alessandria; 12<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt
    - . Inf Bde Pescara
  - . XXVII Corps
    - . 19<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Napoli, Spezia
    - . 22<sup>nd</sup> ID - Bdes Ferrara, Trapani
    - . 5<sup>th</sup> Alpini Raggruppamento (with five bns)
    - . 65<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Belluno, Sesia
  - . XXIV Corps
    - . 47<sup>th</sup> ID - 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Bdes; two Alpini bns
    - . 60<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Tortona, Milano
    - . 66<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Vicenza, Elba
  - . II Corps
    - . 3<sup>rd</sup> ID - Bdes Firenze, Udine, Livorno
    - . 53<sup>rd</sup> ID - Bdes Teramo, Girgenti
    - . 8<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Forli, Avellino
    - . 67<sup>th</sup> ID - Just Bde Foggia (but it had three IR)
  - . VI Corps
    - . 11<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Cuneo, Messina, Palermo
    - . 24<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Gaëta, Emilia
  - . VIII Corps
    - . 48<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Taranto, Lambro
    - . 59<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Modena, Ionio
    - . 7<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Bergamo, Trevisio
    - . 10<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Piemonte, Lucca
  - . XIV Corps (in reserve)
    - . 23<sup>rd</sup> ID - Just Bde Re
    - . 49<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Brescia, Ravenna
    - . 62<sup>nd</sup> ID - Bdes Grosseto, Taro
    - . 64<sup>th</sup> ID - Just Bde Potenza (but it had three IR)
  - . Other reserves
    - . 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav Div - 3 and 4 Cav Bdes
    - . Inf Bde Sesia (Görz garrison)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Army** (G.Lt duca d'Aosta) - 252 bns; 582 light, 778 medium and heavy guns; 756 trench mortars
- . XI Corps
    - . 63<sup>rd</sup> ID - Bdes Rovigo, Lecce
    - . 58<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Pallanza, Massa Carrara
    - . 21<sup>st</sup> ID - Bdes Piacenza, Tevere, Perugia
    - . 31<sup>st</sup> ID - Just Bde Lombardia
  - . XXV Corps
    - . 4<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Parma, Novara
    - . 14<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Pinerolo, Acqui, Verona
    - . 2<sup>nd</sup> ID - Bdes Barletta, Bisagno

- . XXIII Corps
  - . 54<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Lario, Cosenza, Puglie
  - . 27<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Valtellina, Piceno
  - . 61<sup>st</sup> ID - Bdes Bari, Granatieri di Sardegna
  - . 20<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Pistoia, Bologna
- . XIII Corps
  - . 33<sup>rd</sup> ID - Bdes Padova, Mantova
  - . 28<sup>th</sup> ID - Bde Murge; 12<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Bde
  - . 34<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Salerno, Catanzaro; 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Bde
  - . 45<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Toscana, Arezzo
- . VII Corps (in reserve)
  - . 16<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Catania, Siena
  - . Inf Bde Veneto
  - . Inf Bde Caserta
- . XXX Corps
  - . 68<sup>th</sup> ID - Just Bde Siracusa
  - . 69<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Ancona, Arno
- . 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Div - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav Bdes

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

- . 13<sup>th</sup> ID - Just Bde Maurizio (Pescara detached to IV Corps)
- . 25<sup>th</sup> ID - Units not listed (stayed in reserve)
- . 30<sup>th</sup> ID - Bdes Cremona, Aquila
- . 44<sup>th</sup> ID - Just Bde Roma
- . The twelve Bersaglieri bicycle battalions

#### **b. Measures of the Austro-Hungarian leadership**

The great tension that had prevailed on the Isonzo front during the tenth battle only slowly subsided after the fighting died out. The fury of the enemy onslaught had been so impressive that the defenders couldn't recognize the extent to which their counter-thrust on the Adriatic coast had crippled the enemy's effectiveness.<sup>329</sup> It was in fact believed that the Italians would soon renew their major offensive.

#### Activities in June

No significance was assigned to the subsequent Italian offensive at Ortigara in south Tyrol. As previously, it was clear that the main target of the enemy's attacks was the Isonzo front. Here it

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<sup>329</sup>General Capello wrote in "Note di Guerra" (Vol. II, p. 63):

"We were fortunate that our opponents were content to re-occupy their old positions. If the Austrians had continued to attack they would have surely reached the Isonzo!"



was necessary to use the days of rest as effectively as possible by fortifying the battlefield, restoring the destroyed trenches and constructing new installations. In the tenth battle the Italians had widened the area under attack north as far as Canale, so now this sector - which included the plateaus of Bainsizza-Heiligengeist and Bate - had increased importance. Hitherto it possessed only improvised defenses, which would have to be very quickly built up. The lack of roads and water in this barren Karst terrain caused serious concern. Great difficulties would have to be overcome before a significantly larger body of troops could even remain for an extended period of time in the remote area. In particular, a new supply line had to be established, to run from the Grahova railroad station through Bukovo to Reka, then along the road in the Idria valley and finally from Tribusa to the village of Chiapovano.

Moreover, the defensive installations in the area were quite deficient. This was particularly true of the position between Descla and Vodice, which had first been occupied during the tenth battle; now it would have to be constructed from scratch in full sight of the enemy, who looked down on our lines from the Kuk Ridge and Heights # 652. Consideration was given to wresting this high ground back from the Italians. The high command instructed that this option should be studied, but on 16 June GO Borojevic reported back that the operation shouldn't be undertaken. At least two fresh divisions and substantial artillery reinforcements were needed, and he couldn't provide them out of his own resources. Because of the general situation Borojevic anticipated that the enemy would soon resume their attacks; they were continuing preparations to do so without interruption. Perhaps fighting would erupt again in a few days. The Army of the Isonzo therefore had to remain ready to defend themselves so as to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

In this report the Army commander also provided his opinion regarding the course of the next enemy offensive. As previously, the Italians wanted to conquer the city of Trieste. But next time they wouldn't restrict their activity to striking along the shortest route (over the Hermada and Comen). They would once more launch diversionary thrusts against the Descla - Mt Santo sector, and eventually also against the Krn-Tolmein area farther north. He had deployed his units based on this analysis. "We hope that with these forces we can continue to hold out; but because of the enemy's numerical superiority they aren't sufficient for us to take the initiative on a large scale."

These statements make it clear that the commander of the Isonzo

Army had after two years become accustomed to the role of a defender, and that for various reasons he wasn't inclined to rely on maneuver.<sup>330</sup> Thus before the start of the tenth battle he had flatly rejected a suggestion by the commander on the Karst plateau that the Austrians should immediately counterattack after checking the initial enemy onslaught. Consistent with this inclination, GO Boroevic had also hesitated before giving his permission for the counterattack near the coast that started on 4 June. Constant concern that casualties couldn't be replaced lay behind Army HQ's caution. Analysis of the opposing forces indicated that their own units were still outnumbered 2:1 by the enemy, even though the Italians had suffered significantly larger casualties in the tenth battle than had the Isonzo Army. When Italian brigades were shattered, they soon re-appeared at the front in full strength, while it was difficult to rebuilt our units. Almost all the available March formations had been used up, and the supply of new replacement troops remained scanty. The high command was not in a position to honor requests for so-called "extra March formations."

During June three worn-out divisions (7, 16 and 62 ID) departed to the East. During the tenth battle the 24 and 35 ID had arrived, along with three independent infantry regiments; they were followed by 12 ID and 21 Sch Div. In June several units had to be sent to Tyrol. Thus on 1 July the Army of the Isonzo had just one more division than at the start of the tenth battle.

#### Events in July

The July campaign in Galicia made it impossible for the high command to bring forces from the East to the Isonzo. Thus it was now the task of the commander of the Southwestern front, FM Archduke Eugene, to carefully evaluate the situation and the enemy's intentions in order to allot defensive forces between Tyrol and the Isonzo. The Ortigara battle had compelled him to switch the HQ of 73 ID with 2 Mtn Bde (Battalions IV/20, I/21, I/90, FJB 12 and BH FJB 8) from Laibach to Tyrol. On 13 July these units were ordered back, and thus 73 ID was reunited at Laibach as the reserve of the Southwest front. Then, as the possibility of a new Italian operation against Tyrol became less likely while the threat on the Isonzo increased, Archduke Eugene transferred forces from the former to the latter front.

In mid-July FM Conrad's Army Group already had to give up six

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<sup>330</sup>See Glaise-Horstenau, "Svetozar Boroevic von Bojna" in "Neue österreichische Biographie", Vol. I (Vienna, 1923), pp. 109 ff.

batteries and six battalions (IR 57 and SchR 36). Finally they were to "hold in readiness to depart all units that are to a certain extent available, since the start of a new Isonzo battle is expected in the last week of July." For this purpose FM Conrad selected three more battalions (II/51, III/57 and FJB 23) as well as three batteries. At the same time he felt it necessary to declare his reservations against any further weakening of the Tyrol front; his whole Army Group "was only a thin screen, which our opponents can rip apart with local troop concentrations wherever and whenever they please." 10<sup>th</sup> Army in Carinthia also received an order on 20 July to "provisionally" station two battalions (V/47 and VI/BH 4) in readiness on the railroad.

Signs of an imminent new battle included continuing intelligence about the enemy as well as their increasing activity on the Isonzo during July. This included the deployment of new batteries, frequent air patrols, and local thrusts by detachments of storm troops. The only one of these actions that needs to be mentioned occurred at dawn on 16 July at Versic (2 ½ km southwest of Kostanjevica). The Italians captured part of 12 ID's position, but during the day were thrown back.

#### Events in the first half of August

But the major Italian attack, which was expected at the end of July, still didn't materialize. In the first week of August there were no events worth mentioning anywhere on the Southwestern front. It was noted that the Italians evacuated advanced parts of their positions at various points on the Tyrol front (such as in the Fassana Alps and the Vallarsa) while carrying out minor operations at other points in an apparent attempt to disguise the withdrawal of their units. On 7 August Archduke Eugene was convinced that the eleventh Isonzo battle was imminent; he ordered FM Conrad to make four more battalions ready in addition to the three listed above. But 10<sup>th</sup> Army would hold onto their battalions, since it was now believed that the enemy could also attack on the Carinthian front. Another week of anxious waiting passed by. The activity of the Italian artillery greatly increased starting on 14 August. With the help of aerial observers their long-range batteries bombarded the assembly points of our reserves, the routes to the front and the higher level HQ. The HQ of XXIV Corps, which had already been the target of a heavy bombing attack on 11 August, moved from Chiapovano to Lokve. At Grapa southwest of Tolmein a large ammunition dump was hit and blown into the air. XV Corps HQ, which at first tarried by Podmelec, were finally compelled to

switch their location; they moved to Hudajuzna to avoid being completely eliminated.

In these days of great tension there was an action on the extreme northern wing of the Isonzo Army that at the time attracted little attention but deserves to be narrated because of the extraordinary bravery of the combatants. For several weeks the garrison on the Krn had suspected that the Italians were digging a tunnel under the earth. A first lieutenant of sappers was called to the scene and confirmed that the troops in this sector were in great danger; with 30 sappers he immediately initiated counter-measures against the enemy. Despite great danger to their lives, his detachment bored through the rock and in mid-August reached the Italian mine, which was already set to explode. Shortly before the detonation the explosives were rendered harmless and the greatly astounded Italian miners were driven from their tunnel.<sup>331</sup> This gallant action not only saved the Krn garrison from a dreadful calamity but also set back the enemy, who apparently had intended the onslaught against the important position on this mountain as a prelude to the Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo.<sup>332</sup>

Around mid-August the number of Italian deserters increased from day to day. Several times whole parties came over with the cry "On to Mauthausen."<sup>333</sup> This was a sure sign that a major offensive was imminent. But it also clearly indicated that the spirit of the Italian troops had suffered. Statements of prisoners and the activity of the artillery made it possible to expect almost certainly that the attack would begin on 18 August.

#### The order of battle on 18 August

Commander of the Isonzo Army = GO Boroevic von Bojna  
 Chief of Staff = FML von Le Beau  
 Total strength was 249 bns; 1113 light, 357 medium and 56 heavy guns

XV Corps (FML Scotti; C/Staff = Col. Ritter von Pohl)  
 Had 23 bns; 191 light, 40 medium and 4 heavy guns

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<sup>331</sup>Wolf-Schneider von Arno, "Der Minenkampf am Krn 1917" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1936 edition), pp. 1 ff.

<sup>332</sup>Reserve 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Gjuro Hoffmann of SB 13 was decorated for this daring action with the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

<sup>333</sup>At Mauthausen there was a prisoner of war camp established mainly for Italians.

- . 50<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Gerabek) (8 bns; 8800 foot, 100 MG)
  - . 3 Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Tlaskal) - Bns II/18, IV/30, IV/37, III/46, IV/80
  - . 15 Mtn Bde (Col. Koschak) - Bns IV/33, I/61, II/66
  - . 50 Res FA Bde (Col. Edler von Portenschlag)
- . 1<sup>st</sup> ID (FML Metzger) (12 bns; 12,000 foot, 108 MG)
  - . 7 Mtn Bde (Col. Budiner) - Bns II/5, IV/25, IV/53, III/86; BH FJB 3
  - . 22 Lst Mtn Bde (Col. von Colerus) - SchR 37 (3); k.k. Lst Bn 155; k.u. Lst Bns V/4, IX/19
  - . 1 Res FA Bde (Col. Gallistel)
- . Corps troops (3 bns; 2500 foot, 24 MG) - FJB 17, 25, 31

XXIV Corps (GdI von Lukas; C/Staff = Lt Col. Röder)

Had 47 bns; 268 light, 74 medium and 10 heavy guns

- . 21<sup>st</sup> Sch Div (GM Haas) (12 bns; 7800 foot, 96 MG)
  - . 41 Sch Bde (Col. Edler von Schwanda) - SchR 6 (3), 7 (3)
  - . 42 Sch Bde (GM Edler von Grossmann) - SchR 8 (3), 28 (3)
  - . 21 FA Bde (Col Mally)
- . 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID (GM Kratky) (12 bns; 6800 foot, 96 MG)
  - . 110 Lst Bde (Col. Nechwatal) - k.k. Lst IR 31 (3), 32 (3)
  - . 111 Lst Bde (Col. von Richter) - k.k. Lst IR 6 (3), 25 (3)
  - . 106 FA Bde (Col. Meckel)
- . 43<sup>rd</sup> Sch Div (FML Fernengel) (13 bns; 8000 foot, 104 MG)
  - . 59 Inf Bde (Col. Kosel) - IR 24 (3), 41 (4)
  - . 86 Sch Bde (Col. Jungl) - SchR 20 (3), 22 (3)
  - . 43 FA Bde (Col. Leonhardt)
- . 57<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Hrozny) (10 bns; 7000 foot, 96 MG)
  - . 5 Bde (Col. Freih. von Albori) - Bns II/22, II/34, II/52; k.k. Lst Bn 40
  - . 18 Bde (Col. Laxa) - IR 87 (3); Bn III/69; FJB 9; k.u. Lst Bn I/2
  - . 57 FA Bde (Col. Padiaur)
- . 24<sup>th</sup> ID [actually in Army reserves but stationed in XXIV Corps sector] (FML Urbarz) (11 bns; 6500 foot, 104 MG)
  - . 47 Bde (Col. Skoday) - IR 9 (4), 45 (2)
  - . 48 Bde (GM Göttlicher) - IR 10 (3), 77 (2)
  - . 24 FA Bde [in position in Sector II.a] (GM Uherek)

XVI Corps (GM Kralicek; C/Staff = Col. Graf) (45 bns; 226 light, 77 medium and 12 heavy guns)

- . 58<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Freih. von Zeidler) (12 bns; 8000 foot, 104 MG)
  - . 4 Mtn Bde (Col. Noë) - SchR 23 (3); Bn III/85; k.k. Lst Bns 42, 75
  - . 5 Mtn Bde (Col. Prey) - IR 96 (4); FJB 23; k.k. Lst Bn IV/39
  - . 58 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Hussarek)

- . 14<sup>th</sup> ID (GM vo Szende) (13 bns; 8500 foot, 116 MG)
  - . 27 Bde (GM Ritter von Schilhawsky) - IR 71 (3), 72 (3); FJB 11
  - . 28 Bde (Col. Pollak) - IR 48 (3), 76 (3)
  - . 14 FA Bde (Col. Kapretz)
- . 1<sup>st</sup> Lst Inf Bde (GM Ritter von Soretic; 6 bns; 3200 foot, 48 MG) - k.k. Lst IR 1 (3), 2 (3)
- . 187 Inf Bde (GM Edler von Mihanovic; 6 bns; 5000 foot, 48 MG) - k.k. Lst IR 22 (3), 51 (3)
- . Corps troops (8 bns; 5200 foot, 64 MG) - IR 57 (4), SchR 36 (3); FJB 2

The VII and XXIII Corps, which follow, made up "Sector III" under GdI Ritter von Henriquez (C/Staff = Col. Edler von Körner); they had 76 bns; 428 light, 166 medium and 30 heavy guns

- VII Corps (FML von Schariczzer; C/Staff = Col. von Panos)  
Had 38 bns; 194 light, 166 medium and 30 heavy guns
- . 44<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (GM Schönauer) (12 bns; 7300 foot, 96 MG)
    - . 44 Sch Bde (GM Kranz) - Mtn SchR 1 (3), 2 (3)
    - . 87 Sch Bde (Col. Edler von Schuschnigg) - SchR 2 (3), 21 (3)
    - . 44 FA Bde (Col. Edler von Ellenberger)
  - . 17<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ströher) (14 bns; 8700 foot, 112 MG)
    - . 33 Bde (Col. Edler von Kirchhofer) - IR 39 (4), 61 (3)
    - . 34 Bde (GM Wolf) - IR 43 (4), 46 (3)
    - . 17 FA Bde (Col. Svoboda)
  - . 48<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Gabriel) (12 bns; 7000 foot, 96 MG)
    - . 11 Mtn Bde (Col. Fischer von See) - IR 79 (4); Bn I/10; BH FJB 6
    - . 12 Mtn Bde (GM Prinz zu Schwarzenberg) - IR 73 (3); Bns I/93, II/100; FJB 21
    - . (48<sup>th</sup> Division artillery attached to 12 Mtn Bde)

- XXIII Corps (FML von Csicseric; C/Staff = Lt Col. Szahlender)  
Had 38 bns; 234 light, 85 medium and 14 heavy guns
- . 12<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Puchalski) (12 bns; 7600 foot, 104 MG)
    - . 23 Bde (Col. Latinek) - IR 56 (3), 100 (2)
    - . 24 Bde (Col. Edler von Reindl) - IR 3 (4), 20 (3)
    - . 12 FA Bde (Col. Andersch)
  - . 35<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Podhoranszky) (13 bns; 7300 foot, 104 MG)
    - . 69 Bde (Col. Guha) - Just IR 51, but it had 5 bns
    - . 70 Bde (GM Funk) - IR 62 (4), 63 (4)
    - . 35 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Sostaric)
  - . 28<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schneider von Manns-Au) (13 bns; 7100 foot, 96 MG)
    - . 55 Bde (Col. Rada) - IR 11 (4); Bns III/BH 3, IV/77
    - . 56 Bde (GM Eugen Straub) - IR 47 (4), 28 (3)

- . 28 FA Bde (Col. Freih. von Augustin)

Army reserves in the area of Sector III

- . 9<sup>th</sup> ID (FML vo Greiner) (13 bns; 7000 foot, 104 MG)
  - . 17 Bde (Col. Chwostek) - IR 91 (4), 102 (3)
  - . 60 Bde (Col. Ritter von Hiltl) - IR 30 (3), 80 (3)
  - . 9 FA Bde [in position] (Col. Alfred Edler von Filz)
- . 41<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (FML Schamschula) (12 bns; 7100 foot, 96 MG)
  - . 40 Hon Bde (Freih. von Benz-Albkron) - HIR 12 (3), 32 (3)
  - . 82 Hon Bde (Col. Ritter von Sypniewski) - Hon IR 20 (3), 31 (3)
  - . 41 Hon FA Bde [in position] (Col. Capp)
- . 73<sup>rd</sup> ID (FML Ludwig Goiginger) (10 bns; 6800 foot, 80 MG)
  - . 2 Mtn Bde (Col. Panzenböck) - Bns III/8, III/55, II/70; FJB 12; BH FJB 8
  - . 10 Mtn Bde (Col. Kofron) - Bns IV/20, I/21, I/90, III/BH 1; BH FJB 4

Army reserve artillery

- . 7 FA Bde [in position] (Col. Scheucher)
- . 16 FA Bde [in position] (Col. Paul)
- . 62 FA Bde [partly in position] (Col. Vollgruber)

10<sup>th</sup> ID (as Southwest front reserves at Laibach) (FML Ritter von Gologorski) (12 bns; 6200 foot, 96 MG)

- . 20 Bde (Col. Edler von Lunzer) - IR 21 (3), 98 (3)
- . 21 Bde (GM Friedrich von Weisz) - IR 15 (3), 55 (3)
- . 10 FA Bde [in position] (Col. Czapp)

## **2. The initial Italian onslaught, 18-21 August**

In fact on 18 August the Italian artillery did lay down their destructive fire along the entire front of the Isonzo Army, from the coast north as far as the Mrzli vrh. Behind the breastworks, which collapsed under the rain of steel, the infantry waited hour after hour in their dug-outs. The hot August sun burnt down upon the land. When after a dreadful night the new day dawned, Army HQ received reports from all parts of the front that the Italian infantry was advancing to attack.

### 19 August - 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army

There was lively fighting even on the Isonzo Army's northernmost wing, which in earlier battles had remained undisturbed. Here the Italian 46 ID attacked the positions on the Mrzli vrh, which were stubbornly - and ultimately successfully - defended by 3 Mtn Bde. In front of the Tolmein bridgehead, which was held by

the center of XV Corps, the 19 Italian ID mounted feint attacks, which very soon were recognized as such and thus made no impression. But the onslaught of the enemy against the left wing of this Corps, and especially against the right wing of XXIV Corps, was in deadly earnest.

As already narrated, the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army (General Capello) was directing the main effort of his much larger force, initially of five divisions, against the sector of the Isonzo between Selo and Descla; here he could expect the resistance to be weakest. The 22 Lst Mtn Bde of 1 ID and, downstream from Loga, the 21 Sch Div held very thin lines. Thanks to thorough preparations the Italians were able to cross the Isonzo, which was a significant obstacle in front of the defenders' position, under cover of the night and of an intense artificial smoke screen. After overrunning the outposts on the river with relative speed, they created a serious situation for the defenders. Cadorna characterized the river crossing as "one of [our] most glorious achievements, cleverly prepared by General Capello and heroically carried out by the troops."<sup>334</sup> In fact the preparations had been quite extensive. Along the targeted stretch of the river, about 12 km long, it was planned to construct no fewer than eleven bridges plus three smaller foot-bridges. New roads were constructed from the Kolovrat ridge into the valley to bring up the necessary equipment on special vehicles with rubber tires. General Caviglia, commanding Italian XXIV Corps, later reported also that he knew the details of his opponents' defensive installations more than a week in advance, thanks to a deserter of Czech nationality who came over from the Austrian position near Canale; although the man's claim to be a captain was false, he did provide worth-while information.<sup>335</sup>

Nevertheless this large-scale operation wasn't completely successful. In XXVII Corps' sector between Selo and Ronzina, where the 22 ID and six Alpini battalions were supposed to cross the Isonzo, only two bridges and a foot-bridge could be constructed. And the crossing-points that were established near Dobljar soon came under lively artillery fire, which caused congestion. The pace of the entire operation was delayed by the failure to build a bride at Javor. Alternate routes were sought so that the columns could be diverted, but the chain of command broke down and the troops lost their way. The 6 km-long stretch of the river here was guarded by two weak Hungarian Landsturm battalions (V/4 and IX/9) from 22 Lst Mtn Bde; despite the frightful rain of shells, they kept fighting into the evening,

<sup>334</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (new edition, 1934), p. 399

<sup>335</sup>Caviglia, "La battaglia della Bainsizza" (Milan, 1930), p. 62



some of them still in the foremost trenches, others on the heights near the river bank. Because of the threat to the left wing of FML Scotti's XV Corps, he had SchR 37 climb from the Idria valley to the Lom plateau. It was fortunate for the enemy that this Regiment wasn't already in place. "An immediate counterattack would have certainly driven the Italians back over the river."<sup>336</sup>

The Italian XXIV Corps encountered fewer difficulties; they were instructed to cross the river between Loga and Descla with 47 ID (Bersaglieri reinforced by two Alpini battalions) and 60 ID. In this sector, which was guarded by 21 Sch Div, the Italians built four bridges and two foot-bridges in the night of 18-19 August. Construction of the fifth and sixth bridges (by Canale and Morsco) had to be abandoned because of Austrian artillery fire. But large numbers of Bersaglieri were still able to reach the left bank before daybreak and overcome 42 Sch Bde, starting with SchR 28. The Italian 60 ID recoiled from the defenses manned gallantly by 41 Sch Bde. The west Bohemian Schützen captured numerous prisoners and some machine guns from the Italian detachments which had crossed the river at Krestenica.

The commander of 21 Sch Div, GM Haas, had initiated timely counter-measures. But the reserves that were supposed to recover the positions (SchR 8) came under such heavy drumfire as they came up that only some of them reached the Vrh basin. They weren't able to keep the enemy from securing the edge of the heights. Because all telephone connections had been destroyed it was difficult for the commanders to gain a true picture of the situation, particularly near Canale. In fact parts of II Battalion of the SchR "Pisek" # 28 were still holding onto their positions until the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, when they were finally overcome by Italians who struck them in the rear from the north. From the very scanty reports which arrived, in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> it could only be determined that most of the troops were stationed along the line Morsco-Vrh-Point 760. It wasn't learned until the next day that some gallant isolated detachments were still holding a switch position stretching from the Fratta Heights toward Auzza. During the night IR 77 (from 24 ID), which Army HQ had placed at GdI Lukas' disposal, arrived at Humarji; in the darkness they grouped their two battalions on both sides of the road to Vrh.

Meanwhile the main body of the Italian infantry, accompanied by numerous ground-support planes, stormed forward in vain along the 36 km long front from Descla down to the sea. In the center of

<sup>336</sup>Pinchetti, p. 230

XXIV Corps the 106 Lst ID stood fast in the insufficient and now completely battered trenches on the eastern slope of the Rohot valley. On the Corps' left wing the Italians pushed into the positions on the Vodice Heights and north of the Dol Pass. But they were quickly thrown back by the determined counterattacks of 43 Sch Div and 57 ID. Even the air squadrons, striking with bombs and machine guns, couldn't shake the defenders. All the following attacks of II and VI Italian Corps (3, 53, 8, 11 and 24 ID) were repulsed in the Vodice-Mt S Gabriele area thanks to the exemplary cooperation of our infantry and artillery.

Far less dangerous was the onslaught against the firm front of XVI Corps which, just as in the tenth Isonzo battle, dominated the Görz basin. Here the enemy first fired a large number of gas shells in early morning. This was followed by a half hour of drumfire before the infantry assault of VIII Italian Corps (7, 10, 48 and 59 ID). Hand-to-hand fighting developed only at a few points. In most places the thundering artillery checked the foe. The fighting continued until evening, while fresh bursts of drumfire alternated with new infantry thrusts; it finally stopped as darkness fell.

#### 19 August - 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army

Aosta's Army south of the Wippach attacked with determination and great dash. Here also the Italians preceded their great assault by thoroughly gassing the entire area and bombarding the whole front of Sector III with heavy drumfire. The Sector, now commanded by GdI Henriquez, was organized as it had been in the tenth Isonzo battle. As previously, under FML Schariczer's VII Corps the 44 Sch Div and 17 ID were at the front, where 48 ID had replaced 41 Hon ID. FML Csicseric now led XXIII Corps. The defenses of this Corps had been strengthened by building up Line 2.a and connecting it with several trenches on the Fornazza tableland and along the so-called Versic switch position. However, the lines still weren't as strong as the old adjacent position to the north, which VII Corps had already occupied for many months and industriously improved. On the southern wing of XXIII Corps stood the distinguished 28 ID. In the center was 35 ID (whose troops were already fully accustomed to the harsh conditions of the Karst after fighting in late May and early June). The right was held by 12 ID, which hadn't yet seen action in this theater of operations. Behind the front of Sector III, in the S Daniel - Sesana - Opcina area, were the Army's major reserves - 9 and 73 ID plus 41 Hon ID. 10 ID, as the reserve of the HQ of the Southwestern front, were recuperating in the Laibach basin.

The masses of Italian infantry advanced early on the 19<sup>th</sup> under XI, XXV, XXIII and XIII Corps, each of which had three divisions at the front. The k.u.k. VII Corps and the center and southern wing of XXIII Corps were easily able to repulse the first onslaught. But the enemy were able to penetrate the position of 12 ID near Versic, where heavy and persistent fighting developed. Counterattacks by the reserves which were immediately available weren't sufficient to throw back the huge Italian force. Then the divisional reserves tried to mount a counter-thrust, which couldn't even get started under the enormous, murderous enemy bombardment that was pounding the rear areas. Thus the situation of the 12<sup>th</sup> Division became noticeably more serious. Meanwhile the other divisions also had to withstand further attacks, since the enemy quickly recovered from their first setback and delivered new blows. In VII Corps' sector the focal points of hot fighting were the heights south of Biglia, the area around the Fajti hrib and Points 383 and 363 farther south, and finally Kostanjevica.

South of the Brestovica valley the 35 and 28 ID contended with a much larger Italian force. Very bitter fighting raged all day; at some points air units also intervened. The most stubborn contests were waged for the possession of Heights # 126 south of Biglia, the Versic switch position, and the Flondar position. The actions again demonstrated how difficult it is to prepare modern defenses on rocky terrain in the immediate presence of the enemy. Despite all the toil of the last two months, the troops hadn't been able to correct all the weaknesses of the Versic and Flondar positions in time. The deficiencies now became sharply evident, and caused considerable casualties. But 35 and 28 ID were finally able to retain most of their foremost line. Only a small part of the position between the two tunnels at S Giovanni was lost, since here the flanking fire from heavy guns in the Sdokka area made the trenches untenable. In 12 ID's sector the day ended with the retention of Line 1.c on the Stara lovka.

This time the enemy also sought to intervene in the battle effectively from the sea. They had considerably reinforced their heavy guns on the Sdobba and in the Monfalcone area, and so could keep the left flank and the terrain behind the Hermada, as well as the entire coast as far as Opcina, under very intensive fire. Around noon they temporarily broke up the railroad near Opcina. Throughout the day many enemy vessels cruised at a respectable distance in front of the Gulf of Trieste. Occasional shots from the coastal artillery kept them from coming any closer. Finally around 7:00 AM an English monitor fired several rounds at Trieste. But immediately thereafter the enemy ships hastily withdrew and were soon out of sight.

Army HQ had observed all these events with great tension. It was reassuring that this time the enemy had made their main effort on the southern wing right from the start. Thus there was no fear that surprises such as those in the tenth Isonzo battle would recur. The first great onslaught had been repulsed. On the northern wing the enemy penetration of the lines of XXIV Corps didn't seem dangerous. At any rate, it wasn't possible to estimate the extent of the enemy's plans for this area. It was hoped that XXIV Corps' situation would be restored with the help of 24 ID. To prepare for any eventuality, it was ordered that SchR 36 should shift out of the Wippach valley into the area around Lokve; the trains carrying four of the battalions coming from Tyrol (IR 64 plus Battalion I/63) and one from Carinthia (V/47) were directed to Grahova. Furthermore, 73 ID was ordered to leave the Army's southern wing and move first into the Wippach valley. HQ of Southwestern front instructed 10 ID to come up from Laibach to S Daniel to replace the 73<sup>rd</sup>. Since the start of the battle the high command had also initiated measures to reinforce the Isonzo Army, sending 19 ID by train from the East. Helping to clarify the situation was the information that prisoners taken during the day belonged to 33 different brigades; from this it was concluded that a substantial part of the enemy force had already been committed and was being worn down.

#### 20 August - 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army

Meanwhile the hopes of restoring the situation at the inner wings of XV and XXIV Corps weren't fulfilled. Starting at daybreak on 20 August the Italian artillery once more pounded the Bainsizza and Lom highlands with very heavy fire. The troops who'd come up during the night weren't even able to unite with the remnants of 42 Sch Bde which, led by GM Edler von Grossmann, were still desperately defending the strong points along the second line; thus there was no question of these reserves mounting a

coordinated counterattack through the hail of steel. Our own outnumbered batteries weren't in a position to suppress the enemy fire. Nevertheless the savage infantry combat that did break out on this sun-drenched day in the Vrh area was initiated by the Aus-Hung. troops; the Italians restricted themselves to holding onto the edge of the heights they'd gained while somewhat widening the area they occupied where possible. The result of the enemy's hesitation was that our side greatly underestimated the size of the Italian force on the battlefield on both sides of the Avscek valley. The Austrians believed they had just three brigades in front of them. Army HQ reported in the evening:

"North of the Avscek valley [we've deployed] in a fall-back position running from the edge of the heights south of Log, bending through Siroka Njiva and along the western slope of Point 703 toward Levpa; it's held by the remnants of the Hungarian Landsturm Battalion IX/19, SchR 37, and then one company each of IR 53 and IR 5. The group which heroically defended the Auzza-Fratta switch position until afternoon now also had to be pulled back.<sup>337</sup> Battalion II/66 is climbing onto the Kal plateau. The five battalions from Tyrol and Carinthia have arrived; after strenuous marches they have now reached the Kal area, but won't be deployed prior to the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>."

South of the Avscek ravine the remnants of Schützen Regiments 8 and 28, plus the two battalions of Regiments 77 and 45 (which were already greatly reduced), after some unsuccessful counterattacks sought to offer new resistance in the position Levpa - Heights # 716 - Kuk # 711 - Morsko. Here one battalion apiece from Lst IR 32 and SchR 6 had also deployed. Behind them IR 10 (two battalions) and IR 9 (three battalions) had reached the Humarji-Podlesce area after strenuous marches. One battalion from IR 9 had to be left behind east of Britof to support the left wing of XXIV Corps if necessary. For the "counterattack as soon as possible" which HQ of Southwestern front recommended, only five complete battalions were immediately available, and they were exhausted from their march. All the other units had already suffered heavy casualties.

Therefore Army HQ felt compelled to order that the planned counterattacks should be canceled. All forces were to be employed so as to be sure we'd hold onto the line running from Morsko through Kuk 711 to Levpa and then the ridge stretching northeast of Kolk until new reserves would arrive.

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<sup>337</sup>For his outstanding leadership of this group, Captain Johann Iskric of IR 86, commanding the k.u.k. Lst Inf Bn V/2, won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

On 20 August the Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army didn't substantially widen the area they'd penetrated. General Capello's plan, which aimed primarily at conquering the Tolmein bridgehead, was essentially ruined because XXVII Corps hadn't moved forward. While waiting for a flank attack from 22 ID, the 19 ID in front of the bridgehead had merely carried out some diversionary attacks, which naturally had no effect. Also the operation of 46 ID in the Mrzli vrh area wasn't as energetic as on the preceding day, and gained no success. Under XXIV Italian Corps the 47 ID found their advance was limited because of the activity of their opponents and the failure of their neighbors on the left. Also unsuccessful was an attempt to help forward the 60 ID, almost all of which was stuck on the western bank of the Isonzo. General Capello had already sent reinforcements to both XXVII and XXIV Corps in the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, but they failed to arrive in time. The assault which II Corps resumed in the sector south of Descla likewise had lost energy. The troops assembled in the Rohot valley weren't fully able to develop their attack because of the destructive fire of the defending artillery. They made repeated assaults only against Rutarsce and Vodice, where each time they were driven back. On Heights # 652 and Ridge # 503 both sides lay ready for action throughout the day, but no significant fighting developed. In the morning the VI Italian Corps directed an attack toward Mt Santo, which soon collapsed under defensive fire that opened at just the right moment. Renewed attacks toward Mt Santo and Mt S Gabriele around noon were also bloody failures. Thereafter fighting subsided in this sector as well.

Meanwhile the VIII Italian Corps in the Wippach valley had worn themselves out in local attacks against Gravigna and Panowitz, and in repeated attacks toward S Marco, Sober and Vertojba. Although all these assaults were easily repulsed during the day, they were stubbornly repeated until deep into the night. Around midnight the enemy penetrated the position in the Panowitz Woods. But before morning dawned the gallant 1 Lst Inf Bde, which had been offered relief but at their own request had stayed in their assigned defenses, threw the Italians out again. The Army command had no concerns about the solid front of XVI Corps.

#### 20 August - 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army

The situation of Sector III was not as stable. Here also the bitter fighting resumed on 20 August. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army sought with noteworthy persistence to carry out their assignments. But all their efforts against the k.u.k. VII Corps were completely in vain. In the first hours of the morning the

intervention of Mtn SchR 2 had put an end to the dangerous situation on the extreme right wing of 44 Sch Div. Without pausing, the enemy tried to keep up the pressure but were unsuccessful. All of their onslaughts against the left wing of 44 Sch Div and the most vulnerable targets in the sectors of 17 and 48 ID were shattered by the gallant defenders.

The situation of XXIII Corps was considerably more difficult, although there was no imminent danger. It was planned to push the Italians out of the point where they'd penetrated the lines of 12 ID the day before. During the night the Division HQ had prepared their troops for a counterattack; however, at the same time they'd ordered that some batteries deployed far in the front should be pulled back.<sup>338</sup> This interruption in the "wall of fire" from our artillery would have unpleasant consequences. The counterattack opened in the first hours of the morning, but failed. Soon thereafter the enemy renewed their own offensive and threw back 12 ID. The Division's remnants now occupied the back-up position which ran from the Stara lovka toward Kostanjevica. This forced their neighbors to the north, 48 ID, to also bend their left wing back toward this switch-position. South of the road to Brestovica the steadfast 35 ID in Line 1.a held onto the heights of Flondar despite the severe danger to their northern wing. There was bitter fighting around these heights during the entire afternoon and until deep into the night, while the Transylvania troops displayed brilliant evidence of their bravery. Equally gallant and stubborn were the 28<sup>th</sup> Division in the coastal sector. Here they opened the day with a counterattack to recover Line 1.a next to the tunnel of S Giovanni. But meanwhile the opposing Italians also attacked with all their strength. After heavy seesaw fighting the right wing of 28 ID held onto the heights west of Medeazza, still linked with 35 ID near Flondar. Farther south, all of Line 1.a was retained down to the sea. Once more the 28<sup>th</sup> had suffered under especially heavy fire from the Italian artillery on the coast.<sup>339</sup> In the area directly in front of the Hermada the fighting didn't end when darkness fell. The enemy strove stubbornly to reach their objectives, regardless of the heavy casualties they suffered. Even during the night the bitter actions continued,

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<sup>338</sup>Because of the shortage of horses, 12<sup>th</sup> ID HQ were concerned that they couldn't evacuate their forward batteries quickly enough in an emergency.

<sup>339</sup>Besides the heavy guns deployed on land near the mouth of the Sdokka, the Italians pounded the southern wing with some 381 mm naval guns mounted on floating platforms and barges. Also employed were two English monitors, each armed with two 305 mm guns.

especially on Heights # 146 next to Flondar, and between the two tunnels at S Giovanni.

The air units had also again intervened in the fighting; they eagerly attempted to support the infantry directly with bombs and machine gun fire. Moreover there were numerous dogfights, in which five enemy planes were shot down. On this day the number of captured Italians already reached 5600; they came from 40 different brigades. More than 30 machine guns were also taken.

The northern wing of the battle front had already been threatened and was in need of support; now the repeated assaults on the southern wing also occupied the defenders' attention. The main body of 9 ID was being brought up to help 12 ID, and some of their men had already been inserted in the ranks of the latter Division. At this time only 41 Hon ID were still stationed in readiness to intervene on the southern wing. 73 ID were marching to the north. 10 ID were still coming up by train, just as were the first echelon of the promised help from Carinthia and Tyrol.

#### 21 August - 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army

After the night-time combat on the Karst plateau, at daybreak on 21 August the Italians once more stubbornly attacked the entire front of Sector III. No important point along this line of about 16 km was spared from repeated enemy thrusts. Once again the southern wing was the most sorely afflicted. The 28 and 35 ID heroically stood their ground in their positions west of the Hermada. Combat continued to rage back and forth between Lines 1.a and 1.c, as a series of thrusts and counter-thrusts followed one another almost without interruption. The Italians advanced to Medeazza, but still it was possible to drive them back. Parts of the Transylvanian IR 63 fought with exemplary stubbornness around Heights 146 near Flondar.<sup>340</sup> Thus fighting was confined to the narrow area between Lines 1.a and 1.c until darkness fell. But the remnants of the troops deployed by 28 ID had thereby become exhausted, and finally during the night they fell back past Line 1.c. Although this position was soon occupied once more, the counterattack which the divisional commander had planned to launch ahead of Line 1.c on 22 August had to be canceled. Meanwhile north of the Brestovica the remnants of 12 ID, supported by 9 ID, held out along the switch-position Stara lovka - Kostanjevica against all the furious enemy onslaughts.

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<sup>340</sup>First Lieutenant Friedrich Franek, who as a company commander in IR 63 led the battle group on Heights 146, was recognized for the heroic, gallant defense of this key point with the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.



Here the artillery's "wall of fire" had been restored and had a devastating effect on the Italians. Toward noon the HQ of 9 ID took control of this sub-sector. The relief of the remnants of 12 ID could start after darkness fell. The temporary weakness of this part of the front had now been overcome.

VII Corps fought brilliantly to hold their position, even though they also were under assault by a larger enemy force. Here the Italians stormed forward with the courage of desperation, especially in the afternoon. Naturally they sought to finally shatter 48 ID at Kostanjevica and through this area reach the rear of the Hermada. They tried every possible means to reach this goal, but all were in vain. Although the enemy several times broke into the foremost line of the position, they were always compelled to soon withdraw. As in all previous fighting, in this general offensive the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army exerted their strength particularly against the often-contested Points # 363, 378 and 464 (Fajti hrib). Despite employing gas and other weapons, the attack prepared against 17 ID in the morning never really got started thanks to the defenders' watchful artillery. In the afternoon the Italians were finally able to assault strong point 378 after a murderous preparatory bombardment. Their massed infantry moved forward in deep echelon. Although the first waves were massacred, the ones which followed were finally able to set foot in Line 1.a. But the brave IR "Conrad" # 39 (from Debreczen) made short work of the intruders. A short time later the stubborn enemy advanced against Heights 363 on one hand, and against the Fajti hrib on the other. Both attacks soon collapsed under the defenders' fire. Despite these setbacks, in the evening the Italians rallied for another assault against the entire front of 17 ID, which at some points led to bitter hand-to-hand fighting; once more the defending 39<sup>th</sup> IR were especially distinguished, as were the 46<sup>th</sup>.<sup>341</sup> The enemy finally gave up their fruitless attempts that night. 44 Sch Div on the northern wing of Sector III had to fight equally hard. Once again the main objectives of the Italians in this area were the position on the heights along the Fajti hrib slope and strong point 126 northwest of Spacapani. Here also it became quiet late in the evening. The outstanding intervention of the artillery had played a major part in finally checking the enemy's efforts. The way in which they took measures to pound each attacking group even before the assaults began was exemplary.

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<sup>341</sup>Major Constantine Popovits, commanding Battalion IV/39, was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for the "extremely active defense of the line of heights by Point 378, undertaken at his own initiative."

In the Wippach valley on this fourth day of the battle the VIII Italian Corps directed their efforts mainly against the Biglia-St Peter front, probably to directly support the major offensive by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. But the gallant west Hungarians of 14 ID didn't fall back a step. Meanwhile 58 ID repulsed two weak attempts to attack on both sides of the Rosen valley. Then the fighting in front of the k.u.k. XVI Corps ebbed noticeably in the afternoon.

The Italians only assaulted the Mt S Gabriele - Vodice front once in the early morning. Brigade Forli advanced sharply in many lines, but on the Dol Ridge they encountered the no less determined Battalions II/22 and I/87 of the k.u.k. 57 ID; the Italian Brigade had to fall back after a bloody melee, and suffered substantial casualties. Thereafter the enemy infantry were in no condition to renew their attack, although their artillery once more delivered a destructive bombardment and an air squadron hit the area around Britof with many bombs. On Heights # 652 and at Vodice the Bukovina IR 41 of 43 Sch Div repulsed two heavy attacks; thereafter both sides restricted their activity to artillery fire.

### **3. The breakthrough on the Bainsizza-Heiligengeist plateau**

#### **a. The Italians' success on 21-22 August**

While the Army's sturdy front from the sea north to Vodice and Descla was still able to withstand the enemy offensive throughout this fourth day of the battle, on 21 August the defensive lines which had been hastily thrown together around the area penetrated by the Italians at Canale and Auzza began to collapse. It's true that the counterattacks carried out by GM Grossmann in the Vrh area had checked the enemy, who were also hampered by logistical problems, but the fighting on the 20<sup>th</sup> had substantially weakened the already shaken troops of the 42 Sch Bde as well as the parts of 24 ID which had hurried to the scene. Soldiers of the various formations were badly intermingled, and it was hard to restore the proper chain of command. There was no guarantee that resistance would be prolonged on the defensive front established during the night, roughly on the line Morsko - Kuk 711 - Stara sv. duha. The situation was especially foreboding in the sector from Stara sv. duha through the Avscek valley toward Levpa, made up of trenches occupied by isolated company groups. It had been under XV Corps, whose left wing was holding on thanks only to their opponents' less than energetic advance; several battalions of the Corps were stationed here and in the position extending

from Levpa north through Siroka Njiva to Log. Army HQ re-assigned the whole sector to the k.u.k. XXIV Corps, which in turn placed the commander of 24 ID in charge. FML Urbarz, who had taken over the troops on the Bainsizza a short time earlier, thus had to re-arrange his reserves, which further confused the chain of command. Meanwhile SchR 36, which Army HQ had given to XXIV Corps, was marching with two battalions from Lokve to Lokovec. Moreover the Corps commander, who was also commander of Sector II.a which now reached from the southern slopes of Mt S Gabriele in a wide arc to Levpa, moved two battalions of SchR 20 (from 43 Sch Div) forward to Bate.

In the sector just described the defenders would have to contend with opponents who on 21 August were exerting their entire force to reach the objectives they'd failed to achieve the day before. General Capello had already ordered on the 20<sup>th</sup> that II Corps was to thrust with determination toward the Jelenik, enabling 60 ID to cross the Isonzo. XXIV Corps, reinforced by two fresh brigades, was to advance as rapidly as possible while XXVI Corps struck with a strong left wing vigorously toward Lom. At this time the latter Corps was reinforced with a brigade and a number of heavy batteries from the reserve artillery. Finally the Army commander moved XIV Corps forward from Cormons into the Judrio valley.

### 21 August

The Italians' enormous material superiority was once again strikingly illustrated in the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> by their powerful artillery bombardment. But at first the infantry on the Bainsizza plateau advanced only with hesitation. Cooperation between the two arms was apparently faulty. Finally the creeping barrage was resumed, followed by wave after wave of infantry. Meanwhile the Italians had already been attacking in strength against the Morsko-Descla-Vodice line. In the Rohot valley they were stopped cold by the unbending lines of the steadfast 106 Lst ID. The south Moravian Lst IR 25 were especially distinguished south of Rutarsce; when the enemy stormed through parts of our first position the gallant Moravians threw themselves into the fray and drove the Italians back. Battalions of the SchR "Eger" # 6 held onto the switch-position at Descla; farther north SchR "Pilsen" # 7 fought with equal gallantry against a much larger enemy force. The right wing of the latter Regiment, which was bent back in a right angle at Morsko, endured some difficult hours. When the Italians increased their pressure, threatening envelopment, and also succeeded in breaking through the Regiment's left wing, the right finally had to abandon their

position on the river bank. Only remnants of this excellent formation found their way to the rear and sought to offer new resistance on a line running roughly from Rodez to Kuk 711. But this was in vain. The main body of the Italian 60 ID, which had shifted north during the night, forced their way up to the barren Kuk Heights which, after lying for many hours under the concentrated fire of heavy artillery, resembled a blazing volcano. At the same time (around 3:00 PM) a dense crowd of Italians stormed the mountain from the north. The worn-out defenders, mainly companies of the west Galician IR 45, were surrounded and almost wiped out. The defeated troops of Col. Freih. von Vever's group who'd been fighting at Kuk and astride the Vrh-Bate road now fell back toward the Jelenik. The remnants of 41 Sch Bde which had still been holding out on the western slope of the high ground also had to give up the fight.

The fighting surged back and forth in the forest of shrubs which covers the heights on both sides of the Vrh-Humarji road. The enemy broke through north of the road and took possession of Stara sv. duha. But the actions south of the road went on without a decision. All that could be determined in the evening was that the defenders still firmly held onto the Kolk (Point 856). The situation must have seemed even more critical to the commander of 24 ID, since many times he received alarming reports which were only proven to be erroneous after several hours. There was also a rumor that the Italians had pushed through the left wing of XV Corps north of Levpa, which kept the commanders in suspense for a long time and forced FML Urbarz to send his last reserves marching toward Kal.

Despite all the trouble which beset XXIV Corps during this day, GdI Lukas evaluated the situation with self-control and calm. In late evening he reported that the fight was occurring in an area where the enemy artillery was able to fire effectively from three sides. This was especially true on the Jelenik Heights, which were apparently the Italians' next objective. Because of the importance of this area Lukas was sending all available reserves. But the troops engaged here wouldn't be able to hold out indefinitely, and casualties in the open terrain were quite significant. Corps HQ therefore had to regard the situation as serious and believed it would be necessary to quickly introduce fresh units.

At noon an order had already arrived from Army HQ that the Corps was being give 73 ID so that the situation could be restored in the area Morsko-Vrh-Levpa-Log. The Division's commander, FML Ludwig Goiginger, reported to GdI Lukas, and received from XXIV

Corps HQ command over all troops in this area.

The plan was based on the assumption that the line in question could be held by our troops until 73 ID could be deployed, but the Division still wasn't in place in the evening. Thus both generals Lukas and Goiginger intended that the large-scale counterattack would take place at the earliest in the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, after 73 ID reached Lokve. No means were available to bring the troops to the battlefield any quicker, since Army HQ was unable to honor a request to provide trucks. It should be noted, incidentally, that during the battle the Italians transported many brigades by truck.

XXIV Corps meanwhile had no choice but to hold on during the upcoming actions with their own exhausted troops. The Italians were determined to keep attacking to win a complete breakthrough. General Capello had meanwhile inserted XVI Corps (49 and 64 ID) between his XXVII and XXIV Corps and in the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> urged his subordinates to advance with all their strength. XVI Corps were to reach the upper Cepovan valley north of the hamlet of Chiapovano. The direction of this thrust and the depth of the planned penetration make it clear that the Army commander was still sticking to his overall plan of outflanking the Tolmein bridgehead by having the right wing of XXVII Corps wheel around Lom. At the same time the Italian XXIV Corps, deviating from its original assignment to strike more toward the southeast and south, would have greater freedom of movement in their pursuit. The commander of this Corps could rightly claim that until now he'd won the only significant success. II Corps, his neighbor to the right, were still bogged down. On the following day they should finally be able to budge.

### 22 August

As GdI Lukas had foreseen, there was heavy fighting everywhere on 22 August, and especially in the sector by the Jelenik and Kolk Heights. Starting at dawn a very heavy rain of steel descended on the Jelenik, just as it had on the Kuk summit the day before, and covered it with clouds of smoke and asphyxiating gas. Again the Italian infantry waited until their artillery had completed its destructive work; then they advanced in thick masses to break the last resistance of the desperate defenders. The Italians were also able to reach the high ground on the Kolk ridge in their first onslaught, but here they were driven back by a counterattack. The bitter contest on this ridge lasted into the night, by which time the leading battalions of 73 ID entered the fighting and decided it in favor of the defenders.

However, the enemy breakthrough on the road to Bate, which resulted from the loss of the Jelenik Heights, could no longer be rectified. The situation was dangerous, although fortunately the Italians failed to exploit it. The enemy stayed in place at Bate and in front of Heights # 747. While parts of 41 Sch Bde were still holding the line of hills that descends from Heights 747 toward Descla, the center of 106 Lst ID at Rutarsce was broken by a new enemy assault. The battered battalions of this Division had to be pulled back. The gallant Landsturm soldiers had stood up to the enemy offensive for four days, despite frightful artillery and trench mortar fire. They were greatly shocked now that they had to withdraw. Shortly before the retreat, one regimental commander wrote, "Casualties are enormous! I and my Regiment have done our duty to the utmost." The destroyed trenches were full of wounded men and corpses. The Landsturm men had in fact done their duty! Only a few were able to use the difficult routes through the mountains, which were constantly under enemy fire. Others stayed in place, like their comrades of SchR 6 at Descla, and were still holding out the following day. All communications had been cut. Recourse was had to the desperate expedient of having a plane fly over the battlefield, dropping slips of paper which said "Take the southeast direction toward Ravne."

It would be very difficult to establish the new line of battle, which was supposed to lead from Vodice over the Planva Heights (652) and Point 747, then turn sharply east to Bate where it would bend again to the Kolk ridge farther north.

Because of these developments, it was necessary to cancel the plan of having FML Goiginger deploy all of 73 ID on the line Jelenik-Kolk-Point 716 on the next day so they could counter-attack. Instead, as the Division arrived at Lokovec after three tiring night marches they weren't allowed to rest, but were sent ahead to the Bate-Lahka area in response to the danger that the enemy could widen the breakthrough. This was the task now assigned to FML Goiginger, for which purpose he was given (in addition to his own 73 ID) the 24 ID and the remnants of 21 Sch Div.

On this day the enemy didn't seriously attack the sectors of 57 ID and 43 Sch Div, although they continued a powerful artillery bombardment. The right wing of XXIV Corps on both sides of the Avscek valley was undisturbed. North of Levpa the Italians again kept the left wing of XV Corps under very strong destructive fire at Veliki vrh # 703 and at Siroka Njiva, and then conducted many

infantry attacks. But the enemy were repulsed and driven back with the help of reinforcements which had been sent to reinforce FML Metzger's 1 ID and then attached to 22 Lst Mtn Bde (SchR 37, followed by IR 64 plus Battalions V/47 and I/63). Thus on the fourth day of the battle the XXVII Italian Corps once more were denied any success.<sup>342</sup>

#### **b. Orders to evacuate the plateau**

In the evening of 22 August spirits were low at Army HQ in Adelsberg. XXIV Corps reported that the enemy had already reached the village of Bate. The plan of having FML Goiginger and 73 ID attack on the Bainsizza had to be abandoned. The "fight to win time" so that this Division could complete their deployment had been lost. Now the battalions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> had to hasten forward just to bring the enemy to a halt. And thus the last force which was reasonably close to the northern part of the battle field was being used up. If the enemy were also able to overcome these troops, no resources would be available to prevent a serious defeat. Should the Army just wait and hope that the last reserves would be successful? The enemy's numerical superiority was increasing from day to day. Their artillery dominated the entire area with destructive fire of unprecedented magnitude.

GO Borojevic faced a difficult decision. In the Görz basin (by XVI Corps) the battle had come to a pause, but near the coast the enemy were still pounding loudly on the door to Trieste. Both VII and XXIII Corps reported heavy fighting on this bloody battlefield, especially at the flashpoints which have been mentioned so often. The troops held on gallantly. Among other units, Battalions I/93 (Moravian) and II/100 (Silesian) plus the Viennese FJB 21 were distinguished in defending the heights south of Kostanjevica.

In the evening it was known that all attacks against Sector III had been repulsed, but there was no basis for believing that the enemy would desist from further attempts. Therefore no consideration was given to shifting the reserves stationed behind this important part of the front so they could assist the greatly-endangered Bainsizza sector.

In the morning the Supreme Warlord, Emperor and King Charles, had come to Adelsberg and reviewed the situation in a private

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<sup>342</sup>Pinchetti, p. 253

conference with the Army commander. Then he had driven to the Ternova plateau to observe the battlefield. Coincidentally, at the same hour the King of Italy was viewing the scene from the heights on the other side of the Isonzo.<sup>343</sup> In the afternoon the Emperor returned to Laibach without stopping again at Army HQ. Chief of the General Staff GdI Arz, who accompanied the monarch, had told GO Boroevic that the good progress on the Russian front would make it possible to advance against Italy with strong forces. Plans were afoot for a major relief offensive on the Isonzo from the area Tolmein-Flitsch in the direction of Cividale. But the project was being resisted by the Emperor, who didn't want a large number of German units on the Isonzo front. Perhaps the pressures of the battle that was currently raging would prove great enough to overcome Charles' resistance.

The preceding sentences are based on the recollections of Col. Anton Pitreich, who at the time was in charge of the Operational Office of the Isonzo Army. In his opinion this information from GdI Arz made a great impression on the Army commander. Around 9:00 PM GO Boroevic summoned his Chief of Staff FML von le Beau and Col. Pitreich and announced his unexpected decision to evacuate the entire Bainsizza-Heiligengeist plateau. The front of XXVI Corps would be withdrawn to the northern edge of the high ground and the eastern edge of the Cepovan valley; their left wing would rest on Mt S Gabriele. The left wing of XV Corps would pivot back to the line Log-Hoje-Koren-Spilenka-Frata.

Col. Pitreich, who recognized that this decision would have enormous consequences, suggested that they should wait until the arrival of the morning reports. GO Boroevic agreed. But when these reports didn't clarify the situation, at 9:00 AM on 23 August the fateful order was issued. The withdrawal would begin in the night of 23-24 August.

To anticipate a little, the retreat actually wasn't as far-reaching as originally intended. But it's worth examining the question of GO Boroevic's motives in conceiving of such a significant withdrawal, which would have increased the danger to the Tolmein bridgehead and the routes leading to it at a time when the Chief of the General Staff was planning to counterattack from this very bridgehead. It's hardly likely that the Army commander, after mulling over the words of GdI Arz, wanted to endanger the proposed plan. But it is quite possible that once Boroevic realized a retreat was necessary he intended to set up the new defensive position in the form of a pincers. One arm would be the front of XV Corps, facing south on the line Log-

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<sup>343</sup>Caviglia, "La battaglia della Bainsizza", p. 96



Hoje-Koren-Frata; the other would be the front of XXIV Corps, facing north between Mt S Gabriele and Lokve. If the enemy moved forward in the center to the channel of the Cepovan, they would be greatly endangered by any future counterattack from the area south of Tolmein. But the necessary condition was that the intended pincers position had to be held without faltering until a counter-offensive materialized.

The Army commander justified his decision to the high command with a report that thirteen Italian brigades had already been identified in the area they'd penetrated in front of XXIV Corps, and new forces were coming up. The enemy apparently intended to advance south so as to roll up XVI Corps. Opposite this larger force, the units defending the threatened area had shrunk considerably in size; they lacked the strength to continue to hold their positions under the destructive fire of the Italians' overwhelming artillery. This had compelled Boroevic's sweeping decision. The retreat he planned would prevent the rapid extinction of his forces and perhaps cross up the enemy's plans; the Italians would have to bring up their batteries over difficult terrain, and thus the defenders would gain valuable time.

The high command asked HQ of Southwestern front for their opinion. FM Archduke Eugene wired back that he "unfortunately [had to] share the conviction of the Army commander." There was no chance that the planned counterattack by 73 ID could substantially improve the situation on the plateau; also the reduced forces were hardly sufficient to hold onto a position anywhere in the forested area west of the Cepovan valley.

Thereupon GdI Arz sent a summary of the current situation to GFM Hindenburg with a request to release four or five divisions from the Russian theater of operations for the Isonzo front. The Chief of the General Staff also noted that in his opinion "two principal military objectives" were now paramount - the security of Trieste against the Italians, and of Czernowitz against possible recapture by the Russians. Since GFM Mackensen's offensive at Focsani had ended, and since (in the opinion of the HQ at Baden) the chances of success for the planned operation against Riga had declined due to the recovery of the Russians, units could be made available for the Southwest by stretching the lines of neighboring divisions and by shifting forces that had been earmarked for the Riga campaign. The AOK wanted 4, 29 and 33 ID plus 46 Sch Div and 145 Inf Bde.

**c. The crisis is overcome**23 August

After a relatively quiet night had passed, at daybreak on 23 August the thunder of the guns once more rolled over the battlefield. The gaze of the higher-level commanders was directed toward the Bainsizza plateau, the wounded part of the Army's front. In 24 ID's sector Point 833 on the Kolk Ridge was lost in the morning. But Battalion I/21 and BH FJB 4, both from 73 ID, stormed forward and recovered the peak; they held onto it, along with the highest point on the ridge (# 856), against all enemy attacks. Thus a wall was maintained that prevented a further advance by the Italians who'd pushed down the Vrh-Bate road the day before. Therefore the remnants of 21 Sch Div, whose line formed a half circle farther south around Bate, remained relatively undisturbed. GM Kratky and his subordinates had been able during the night to pull back the remnants of 106 Lst ID to a line running from the right wing of 43 Sch Div at Vodice over the Planva Heights (# 652) to the village of Dragovice, although their front wasn't continuous. The Landsturm soldiers had suffered greatly under the fire of the heavy artillery, but in the first hours of the day they weren't attacked by infantry. This was because ahead of the new line the groups that had remained behind gave the Italians considerable trouble before succumbing to their fate. It's noteworthy that one such group still held out on the important Heights # 747 until noon. At this time the Italians began to advance out of the mountain ravines in front of 106 Lst ID. They attacked the Planva Heights with particular strength, and finally after many hours of fighting drove the exhausted Landsturm units back toward the Kobilek Heights (# 627).

Meanwhile around 10:00 AM the Corps HQ and group commander FML Goiginger received the Army's order to retreat. It stated that starting in the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> the left wing of XV Corps should bend back to the line Log - Hoje - Koren - Spilenca [Spilenka] - Frata (Point 909), and that XXIV Corps should withdraw to the line Mt S Gabriele - Zagorje - Point 664 - Zavrh. This Corps was also to occupy the eastern edge of the Cepovan valley between Zavrh and the Frata, and in particular to secure the roads which climbed out of the valley to Lokve and Podcepvna.

The order to retreat came as a surprise to the commanders involved. The first to rush to the telephone was FML Goiginger. To Army HQ he described the situation as "no longer very

disturbing at this time"; he stated that a retreat past the Cepovan valley would be dangerous and suggested that at most the retreat should stop on the heights west of this valley.<sup>344</sup> Then he conferred with both Corps commanders, who soon agreed that at first they should withdraw only to the line Log - Mesnjak - Hoje - Point 814 (southwest of Kal) - Vrhovec - Point 878 - Madoni - WH. Kal - Zagorje - Mt S Gabriele. FML Scotti reported to Adelsberg that to ensure the safety of the Tolmein bridgehead it was especially necessary to establish a line of resistance as far forward as possible. GdI Lukas stated his opinion that he'd be able to maintain resistance along the line described above in the coming days, and didn't want to cross the Cepovan valley unless as a last resort. FML Goiginger had rendered valuable service by approaching the Corps HQ so quickly with his ideas. The assertions of Goiginger and of the Corps commanders were gladly received by GO Borojevic, and caused him in the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> to already amend the orders that had been issued in the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

This change in plans was also influenced by the relaxation in tension that was already noticeable in the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Attacks against the left wing of XV Corps were repulsed with relative ease. The enemy advance on both sides of the Avscek valley was completely lacking in energy. Also the Italian XXIV Corps, which hitherto had been the most active, seemed to be slackening. A renewed thrust against the Kolk Ridge in the afternoon was quickly checked, after which this area was quiet. For a while the sector Vodice - Mt Santo - Mt S Gabriele came under lively artillery fire, but it wasn't attacked. The only heavy fighting in the afternoon occurred in the Kobilek area, which was still a dangerous point. But the Italians weren't able to permanently occupy these important heights. Army HQ praised in particular the achievements here of IR 41 and SchR 22 from Bukovina, as well as those of the Moravian 1st IR 25. Only one battalion from 73 ID had to be sent to this sector (at Dragovice), while two battalions of IR 57 which had been switched from XVI to XXIV Corps were still in reserve in the evening.

The Görz basin remained quiet, while south of the Wippach new fighting didn't flare up until the afternoon and then never developed into a coordinated, major Italian attack. VII Corps easily repulsed several thrusts. Under XXIII Corps, the vigilant artillery prevented an enemy assault on 9 ID. The Italians struck the position at the foot of the Hermada (Line 1.c) with greater determination, but their effort was in vain. The

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<sup>344</sup>Ludwig Goiginger, "Der Krisis in der 11. Isonzoschlacht" (in Österr. Wehrzeitung for 1921, Issue 36)

Transylvanian 35 ID stood fast, as did the gallant 28 ID. In the latter Division the Bohemian IR 11 and Styrian IR 47 once more made "super-human efforts" while enduring a frightful bombardment by the heavy batteries on the Sdobba.<sup>345</sup> As it began to grow dark the tumult on the battlefield suddenly ceased, as if the signal had been given to "Cease fire."

In fact, on 22 August the Italian high command had already ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to interrupt their attack, secure the ground they'd won, bring order to their units, and stand ready for a new effort. At the same time the Army was instructed to pin down their opponents to prevent the transfer of forces to the north. Therefore the final attacks on the Karst and near the coast were probably intended to secure as much success as possible at the last minute.

#### 24 August

In the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> there was a still indefinite but nonetheless growing perception that the battle had passed its high point. Only the situation on the Bainsizza plateau, where the retreat had started, was still uncertain. In the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> the commanders of this sector reported that they had disengaged from the enemy during the night without disturbance and that occupation of the new line of resistance was making good progress. Then the Army commander regained his old confidence and let XV and XXIV Corps know that he intended to continue to hold the defensive front selected by the Corps' commanders. In guidelines issued around 10:00 AM GO Boroevic emphasized the advantages of the chosen line. It was shorter than a position on the eastern edge of the Cepovan valley and already contained several installations and caverns. Moreover the artillery would have better conditions for supporting the infantry. The defenders would still possess the valley itself, with its water resources, billets and roads. Therefore it was urgently important to hold onto the position now occupied. This would depend primarily on the condition and self-confidence of the troops, as well as the intentions of the enemy. The Corps commanders were asked to report their evaluations of these factors.

Although GO Boroevic didn't issue the final order for a prolonged stand on the Bainsizza plateau until the evening of 25 August, in fact the instructions described above represented the turning point which would lead to the complete elimination of the crisis. This was due in large part to the enemy, who let slip their

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<sup>345</sup>Vogelsang, p. 616

opportunity to exploit their success on a large scale. Afterwards General Caviglia accused 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ of failing to take advantage of the moment by having sufficient units available to pursue their defeated opponents.<sup>346</sup> It is a fact that in the Army's sector there were more than a hundred fresh battalions in addition to the units already engaged. But it's also apparent that the corps commanders, including Caviglia himself, didn't know how to build on their success. Probably the ardor of the Italians was already waning at this time. This can be deduced from the lack of energy they displayed in the attacks on 23 August, which caused Capello to summon his corps commanders to a meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

During this conference the Italian generals received the surprising news that Mt Santo had been occupied. The Corps commanders hurried back to their posts, now finally aware that the situation had changed substantially.

The Aus-Hung. rear guards succeeded in holding up the enemy for several hours on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The latter expended tons of ammunition on the abandoned positions before climbing the Kobilek and Kolk Heights which they'd stormed in vain the day before; finally toward noon they set foot on the Vodice and Mt Santo. The Italians' delay was very welcome to the retreating troops and enabled them to overcome the severe traffic jams which had developed as artillery and supply columns came together during the night. Italian airplanes appeared, hoping to increase the confusion on the road between Podlesce and Chiapovano with bombs and machine gun fire, but by this time the worst of the congestion was over. In the afternoon enemy patrols probed the new defensive line, but didn't attack. The only serious fighting during the day took place around the position which had been retained on the western slope of Mt S Gabriele. Here the Palermo Brigade struck with determination, supported by powerful artillery. Although the Italians advanced several times until deep in the night, they were repulsed each time by the gallant FJB 9.

Although this action also involved the right wing of XVI Corps at Sv. Katarina, otherwise there was relative quiet in the Görz basin. Another source of considerable satisfaction was the fact that since the previous evening the pause in the fighting on the Karst and by the coast was continuing. The enemy were digging in and seemed to be relieving some units. Oppressive heat spread

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346Caviglia, "La battaglia della Bainsizza", pp. 101 ff. See also Baj Macario, "La crisi della Bainsizza" (Rome 1933)

over the silent battlefield. It was now finally possible to give the survivors of the courageous 35 ID some well-deserved rest. They began to be relieved by 10 ID. The 41 Hon ID was still completely unscathed, and stood ready for any contingency behind the left wing of the Isonzo Army. 12 ID was being rehabilitated in the Gabrovica area. The southern wing of the Army seemed to be in no danger. Decisive for future developments was the question of whether the badly battered troops on the Bainsizza plateau would be able to hold out until new units arrived. 19 ID was coming by train from the Eastern front, but its fighting quality wasn't highly rated. Following the 19<sup>th</sup> was the 53 ID, which for now had just three Hungarian Landsturm regiments. IR 50 and 26 Sch Bde (Schützen Regiments 14 and 25) were expected from Tyrol.

Around this time an order arrived from the high command that the Isonzo front should be divided between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Armies. This change had already been discussed with the Chief of the General Staff. The HQ of GO Boroevic and his staff at Adelsberg were upgraded to army group level. 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army would consist of XXIII, VII and XVI Corps under GO Freih. von Wurm, with Col. Körner as his chief of staff. Command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was entrusted to GdI Henriquez, with Col. Freih. von Salis-Samaden as chief of staff. Initially the Army would control just XXIV and XV Corps, but the high command was adding a newly-formed IV Corps HQ (to be led by the distinguished GdK Schönburg, hitherto of XIV Corps) plus a group HQ under FML Kosak. At the start the new Army HQ were to be responsible solely for leadership on the battlefield, while their supply services were still provided by Adelsberg.

The former IV Corps HQ in Carinthia were re-designated "GdI Hordt's Group." GdI von Martiny, who'd been waiting for a new assignment since the setback at Luck, took over XIV Corps in Tyrol. The new organization in the coastal lands was to become effective gradually as the new commanders arrived and their HQ were set up.

#### **d. The Italians attack the new defensive front**

After the troops on the Bainsizza plateau had withdrawn from the zone where they'd been under heavy fire from Italian artillery, their fighting spirit quickly revived. Thanks to the enemy's sluggishness on 24 August the occupation of the new line of resistance and organization of the units went relatively smoothly, despite many hitches caused mainly by the tangled terrain. In particular, the shortage of horses caused some serious problems for the artillery. Several days were to pass before all the batteries were deployed and ready to fire.

The new deployment was carried out as ordered. The southern wing under Col. von Colerus (commanding 22 Lst Mtn Bde) held the line Selo-Mesnjak-Kal. His Brigade now consisted of IR 64, SchR 37 and Infantry Battalions V/47, I/63, II/66 and VI BH/4 plus k.u. Lst Inf Bn IX/19. Near the village of Kal they linked up FML Ludwig Goiginger's group of XXIV Corps. This group was divided into two sub-sectors: one led by FML Urbarz (three battalions of 47 Inf Bde and three of 10 Mtn Bde) and the other by GM Haas (five battalions of 2 Mtn Bde). Goiginger's line extended south to the border with 43 Sch Div at Madoni. In his Group's reserve he had the remnants of IR 10, 45 and 77 plus those of SchR 36, all combined into about five battalions. FML Fernengel barred the route into the Cepovan valley between Madoni and Zagorje with ten battalions of 43 Sch Div and two of IR 57. GM Hrozny was responsible for defending the Zagorje - Mt S Gabriele sector with the ten battalions of 57 ID. As reserves for the whole XXIV Corps, Battalions II/20 and III/55 of 73 ID and a battalion from IR 57 were stationed at Lokve.

Therefore on 25 August along the 22 km line between Log and Mt S Gabriele there were 52 battalions, most of which had already fought hard and suffered substantial casualties. The 21 Sch Div and 106 Lst ID weren't fit for combat. They were being rebuilt by incorporating new March formations - the 21<sup>st</sup> was in the Chiapovano area with 1100 riflemen and the 106<sup>th</sup> near Nemci and Lokve with 900.

In the morning, when questioned by Army HQ about the defensibility of the new line, FML Scotti once again stated emphatically that our ability to hold onto the high ground of Lom and Bainsizza at the greatest possible distance from the Cepvan valley was a "question of life or death" for the Tolmein bridgehead. FML Goiginger laid equal stress on this fact; he reported that the line of resistance that he'd selected between

Kal and Madoni was favorable. It could be held for a long time, although technical improvements were needed along with considerable reinforcements, especially artillery. The setback in the last few days was "due to the failure of certain units which succumbed to the Italians' 3:1 superiority in artillery and trench mortars."<sup>347</sup> The enemy's preponderance had psychological as well as physical consequences, since the troops bemoaned the lack of support in equal measure from our own side.

In the sector described above there was no danger from massive Italian artillery fire at present. Therefore the lack of prepared positions here was not a great disadvantage. In fact, the troops could find their posts better in the natural defenses of the terrain than they could in the chaos of walls and trenches. Of course it was possible that there would have to be further changes in the line of battle. But these could be carried out on the authority of the local commanders, since Army HQ themselves considered that even the evacuation of the entire plateau was a possibility. XXIV Corps HQ therefore indicated that if necessary due to enemy pressure the troops could fall back to the western edge of the Cepovan valley. Meanwhile 73 ID demonstrated that such a long withdrawal wouldn't be needed.

At the points where the new line linked up with the old positions (in the south by Mt S Gabriele and in the north by Log and Mesnjak) the defenders were still within the effective range of massed Italian artillery fire. Therefore in these sectors the operations were part of a very difficult battle of materiel. The hotly contested Mt S Gabriele especially became a scene of destruction and death.

On the Italian side, in the evening of 24 August the II Corps reached the line Gargaro-Bitez and XXIV Corps the line Slemo-Trusnje. XIV Corps had moved through Levpa and were advancing toward Koprivisce. Because of the successes farther south, XVII Corps were finally able to move their right wing forward toward Hoje. The strong center of this Corps (65 ID and 5 Alpini Group) had meanwhile tried in vain to penetrate the village of Mesnjak and storm Heights # 549 south of Log. Their gallant assault was well prepared and was supported by the artillery of XXVII and XIV Corps, "but in this area there was no attack that wasn't followed by a counterattack, and thus it was never possible to win a success, either on the 24<sup>th</sup> or in the days which followed."<sup>348</sup>

<sup>347</sup>Apparently Goiginger's remark referred to the Schützen Regiments # 8 and 28. A later investigation determined, however, that the charge was only justified in part.

<sup>348</sup>Geloso, pp. 152 ff.



25 August

There was lively fighting again at Mesnjak, Hoje and Heights 549 on 25 August. It gained the Italians no success. The enemy deployed strong forces against FML Goiginger's group, but they didn't coordinate their attacks. On the Vrh Scur # 814 (southwest of Kal), at Vrhovec, Podlesce and Kuscarji, and finally at Podlaka there were local actions; in the afternoon the fighting by Podlesce and Podlaka assumed greater proportions. The Italians were repulsed everywhere, in many places after hand-to-hand combat. FJB 12 and Battalion III/BH IR 1 were especially distinguished.

43 Sch Div, adjacent to Group Goiginger on the south, still weren't fully oriented as to the new situation. When it was reported that about 18 enemy battalions were assembled in the area north of Madoni, the Division feared that the batteries they'd stationed north of the Cepovan valley were endangered. Corps HQ, upon learning of their concern, in turn asked FML Goiginger for his opinion. From that determined commander they received an answer that was short and to the point: "We can't determine what [forces] are deployed behind the attacking enemy troops, but we will repulse the attack. Withdrawal is by no means necessary."

On this day the 18 Inf Bde of 57 ID on Mt S Gabriele was under very heavy attack from the 11 Italian ID. The mountain burned under drumfire. After a bitter struggle part of the position on the western slope had to be given up. But Line 1.b on the northern summit was stubbornly defended by parts of IR 87 and by the Hungarian Landsturm Battalion I/2, while FJB 9 continued to hold onto the southern part of the slope positions.

This development on Mt S Gabriele caused GdI Lukas to make available to GM Hrozny the two battalions of 73 ID which had been held back in the Corps' reserves at Nemci and Lokve. They marched to Voglarji. This put an end to the plan of returning both battalions to FML Goiginger, who expected a major enemy attack on the next day. Therefore he requested to be assigned the next regiment to arrive at Grahova. But Corps HQ couldn't fulfill this request. With the concurrence of Army HQ the 50<sup>th</sup> IR, which was just arriving, were sent to Lokve and Chiapovano as the Corps' new reserve.

26 August

In the night of 25-26 August a refreshing rainstorm interrupted

operations. When the new day dawned the Italians renewed their attacks against the left wing of XV Corps. Once more there was a fierce contest for possession of Heights # 549 south of Log, where Battalions V/47 and I/SchR 37 offered heroic resistance.<sup>349</sup> The Italians managed to break through at Mesnjak. But then they were thrown back and had to be content with holding the western part of this extended village. Against Goiginger's group the enemy wasted their strength in isolated thrusts, without gaining any lasting success. Apparently they still hadn't been able to bring their batteries over to the eastern bank of the Isonzo. In the afternoon they climbed the Vrh Scur in a well-conducted onslaught; but here the 47 Inf Bde, although numbering just 2300 riflemen, soon recaptured the barren mountain ridge. Also the heights between Vrhovec and Madoni were the scene of see-saw fighting, just as on the previous day; finally the Aus-Hung. troops won the upper hand.

In the Mt S Gabriele area, it was clearly the Italians' intention to envelop the mountain from the north. About a division's worth of troops moved closer to the entry into the Cepovan valley and toward Zagorje. In the afternoon, after powerful artillery preparation, they took Heights # 561 south of WH. Kal. At noon a brigade from the 8 Italian ID, deployed in depth with many lines, stormed ahead from the Dol Pass toward the Veliki Hrib, while the other brigade renewed the frontal assault from the west through Kramarca. But the brave battalions of 18 Inf Bde didn't fall back a step, and even took 230 Italian prisoners. As darkness fell the destructive fire of both sides' artillery declined, at least for the short hours of the night.

Thus another day was successfully completed. This was of great importance to Army Group HQ, since their entire goal was only to gain time. In the morning GO Borojevic had expressed some gloomy thoughts when he asked the high command what he should do "in case the Army, despite their heroic efforts, aren't able to surmount the current difficult situation." He professed that he was free of pessimism but needed instructions for the worst scenario. The piecemeal commitment of isolated units separated by great distances was only a temporary emergency measure, that couldn't alter the overall situation.

It is possible that with this message GO Borojevic was mainly trying to learn more about the plans which the Chief of the General Staff had mentioned on 22 August. At any rate, the HQ of Southwestern front, in their attached report, stated that

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<sup>349</sup>Pichler, "Das V./47. Bataillon" (in Vogelsang's "IR. 47", p. 784)

circumstances demanded that "we deal with the Italian Army, which can only be done with an offensive."

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

##### **a. Wavering decisions of the Italian high command**

As we have already narrated, on 22 August General Cadorna had ordered his 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to break off their offensive. Writing after the war, the Marshal noted that "The result of the first assault, which normally is the most productive, was too limited." He feared that a better result could be purchased only with large casualties and considerable damage to the troops.<sup>350</sup> Now he would seek to make future operations of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army more profitable by increasing the pressure from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, which had already gained some substantial success. For this purpose, on 22 August the Duke of Aosta was instructed to soon transfer two divisions with a large number of medium and heavy batteries and trench mortars to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Thus the massive artillery of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army swelled to 1550 medium and heavy guns, plus 850 light pieces.<sup>351</sup> General Capello was ordered to continue his operation, and to once more commit VIII Corps to the attack, so that the defenses on the heights east of Görz could be overcome.

In his memoirs Cadorna defends himself against "malicious critics" who stated that by taking these measures he was diverging from his goal of "Laibach-Trieste." As counter-evidence, he points out that on 26 August the high command informed the two Army commanders that resources weren't sufficient to support both of them attacking simultaneously, and that developments to date on the Bainsizza plateau hadn't forced their opponents to weaken the front near the coast. But when 3<sup>rd</sup> Army did resume their great attack, substantial artillery and all available trench mortars would be shifted to them from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The Army commanders should be ready for this change, and the Duke of Aosta would determine the point in time when he could again resume his operation, hopefully as soon as possible.<sup>352</sup>

Apparently on 26 August General Cadorna believed that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would soon reach their objective, the high ground by Ternova. General Capello also seems to have had high hopes, since on this day he made a cavalry division and three bicycle battalions

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350Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 406

351Geloso, p. 116

352Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 412

available to XXIV Corps. The Corps commander, however, had to leave the horsemen in the Isonzo valley, since water was lacking on the Bainsizza plateau.<sup>353</sup> The mood of cheerful confidence would soon be dispelled.

### 27-28 August

No progress was made on 27 August. On the Bainsizza plateau the troops in the center found themselves up against a defensive front strengthened by numerous batteries, without as yet having sufficient artillery support of their own. Also no ground could be gained in the Lom sector. The area around Mt S Gabriele was heavily bombarded once again. Near Görz the VIII Corps prepared for their new operation with powerful artillery fire while the infantry worked their way up to the opposing positions. Individual detachments attacked, and received a bloody repulse. A sultry southern wind brought gusts of rain, which continued through the following night. This was a refreshment to all those who were performing their difficult duty in this dreary mountain terrain.

On 28 August, which was supposed to be a day of major battle for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, all their efforts were shattered even though the infantry advanced with noteworthy determination. The heaviest assault was directed against Mt S Gabriele, and extended north past the heights by Madoni and south past Mt S Marco. At the same time powerful thrusts developed on the Bainsizza and Lom plateaus. In particular the XXVII Corps strove to achieve their long-sought breakthrough toward Lom. After strong artillery preparation their right wing were able to climb the heights south of Hoje village but couldn't hold onto their gains. Near Mesnjak a storm column pushed ahead almost to Dolgi Laz, but in the evening had to retreat, defeated. At Madoni and the entrance to the Cepovan valley the Teramo, Aquila and Campobasso Brigades bled themselves in futile assaults against the left wing of Goiginger's group and against 43 Sch Div (which had been reinforced by IR 57). In the sector chosen for the main attack, Mt S Gabriele was the center point of heavy fighting. From daybreak the heavy Italian batteries pounded this important bastion with full fury. Toward noon there were infantry assaults from both the north and west. Combat lasted into the night, especially around the northern summit (Veliki hrib) and ended when both sides lay exhausted, their last grenades in hand, just a stone's throw apart. The fighting along the line Sv Katarina-Mt S Marco was equally grim. It was particularly sharp in the Panowitz Forest, where Brigades Gaeta and Bergamo confronted the

<sup>353</sup>Caviglia, "La battaglia della Bainsizza", p. 109

Linz Lst IR 2, and at Mt S Marco. Here the Porto Maurizio, Piemonte and Jonio Brigades stormed forward courageously, accompanied by bold pilots, and tangled with the brave veteran troops of the Bohemian FJB 2, k.k. Lst IR 51 and Croatian IR 96. All positions remained in the hands of the defenders. Thus the intervention of VIII Corps in the actions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army hadn't led to any gains.

### 29 August

The operations of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 29 August were also fruitless. After the collapse of a final thrust at Hoje and Mesnjak the operations on the Bainsizza and Lom plateaus were halted around noon. Thus ended the activity of the XXVII, XIV and XXIV Italian Corps, after IV Corps on the northern wing had already stopped when their first assaults on the Mrzli Vrh failed. The offensive now was continued solely by II, VI and VIII Corps in the area of the principal objective, Mt S Gabriele. In the next few days these corps were joined by several fresh brigades, including some that had earlier belonged to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. How greatly the Italians had been encouraged by their opponents' retreat was demonstrated on 29 August when a "flying column" of two infantry battalions, one squadron and a mountain battery tried to penetrate into the Cepovan valley through the opening at WH Kal.<sup>354</sup> The time for such an operation was long past. Nonetheless, it was a gallant effort when the mountain battery deployed on Heights # 561,<sup>355</sup> a few hundred meters in front of IR 24 (of 43 Sch Div), and when the horsed squadron rode ahead toward WH Kal. The Italians also thrust in vain toward Zagorje, where they received an evil reception from the left wing of 43 Sch Div and from Battalion III/69 of 5 Inf Bde. Once again there was heavy fighting around Mt S Gabriele. Despite several Italian assaults the stubborn defenders - still the same battalions of 18 Inf Bde - didn't budge. VIII Corps in the Görz basin didn't attack until afternoon so as to give the artillery more time to wear down their opponents. But they were disappointed; the attack didn't progress past the first line. As darkness gathered and rain began to fall the tumult of battle finally subsided.

Now the high command decided to completely cancel the major offensive of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. General Cadorna was forced into this by a pressing shortage of ammunition. At the same time he informed 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 29 August that the continuous wastage of men and equipment made it necessary for the time being to place limits on their current operations as well. They could only seek to win

<sup>354</sup>"Brigate di Fanteria", Vol. VIII, p. 193

<sup>355</sup>These heights are incorrectly shown on many maps as # 661.

local improvements to their position. But General Capello should draw up plans and prepare for a future decisive attack designed to overcome his opponents along the entire line of defenses in the Görz basin. The target would be the area between the Wippach and the southern edge of the Ternova plateau, including Mounts S Gabriele and S Daniele. Cadorna added that this operation should be carried out with the greatest energy and the strongest possible artillery support. It would begin in mid-September.<sup>356</sup>

This order caused General Capello to finally abandon the concept of attacking toward Tolmein which he had been stubbornly following. Now he decided to anticipate Cadorna's intentions in part by continuing the attack already in progress against Mt S Gabriele. He chose this course not only because of the high command's hope that eventually 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would assist the operations of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, but also because this large mountain complex blocked the road out of the Isonzo valley through the Dol Pass into the Britof basin.<sup>357</sup>

## **b. Fighting intensifies around Mt S Gabriele**

Five days had now passed since the retreat on the plateaus of Bainsizza and Lom. Fresh units had been joining the Isonzo Army since 26 August although, as GO Borojevic complained, only "in dribblets." Since the recuperation of the battered divisions was also making progress, the situation was improving as each day passed. On 29 August confidence had returned completely, and it was believed that any danger on the plateaus could be overcome. It seemed certain that the new line in this area could be held indefinitely, and therefore all available resources were devoted to making technical improvements to the position.

On 29 August GdK Schönburg assumed command of Sector II.a, between the village of Kal and Sv. Katarina. Mt S Gabriele, which had always been the strong point of the barrier guarding the basin of the Wippach valley, had assumed even greater importance after the evacuation of Mt Santo. Now it was also the advanced bulwark for the defenses of the Ternova plateau. The mountain complex, with its grey mass rising into the sky, had originally been vulnerable only from the west. But since 25 August waves of Italian troops had also broken against it from the north. Defending against attack from this direction was very difficult since the entrenchments here weren't as technically

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356Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 414

357Capello, p. 131

advanced. An even greater drawback was the fact that our own batteries which formerly had been posted in the Britof basin and behind Mt Santo - thus protecting S Gabriele with effective fire from the side - had now been replaced by enemy guns.

The number of batteries the Italians employed to bombard the Gabriele sector increased from day to day; finally they deployed more than 700 medium and heavy guns and several hundred trench mortars in addition to their light artillery. "This was the greatest concentration of firepower in an area this size during the war."<sup>358</sup>

Thus Mt S Gabriele, which had been under heavy attack since 24 August, became even more the center of the battle, which in other areas was already dying out. After four days of combat, on 29 August the Italians finally captured a trench on the northern summit (Point 526). During the following night the 87<sup>th</sup> IR recovered part of the works from the Italians while taking about 100 prisoners. Next day the enemy attacked again, seizing a portion of the trench about 200 paces long. Now the I Battalion of IR 50, which had recently arrived from Tyrol, was supposed to counterattack, but their effort collapsed. Meanwhile in other sectors Battalions II/34 and IV/20, along with IR 87, continued to defy the new Italian onslaughts, even though their ranks were reduced by the frightful rain of steel. During the night and in the morning of 31 August the artillery fire was declined to a bearable level. It swelled again around noon, and after three hours of drumfire the infantry attacks resumed. The enemy were unable to widen the foothold they'd won on the Veliki hrib by even a foot. Then the parts of IR 87 engaged in this sector counterattacked, along with Battalions II and III/50 which had arrived during the night. They weren't able to recover the entire position. Meanwhile enemy thrusts were easily repulsed at Kramarca and Zagorje.

On 1 September the Italians stayed in place on the Veliki hrib. But further attacks were expected because strong enemy forces continued to come up from the Isonzo valley in the direction of the Dol Pass and from there toward the western slope of Mt S Gabriele and toward the Veliki hrib; moreover, the Italian guns and trench mortars maintained a heavy fire. Col. Laxa, commanding 18 Inf Bde, took action to anticipate the enemy assault.<sup>359</sup> The Egerland Lst IR 6, which was eventually supposed

<sup>358</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 415

<sup>359</sup>Wladimir Laxa, a colonel in the General Staff corps, was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for his outstanding direction of the defense of Mt S

to relieve IR 87, had arrived at Ravnica; after incorporating March troops it was organized as two and a half battalions. During the day Laxa sent one of the battalions to the eastern edge of Mt S Gabriele. But the expected attack didn't materialize, even though Italian artillery continued to bombard the Gabriele sector. On 2 September their fire diminished. The 87<sup>th</sup> Regiment narrowed the area penetrated by the enemy, and in the evening prevented the Italians from once more widening their sector. Gradually it grew quiet, and it was possible to relieve the gallant south Styrian regiment. They had endured some of the most difficult fighting "ever experienced by an Austrian unit."<sup>360</sup>

Compared with the events on Mt S Gabriele, operations during these days in other parts of Sector II.a were unimportant. All the thoughts and concerns of the higher-ranking commanders were concentrated on this key point of the front; the question as to whether this bulwark could be retained was urgent. The divisional commander GM Hrozny reported on 2 September: "The lessons of the fighting thus far to defend the Gabriele compel me to once more report that this position, and the Veliki hrib in particular, cannot be a permanent position because of the extraordinarily unfavorable tactical situation; in the long run the strong enemy artillery fire, which continues unabated, cannot be resisted."

The commander of Sector II.a also felt compelled to report that retention of Mt S Gabriele couldn't be "guaranteed unconditionally." At this time there were enough troops available, but for critical situations he'd need units with proven combat value. The divisions being sent to the Sector, 19 and 53 ID, weren't accustomed to the Karst. SchR 25, which had come from Tyrol, had already been sent to an important point under Goiginger's Group and thus wasn't available. The Transylvanian IR 50 had spent a year in the trenches in Tyrol and wasn't used to heavy combat; the first battalion of this Regiment to be sent to Mt S Gabriele had failed in the fighting on 30-31 August. But the troops of 18 Inf Bde, which had been involved in heavy combat without interruption, would finally have to be relieved. Battalion I/87 numbered just 185 riflemen, and the other battalions had also suffered heavily. Sector HQ intended to gradually relieve 18 Bde with the regiments of the veteran and now rebuilt 106 Lst ID, but 40% of the soldiers in this Division were young men who'd never been in the field. Therefore it would

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Gabriele.

360Veith, "Die Isonzovertheidigung vom Falle von Görz bis zur Eroberung von Karfreit" (in Mil. Wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1932 edition), p. 652



be extremely useful if a fresh unit of veterans was made available for Mt S Gabriele. Army HQ replied that the mountain should be held in any circumstances so as to gain time until the planned counter-offensive started. Keeping Mt S Gabriele was in fact essential for this operation. The Army commander reassigned Mtn SchR 2 (of 48 ID) from the Karst sector to GdK Schönburg. HQ of the Southwestern front had already ordered the Upper Austrian IR 14 to move from Tyrol to the Isonzo.

### **c. The k.u.k. XXIII Corps counterattacks on the coast**

On the Karst and near the coast the Italians had been content since 24 August to fire their artillery and undertake minor infantry operations which didn't lead to anything more than local fighting. Many times the bombardment was so heavy that it seemed to be a preparation for a major assault. Planes whizzed over the positions, and their crews dropped bombs as soon as they believed they'd spotted a battery. But the defenders weren't deceived; they could see each morning that the Italians were expanding their barbed wire barriers. This clearly indicated that not only were the enemy not planning to attack - they feared an assault from our side. The events of the tenth battle had taught the Italians to keep alert. General Cadorna ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ to be prepared to lay down a barrage in front and on the flanks, so as to avoid losing the advantages gained by XXIII and XIII Corps. He closed his instructions with the following words: "We must remember that the troops opposing us on the Karst have been thoroughly trained to carry out surprise attacks."<sup>361</sup>

#### The plan

And in fact such was the intention in the Aus-Hung. ranks. FML Csicseric, who'd succeeded FML Schenk, planned to attack and drive back the enemy at the first opportunity, just as his predecessor had done during the tenth battle. The reason for this operation was also the same as on 4 June - Line 1.c, into which the k.u.k. XXIII Corps had been pushed back, lay too close to the foot of the Hermada to permit the artillery to deploy in their full strength. In particular, the flat-trajectory guns could hardly be used at all. FML Csicseric therefore was determined to start his counterattack as soon as permitted by the condition of the troops. His plan was to at least reach Line 1.a along the entire front of his Corps. But at a conference with the Sector commander GO Wurm at Sesana the concept was altered;

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<sup>361</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 408

Line 1.a would be the target only in the Hermada area, while the troops near Selo would just aim for Line 1.c. Furthermore the Sector commander specified that no objectives should be sought beyond the designated lines. He wanted to make sure that the general reserves (12 ID and half of 41 Hon ID) were kept from getting drawn into the fighting.

The Corps commander discussed his plans with the division HQ and ordered on the 29<sup>th</sup> that the operation would start on 4 September after careful preparation. The main assault in the Hermada sector would be led by FML Schneider-Manns-Au, who had available the troops of 28 and 35 ID plus two regiments of 12 ID. At the same time the commander of 41 Hon ID, FML Schamschula, would thrust ahead with two regiments of his Division to recapture Line 1.c by Selo. Col. Freiherr von Janecka was in charge of the artillery. He suggested that after a powerful surprise bombardment along the Karst front, the guns should pause for ten minutes, after which the area to be attacked would be subjected to very strong destructive fire for a half hour. Corps HQ incorporated this suggestion in their order and emphasized that the success of the operation depended in large measure on accurate artillery fire as well as on a punctual and determined infantry advance.

#### The operation

Preparation for the attack could be carried out without interference, since there were no significant developments on this front around the end of August. Everything was ready on the evening of 3 September. Although the infantry had only enjoyed a brief period of recuperation after the heavy fighting of the first days of the battle, they were completely confident. They finished deploying for the assault was complete early in the morning of 4 September. The artillery opened fire as planned. Under pale moonlight, which gradually was replaced by the morning dawn, a heavy rain of steel burst upon the enemy. The infantry left their trenches around 5:30 AM, stormed forward, and an hour later had almost everywhere reached Line 1.a in the Hermada area. During the conquest of the southern railroad tunnel, in which the Italians thought they'd found a secure refuge, one of the most gruesome episodes of the war developed. The history of IR 47, which played a glorious part in the counterattack, records that there was a mighty explosion at the mouth of the tunnel, causing catastrophe for the Italians trapped inside. Only a few were able to flee to their opponents, who at this moment were their saviors. Fire raged inside the tunnel for two whole days. Only then was it possible to recover the carbonized bodies of numerous

Italian soldiers from the wreckage and debris.<sup>362</sup>

Thus far the operation of Schneider-Manns-Au's group had cost very few casualties. It was carried out so quickly that the bewildered enemy weren't able to initiate counter-measures until some time had passed. To them it was hardly believable that the ground they'd conquered in four days of severe fighting had almost all been lost to one thrust by their opponents. Meanwhile the Honved on the Selo tableland had failed to reach their goal in the first onset. Although they managed to penetrate the destroyed town of Selo, on its western edge they collided with an insurmountable wall of fire from many machine guns. After suffering heavy losses in vain, in the evening they finally returned to their starting points. A few hours previously the Italians started to counterattack in the Hermada sector, and were able to recover a stretch of Line 1.a south of Flondar. Parts of IR 51 and 62, along with Battalion II/47, threw themselves on the enemy; by the time darkness fell they were only able to seal off the new penetration. Therefore the Corps commander ordered FML Schneider-Manns-Au to continue the fight for Line 1.a on the next day, and gave him all of IR 15. Meanwhile FML Schamschula was instructed to forego any new attempt to take Line 1.c.

The assault in the Hermada area resumed at daybreak on 5 September; in a brilliant and energetic thrust the troops again reached all of Line 1.a. Just as on the previous day, the Italians thereupon counterattacked, but this time they were unable to break into our foremost line; it remained in the hands of the k.u.k. XXIII Corps despite repeated enemy thrusts.

This operation closed the battle on the southern wing. Italian casualties were no doubt very great. The prisoners alone numbered 163 officers and 6620 men. The ensuing quiet in the sector then made it possible to relieve the 28<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Divisions, which could bask in the glory of their great deeds.

#### **d. Continuing actions around Mt S Gabriele**

On 1 September the Italian high command felt compelled to postpone the date for the start of the great offensive in the Görz basin, which they'd just established three days earlier, until the end of September because they feared that they couldn't

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<sup>362</sup>Vogelsang, pp. 624 ff.

assemble the necessary ammunition by the middle of the month.<sup>363</sup> To be ready for unforeseen developments they didn't want the supplies for the medium and heavy batteries to sink below a certain level, and the stocks were already near this level. But the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army believed that the capture of Mt S Gabriele shouldn't be postponed. He wished to continue this limited operation since if successful it would be useful for the larger plans which the high command had for the future.<sup>364</sup> Therefore he ordered the assault to resume on 4 September.

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363Cadorna, *La guerra* (1934 edition), p. 414

364Capello, "Per la verità" (Milan, 1920), pp. 48 ff.

4-7 September

This surprise attack caught the defenders in a moment of weakness. Coincidentally, in the night of 3-4 September most of the sorely-tried troops of 57 ID were being relieved, at first by two regiments from 106 Lst ID. This Landsturm Division had suffered very great casualties in their heroic fighting in the Rohot valley. After a short, hardly sufficient rest they were now being inserted in a very important part of the front because the commanders had little faith in 19 ID, which had already arrived from the Russian theater of operations a few days previously (although with just six battalions for now).

The k.k. Landsturm Infantry Regiments # 6 and 31, numbering 2500 riflemen between them, had just taken up positions on Mt S Gabriele and could hardly orient themselves in the darkness of night. At daybreak they were suddenly assaulted by the Italians. The trenches at Point 552 were lost, and the principal summit (Point 646) also fell soon afterwards. More than 1000 men were taken prisoner. The situation had suddenly become critical. The defenders' artillery responded quickly and accurately, and laid down a wall of fire in front of the enemy, who were already descending the eastern slope. Division HQ ordered the Moravian Lst IR 25 to counterattack. The Regiment split up into many small groups which worked their way forward through the area at the eastern foot of the smoking mountain, which was now under enemy fire; they moved slowly but without hesitating. Toward noon the summit was recovered. But new Italian forces were also climbing S Gabriele from the west. Thus the fighting was very costly for both sides, while the rest of the trenches, the caverns and the installations changed hands several times. GM Hrozny reported in the evening: "The situation is somewhat clearer. The troops on the right wing of 18 Inf Bde - the parts of IR 87 and 50 still at the front, Landsturm Battalion I/2, and parts of [k.k.] Lst IR 6 and of Mtn SchR 2 - are still holding the old position to a point just north of Heights 526. From here the battle lines run along the eastern slope to Point 646 and thence, unchanged, to the right wing of 58 ID."

The grim combat continued on 5 September. Lst IR 32 and two battalions of IR 24 (from 43 Sch Div) mounted a new counterattack. The Italians also sent fresh regiments into the battle. And the artillery on both sides continued to hammer away. When evening finally arrived it seemed that the fight had ended on the same line as on the preceding day. The remnants of IR 50 were relieved. Since it was recognized that the enemy once more were bringing up new forces, further combat had to be

anticipated. Therefore divisional HQ requested to be given k.u. Lst IR 6; this was the leading regiment of 53 ID, arriving at this time from the Russian theater of operations. As expected, further mass assaults ensued in the morning of 6 September. The battle raged until evening; when it finally subsided the positions were still held by our troops, who'd fought with marvelous steadiness. On 7 September the Italians made one more attempt, which collapsed. But their artillery fire continued without interruption and with hardly any less intensity.

General Capello must have bitterly regretted later how regiment after regiment had been sent into destruction on Mt S Gabriele. Casualties certainly were very costly. Since the operation still wasn't succeeding as expected, General Capello suggested that the stubborn defenders might be driven to desperation and surrender with massed fire by all his batteries and trench mortars, day and night without interruption. He intended to lay a ring of fire around the mountain, which would completely surround his opponents and cut them off from any supplies or support.<sup>365</sup> Although General Cadorna had doubts whether this "siege by fire" would be successful, he permitted the attempt.

#### 8-13 September

HQ of 57 ID were still in charge of the sector, although all of their own organic troops had been relieved. All of their reports on 8, 9 and 10 September included, among other information, one simple sentence - the severe fire continues with unabated intensity. These few words conceal a frightful reality. An animated description is provided here:<sup>366</sup>

"The skies were deep blue, and tropical heat brooded over the landscape. It was hot and dry under the roar of the guns, which hour after hour pounded the same target. Shells howled and whined, exploding as they splintered stones. Masses of rubble rose into the air, including here and there a sandbag, a beam, a piece of iron or a chunk from the barriers. Then the debris tumbled to the ground where it lay until the next explosion once more sent it skyward. Men cowered in this hell - here double infantry sentries, there an artillery observer. Their eyes were red, and their gaze was dull. Uniforms were covered with stone splinters, helmets battered. A pestilential stench of decay enveloped

<sup>365</sup>Capello, "Note di guerra", Vol. II, p. 132

<sup>366</sup>From Weber, "Isonzo 1917" (Klagenfurt), p. 90. Another good presentation is Hübner's "Die elfte Schlacht am Isonzo 17. August bis 8. September" (Vienna-Leipzig).

the mountain, nauseating and unspeakably repulsive. Bodies of friends and foes moldered on the slopes, and no one could haul them away. Many times wounded men cried out in the field of craters, cried for hours for help and water, for mercy. But they were seldom even heard. The thunder and din swallowed up all other noises. It filled men's ears while the bombardment removed from this earth the wounded who were doomed anyway. The other troops, the majority, crouched in caverns where they waited and waited. Men who in their youth hadn't been accustomed to combat and privation. Here they became as hard and pitiless as the fate which held them by the throat. The mountain was their fate. All that was left to them were hate and the unbending determination to sell their lives as dearly as possible to the enemy - this enemy whom they cursed at every thunderous explosion."

The artillery siege lasted for three days, during which about 45,000 rounds were fired. On 11 and 12 September the Foggia and Girgenti Brigades intended to enter the position which, they hoped, had been sufficiently softened. But they encountered very stout resistance and to their surprise were even subjected to a counterattack, as will be narrated shortly.

Naturally the Aus-Hung. generals up to the level of the high command followed events around the important bastion of the Isonzo front with earnest concern. GO Borojevic had reported on 5 September that - despite the enormous sacrifices and the employment of every possible means of defense - it was possible that he wouldn't be able to continue to hold this area. But he was firmly determined that if the mountain fell the next troops to be threatened, XVI Corps, wouldn't voluntarily withdraw; they would merely bend back their northern wing and continue to offer resistance. Since then 20 Hon ID and the Upper Austrian IR 14 had arrived, so prospects were significantly improving. Also it could be expected that the enemy's activity would finally taper off because it was obvious that they'd already expended a very great part of their strength.

The plan now was to deploy IR 14 so as to clear up the situation on Mt S Gabriele. But since the lower-ranking commanders couldn't agree completely about how this should be done, GO Borojevic ordered that the operation shouldn't take place until powerful and systematic artillery cooperation could guarantee success. In any event the batteries of 20 Hon ID needed to be deployed. At the same time the 39 Hon Inf Bde (Honved Infantry Regiments # 1 and 17) was placed under GdK Schönburg; they would

provide the necessary back-up for the operation and later would gradually relieve all the troops still at the front under 57 ID HQ. Then k.u. Lst IR 6 of 53 ID should be given up to FML Goiginger, and this Division could start relieving 73 ID. The 106 Lst ID, which was completely wrecked (it numbered no more than 1000 riflemen), was pulled back to the Haidenschaft area where the remnants of 57 ID were also stationed. Both units had suffered extraordinary losses in dead and wounded.

On 9 September GO Boroevic again advised that the counterattack at Mt S Gabriele shouldn't be mounted hastily. But the nerves of the lower-ranking commanders had been so badly strained by the rush of events that IR 14, which had already been standing ready on the eastern slope of Mt S Daniele since 8 September, was sent forward in the night of 10-11 September before all the preparations were complete. The Regiment, divided in two groups, began their movement around 8:00 PM. In the flashing light of the shells exploding on all sides the infantry deployment was delayed. The climb took so much time that when our artillery, as ordered, delivered a half hour of surprise fire the companies weren't at their jumping-off points. As morning dawned the group which was aiming for Heights 552 found it necessary to postpone the operation until the following night. Meanwhile the other group attacked Point 448. They stormed the trenches but soon had to give them up; with difficulty they were able to keep the enemy troops who followed them from entering their own lines. Preparations were once more made to attack Heights 552 in the night of 11-12 September. Just before dawn it was carried out as a surprise assault. Everywhere led with dash by junior officers, the gallant Upper Austrians stormed the heights. They captured 600 Italians along with 12 machine guns.<sup>367</sup>

This operation by IR 14 took place at the very time when the enemy, reinforced by Alpini, had planned to reap the benefits of their long bombardment. And so there was heavy fighting again on 12 September, featuring massive and relentless artillery fire by both sides. After hours of combat, especially around the Gabriele summit, the Italians finally realized that their costly assault had been nipped in the bud. After a final attack on 13 September the artillery fire gradually died down, although fighting around the "Mountain of Death" (as the Italians called Mt S Gabriele) didn't come completely to an end.<sup>368</sup>

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367"IR. 14, Ein Buch der Erinnerung", pp. 265 ff.

368Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 442



## 5. An analysis of the eleventh battle

The eleventh battle of the Isonzo, like most of the preceding actions, was celebrated as a victory by both sides. There is no doubt that the loss of the Bainsizza plateau had been outweighed by the prevention of the enemy breakthrough that had seemed so certain, and that the defenders' objective evaluation of this situation justified their belief that they had been victorious. The Aus-Hung. troops unanimously shared this belief, and their spirits rose accordingly. On the other side, the Italians had won a significant amount of ground. But there were unmistakable signs of disappointment, both in the ranks of the Army and in public opinion, because a final triumph hadn't been won despite all their efforts, and because they couldn't overcome their stubborn opponents.

The HQ at Baden and Udine had concerns about the situation. It was mainly the k.u.k. high command which recognized that they'd won a Pyrrhic victory, likely to be their last defensive triumph. There were more than enough reasons behind this conclusion. Casualties in the eleventh Isonzo battle included more than 10,000 dead and 45,000 wounded, plus around 30,000 missing. Adding 20,000 cases of illness, the total loss was 110,000 men. Even if the losses of the Italian Army were much greater, ours had been substantial enough to tilt the balance of forces ever more in favor of the enemy. Austria-Hungary had long been compelled to draw replacement personnel almost entirely from just one source - wounded men who'd been restored to health. It was no longer possible to completely replenish the ranks in this fashion. Since each battle aggravated the personnel shortage, the defenders would finally be weakened to a point where they lost their cohesion. A counter-offensive was the only method by which the continuous pressure could be relieved. As noted earlier, this concept was already under consideration when the eleventh battle started.

The loss of ground on the Bainsizza plateau in itself had no bad effects. On the contrary, the withdrawal of the defensive line had shortened the front. This wouldn't have been the case if the retreat had continued beyond the Cepovan valley. The fortunate accident that the Italians failed to recognize how favorable their situation was on 23 August and the following days, and especially the glorious intervention on our side by trusty lower-ranking commanders, made it possible to overcome the serious crisis of this period. It should also be noted that a retreat to the northern edge of the Ternova high ground would have made defense of the Gabriele sector extraordinarily difficult and

probably would have led to the loss of this important bulwark. This is because it's doubtful that the heroes on Mt S Gabriele, if menaced also from the northeast, would have been able to resist simultaneous onslaughts from three sides. And the fate of the defenses in the Görz basin and of the planned counter-offensive hinged on holding onto this peak. If ever a mountain has become a monument to courage, it is Monte S Gabriele. The name of this mountain will always be remembered in connection with the heroism of the glorious k.u.k. Army. But the enemy has no cause to be ashamed of the fighting that raged here. There were days in which the decision stood at the razor's edge at this key point, where there were stout-hearted commanders at all levels who kept confidence alive. Among them was GdK Schönburg, who for this reason was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

In the final attack on Mt S Gabriele the Italians brought the battle of materiel to its highest level. Both the employment of heavy weapons and the expenditure of ammunition reached levels never before witnessed on the Isonzo front. Between 18 August and 6 September, the Aus-Hung. light guns fired 1,500,000 rounds, the medium guns 250,000, and the heavy mortars 22,000. Ammunition use in the eleventh battle was one third greater than in the tenth battle. The wear and tear on the guns also bore witness to the enormous commitment of all available means in this difficult action. 38% of the guns were rendered unusable (in addition to 36 pieces that were lost).<sup>369</sup> These figures were another reason why there was concern that the Isonzo front would be torn apart, and why means had to be found to put an end to the wasteful and indecisive defensive fighting.

At the risk of being repetitive, we'd like to provide further details about the spirit and bearing of the troops. In an evaluation of the Aus-Hung. forces prepared by 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army (which was captured later) we find the following noteworthy opinion: "When attacked, their troops fight on because of discipline and the instinct of self-preservation. Propaganda of hate against Italians is impressive and pervasive. The majority of the personnel are of Slavic nationalities; in front of our lines we now have 61% Slavs, 16% Magyars, 13% Germans and 11% Romanians.<sup>370</sup> It might be imagined that these troops have less power of resistance. But we have learned that the same Slavs who

<sup>369</sup>Pinchetti (p. 296) states that the Italians captured 145 guns, but his total includes infantry guns and trench mortars.

There are substantial discrepancies in the number of captured artillery pieces claimed in various Italian sources.

<sup>370</sup>These percentages in fact were nearly correct.

surrender in droves on other fronts fight with special stubbornness on our front. It's enough to point to the Czechs, who've displayed unparalleled tenacity; in their caverns they would rather be slain than surrender."<sup>371</sup>

The eleventh battle of the Isonzo not only wore down the material strength of the Italian Army, but especially its inner cohesion. Marshal Cadorna has claimed that this battle "is celebrated in Italy and outside our Kingdom as one of the grandest operations of the European war, and it also was a great morale-booster."<sup>372</sup> But these words are merely a pretense and self-deception. Certainly a defeat of such great proportions as the Italians suffered in October and November 1917 wouldn't have been possible if their Army hadn't been already badly worn down in the preceding battles. Italy's tangible losses in combat strength during the eleventh battle were 40,000 dead, 108,000 wounded and 18,000 missing.

The eleventh Isonzo battle was the Italian Army's last offensive operation in the coastal lands. At its close they were able to assert that they had gained more ground than in any of the other ten battles. Nonetheless, in the two and a half years since entering the war the Italians had only advanced a third of the way toward their chosen strategic goal, Trieste. At the point of deepest penetration, between Sagrado and Kostanjevica, the front had been moved ahead just twelve kilometers; east of Plava it had advanced ten kilometers on the plateaus of Bainsizza and Heiligengeist.

The small extent of the conquered territory, mostly barren Karst, after such enormous hecatombs is even more striking when we consider the increase in force during these thirty months. The Italians entered the first battle in June 1915 with 18 divisions and 750 guns; they started the eleventh with 51 divisions plus 5200 guns and trench mortars. Naturally the Aus-Hung. forces also increased substantially. But their numbers were still much lower - they started to fight on the Isonzo in June 1915 with 8 divisions and 354 guns, while in the eleventh battle they opposed the enemy with 24 divisions and 1880 guns.

Italy's Army and people increasingly recognized the uselessness of their costly operations to date. The result was lack of confidence, which weakened the cohesion of the part of the Italian forces stationed on the Isonzo. At precisely this point

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371See Anton Pitreich, "Der österreichisch-ungarische Bundesgenosse im Sperrfeuer" (Klagenfurt, 1930).

372Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 424

of time the Central Powers were planning a counter-stroke, the description of which will make up the next section of Volume VI.

### ***B. Events in Tyrol and Carinthia in summer 1917***

At the start of July the HQ of FM Conrad's Army Group became aware that the enemy were pulling units from the Tyrol front. The enemy deployment by the Sieben Gemeinde increasingly resembled the situation prior to the Ortigara battle. Similar reports arrived from the Etschtal group of 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Troop concentrations near railroad stations and heavy traffic from the Tyrol front to the Isonzo clearly revealed the enemy's immediate plans.

Since no large-scale enemy offensive was feared on the Tyrol front for the upcoming weeks, the Army Group's task was to directly support the Army of the Isonzo during the anticipated eleventh battle on that river. FM Conrad believed that a major thrust, even if delivered by just the units he currently had, could pin down the Italians or even draw forces in his direction, diverting them from the front in the Julian Alps. In particular, an attempt to conquer the Pasubio massif could make a deep impression on the enemy. It would provide the Army Group useful advantages, not only for the local defenders but also in case a new offensive from Tyrol took place in the future. Therefore plans for an assault on the Pasubio were prepared in full detail.

The high command wasn't opposed to Conrad's line of thinking, but they felt that the build-up of enemy forces in front of the Isonzo Army made it necessary to strengthen that sector. Since no reserves could be taken from the Eastern front, they commanded FM Archduke Eugene to carry out the necessary troop movements within his own Southwestern front. As we have already narrated, FM Conrad therefore had to give up a series of units to the Army of the Isonzo.

At the start of July there was a total of 155 battalions, 8000 Standschützen and about 1400 guns in Tyrol. By the start of the eleventh Isonzo battle 15 battalions and many batteries had been sent away. Since the front line stretched for 340 km, and the Italians had an estimated 250 battalions stationed here, implementation of the Pasubio operation seemed too risky. To avoid endangering defense of the province, Conrad had to refrain from any offensive. He asked that the Tyrol front shouldn't be further weakened, because otherwise the enemy could be emboldened to assault; the conquest of Tyrol would become more attractive if there was a likelihood that the war might end in a negotiated

peace. "I can't agree with the notion that we can put up with a setback in Tyrol", Conrad wrote at the end of July, "because I believe that we have enough forces available to remain victorious both here and on the Isonzo if they are properly divided. Furthermore I can't refrain from pointing out that after our successes in Russia and those anticipated on the Isonzo, Italy should be struck an annihilating blow, in which an advance from Tyrol - like that in spring 1916 - can be of decisive importance. A pre-condition for such a thrust, however, is that we must maintain the *status quo* here under all circumstances."

No fighting of note took place along the battle lines in July and the first half of August. Rifle and artillery fire flared up occasionally, and at many points there were skirmishes between small detachments. None of this could disturb the defenders. Meanwhile intercepted wireless messages confirmed that the Italians had withdrawn 17 brigades between the end of June and mid-August. Since the arrival of most of these brigades in Friauli had also been noted, the threat to the Isonzo Army was increasing while danger subsided in Tyrol. Therefore HQ of the Southwestern front ordered that FM Conrad should hold further units in readiness to leave.

When the eleventh Isonzo battle began, the first contingent to be summoned were four battalions (IR 63 plus Bn I/64). Under the pressure of events on the Bainsizza plateau, FM Archduke Eugene then ordered that all available troops in Tyrol should be placed at his disposal. This could be implemented without any great misgivings since it had been determined that the Italians had pulled back their lines on the Asiago plateau. IR 50 (with four battalions) and SchR 25 immediately left by train. Before the end of August they were followed by the HQ of 26 Sch Bde and the Moravian SchR 14.

Despite the cutback in strength, between 21 and 30 August many storm troop operations were carried out, in which more than 300 prisoners plus 6 machine guns were brought back. An especially bold stroke was the capture of the icy summit of the Trafoia on the Ortler (in the sector of 53 Half Bde). Here some gallant troops - mostly Kaiser-Schützen - had been on guard for years in Tyrol's highest mountain range, waging a silent struggle with the forces of nature. They were always trying to improve their defensive position. After working for months to build a tunnel through the eternal glacier ice, in mid-March they had wrested from the Italians the "Hohe Schneid", which lies 3 km south of the Stilfser Joch. After equally long but successful labor they were ready to capture the Trafoia summit, which rises to a height

of 3553 meters south of Mt Ortler. At the end of August, construction of a tunnel about 2 km long through the ice was far enough advanced that a bold high mountain company could launch a surprise assault. They were successful. The Italian outpost of 30 men were taken prisoner, and defenses were prepared on the conquered summit. But the comrades of the captured Alpini sought revenge. Three days later they climbed up the glacier to the south; courageously disregarding the machine gun fire that rained upon them they recovered the Trafoia summit.<sup>373</sup>

But such small-scale undertakings by the defenders of Tyrol weren't able to pin down the enemy. It was known that they were sending all available units to the Isonzo, and in fact to a much larger extent than they had done in the tenth battle. In May the Italians had left 300 battalions to face Tyrol, but now the total had sunk to 220. Moreover, each battalion left behind had given up 75 men from the youngest draft class as replacements to the units on the Isonzo. This was proof that in August the Italian high command were determined to do everything possible to win a decision on the Isonzo. Because of the reduced size of the forces opposite Tyrol, they dissolved 6<sup>th</sup> Army in mid-September. The Val Sugana Sector with XVIII Corps were placed under 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The "Command on the Asiago Plateau" was re-instituted and placed under 1<sup>st</sup> Army.<sup>374</sup>

Therefore Conrad's Army Group could also give up further forces for the great decisive battle. They had sent 28 battalions and 17 batteries by the end of August. Now (at the start of September) IR 14 was also ordered to depart; they would be followed by another series of units (to be listed below).

During this period the situation in Carinthia was generally quiet. On the left wing of 10<sup>th</sup> Army the 93 ID became engaged in local actions at the time when the eleventh Isonzo battle was starting. Apparently the enemy here intended a diversionary operation. Nevertheless 10<sup>th</sup> Army was able to release two battalions to the Isonzo Army in timely fashion.

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373Lempruch, "Der König der deutschen Alpen und seine Helden" (Stuttgart, 1925), pp. 102 ff. "Alpini", pp. 456 ff.

374Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 423

## **X. The Fall Offensive against Italy**

### **A. The Preparations**

#### **1. Genesis of the concept and of the plan of attack**

Already after the tenth battle of the Isonzo the k.u.k. AOK had come to the conclusion that, even though the battle ended with a successful counterattack by Aus-Hung. troops, the Isonzo Army would sooner or latter finally succumb if such very costly operations continued. Elastic defensive tactics or a withdrawal were out of the question because of the proximity of Trieste, the goal which the Italians were seeking so eagerly. If the enemy broke through the front and planted their standards on the Hermada, then Trieste and the link with the sea would be lost; the left wing would hang in the air, since our forces were insufficient to lengthen the front. If the Italians did achieve such a breakthrough they would also create a major gap in the wall which defended the beleaguered fortress of the Central Powers. The Entente could easily exploit this breach by employing their enormous superiority in numbers and military equipment.<sup>375</sup>

#### The original concept of the offensive

This menace could be overcome only with a major counterattack on the Isonzo front that would throw the Italians back a considerable distance. But for this purpose much more was lacking than the necessary number of troops. Then the picture seemed to change at the end of July thanks to the successful allied counter-offensive in east Galicia. The high command at Baden believed it was possible that Russia no longer had the strength to unleash any major assaults in 1917, and therefore they wanted to take advantage of the new security in the East by striking a blow against Italy.

In a memorandum of 31 July the k.u.k. high command analyzed the possible directions of attack. They believed that a thrust from Tyrol would do the most damage to the enemy, for whom it could even lead to a catastrophe. But they doubted that they could assemble a sufficient number of mountain-trained troops (at least

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<sup>375</sup>Konopicky and Glaise, "Vom Isonzo zum Piave" in Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 424.

12 divisions), even if they received complete cooperation from the German generals who ran the Eastern front. Another serious drawback was that the deployment by train would be time-consuming, since all troop transports would eventually have to pass through one stretch of rail between Franzensfeste and Trent.

The situation was different on the Isonzo. Here 20 divisions and strong artillery were already stationed. But the k.u.k. high command believed that even if the Isonzo Army were substantially reinforced they could hardly achieve a great success by a frontal attack, and would suffer very heavy casualties. A meaningful victory could be achieved "only by rolling up the Italian front on the Isonzo from the Tolmein-Flitsch area." This was the same area recommended by FM Conrad in his memorandum of 23 January 1917 under somewhat different circumstances. On 1 August the German plenipotentiary GM Cramon quickly reported about this plan of attack to his own high command, noting that the HQ at Baden would if necessary be requesting German assistance.<sup>376</sup> But the English offensive in Flanders which began on 31 July made it impossible for the time being for the German OHL to agree to release troops. The attacks which the French initiated near Verdun on 20 August increased the tension on the Western front.

#### Impact of the eleventh Isonzo battle

Cadorna's preparations for a new onslaught, which were clearly recognized, also compelled the upper-level Aus-Hung. commanders to first complete their defensive measures on the Isonzo. The eleventh battle, which was more furious than the earlier ten, began on 17 August. Thanks to the bravery of our troops it was possible to hold onto almost all of the center and southern wing of the Isonzo front. But the northern wing was forced back into an un-prepared position. Retaining this position in a major new battle would at the very least cause especially heavy casualties. And if the defense was unsuccessful the Tolmein bridgehead would be lost, in turn making the entire Isonzo front untenable.

The worst crisis of the eleventh battle seemed to have been surmounted on 25 August. That same evening GdI Arz decided to definitely carry out before winter the counterattack which he had outlined to GO Borojevic three days earlier. He believed that only such an operation could "completely" dispel the danger that the Italians might break through in a twelfth battle. Now only an attack from the Isonzo was under consideration. Because of the size of the enemy forces piled up in the coastal lands and

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<sup>376</sup>Based on a letter from General Cramon to GO Arz on 12 October 1920.



the difficult situation caused by the loss of the Bainsizza plateau, it was feared that our units on the Isonzo would be overwhelmed before a thrust from south Tyrol could halt the Italians. In addition to all the drawbacks of a Tyrol offensive listed above, the season was already late and it would be easier to supply troops on the Isonzo in bad weather.

Since 40 Italian divisions were facing 21 Aus-Hung. in the coastal lands, at least 20 more divisions would be needed to carry out a frontal assault. Three Aus-Hung. divisions (19 ID, 20 Hon ID and 53 ID) were already coming from the East to reinforce the Isonzo front and would be available for any offensive. Thus 17 more divisions were needed, but it would be impossible to find such a force. Even for a limited expansion of the attacking group it was necessary to obtain cooperation from our ally. The Germans would be asked to send eight infantry divisions to the Isonzo front while relieving five Aus-Hung. divisions from the East. To effectively deal with the Italian artillery, estimated to consist of 3000 guns, our own 1800 guns should be reinforced by 1000 more. In all these questions an agreement with the German OHL was needed as soon as possible.

It was intended that the main blow would be struck by Aus-Hung. and German divisions from the Tolmein-Flitsch area in the general direction of Cividale; at the same time German troops would carry out feint operations on the Tyrol and Carinthia fronts.<sup>377</sup> In the opening phase the situation would be cleaned up on the Bainsizza plateau by recovering our old positions on the Isonzo. Then the advance would continue to the line Ponta di Montemaggiore - Mt Lupia - Azida - Plava - Salcano. Thus the original objective was merely a wide-ranging improvement of our positions, which would bring the Isonzo armies forward to a sector favorable for the defense.

#### Obtaining German assistance

After the personal impressions which Emperor Charles received when he visited the Isonzo front on 22 August, he also was convinced that a counterattack was necessary to redeem the situation. But for mainly political reasons he had reservations about having German troops fight in the Italian theater of operations. Therefore in a letter sent to Emperor Wilhelm on 26 August he requested that German divisions should relieve Aus-Hung. units in the East so the latter could move to the Southwestern front. He continued, "You will certainly understand

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<sup>377</sup>Schwarzleitner, "Karfreit" (in Österreichische Wehrzeitung, 1921 edition, issue 23)

why I feel it's important to carry out the offensive against Italy with just my own troops. My entire Army considers the struggle in Italy to be 'our war.' From youth all the officers have yearned to fight the Italian arch-enemy, a feeling inherited from their fathers. If German troops helped out in this theater of operations it would have a negative effect on morale. I and my Army need only German artillery, especially heavy guns, on the Italian front."<sup>378</sup>

On 29 August GM Waldstätten, Chief of the Operational Detachment of the AOK, went to Kreuznach to discuss specific suggestions. GdI Ludendorff at first showed little inclination to cooperate. To him it seemed preferable to conquer Moldavia and break the resistance of the Russian Army by continuing the attacks from Bukovina and near Focsani.<sup>379</sup> At the very least, Romania would then be forced to conclude peace. Also Ludendorff believed that the battle still raging in Flanders made it impossible to make sufficient forces available. When GM Waldstätten insisted that improving the situation on the Isonzo was of decisive importance to Austria-Hungary, GFM Hindenburg arranged to have one of his German deputies investigate on the spot the possibilities for an offensive. For this assignment he chose the Bavarian G.Lt Krafft, currently Chief of Staff to an Army Group on the Western Front; he was very familiar with mountain warfare.

On 1 September Emperor Wilhelm sent a letter in reply to his ally. He opened by stating that it was impossible for him to commit his operational reserves, which after the victory at Zloczow were attacking Riga, to relieve Aus-Hung. divisions in the East. This "would seriously endanger our overall military situation", since the reserves might be needed at any moment to defend the Western front. But once the Riga offensive succeeded, and if the general situation and the lateness of the season permitted, he would entertain the idea of an attack on the Isonzo "and carry it out with troops of both our Armies."

On the same day (1 September) GM Waldstätten, who'd returned from Kreuznach, met at Marburg with the authorized representatives of the HQ of Southwestern front and of Boroevic's Army Group to inform them about the planned offensive. On the next day the k.u.k. high command notified front HQ at Marburg that they intended to send another eight or nine divisions to Boroevic in addition to 13 Sch Div and 20 Hon ID (which were already on their way). The reinforcements would make it possible "to carry out an

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<sup>378</sup>From an Italian translation in Cabiati's "Ottobre 1917", pp. 27 ff.

<sup>379</sup>Ludendorff, pp. 383 ff.

offensive from the Tolmein area in the general direction of Cividale." Preparations were already being initiated "with the greatest energy."

GdI Arz - who laid great emphasis on gaining the help of German divisions due to their more ample supplies of artillery, air support and military equipment - had meanwhile succeeded in overcoming Emperor Charles' resistance to the participation of German troops in the upcoming offensive. In a letter sent to Wilhelm on the 5<sup>th</sup>, Emperor Charles expressed hope that he would soon see the allied forces advancing victoriously against the enemy.

Meanwhile G.Lt Krafft and his small staff completed their observations in the Isonzo area. They had been guided by the k.u.k. General Staff Major Sigismund Ritter von Schilhawsky, the expert on Italy in the AOK's Operational Detachment who'd drafted both of the operational proposals (of 31 July and 25 August). On 8 September Krafft reported to Kreuznach and recommended an offensive on the Isonzo, even though "the difficulties will approach the border of impossibility."<sup>380</sup> Now GFM Hindenburg also adopted the suggestions of GM Waldstätten, who'd once again come to Kreuznach, and decided to implement them. Waldstätten informed Baden of this important development by sending a code-word chosen to indicate the offensive would proceed - "Trustworthy weapons secured!"

#### More specific planning

The following German HQ and units were chosen to take part in the offensive -

- . The former 6<sup>th</sup> Army HQ of GdI Otto von Below (now given # 14), plus the HQ of III Bav Corps (G.Lt Freiherr von Stein) and LI Corps (Württemberg G.Lt von Berrer);
- . Six infantry divisions - 5, 12, 26, 117 ID plus the Alpenkorps;
- . A number of Jaeger and Storm battalions, which later were united under a Jaeger Division; and
- . Strong artillery plus a large number of trench mortars, planes and specialized troops.

The Aus-Hung. units included troops already stationed between Tolmein and Flitsch - XV Corps (1 and 50 ID) plus 93 ID on the eastern wing of the k.u.k. 10<sup>th</sup> Army. The latter Division, after exchanging several of its battalions<sup>381</sup>, was re-designated 55 ID.

<sup>380</sup>Krafft, "Der Durchbruch am Isonzo" (Oldenburg, 1926), Vol. I, p. 18

<sup>381</sup>Four of the Division's Landsturm battalions were exchanged for

They were joined by GdI Alfred Krauss' I Corps HQ from Bukovina, the Edelweiss Division and 22 Sch Div from Tyrol, and the 4, 29 and 33 ID from the Eastern front. To relieve the two divisions from Tyrol the 19 ID, reinforced to 15 battalions, was sent from the Isonzo to 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

After the basic concept of an offensive against Italy was approved, on 10 September the details were agreed between Baden and Kreuznach. Two days later the Southwestern front received the necessary orders. Command over the attacking units was expressly given to Emperor Charles, even though he was commander-in-chief anyway since December 1916. Directly under the Emperor was FM Conrad, who was in charge of the troops in Tyrol and Carinthia - Areas I and II on the Tyrolean western front, 11<sup>th</sup> Army and 10<sup>th</sup> Army. XX Corps, hitherto independent, was assigned to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. FM Archduke Eugene's Southwestern front HQ would command the forces operating on the Isonzo - the reinforced k.u.k. I Corps (three Aus-Hung. divisions plus the German Jaeger Division), the German 14<sup>th</sup> Army (six German and three Aus-Hung. divisions), Boroevic's Army Group (the ten divisions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army and eleven of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army), and finally the strategic reserve (three Aus-Hung. divisions).

With these units the Southwestern front would begin the offensive between 10 and 20 October on a date yet to be determined; the goal was "to throw the Italians back over the pre-war border, and if possible over the Tagliamento." For this purpose, the first task assigned the German 14<sup>th</sup> Army was to "capture the Jeza mountain massif and thus break through the Italian front", while 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, "with a strong northern wing, and the reinforced I Corps join the attack toward Bergogna and Karfreit." The German OHL proposed that until this area was reached the I Corps should be placed for tactical purposes under 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Later the Corps would again be placed directly under Southwest front HQ, when it was guarding 14<sup>th</sup> Army's western flank. In this attack the 14<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army would reach the line Cividale - Mt Sabotino. 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army would vigorously pin the enemy down, to keep them from shifting troops against our principal thrust. GO Boroevic was explicitly reminded of the importance of holding onto the Lom plateau; the success of the whole offensive depended on this position.

On 15 September GdI Below and his Chief of Staff G.Lt Krafft reported to Archduke Eugene at Marburg, and they had their first discussions about the upcoming operation. The principal concern

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IR 7 of 94<sup>th</sup> ID; furthermore the new 55<sup>th</sup> ID was assigned BH IR # 2 from 6<sup>th</sup> ID.

of the k.u.k. generals was to move their defensive front forward to the line Cividale - Mt Sabotino. But the German army commander, full of confidence because he was leading such distinguished picked troops, not only proposed that the enemy should be thrown over the Tagliamento "if possible", but eyed objectives lying beyond that river.<sup>382</sup> For with every step taken on the other side of the Tagliamento, another part of the Italian front opposite Carinthia and Tyrol would collapse. This would considerably shorten the Aus-Hung. defensive lines, and do more to ease the burden on the armed forces of the Danube Monarchy than would the more restricted goals of the k.u.k. high command.

Under the guidelines for the offensive, GdI Below intended to advance from Tolmein through Gemona and Tarcento toward the stretch of the Tagliamento between Cornino and Pinzano. At the start the main effort would be made by the right wing of 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Their first objective was "the line of heights north of Cividale and the pre-war border northwest of the Korada." GdI Below would also make it easier for the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to cross the Isonzo; attacking at the same time as 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the latter command was supposed to reach a line running from the border northwest of the Korada to Mt Santo. Krauss' group would guard the flank by Karfreit and Bergogna; as they protected Below's right wing they would also join the advance of his 14<sup>th</sup> Army.

Based on the discussion with Below and the instructions of the k.u.k AOK, Archduke Eugene issued implementing orders on 18 September. This initiated the last large-scale inter-allied operation by the two Central Powers, which was to deliver a decisive blow against Italy. The original plan for the twelfth Isonzo battle, which was only supposed to bring some relief to the hard-pressed front in the coastal lands, was being expanded to envision wider goals, although from the start the extent of these goals wasn't clear to all of the higher-level commanders.

## 2. The deployment

The area chosen for the deployment before the offensive had the disadvantage that it wasn't possible to bring up the troops and equipment by rail to points near the positions. The railroad that led from Assling through the Wochein Tunnel into the Baca valley didn't have a great capacity, and due to the menace of Italian long-range fire it could be used only between Podbrda and

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<sup>382</sup>Krafft, Vol. I, p. 31

Grahova. The stretch between Villach and Tarvis was equipped to handle unloading of troops and freight on a large scale, but it could be used only for I Corps' attack near Flitsch. Therefore the deployment for the offensive was planned to take place in two phases. First the bulk of the infantry from divisions arriving by rail would assemble in the immediate areas where they detrained; here they would complete their training for mountain warfare and receive the necessary equipment. While this transpired the artillery, ammunition, special gear and rations would be brought up to the jumping-off points. In order to ensure secrecy, the infantry themselves would be the last to deploy.

Since many of the attacking divisions first had to be relieved from either the Western or Eastern fronts, the massive transportation effort couldn't start before 20 September.<sup>383</sup> It was expected to last for about 30 days. Therefore the attack was to start on 22 October. Details about the movement of each unit appear in the Appendix.

The HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army were established at Krainburg. Four of their divisions assembled in the Sava valley between Laibach (exclusive) and Mojstrana, and two more in the area near Klagenfurt and farther east. The strategic reserves went to the Laibach basin, I Corps to the Tarvis-Villach area. As a deceptive measure, the Alpenkorps with their infantry and mountain artillery first detrained in the Trent area while their other components were sent directly to Assling. As another means of confusing the enemy, small German detachments prepared quarters for larger units at Trieste.

#### The rail lines and roads in these areas

The railroad installations in these areas were of great importance. Already during the tenth Isonzo battle - and even more during the eleventh - the stations were enlarged and ramps were built along the tracks between Assling and Grahova. But the short stretch of line south of the Wochein Tunnel, plus the Grahova-Tribusa overhead cable railway, were insufficient to supply the troops fighting at Tolmein and on the Bainsizza plateau, so use had to be made of the more distant stations at Krainburg, Bischoflack and Unt. Loitsch. On 28 September a

<sup>383</sup>The 4<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> ID were coming from Volhynia, 33<sup>rd</sup> k.u.k and 5<sup>th</sup> German ID from east Galicia, the 200<sup>th</sup> from Bukovina, the 117<sup>th</sup> from southeastern Transylvania, the Alpenkorps from Romania and finally the 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> German ID from the Western theater of operations.

horse-drawn line was completed to carry goods unloaded at these points, from Bischoflack along the Kirchheim road to Hotaule. Meanwhile a motorized field rail line was being constructed from Unt. Loitsch through Idria. It was open to traffic on 18 October, but a few days later it was wrecked by a landslide. Thus it was of practically no help during the deployment near Tolmein.

The sector Krn-Flitsch-Rombon was served by the field- and cable-railway line from the Wochein through the Mojstrovka Pass to the eastern end of the Flitsch basin and by the cable lines from Tarvis to Raibl. The latter were connected to a small electric rail line which led through a mine tunnel as far as the village of U. Breth.

All these transportation routes now helped during the deployment, but they were far from sufficient. Therefore roads were also employed. Only two small mountain roads led out of the Krainburg basin to Tolmein - one each through the Podbrda and Kirchheim Passes; at most points they were suitable only for one-way traffic. The route from Loitsch merged already into the Kirchheim road at Straza. Work details were assigned to quickly improve these routes for the intended traffic. Because of enemy activity in the air, marches took place only at night. I Corps HQ initiated similar measures to facilitate the movement of their troops along the Predil road and the route over the Mojstrovka Pass.

The first plans for the enormous railroad movement involved 1900 trains (64 per day), plus 15 to 20 more trains for the necessary transportation of civilians and their foodstuffs as well as rail employees in the areas where the trains actually unloaded. But in the 30 day period the number of purely military trains swelled to 2400 because of an unexpected increase in the number of German replacement troops, some special assignments, and later the approach of additional artillery. Roughly 100,000 cars were employed, thus about two-thirds of the resources devoted to military transport by the entire Monarchy. The scope of this achievement, which was a brilliant triumph for the railroad troops, is best illustrated by a comparison. During the mobilization against Russia in summer 1914, each day a total of 120 military trains were running on the seven lines leading to Galicia, while civilian traffic was halted completely. Now, in October 1917, the Laibach railroad station alone accommodated 120 trains per day. Except for a few minor accidents, this enormous movement was completed smoothly.

Artillery and ammunition

The deployment points for the artillery were chosen already by 19 September; thereafter the batteries were brought up to their stations along with the necessary ammunition. The Southwestern front was reinforced by around 1500 guns, as well as 420 medium and heavy trench mortars. These totals include the Germans' 460 guns and 216 trench mortars. The additional pieces were assigned almost entirely to the units in the sector of the principal attack (14<sup>th</sup> Army - including I Corps - and the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army), increasing their strength to 1720 guns. In fact the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army and, to a limited extent, Conrad's Army Group had to give up some of their weapons. Finally the artillery training brigade was brought up from Hajmasker to 14<sup>th</sup> Army, where they'd continue their education by firing on the enemy.

The artillery working with 14<sup>th</sup> Army on 24 October numbered 1678 guns plus 44 trench mortar batteries (or companies); Kosak's group, attacking at the same time, had 424 guns and 23 trench mortar batteries. On the day the offensive started, between the Rombon and the sea a total of 3540 guns and 78 trench mortar batteries (or companies) were available.

Between 8 September and 16 October the Aus-Hung. forces were sent around a million rounds of ammunition, 10% of which were gas shells. For this purpose alone 2000 boxcars were used, in 60 trains. The comparable figures for German artillery are unknown. The supplies available to Corps Krauss, 14<sup>th</sup> Army and the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army reached a total of 1000 rounds for each light field (or mountain) gun, 800 for each heavy howitzer, 500 for each 10.4 cm cannon and 200 for each 30.5 cm mortar. In the other parts of Boroevic's Army Group the guns were provided about one quarter fewer rounds.

Archduke Eugene's Army Group were assigned 30,000 additional horses to make the artillery fully mobile again.<sup>384</sup> But moving the guns still presented considerable difficulties, especially in the mountains. Many times the infantry had to help out. Under Krauss' group, infantrymen were still bringing up rounds to the batteries stationed in the mountains until the last night before the offensive. Nevertheless it wasn't possible to bring all

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384 Since Archduke Eugene's front also received animals for other purposes, the total of additional horses actually reached 68,000. Conrad's Army Group, which was preparing for a more limited mission, received 16,000. But almost all the horses were under-nourished due to lack of fodder.



supplies up to the desired level. There were considerable shortfalls in the units on the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army.

#### Air and technical support

Bad weather, including constant rainstorms, set in on 10 October and increased the difficulties of the deployment. But it also prevented the enemy air units from carrying out wide-reaching reconnaissance flights. In addition, German fighters arrived early in the theater and soon dampened the enthusiasm of the Italian pilots.

The technical troops of Archduke Eugene's front were reinforced by around 16 sapper, 1 bridging and 45 construction companies. The latter were held in the rear because of a rule that only combat troops could accompany the foremost echelons of the marching columns; this proved to be disadvantageous. The very thorough preparations were completed with the arrival of numerous telegraph detachments, medical stations, 34 auto columns, 30,000 prisoners of war (for use as laborers), considerable construction equipment, and the necessary rations.

#### The infantry come forward

The deployment of the infantry began on 16 October and unfolded according to a detailed schedule; movement from Bischoflack to Tolmein took place in six night-time marches. Beforehand the German 12 and 26 ID had come up from the Klagenfurt basin and crossed the Karawanken hills on the Seeberg and Loibl Passes. Some troops of the Alpenkorps, who'd shifted in early October from Tyrol into the Wochein, marched from there along a mountain path to Podbrda. At the front the divisions took up their positions after relieving the garrison troops in the trenches. Despite the thorough preparations, wretched weather caused considerable difficulties during the deployment. Also the preparations of I Corps and of Kosak's group (of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army) fell behind schedule due to delays in bringing up ammunition. Therefore it took two days more than planned to complete the deployment. The start of the offensive was finally postponed until 24 October.

In the first half of October it had seemed for a while that the entire operation would be affected by the heavy fighting which occurred at this time in Flanders. Two German divisions which had been held ready to reinforce 14<sup>th</sup> Army (28 and 195 ID) were drawn into the whirlpool of battle in the West. Also the very experienced mountain troops of 8 Bav Res ID, which Archduke

Joseph's Army Group had made available in Bukovina, were sent in mid-October to France instead of to Flitsch. On 10 October the OHL asserted that the field and heavy batteries they'd attached to the divisional artillery would have to already be pulled out after the first days of the attack. On the 12<sup>th</sup> they wired that 14<sup>th</sup> Army should also be prepared to quickly part with some infantry. When the battle in the West died down around the 18<sup>th</sup>, the OHL conceded that all the Army's troops could stay unconditionally. But after receiving this news GdI Below still had the impression that the OHL wanted to terminate 14<sup>th</sup> Army's participation in the offensive as soon as possible.<sup>385</sup> Therefore his HQ were all the more eager to complete the preparations so that the offensive would be a complete success.

Without a doubt it was a brilliant achievement of the Chief of the General Staff GdI Arz and the head of his Operational Detachment GM Waldstätten to get the offensive going despite countless difficulties.

### **3. Boroevic's Army Group between mid-September and the start of the offensive**

When Archduke Eugene's first written order for the offensive arrived at Adelsberg on 18 September, both of GO Boroevic's armies were still dealing with the aftermath of the eleventh battle. In particular, fighting continued on Mt S Gabriele. It did seem that possession of the blood-soaked mountain was assured after the commitment of the IR "Hessen" # 14. 57 ID, along with IR 14, left the scene of their glorious action on the 17<sup>th</sup>, entrusting Mt S Gabriele to the reinforced 20 Hon ID which took their place. But further Italian attacks would have to be repulsed, as will be narrated below.

#### Changes in the order of battle

The order from Southwestern front HQ instructed Boroevic's Army Group to keep the northern wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army strong; eventually it would "attack simultaneously with the 14th German Army and initially reach the line running from the border northwest of Korada to Mt Santo." As mentioned earlier, the task of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army was to pin down enemy units. The Army Group gave up XV Corps to Below's Army on 3 October, and 13 Sch Div on the 12<sup>th</sup>. They were supposed to create a new division from excess troops, and prior to the offensive were to transfer one

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<sup>385</sup>Krafft, Vol. I, pp. 36 ff.

division from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army.

The Army Group encountered substantial difficulties in carrying out their instructions. One of the pre-conditions for the offensive was that GO Boroevic should continue to hold onto all of his current front, which at many points was still insecure; this was his immediate assignment. When 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army was ordered to take part in the offensive a new problem was discussed in Adelsberg - whether the Army Group should first let 14<sup>th</sup> Army carry out the breakthrough attack and then join them in echelon, or have the northern wing take part directly in the breakthrough.<sup>386</sup> The latter course would be difficult, mainly from the artillery's standpoint. The Army Group didn't have enough guns to take part in a general offensive while ensuring that both of their armies continued to hold all of the positions.

GO Boroevic decided to create an attacking group on the northern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. Led by FML Kosak, it would consist of 73 and 35 ID. On 10 October the 73<sup>rd</sup> ID was given a new number - 60. The strength of 35 ID, which relieved 13 Sch Div on 12 October, was increased from eight to twelve battalions when the Division was assigned IR 64 (already stationed near Lom) plus Battalion I/63. 57 ID were stationed behind Kosak's men. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army was reinforced by about 400 guns and 200 trench mortars, which were either sent by the k.u.k. AOK or transferred from Wurm's Army. Therefore, they were able to give Kosak's group sufficient fire power. But HQ of Southwestern front deemed that this force was still insufficient, even after 29 ID was also assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army as will be narrated below. Therefore 28 ID were shifted from the Army Group's southern wing to Chiapovano. The long period of indecision about the date of Kosak's attack was settled on 21 October, when Southwestern front HQ ordered specifically that his infantry were to advance simultaneously with those of his northern neighbor (XV Corps of 14<sup>th</sup> Army).

1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army were busy trying to deceive the enemy by pretending to make serious preparations to attack along the entire front. For this purpose, on 15 October they began a coordinated bombardment with all their artillery, followed three days later by long-distance fire from the southern wing toward Grado. Because of the limited number of guns, for this feint operation the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army received a daily allotment of 1500 rounds for each division, while 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army at this time were supposed to use just 1000 rounds each day. Furthermore some infantry attacks were prepared - in the Wippach valley and to

<sup>386</sup>From a manuscript by Anton Pitreich.

capture the western summit of the Fajti hrib. They were supposed to take place at the same time as the breakthrough near Tolmein.

Of the strategic reserves, which initially were supplied by Borojevic's Army Group HQ, the 33 ID were brought to Laibach, 4 ID to Ob. Laibach and 29 ID to Haidenschaft (so as to avoid overcrowding). Thus the 29<sup>th</sup> was in the best position to fulfill the needs of the Army Group. At the start of October they were assigned to Borojevic, who shifted them into the Ternowa Forest behind the northern wing, where they could reinforce Kosak's group if needed. To replace 29 ID the 13 Sch Div were assigned to the strategic reserve. Then the entire reserve (4 and 33 ID plus 13 Sch Div) were attached to 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which would supply them and provide orders for their deployment. Logistical support for these attached Aus-hung. troops was the responsibility of the newly-formed "6<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Detachment." The artillery of 4 and 33 ID would take part in the preparatory bombardment during the Tolmein breakthrough. 43 FA Bde, which had been pulled from the front and placed in reserve, were shifted by rail to I Corps at Flitsch. The reserve of Borojevic's Army Group was the 106 Lst ID at Haidenschaft. Since no forces were coming to create the new division which Borojevic had been instructed to form, he put 1 and 187 Lst Inf Bdes together as the 63 ID, most of which was stationed in the front next to 58 ID east of Görz.

#### Actions by the Army Group

The fighting on the Isonzo after 15 September kept the defenders in suspense, but didn't affect preparations for the offensive. Mt S Gabriele was once more the focal point of the actions. Here the 20 Hon ID, which had been at the front for two days, was assaulted by the enemy in the evening of 19 September. This surprise attack, initiated without any artillery preparation, failed completely; it served only to swell the number of Italian casualties, which had already been quite large. They suffered a similar misfortune on the Bainsizza plateau opposite the former sector of 21 Sch Div (which had been relieved by 53 ID). On 22 September the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division made some thrusts in an attempt to recover the forward trenches near Kuscarje which had been lost by their predecessors. But this operation was only partly successful. The badly worn-down 21 Sch Div were soon afterwards deployed as a reserve behind the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army.

Fighting flared up again on the 28<sup>th</sup>. After a brief bombardment the Italians launched attacks in the morning and afternoon, and

were defeated by 20 Hon ID. But at night the hotly contested caverns where guns were stored were lost, along with the adjacent trenches extending north as far as Point 367. On the 30<sup>th</sup> the actions extended along the entire front of IV Corps (which since the 18<sup>th</sup> had commanded 20 Hon ID and 43 Sch Div) and of the southern wing of XXIV Corps (which had 53 and 24 ID in line with 9 ID stationed directly behind them in reserve). All of the sectors under attack were held, although 53 ID had to carry out counterattacks. On the 30<sup>th</sup> the 20 Hon ID drove the enemy out of the lost caverns and recovered all of the original foremost battle line.<sup>387</sup>

On the first two days of October the caverns were once more the objective of stubborn but ultimately unsuccessful Italian onslaughts; the enemy had to leave 6 officers and 400 men in the hands of the gallant defenders. Although some fighting continued around Mt S Gabriele until 20 October, only two actions are worth recording. These were a series of assaults between 5:00 and 10:00 AM on the 4<sup>th</sup> and a surprise attack in the night of 8-9 October; both of these enemy operations ended in defeat. On the 15<sup>th</sup> the 60 (ex 73) ID repulsed an Italian attack against the center of their sector near Mesnjak.

#### **4. Events in Tyrol and Carinthia between the start of September and 24 October**

For the impending offensive FM Conrad's Army Group had the thankless tasks of giving up units while pretending to make their own preparations to attack. This assignment was especially difficult because the enemy were about twice as strong as Conrad's command.

On 2 September GM Richard Müller, the Field Marshal's Chief of Staff, had already been called to Marburg and briefed about the plans for the offensive. On the next day the Army Group were ordered to be ready to transfer the Edelweiss Division HQ and seven battalions, all to be taken from XIV Corps. For this purpose 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ selected IR 59 and KJR 3 (each with three battalions) plus Battalion I/KJR 4. These troops were relieved by other units of the Edelweiss Corps; they left the front and assembled at Trent, Aldeno and Caldonazzo. Here they enjoyed a brief period of rest and training in offensive tactics before

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<sup>387</sup>Here Col. Karl Kratochwil von Szentkereszthegy, commanding 81 Hon Inf Bde, won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.

their departure.<sup>388</sup>

On 12 September Army Group HQ got orders to give up 15 more battalions (six from the Kaiserschützen and nine from III Corps) plus a divisional HQ; in return the 19 ID were to be shifted from the Isonzo to Tyrol. Army Group HQ ordered the departure of 22 Sch Div HQ with 43 Sch Bde (SchR 3 and 26), 98 K-Sch Bde (K-SchR I and II), and BH IR 2 (the latter from 6 ID). FM Conrad considered that his force had been considerably weakened by giving up 25 mountain-trained battalions (including IR 14), while gaining the less reliable 19 ID which came with just 12 ½ battalions instead of 15.<sup>389</sup> He also had to surrender 5 mountain, 2 heavy howitzer and 1 ½ mortar batteries. It is true that the German Alpenkorps moved by train to Tyrol at the same time as 19 ID (starting on 15 September), but they would stay here only until the start of October.

### Tyrol

Now on 15 September the 11<sup>th</sup> Army reported that the enemy were being reinforced opposite III Corps. XX Corps noticed unusually heavy auto traffic moving coming from the south toward Cortina d'Ampezzo and Alleghe. These threats were magnified on the 18<sup>th</sup> when the Italians made a surprise attack in the Sugana valley.

Around 1:00 AM on this day five battalions overran some sentries of the k.u.k. 18 ID, thrust through the position, and pushed into Carzano. The assault succeeded because several treacherous members of Battalion V/BH 1, including a reserve first lieutenant of Slovenian nationality, guided the enemy soldiers, some of whom were wearing Austrian uniforms.<sup>390</sup>

The five Italian battalions were the foremost wave of 15 ID, which was reinforced with bicycle battalions, armored cars, and motorized batteries and detachments. Organized in twelve storm columns, the Division was supposed to thrust into the Sugana valley as far as Trent. Plans for the operation had been based in part on suggestions by the deserters. If it succeeded the

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388Schemfil, "3. KJR im Weltkrieg", p. 446. Hoen, "IR 59 im Weltkrieg", p. 572

389IR 81 came to Tyrol with just one and a half battalions instead of three, and IR 50 with just three instead of four.

390TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Not one of the traitors was a Bosnian; they were Slovenes and Czechs who'd joined the Battalion during the war. See Schachinger, "Die Bosniaken kommen!" (Graz, 1989), pp. 179 ff.

Italians intended to exploit the success by also committing 62 ID, deployed in echelon in reserve extending to Feltre.<sup>391</sup> But the enemy penetration was soon discovered, and sealed off by the troops stationed next to the area. On their own initiative, some small reserve forces hastened to the scene from all sides before dawn. They carried out a concentric counter-attack against the Italians, who intended to thrust to Borgo and were already approaching our batteries. The enemy were soon driven back, suffering heavy casualties. Before the morning ended, and also before the divisional and Army reserves could hasten forward, the original situation had been restored.<sup>392</sup> The thrust which the Italians had launched with the help of the traitors had failed completely, despite Cadorna's far-reaching hopes.

A day after the surprise attack at Carzano the Italians exploded a large mine on the Colbricon (southwest of the Rolle Pass). On 20 September they unleashed a strong attack on our position at Mt Sief, which resulted only in heavy casualties. On the 21<sup>st</sup> they tried to take a large part of our defensive installations on the Marmolata, but were able to capture just one cavern.

These striking signs of Italian activity compelled FM Conrad to report on a continuing basis about the dangers of further weakening the Tyrol garrison. On 1 July he still had 155 battalions and 1417 guns available; now he had just 116 battalions (of which only 69 were at full strength) and 1296 guns; he estimated that he was opposed by 253 battalions and 2000 guns. The Marshal also warned that most of the battalions were made up of troops speaking many languages. Also there was a significant increase in the number of men deserting or going over to the enemy; such incidents among the enlisted men were quite often due to hunger, but among officers they were almost always for nationalistic reasons.

Nevertheless the HQ of Southwestern front didn't revoke any of

<sup>391</sup>Pinchetti, pp. 329 ff. Pettorelli-Lalatta, "I.T.O." (Milan, 1931), pp. 145 ff. By the same author, "Il sogno di Carzano" (Bologna, 1926), pp. 83 ff. Pivko, "Carzano" (in Slovenian; Marburg, 1924). Also based on a letter from Marshal Cadorna to GdA Krafft dated 5 January 1927.

<sup>392</sup>Hoen, Waldstätten-Zipperer and Seifert, "Die Deutschmeister" (Vienna, 1928), pp. 725 ff. Feichtmeier, "Nachtgefechte" (in "Mil. wiss. Mitt.", Vienna; 1926 edition, pp. 142 ff.) The Italian casualties, as far as we can determine, included 17 officers and 896 men either killed or captured. The defenders lost a total of just 10 officers and 306 men (dead, wounded or missing).

their orders that troops should be transferred, and measures taken to deceive the enemy. The Marshal didn't expect any great success from the latter. When the Italians carried out large storm troop operations in the Adamello and Judicarien sectors on 27 and 28 September, it was an opportunity for two battalions of the German Alpenkorps to fight alongside the defenders (who were completely successful). Although the Alpenkorps departed on the 30<sup>th</sup> for the Wochein<sup>393</sup>, three German Storm battalions arrived from the Western front; one was stationed with XIV Corps on the Pasubio, one with III Corps on the Ortigara, and the third in the Puster valley sector (by Peutelstein and on Mt Piano). On the latter position there was an attempt on 22 October to advance from the works on the steep northern slope to the more level upper part of the mountain, but the attack was unsuccessful.

Furthermore, 21 German radio stations set up between Lake Garda and Sugana valley were broadcasting false orders after mid-October. And it was hoped that Emperor Charles' presence at Bozen between 15 and 23 October might also deceive the enemy.

The assembly of strong Italian forces in the Sugana valley (4 infantry and 2 Bersaglieri brigades were identified, along with several Alpini and bicycle battalions) was believed correctly to show that the attempts to deceive the enemy had been successful. But now this Italian force represented a danger and forced Army Group HQ, which had been directly under the high command since 3 October, to hastily move all reserves not needed elsewhere into the Sugana valley. Furthermore FM Conrad asked the Chief of the General Staff, who was visiting Bozen on 20 October, for six battalions from the Russian front. No infantry were available for the moment, but several days later an order was issued to send to Tyrol the 9 CD, which wasn't needed in the East, along with the HQ of Hauer's Cavalry Corps. 9 CD did entrain for Tyrol, but on 29 October they were diverted to 7<sup>th</sup> Army; soon thereafter the HQ of Hauer's Corps were dissolved. By this time the 12<sup>th</sup> battle of the Isonzo had begun; it relieved the tension which had been growing along Tyrol's southeastern front in the last few weeks.

### Carinthia

The circumstances were no less difficult for 10<sup>th</sup> Army, which had for a long time been protecting the borders of Carinthia and the area around the source of the Isonzo with very weak forces. To I

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<sup>393</sup>But one German Jaeger battalion stayed for about two more weeks in the Judicarien sector. (See the order of battle below for further information about the German units.)



Corps, which was to advance on their eastern wing, they'd given up 55 ID, which was equipped for attacking in the mountains, but nevertheless they were expected to employ other units to cover the right flank of I Corps with an accompanying thrust.

To simplify the chain of command, on 10 September the 10<sup>th</sup> Army had given up GdI Archduke Peter Ferdinand's group HQ, hitherto responsible for the Army's eastern sector; the Archduke went to Tyrol, where on the 16<sup>th</sup> he assumed command at Meran over Areas I and II. From the 20<sup>th</sup> the Flitsch sector was under the HQ of I Corps, which in turn were subordinate to 10<sup>th</sup> Army until 3 October (when they were assigned to 14<sup>th</sup> Army). 10<sup>th</sup> Army now selflessly gave Krauss' Corps field battalions with mountain experience, heavy batteries, high mountain companies and mountain guides, and military equipment of all sorts. But this reduction in strength diminished the Army's ability to carry out deception measures at other points to divert the enemy (as ordered), and even to provide forces for thrusts to accompany the main offensive.

Already on 8 September the Carinthian Volunteer Rifles in the Granuda Mountains (southeast of Malborgeth) had inflicted considerable damage on the enemy with a sharp thrust. On 18 October the 94 ID, stationed on both sides of Plöcken Pass, sought to divert the enemy with storm troop operations along all parts of their front. Detachments of FJB 8 were able to penetrate the Italian positions on the Kl. Pal; the gallant Jaeger inflicted casualties on the majority of the garrison. At other points the Italians responded to the storm troops for several days with heavy fire, which lasted in the always-tense Plöcken area for several more days.

Finally it was decided that parts of 59 Mtn Bde in the Seebach valley would attack toward the Nevea Ridge to directly support Krauss' Corps. However, this operation would be successful only if accompanied by a thrust from the Rombon through the Prevala Gap by a side column on Krauss' right. 10<sup>th</sup> Army, which had been weakened to the outmost, could do no more. Most of their battalions had little capacity for attacking, and some weren't even trustworthy on the defensive. On 2 October two officers and 22 men of Battalion VII/104 (made up of recovered wounded from the Esseg IR 78) went over to the enemy.

Although after giving up the Flitsch sector the HQ of 10<sup>th</sup> Army at Villach were no longer situated behind the center of their front, GO Krobotin remained in this town. The original plan had been to place XX Corps, guarding the Dolomite front, under 10<sup>th</sup>

Army but this was canceled to avoid having to alter long-standing command and logistical communications.

### **5. The Italian leadership between the eleventh and twelfth battles of the Isonzo**

After the eleventh Isonzo battle, in which the Italians were able to conquer the western half of the Bainsizza plateau, General Cadorna had planned to resume the offensive at the end of September; after careful preparation he would attack from the southern part of this plateau through the outlying parts of the Ternova Forest. But he soon altered his intentions. The Italians couldn't replace all of the 300,000 men whom they'd lost in the tenth and eleventh battles in the foreseeable future because the flow of replacements was slowing down. A larger factor was the even longer amount of time it would take to replenish the ammunition supplies. The area where the center of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was now stationed lacked water and roads, and would have to be built up before it could be the base for a new offensive. Although the troops had fought with a spirit of self-sacrifice in August, increasing breaches of discipline (described farther below) may also have made the Italian Chief of Staff reluctant to risk another trial of strength. And intervention by the parliament was imminent, since they wondered whether the extent of the captured ground was worth the bloody casualties. It was known that the defenders had received considerable reinforcements near Chiapovano. And finally the Italians were concerned that the collapse of the Russian Army might enable the Aus-Hung. high command to have still more divisions available to deploy on the Isonzo.

For all these reasons, and because it was believed - based on statements of deserters - that the Austrians might attack, on 18 September the Italian high command ordered their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies to halt all preparations for an offensive and to be ready to defend themselves "to the utmost."<sup>394</sup> Cadorna furthermore planned to create a reserve army of 200 battalions on the Tagliamento, where they could intervene energetically against any attacks from Tyrol or from the coastal lands. He issued orders to this effect on 3 October, but they weren't implemented due to resistance by the Army and corps commanders, who didn't want to give up any troops.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 420 ff.

<sup>395</sup>"Relazione della commissione d'inchiesta - Dall Isonzo al Piave" (hereafter cited in translation as "Report of the

On 21 September Cadorna shared with the two Western powers his decision to fall back onto the defensive. He felt justified in stopping the offensive because he believed that with the eleventh battle he'd completely fulfilled the promise made in Paris at the end of July that Italy would strike on a grand scale. Cadorna defended the decision to stay on the defensive on the grounds that his opponents had received reinforcements on the Isonzo, and that Italian casualties since the start of May (including those due to illness) totaled 720,000 men.<sup>396</sup> But the termination of the offensive angered Italy's allies, who didn't want to believe that the Central Powers would attack in the Southwest. Therefore they withdrew the majority of the heavy batteries (200 guns) they'd attached to the Italian Army.

Meanwhile reports began to arrive in mid-September that the Austrians were closing their border with Switzerland, that a Bavarian division had appeared in south Tyrol and that troops were being shifted to Trent; this was alarming to the Italian high command. Thereafter Cadorna himself reviewed the defensive measures on the Tyrolean front, as well as the construction of roads and fortifications on the Mt Grappa massif. Then he turned his attention to the Isonzo front, where the appearance of Austro-Hungarian and German reinforcements made it likely that there would be local attacks. In particular Cadorna was concerned about the Bainsizza plateau.

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Investigating Committee") (Rome, 1919), Vol. I, p. 30  
396Robertson, p. 442

The situation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army

Here the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, General Capello, didn't comply with an order of the high command on 10 October that the only artillery to be left on the Bainsizza plateau were field batteries and heavy guns that could be easily moved. He didn't agree that the anticipated Austrian attack, which presumably would be preceded by a short burst of destruction fire, could be checked merely with a counter-bombardment. The Army commander, who was very energetic but also self-willed, insisted that a successful defensive action must include an immediate counterattack. In most cases, therefore, he didn't alter the deployment of his infantry or artillery, and instructed his corps that if the enemy did attack they should be ready to capture Mt S Gabriele, Ravnica and the eastern edge of the Bainsizza with a counter-thrust.<sup>397</sup>

This difference of opinion led to a lively exchange of views between Cadorna and Capello, which ended with an order issued by the high command on 20 October. Now 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were instructed that in the event of a Central Powers offensive they were to refrain from any major counterattack because of the reduced strength of the units and the difficulty in finding sufficient replacements. However, it was believed that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's strength was fully sufficient for a completely defensive battle; they were empowered only to launch local counterattacks while keeping in mind that they had to avoid wearing down their forces.<sup>398</sup>

This order, which was supposed to result in a major change in the deployment of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, arrived at the same time as intelligence reports that the upcoming offensive would target this Army in particular. Now it seemed that there was no time for major changes. General Montuori, who was acting commander during General Capello's temporary absence due to illness, therefore ordered just some minor troop movements (which were carried out only in part), and a pull-back at tactically unfavorable parts of the front in the Flitsch basin and on the slopes of the Mrzli- and Vodil vrh.

The intelligence received at Cadorna's HQ in Udine had continued to give the impression that an attack involving strong German forces was imminent from the Flitsch-Tolmein area. Information

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397Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 47

398Capello, "Per la verità", pp. 251 ff. Heydendorff, "Cadorna-Capello. Die italienische Führung vor der Schlacht bei Karfreit" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1933 edition, pp. 854 ff.)

gleaned on 20 and 21 October provided almost complete clarity. On these days three Aus-Hung. officers - two of Romanian and one of Czech nationality - went over to the enemy and provided concrete details. One corps would attack at Flitsch, and other strong forces in the area between the Krn and Lom; the objective was the line Mt Mia - Matajur - Kolovrat. The k.u.k. 50 ID would attack between the Krn and the Isonzo, the German 12 ID out of the Isonzo valley by Dolje, the Alpenkorps (supposedly of three divisions) farther south and the 200 ID against the Jeza. Three other German divisions were stationed in reserve. The offensive would be initiated with a gas bombardment, followed by one and a half hours of destruction fire against the infantry, primarily with trench mortars. The attack was intended to start on 25 or 26 October, but might begin even earlier.<sup>399</sup> The deserters finally stated that the offensive would be expanded to the south as far as the sea.

To confirm that defensive measures were being taken as ordered, Cadorna had already sent two colonels from his staff to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 19 October. Their reports, in particular regarding the IV and XXVII Corps and the morale of the troops, were confident. Both colonels agreed that there were no signs of an imminent offensive along the front, and that to date no systematic bombardment had taken place.

Cadorna took one further measure - on the 22<sup>nd</sup> he journeyed himself to the IV and XXVII Corps, which seemed to be the most endangered. Based on the ideas of the commander of IV Corps, Cadorna ordered immediately that 34 ID of VII Corps, which was stationed in the Natisone valley north of Cividale, should transfer to VI Corps at Karfreit. This Division was to be relieved by 62 ID from Tyrol. Neither of the corps commanders displayed any apprehension.

#### The Italian deployment and order of battle

The overall ratio of the opposing forces also justified confidence that the impending onslaught could be resisted. The estimates of the staff at Udine indicated that there were 53 enemy divisions (including 9 German) with 645 battalions - 7 ½ divisions (92 battalions) opposite 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and 28 divisions (329 battalions) opposite 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The remainder were in Carinthia and Tyrol. Italy's own forces consisted of 63 infantry divisions with 856 battalions. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had 9 divisions (108 battalions and 1196 guns), 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had 25 divisions (353 battalions and 2430 guns). Holding the positions on the mountain fronts there

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<sup>399</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 431 ff.

were 22 divisions (281 battalions) under the Carnic Group, 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies, and the independent III Corps. The strategic reserve contained 114 battalions, of which just 15 were behind the Tyrolean front; three divisions with 39 battalions were ready to help 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, four divisions with 60 battalions were stationed behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division was mostly divided up between the corps on the Isonzo front, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> was in the strategic reserve (on the Natisone). The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> CD had been stationed far behind the front but now were moving up from their quarters toward the Isonzo.<sup>400</sup>

All of our narrative thus far shows that the Italian high command were in general well informed about the upcoming offensive of the allied Central Powers. Very accurately, they expected the main thrust to come from the area between Flitsch and Lom, and especially through Tolmein. But they erroneously also expected attacks farther south as far as the sea. Thus the deceptive measures of the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army had achieved the desired effect. And the Italian deployment didn't reflect their accurate analysis of where their opponents would strike hardest, since they placed so much of their strategic reserve behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army even though they knew it was less threatened. This is surprising, since the Italian high command had available a mostly correct estimate of the number and locations of the opposing divisions. Since in fact the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army and the southern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> weren't attacked at the outset, the placement of the Army and strategic reserves - with the main body massed in the area between Palmanova, Cormons and Cividale - was a fateful mistake.

At first the Italians didn't know when the offensive was scheduled to start. In fact the HQ of Southwestern front didn't finally set a date until 22 October. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the Italians learned from intercepted telephone conversations that their opponents would initiate the preliminary bombardment at 2:00 AM on 24 October.<sup>401</sup> Trusting in the strength of their defenses, the Italian generals however took no further actions.

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400 Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 440 ff.

401 "Report of the Investigating Committee", Vol. II, p. 43

THE ORDER OF BATTLE<sup>402</sup>

Commander-in-Chief = King Victor Emmanuel III

Chief of the General Staff = G.Lt Count Cadorna

**III Corps** (independent - from the Stilfserjoch to Lake Garda)

Had 2 ID (32 bns, 84 batties) - 5 ID, reinforced 6 ID

**1<sup>st</sup> Army** (Lake Garda to the Val Sugana)

Led by G.Lt Count Pecori-Giraldi; had 12 ½ ID (122 bns, 9 sqdns, 293 batties) - XXIX Corps (27 & 37 ID), V Corps (55 ID [reinf.] & 69 ID), X Corps (9 & 32 ID), XXVI Corps (11 & 12 ID), XXII Corps (2 & 57 ID), XX Corps (29 & 52 ID). One independent bde

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

Led by G.Lt Nicolis di Robilant; had 6 ID, 2 Alpini Groups (91 bns, 3 sqdns, 129 batties) - XVIII Corps (15, 51 & 56 ID), IX Corps (17 ID [reinf.] & 18 ID), Val Costeana Sector (6<sup>th</sup> Alpini Raggrupamento), I Corps (just 1 ID, reinf.); independent - 1 bn & 2 sqdns

**Zona Carnia** (Carnic Alps)

Led by G.Lt Tassoni; had 2 ID (31 bns, 2 sqdns, 98 batties) - Just XII Corps (26 ID [reinf.] & 36 ID)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Army** (from Mt Rombon to the Wippach)

Led by G.Lt Capello; had 25 ID, 1 Alpini Group (346 bns, 11 sqdns, 604 batties) - IV Corps (50 ID [reinf.], 43 ID [reinf.], 34 ID), XXVII Corps (19 ID [reinf.], 10<sup>th</sup> Alpini Group, 65 ID, 22 ID, 64 ID), XXIV Corps (10, 49 & 68 ID), II Corps (8, 44 & 67 ID), VI Corps (24 & 66 ID), VIII Corps (48, 59 & 7 ID), VII Corps (3 ID [reinf.], 62 ID), XIV Corps (25 & 30 ID), XXVIII Corps (23 & 47 ID [both reinf.]); independent - 1 sqdn, 75 batties

**3<sup>rd</sup> Army** (from the Wippach to the sea)

Led by G.Lt Duke of Aosta; had 9 ID (108 bns, 8 sqdns, 247 batties) - XI Corps (31 & 58 ID), XIII Corps (14 ID [reinf.] & 54 ID), XXIII Corps (61, 28 & 45 ID), XXV Corps (4 & 33 ID)

**Reserves under the high command**

(7 ID, 4 CD; 114 bns & 102 sqdns)

. In 4<sup>th</sup> Army's area - 5 Bersaglieri bicycle bns

. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's area - 13 ID [reinf.], 53 ID [reinf.], 60 ID

. In 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's area - XXX Corps (16 & 21 ID); 20 ID [reinf.], 63

**402TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:** In the original this is part of Beilage 23.

It is undated; there were frequent changes in the assignments of the various brigades during this period, a process which intensified as the catastrophe unfolded.

ID [reinf.]

. Cavalry - 1, 2, 3, 4 CD

**Total** strength of the Italian Army on the front with Austria-Hungary was = 891 bns, 153 sqdns, 1455 batties (with 6918 guns: 3828 light, 2933 medium and 157 heavy), 266 trench mortar batties, 300 tech comps

## 6. The Italian defensive positions

All parts of the coastal lands that were in enemy hands were covered by an enormous network of positions. The majority of the trenches had been dug by the Italians during their offensives. Therefore they were thickest in the area around Görz and on the Comen plateau. As a precaution, however, even before the war the Italian high command had begun to build some positions in the rear, so some of them were on the other side of the border. Since the fighting in the mountainous part of the Isonzo front north of Plava had been less prolonged and stubborn in comparison to the enormous battles near Görz and on the Karst plateau, naturally there were fewer positions here. But the entrenchments that did exist were quite strong because of the rugged terrain; these defenses, especially those toward the rear, had been constructed to confront possible Austrian attacks rather than in response to the immediate demands of the fighting.

These positions on both sides of the upper Isonzo were now very important, because in the upcoming offensive they lay in the path of the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army. They were well-known to the Aus-Hung. commanders from direct observation and from aerial reconnaissance reports.

The foremost position between the Wischberg (Point 2660) and Mt S Gabriele lay almost directly next to our own defensive installations. In the valleys - including the Seebach valley (in front of the Nevea Ridge), the Flitsch basin and opposite the northern part of the Tolmein bridgehead - this position was made up of many parallel lines running between the mountain slopes. In front of the southern part of the bridgehead the enemy position lay farther back from our lines. Instead of running through the valley between Ciginj and Selo it had been built along the ridge between the Jeza Heights (# 929) through the Hrad vrh (# 687) toward Doblar. Strong fortifications on the thickly-wooded slopes blocked the way up from the afore-mentioned valley. Naturally the weakest part of the Italians' foremost lines was the position on the Kal plateau, where they had been stationed



only since the eleventh battle died down.

The second position extended from the defile at Saga over the Polounik to Vrsic (# 1897), then from the Krn through the Pleca (# 1034). It crossed the Isonzo at Selisce and ended on the Kolovrat. The third position was only partly complete at many points. It ran from the Ucea valley (west of Saga) over the Stol (# 1668), the Starijski vrh (# 1136) and the Volnik (# 793) to Idersko. It blocked the Isonzo valley north and southeast of Karfreit [Caporetto], where it created a bridgehead around this town. Farther south it continued from Luico over the Kolovrat Ridge to Jeza.

The part of the Kolovrat ridge between the border Heights 1114 and the Jeza was a key point. In addition to the first position, which from here extended toward Doblar, there was a defensive line on each of the two chains of hills that run along the Judrio. The eastern line had been built from the Korada (# 812) along the various heights of the Coglio; the western line ran over the strongly fortified Castel del Monte west of the pre-war border into the plains. Fortifications farther to the rear blocked the Natisone valley near Azzida, before it left the mountains. The rear areas of the Italian front on the Bainsizza plateau were relatively weak. The only continuous second line here ran along the western bank of the Isonzo from Doblar to Plava; prior to the eleventh battle it had been the foremost position. There was also a trench network between the Isonzo downstream from Plava and the Rohot Brook; after the tenth battle it had served as the jumping-off point for the attack on the Bainsizza.

Since the allies planned to have 14<sup>th</sup> German Army advance to a line from Gemona through the heights north of Cividale to the border northwest of the Korada, it would be of decisive importance to quickly seize the group of trenches on the line of ridges between Point 1114 and the Jeza. From here it would be possible to roll up the positions on both banks of the Judrio from the north and also advance into the unfortified area north of Cividale. For the thrust of Krauss' group, which would protect the right flank of 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the key points were the defenses near Saga and on the Stol. Both must be secured before strong forces could advance west through the Ucea valley. And possession of the Stol Ridge would be important to ensure that these troops weren't attacked from the south while they moved through the valley, and so that the units which reached Karfreit through Robic would be able to strike toward Cividale through the Natisone valley.

All of these factors had a major effect on the orders issued for the offensive.

## 7. Orders for the attack

The main body of 14<sup>th</sup> Army's infantry didn't reach their jumping-off points until 22 October. Thus they had little time in which to make ready for their very difficult assignments. To camouflage the arrival of these new units in the positions, the German advanced troops and scouts were given Austrian caps. The Aus-Hung. soldiers who relieved BH IR 4 (of 55 ID) in the Flitsch basin wore fezzes, and the Regiment's imam on the Rombon continued to call men to prayer in the midst of troops from the Alpine lands.

A series of orders governed the development of the operation. They were the result of meetings between the higher-ranking commanders, the most important of which involved the two most responsible members of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army HQ - GdI Below and G.Lt Krafft - and the commander of I Corps, GdI Krauss. All three generals agreed that the Tagliamento could be only their minimum objective; their plans reached farther than those of the k.u.k. high command. From the memoirs of GdI Krauss in particular it's clear that he wanted to overrun the Italians, prevent them from rallying, and capture the Stol in one bound.<sup>403</sup>

G.Lt Krafft expected that after the initial breakthrough the enemy would try to set up a new defensive front on the heights east of Cividale, with their left wing approximately on Mt Juanes; therefore he wanted I Corps to envelop the Italians' northern wing. And then he intended to have this Corps move to the right, into the Venetian Alps, so as to cause the collapse of the Italian positions in front of 10<sup>th</sup> Army. GdI Krauss, on the other hand, felt it would be preferable if his Corps pivoted toward the left, cutting off the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army. Finally the plan of the German Army HQ was adopted.

GdI Below, whose Army would be the spearhead of the offensive, issued an order on 4 October giving them the assignment of throwing the enemy "out of the Karst area, which is unfavorable for our defenders, and beyond the Tagliamento." For this purpose

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<sup>403</sup>Krafft, Vol. I, p. 31. Krauss, "Die Ursachen unserer Niederlage" (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Munich, 1921), pp. 220 ff. By the same author, "Das Wunder von Karfreit" (Munich, 1926), pp. 24 ff.

14<sup>th</sup> Army should "break through the enemy front at Flitsch and Tolmein, and then reach a line between Gemona and the Cividale area....Pressure should be continuous from the start on the right wing." GdI Below stated that after the first enemy position had been broken through, it was essential to gain "uncontested possession of the route Flitsch-Saga-Karfreit-Tolmein through the valley" so that the objective could be reached. For this purpose "the first goal to be achieved, in an advance that will continue day and night without interruption, is the line Canin - Pta. di Maggiore - Mt Mia - Mt Matajur - Mt S Martino - Mt Hum - Tribil d. sp. - Kostanjevica Heights." The high ground on this line had been chosen as a goal because it made up the main strong point of the defenses which the Italians had already partly completed; furthermore, Mt Mia and Mt Matajur were the bulwarks of the Natisone valley, through which Below hoped to quickly reach the plains.<sup>404</sup>

It was expected that a thrust from these heights toward the line Gemona-Cividale would cause a vigorous reaction from the enemy, principally against the Army's right wing from Cividale which was the center of the Italians' road network. Below's Army order stated further that "Everything depends on our not giving the enemy time to prepare for and carry out prolonged resistance in a flanking position on the Juanes plateau or northeast of Cividale."

The German army commander also gave his troops tactical guidelines for the difficult upcoming operation. He wrote, "The basic rule for any attack in the mountains is to take and hold the line of heights, which creates a land bridge to your next objective. Take detours on high ground rather than crossing valleys and deep ravines, which takes more time and greater exertions. Use the valleys to quickly bring up reserves, mobile artillery and supplies. Each column on the heights must have permission to move ahead on their own authority; thus there will always be a chance that they can help neighbors who've been lagging behind by pivoting into the rear of their opponents." These orders of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army HQ substantially endorsed the standard mountain tactics of the Aus-Hung. Army. GdI Krauss, on the other hand, emphasized the "breakthrough in valleys", where a quick advance was possible; enemy units on the heights should just be pinned down. As our narrative will show, at least one German division would also win a decisive success with a well-planned thrust through a valley.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>404</sup>From a letter by GdA Kraft to GdI Alfred Krauss on 17 March 1926

<sup>405</sup>Lequis, "Einiges zum 'Wunder von Karfreit'" (in "Deutscher

Specific tasks of the attacking groups

While these general instructions were being issued, the various attacking groups were formed and given their specific assignments.

GdI Krauss' group (HQ of the k.u.k I Corps) had the Edelweiss Division, 22 Sch Div, 55 ID and the German Jaeger Division. They would deliver the main thrust in the Flitsch valley with one blow through Saga to the Stol; simultaneously they would mop up the slopes of the Rombon and of the Canin as far as the Skutnik. A strong column on the left would capture the Vrsic, then thrust through Ravna and Karfreit to Staro Selo. This would open up the Karfreit basin and make it possible, if necessary, to roll up the Stol position from the east and to advance toward Mt Carnizza. In the next phase Krauss' group would concentrate to thrust in the general direction of Monteperta and Mt le Zuffine. Smaller forces would cover the right flank of the Army by attacking from Saga to Resiutta and Venzone. As mentioned earlier, the left wing of 10<sup>th</sup> Army was to join this operation by attacking toward the Nevea Ridge. The common goal of the inner wings of 10<sup>th</sup> Army and of Krauss' group was the Fella valley between Pontebba and Gemona.

G.Lt Stein's group (HQ of III Bavarian Corps) had the k.u.k. 50 ID, German 12 ID, the Alpenkorps and German 117 ID. Their first major object was Mt Matajur. To succeed they would need to quickly capture the position at Point 1114. In the next phase Krauss and Stein's groups would cooperate to take the Mt Juanes massif.

G.Lt Berrer's group (HQ of LI German Corps) had the 200 and 26 (or 1<sup>st</sup> Württemberg) ID. They were supposed to take the Jeza massif, thrust past Drenchia and the La Glava Heights, and capture Mt S Martino (the chapel at Point 965). 200 ID, in the front line, would then continue from Mt S Martino along the ridge toward Mt S Bardolomeo. 26 ID, initially in reserve, would advance on the left wing past Mt Hum toward Mt S Maria Mna.

FML Scotti's group (HQ of k.u.k. XV Corps) had the k.u.k. 1 and German 5 ID. Their first assignment was to make it easier for

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Offizier-Bund"; Berlin, Issue 10 for 1927). TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See also C. Falls, "The Battle of Caporetto" (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 24; Falls points out that in the almost flat terrain of northern France the Germans would shortly also use valleys to great advantage in their counterattack at Cambrai.

the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to cross the Isonzo; the first goals of 1 ID's attack were the Globocak Heights and the town of Kostanjevica. 5 German ID, starting in reserve, would come forward through Srednje in the direction of Castel del Monte, the principal objective of the entire group. 1 ID could advance from Kostanjevica to Mt S Giovanni, depending on the success of the attack by 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army.

Under Boroevic's Army Group, FML Kosak's command (60 and 35 ID) had been created on the northern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. They were to advance through the Avscek trenches to capture the Vrh Heights. This would hinder the strong enemy force here from intervening in the area where 14<sup>th</sup> Army was breaking through. And the capture of Vrh was also a pre-condition for crossing the Isonzo in the Auzza-Ronzina area. To make it easier to cross the river, several battalions of 57 ID - with mountain artillery and bridging equipment - would join the attack of 1 ID on the left wing of XV Corps. After the crossing was complete, all of 57 ID would thrust along the Kolovrat ridge to the Korada; they would be followed by 28 and 29 ID. Chosen to command this group of three divisions (which would be inserted between XV Corps and Group Kosak) was GdI Kaiser, whose II Corps HQ arrived at Bresowitz - 7 km west of Laibach - on 19 October. XXIV Corps would join the attack by Group Kosak.

Stationed in reserve under Southwestern front HQ, but in the sector of 14<sup>th</sup> Army, were 4 and 33 ID plus 13 Sch Div. It was planned that they would move forward in intervals through Tolmein and St Luzia to Karfreit. From here they could reinforce either Krauss or Stein as the situation warranted. Thus it would be possible to further intensify the intensity of the thrust.

The entire operation was thus conceived as a large-scale breakthrough, which would gain ground in echelon toward the right. The strong group in the north would thrust deeply into the enemy lines and reach the Tagliamento. 14<sup>th</sup> Army deployed eight divisions at the front for the first onslaught (five Aus-Hung. and three German). Two more divisions, from Boroevic's Army Group, would attack on their left. The eight assault divisions were followed in the second line by four German divisions and finally the three Aus-Hung. divisions of the strategic reserve. Thus the allies would have more than 2:1 superiority in the area of the breakthrough, while Boroevic's Army Group were just 2/3 as strong as the Italians in their sector.<sup>406</sup>

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406 Pohl, "Die Kriegführung der Mittelmächte gegen Italien" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1926 edition, p. 157)

Gas shells would be fired from 2:00 to 4:30 AM on the day of the attack, so as to damage the infantry in the foremost enemy trenches and neutralize the identified Italian batteries. The artillery would begin their fire for destruction at 6:30, and the trench mortars would join in around 7:00. At 8:00 AM the infantry would attack at Tolmein, followed an hour later by the troops at Flitsch.

## 8. The Central Powers' order of battle<sup>407</sup>

*German units are shown in italics*

Under the All-Highest Command of Emperor and King Charles...  
 Chief of the General Staff = GdI Freih. von Arz  
 Chief of the Office of Operations = GM Freih. von Waldstätten

A. Army Group Conrad (as of 1 November 1917)  
 Commander = FM Freih. Conrad von Hötzendorf  
 Chief of Staff = GM Richard Müller

### 1) Group Archduke Peter Ferdinand

Commander = GdI Archduke Peter Ferdinand; C/Staff = Col. Buzek  
 Had 5 3/4 bns, 10 SS dets, 5 high mtn (mtn guide) comps; 1 cav half regt, 2 mobile batties, 3 fort arty comps, 2 tech comps; 8 light and 100 fixed guns, 83 fixed MG  
 . Area I [Stilfserjoch] (Col. Freih. von Lempruch; had 1 bn, 4 SS dets, 2 high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 1 fort art comp, 1 tech comp; 44 fixed guns, 26 fixed MG) - Res Bn IV/29; SS Dets Prad, Schlanders, Stilfs, Taufers; High Mtn Comp 30; one mtn guide det; a comp of Fort Arty Bn 4, 26 fixed MG; a det of SB 8  
 . Area II [Tonale] (Col. Förster; had 3 bns, 6 SS dets, 3 high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 1 cav half regt, 2 mobile batties, 2 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp; 8 light and 56 fixed guns, 57 fixed MG - Res Bns I/29, II/37; IV Bn/K-SchR I; SS Dets Cles, Innsbruck III, Lienz, Malé, Passeier, Ulten; High Mtn Comps 21, 28; a mtn guide det; Tyrol K-Sch Half Regt; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 8, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 28; 1 & 2 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 7; 6 Comp/SB 10

### 2) 11<sup>th</sup> Army

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<sup>407</sup>The numerical strength of the infantry and cavalry units isn't shown because figures are not available. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In the original this material makes up most of Beilage 23. Details on the German order of battle have been added here from "Der Durchbruch am Isonzo" (an official work, part of the "Schlachten des Weltkrieges" series; Oldenburg, 1926), Part I, pp. 197-209.

Commander = GO Graf Scheuchenstuel  
 Chief of Staff = GM von Soos

a) Area III [south Tyrol]

Commander = FML Edler von Kletter; C/Staff = Lt Col. von Pfersmann

. Adamello Border Sector (Col. Hohenberger) - Bn I/Hon IR 311; ½ k.k. Lst Bn 166; ½ k.u. Lst Bn III/30; SS Dets Gries, Valarsa; High Mtn Comps 23, 25, 29; half of a high Alpine storm comp; ½ 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 202, 1/4 4 Batty/Hvy FAR 8; 10 light, 1 heavy & 9 fixed guns; 20 fixed MG

. Judicarien Border Sector (Col. Spiegel) - Res Bn I/37; k.k. Lst Bns 163, 170; SS Dets Bezau, Bludenz, Klausen; High Mtn Comps 26, 31, 32; 58 fixed guns, 44 fixed MG

. Riva Border Sector (FML Edler von Schiesser, who also led the Riva Fortress) - Res Bns III/29, V/37; k.k. Lst Bns IV/2, 173, 174; SS Dets Bozen, Lana, Riva, Sarntheim; 5 Batty/FKR 35; ½ 3 Batty/Mtn AR 10; 6 light & 80 fixed guns; 44 fixed MG

. Directly under Area III - A mtn guide comp; 1, 3 Res & 3 Ma Comps/Fort Arty Bn 1; 2, 3 Fort, 3 Res & 4 Res Comps/Fort Arty Bn 4; 3 & 4 Fort Comps/Fort Arty Bn 7; k.u. Lst Arty Comp 3/V; 10 Comp of SB 14, 1 Comp of PB 3

b) 56<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (FML Kroupa) - 9 ½ bns, 5 SS dets, 13 ½ mob batties, 2 TM batties, 4 ½ fort arty comps, 3 tech comps; 36 light, 6 heavy, 3 very heavy & 74 fixed guns

. 88 Sch Bde (Lt Col von Hiltl) - k.k. Lst Bn IV; k.u. Lst Bn III/20; SS Dets Brixen, Kizbühel, Reute; 11 fixed MG

. k.u. 28 Lst Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Sparber) - Bns I/1, I/KJR 1; k.u. Lst Bns VIII/17, VIII/19; SS Dets Glurns, Schwaz; 8 fixed MG

. 141 Inf Bde (Col. Wolf) - Bns IV & V/22; k.u. Lst Bns II and ½ of III/3; 17 fixed MG

. 56 FA Bde (Col. Ziller) - 6 Batty/FHR 22; Mtn AR 6 (7); 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 11; ½ 4 [Can] Batty/Hvy FAR 3; 8 [Can] Batty/Fort AR 6; 4 [42 cm How] Batty/Fort AR 6; 42 cm How Batty 8; 1/4 of 5 [24 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 7; a flak batty; 19 Comp/Fort AR 4; 1 & 5 Ma Comps/Fort Arty Bn 1; ½ 13 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Bn 2; 7 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 4; two TM batties

. 3 Comp/SB 8; 2 Comp/SB 12; 9 Comp/SB 14

c) XIV ("Edelweiss") Corps

Commander = GdI von Martiny; C/Staff = Col. Schneller

Had 13 ½ bns, 2 SS dets, 2 high mtn (mtn guide) comps; ½ sqdn; 31 mob batties, 2 TM batties, 3 fort arty comps, 2 tech comps; 122 light, 14 heavy, 8 very heavy guns; 67 fixed guns; 44 fixed MG

- . 8<sup>th</sup> ID (KJD) (FML Edler von Verdross) - 9 ½ bns, 1 high mtn comp; 1/4 sqdn, 17 mobile batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 62 light, 12 heavy, 6 very heavy guns; 20 fixed guns, 42 fixed MG
  - . 1 KJ Bde (GM Freih. von Ellison) - Bns ½ I & II/81, II & III/KJR 1, II & III/KJR 4; High Mtn Comp 22
  - . 2 KJ Bde (Col. Julius von Lustig) - Bns III/81; III, IV & V/KJR 2
    - . 1/4 of 2 Sqdn/Tyrol K-S Reit Bn; 1 Comp/SB 6
    - . 8 FA Bde (Col. Erler) - FKR 8 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 8 (3), Hvy FAR 8 (3); 6 Can Battay/Mtn AR 10; 4, 5 & 6 Can Batties and 1 How Battay/Mtn AR 20; 1 [21 cm Mor] Battay/Fort Arty Bn 3; 5 & 12 [24 cm Mor] Batties/Fort AR 7
- . 15 Inf Bde (GM Phleps; had 4 bns, 2 SS dets, 1/4 sqdn, 10 mobile batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 48 light, 2 heavy guns, 25 fixed guns, 2 fixed MG
  - . Inf - IR 50 (3); Bn V/BH 2; SS Dets Kufstein, Zillertal
  - . Attached - 1/4 2 Sqdn/Tyrol K-S Reit Bn; 1 Comp/SB 14
  - . 3 FA Bde (GM Grandowski) - FKR 3 (2-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 3 (3), 2 [Hvy How] Battay/Hvy FAR 3; 1-3 Can Batties/Mtn AR 20
  - . Folgaria Fortification Group Command (12 fixed guns)
- . Corps troops - One mtn guide comp; 15 Comp/Fort AR 3; 1 & 2 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 6; ½ k.u. Lst Arty Comp 1/V; three flak batties; 42 cm How Battay 6

## d) III Corps

Commander = GdI Ritter von Krautwald; C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Karg

- Had 22 bns, 4 SS dets, 1 mtn guide comp, 3/4 sqdn, 32 mobile batties, 2 TM batties, 2 fort arty comps, 5 tech comps; 128 light, 10 heavy, 4 very heavy guns; 35 fixed guns; 78 fixed MG
- . Col. Vidossich's Group - 4 ½ bns, 2 SS dets, 1/4 sqdn, 7 batties, 1 tech comp; 24 light, 4 heavy, 2 very heavy guns; 8 fixed guns, 20 fixed MG
    - . Inf - Bns ½ I/51, I/102; Res Bn III/37; k.k. Lst Bns IV/23, V [Tyrol]; SS Dets Kaltern, Landeck
    - . Attached - 1/4 3 Sqdn/Hon HR 10; 3 Comp/SB 3
    - . Lt Col. Botschen's FA Bde - 1 & 5 Batties/FKR 22, 3 Battay/FHR 6, 5 Can Battay/Mtn AR 10, 5 Can Battay/Mtn AR 11, 29 [Can] Battay/Fort AR 1, 1 [24 cm Mor] Battay/Fort AR 4
  - . 19<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Elmar) - 7 ½ bns, 1/4 sqdn, 12 ½ batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 48 light, 2 heavy, 2 very heavy guns; 14 fixed guns, 28 fixed MG
    - . 37 Bde (GM Edler von Augustin) - IR 75 (3); k.k Lst Bn 172
    - . Lt Col. von Vidale's Group - Bns IV/27, V/BH 1
    - . Lt Col. Schwarz's Group - Bns ½ I/51, III/74
    - . 1/4 3 Sqdn/Tyrol K-Sch Reit Bn; 1 Comp/SB 9
    - . 22 FA Bde (Col. von Walzel) - FKR 22 (2-4 & 6 Batties),



- FHR 22 (3), Hvy FAR 22 (2); 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10, 3 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 11, ½ 4 [Can] Batty/Hvy FAR 6; 7 [24 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 6
- . 6<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Schilhawsky) - 10 bns, 2 SS dets, 1/4 sqdn, 12 ½ batties, 1 TM batty, 3 tech comps; 56 light, 4 heavy and 6 fixed guns; 28 fixed MG
- . 11 Bde (GM de Brunfaut) - IR 27 (3), 35 (2)
- . 12 Bde (Col. Dorotka) - IR 17 (3); Bn X/14; FJB 7
- . Also - SS Dets Lavarone, Levico; 1/4 3 Sqdn/Tyrol K-Sch Reit Bn; 5 Comp/SB 5, 5 Comp/SB 8, 1 Comp/PB 2
- . 6 FA Bde (Col. Kratky) - FKR 6 (1-3, 5 & 6 Batties), FHR 6 (3); ½ 4 [Hvy Can] Batty/Hvy FAR 6, 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10, 1 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 11, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 6, 3 [How]/Batty Hvy FAR 22
- . Corps troops - A mtn guide comp; 3 & 4 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 6; 2 fixed MG; Lavarone Fort. Group Command (7 fixed guns)
- e) 18<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Vaic) - 11 ½ bns, 3 SS dets, ½ sqdn, 16 mobile batties, 1 TM batty, 3 fort arty comps, 1 tech comp; 58 light, 12 heavy & 36 fixed guns; 28 fixed MG
- . 181 Bde (Col. Ritter von Romer) - Bns X/59, I & II/SchR 36; FJB 22; a bn of the Upper Aus Vol Rif Regt; 15 fixed MG
- . 1 Mtn Bde (GM Teus) - Bns IV/4, III/SchR 36; Res Bn IV/37; k.k. Lst Bn I; SS Dets Lechtal, Meran, Sterzing; 13 fixed MG
- . Also - Bns ½ II/81, 1/4 II and 1/4 III/KJR 1; k.k. Lst Bns 164, ½ 166; a mtn guide comp; ½ 2 Sqdn/Tyrol K-Sch Reit Bn; 1 Comp/PB 10
- . 18 FA Bde (no commander) - 4 Batty/FKR 6, 2 Batty/FHR 22, 6 Batty/Res FHR 202; 1, 2 & 3 Can Batties/Mtn AR 1, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 10; 2, 3 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 28; 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 1; ½ 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 28; 4 [Can] Batty/Hvy FAR 22, 3 [How] Batty/Hvy FAR 3, 3 [How] Batty/Hvy FAR 6; 1 ½ flak batties, 1 TM batty; 4 Ma Comp/Fort AR 1, 6 Ma Comp/Fort AR 6; a det of Fort AR 7; ½ k.u. Lst Arty Comp 1/V
- f) Directly under 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ (3 bns, 4 air comps) - Army Storm Bn; I Bn/IR 22; Lt Col. Edler von Schönner's Bike Bn; Air Comps 17, 21, 24, 48
- TOTALS for 11<sup>th</sup> Army - 69 ½ bns, 23 SS dets, 11 ½ high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 1 ¾ sqdns, 96 ¾ mob batties, 7 TM batties, 22 ½ fort arty comps, 13 tech comps, 4 air comps; 362 light, 34 heavy & 15 very heavy guns; 359 fixed guns, 294 fixed MG

## 3) XX Corps

Commander = GdI Ritter von Roth; C/Staff = Col. von Lorx  
Had 45 bns, 16 SS dets, 16 high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 42 mobile

batties, 1 ½ TM batties, 17 ½ fort arty comps, 8 tech comps, 2 air comps; 158 light, 20 heavy, 2 very heavy guns; 229 fixed guns, 159 fixed MG

. Area IV [Fassana Alps-Pordoi], HQ of 52<sup>nd</sup> ID (FML Heinrich Goiginger) - 23 bns, 9 SS dets, 4 high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 23 batties, ½ TM Batty, 6 ½ fort arty comps, 4 tech comps; 90 light, 6 heavy, 1 very heavy guns; 90 fixed guns, 61 fixed MG

. 13 Mtn Bde (Col. Hadaszczok, acting) - K-Sch Regt III (2); Bns III/59, II & IV/104, II/SchR 5, II/K-SchR II; FJB 20; Res Bn II/29; SS Dets Auer, Feldkirch; a mtn guide comp

. 9 Mtn Bde (Col. Lercher) - Bns IV/12, III/49, IV/84, IV/87, IV/K-SchR III; a combined bn; SS Det Rankweil; a mtn guide comp

. 179 Bde (Col. Covin) - Bns II/92, I/K-SchR III; Res Bn V/29; k.k. Lst Bns 38, 39, 159, 161; SS Dets Campitello, Dornberg, Imst, Kastelruth, Nauders, Welschnofen; High Mtn Comp 24; a mtn guide comp

. Also - Sturm Bn 52; one comp each of SB 6 & PB 5, 8, 10

. 90 Res FA Bde (Col. Hubischta) - Mtn AR 2 (8), 14 (8); 4 Batty/Res FKR 202, 4 & 5 Batties/Res FHR 202; 2 Can & 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 204; 6 [Can] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 4; ½ 1 [How] Batty/Fort AR 3; ½ 12 [24 cm Mor] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 5; half a TM batty; 4 Ma Comp/Fort AR 2, 8 Comp/Fort AR 6, 1 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 1, 5 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 5; ½ 3 Ma Comp/Fort Arty Bn 9; k.k. Lst Arty Comp 8/2; k.u. Lst Arty Comp 3/IV

. Area V [Buchenstein to Carinthia border], HQ of 49<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Steinhart) - 20 bns, 7 SS dets, 12 high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 19 batties, 1 TM batty, 11 fort arty comps, 4 tech comps; 68 light, 14 heavy, 1 very heavy guns, 139 fixed guns, 98 fixed MG

. 96 Bde (GM Korzner) - Bns III/73, I/KJR 2, III/KJR 3; k.k. Lst Bns 165, 167; SS Dets Bregenz, Enneberg, Gröden, Rattenberg; High Mtn Comps 3, 14, 15; a mtn guide comp

. 56 Mtn Bde (Col. Gustav von Krammer) - Bns II & VI/KJR 2, III/BH 4; k.k. Lst Bns 29, 162, 168; SS Dets Sillian, Silz, Welsberg; High Mtn Comps 16, 17, 18, 27; a mtn guide comp

. 21 Mtn Bde (GM Edler von Maendl) - Bns I, III & VIII/104; k.k. Lst Bns II, III, 171; SS Dets Innsbruck I & II; High Mtn Comps 19, 20; a mtn guide comp

. Also - Sturm Bn 49; k.k. Lst Bn 160; one comp each of SB 1, 4, 14 and of PB 2

. FA Bde Pustertal (CO not listed) - RFKR 202 (1, 3 & 6 Batties), RFHR 202 (2); Hvy RFAR 202 (2); Mtn AR 8 (7); 1 & 4 Can Batties/Mtn AR 204, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 1, 3 How Batty/Mtn AR 14, ½ 1 & 3 [How] Batties/Hvy FAR 3, ½ 12 [24 cm Mor] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 5, 2 Ma Comp/Fort AR 1, 3 Ma Comp/Fort AR 6, 3 & 4 Comps/Fort Arty Bn 1, 1 Comp and 2, 3 & 4 Ma Comps/

Fort Arty Bn 4; ½ 6 Comp/Fort Arty Bn 5; k.k. Lst Arty Comps  
 9/2, 16/2; k.u. Lst Arty Comp 4/IV  
 . Corps troops - Bns II & III/81; Air Comps 15, 45

4) Directly under Conrad's Army Group HQ - 4 Batty/FKR 6 (6 light guns) and 3 fixed guns

TOTALS for Conrad's Army Group = 120 1/4 bns, 49 SS dets, 2 ½ high mtn (mtn guide) comps; 1 cav half regt, 1 3/4 sqdns; 141 2/3 batties, 8 ½ TM batties, 43 fort arty comps, 22 3/4 tech comps, 6 air comps; 534 light, 3 heavy, 17 very heavy, 531 fixed guns, 536 fixed MG

#### CHANGES in Conrad's Army Group

In addition to the units shown above, on 24 Oct the Army Group still had attached three elite German units that had come from France - *Sturm Bns of Crown Prince Rupprecht's, the German Crown Prince's and Duke Albrecht's Army Groups*. But these bns were already moving on to 14<sup>th</sup> Army where they joined the *Jaeger Division*. Between 1 and 4 November, Conrad was reinforced by two infantry divisions:

- . 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID (FML Kratky) - 12 bns, 1 sqdn, 10 batties (60 light guns)
  - . k.k. 110 Lst Bde (Col. Nechwatal) - k.k. Lst IR 31 (3), 32 (3)
  - . k.k. 111 Lst Bde (GM Johann von Richter) - k.k. Lst IR 6 (3), 25 (3)
  - . Res Sqdn/UR 1
    - . 106 Res FA Bde (HQ and CO were still with XXIV Corps) - Res FKR 106 (4) and Res FHR 106 (6)
- . 21<sup>st</sup> Sch Div (FML Podhajsky) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn
  - . 41 Sch Bde (GM Edler von Schwanda) - SchR 6 (3), 7 (2)
  - . 42 Sch Bde (Col. Steinsberg) - SchR 8 (2), 28 (2)
  - . 4 Sqdn/DR 7

**B. 10<sup>th</sup> Army** (as of 31 Oct 1917, the date they were reassigned from Conrad's Army Group to Southwestern front HQ)

Commander = GO Freiherr von Krobotin

Chief of Staff = Col. Domashnian

94<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Lawrowski) - 13 bns, 2 high mtn comps, 1/4 sqdn, 20 batties, 2 TM batties, 1 tech comp; 88 light & 4 heavy guns  
 . Lesachtal Group (Col. Edler von Fasser) - k.k. Lst Bn 148; a high mtn comp; Salzburg & Styrian Vol Rifle Bns  
 . 25 Mtn Bde (GM Ritter von Wasserthal) - Bn III/18; FJB 8; a combined FJB; k.k. Lst Bns I/26, 30; a high mtn comp  
 . 57 Mtn Bde (Col. Albert von Watterich) - k.k. Lst Bns 151, 157

. Also - A storm bn; k.k. Lst IR 26 (2); 1/4 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; 7 Comp/SB 3

. 94 Res FA Bde (Col. Kizovszky) - 5 & 6 Batties/RFKR 92; RFHR 92 (4); 6 [How] Batty/RFAR 57; Mtn AR 17 (8); 2, 3 & 4 Can Batties and 5 How Batty/Mtn AR 202; 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 203; 3 [How] Batty/Hvy FAR 43; 1 TM Batty/Fort AR 7

#### Hordt's Group

Commander = GdI von Hordt; C/Staff = Lt Col. Dobretzberger  
Had 15 3/4 bns, ½ sqdn, 19 1/3 batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 74 light & 8 heavy guns

. 29 Mtn Bde (GM Archduke Heinrich Ferdinand) - 6 bns, 2 high mtn comps, 1/4 sqdn, 7 batties, ½ tech comp; 32 light guns

. Lt Col. Eltz's Group - Bns V & VI/104; two high mtn comps

. Col. Prince von und zu Liechtenstein's Group - Bn I/Hon IR 316; k.k. Lst Bn 149

. Also - Bn VII/104; Storm Comp 29; 1/4 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; ½ 6 Comp/PB 3

. "Res FA Bde of 29 Mtn Bde" (Col. Mostböck) - 5 [Can] Batty of Hvy Res FAR 57; Mtn AR 203 (6)

. 59 Mtn Bde (GM Edler von Dietrich) - 8 ½ bns, 6 high mtn comps, 1/4 sqdn, 12 batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 42 light & 8 heavy guns

. Group Fella (Col. Heinrich von Lustig) - k.k. Lst Bns 10, 41; Carinthian Vol Rif Regt (3)

. Group Raibl (Col. Scotti) - Bn V/7, FJB 30; ½ Sturm Bn 59; k.k. Lst Bn 152; six high mtn comps

. Also - 1/4 1 Ma Sqdn/DR 15; 9 Comp/SB 3

. 2 Batty/RFKR 202; Mtn AR 5 (9); 28 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 2; 4 TM Batty/Fort AR 3

10<sup>th</sup> Army troops - 3 [24 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 1, 28 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 2; 15 fixed batties (47 naval guns); Air Comp 16

TOTALS for 10<sup>th</sup> Army - 29 1/4 bns, 10 high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 3/4 sqdn, 41 1/3 mobile batties, 3 TM batties, 2 ½ tech comps, 1 air comp; 162 light, 12 heavy, 4 very heavy and 160 fixed guns

C. Southwestern front (as of 24 October 1917)

Commander = FM Archduke Eugene

Chief of Staff = GM Konopicky

#### 1) **14<sup>th</sup> German Army**

Commander = GdI Otto von Below, C/Staff = Bav. G.Lt Krafft von Delmensingen; Arty General = GM von Berndt

## a) Krauss' Group (I Aus-Hung. Corps)

Commander = GdI Alfred Krauss, C/Staff = Col. Primavesi;

artillery led by Col. Edler von Reutter

Had 41 ½ bns, 3/4 sqdn, 89 ½ batties, 9 ½ TM batties (comps), 1 tech bn, 10 tech comps, 5 air comps; 300 light, 78 heavy, 14 very heavy and 14 fixed guns

. 3<sup>rd</sup> ID (Edelweiss Div) (GM Edler von Wieden) - 10 bns, 1/4 sqdn, 15 batties, 2 TM batties, 3 tech comps; 68 light, 12 heavy, 7 fixed guns

. 216 Bde (Col. von Spiess) - IR 59 (3); Bn I/KJR 4

. 217 Bde (Col. Edler von Mollinary) - IR 14 (3), KJR 3 (3)

. 1/4 1 Sqdn/Reit SchR 1; Comps 5/SB 7, 5/SB 10, 3/Special Sapper Bn 61

. 53 Res FA Bde (GM Alois Adler) - RFHR 53 (3), 3 Batty/RFHR 202; Mtn AR 22 (7); 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 3, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 5, 3 [How] Batty/Hvy FAR 16, 4 [Can] Batty/Hvy RFAR 106, 17 [Can] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 4; two TM batties, 7 fixed guns; 2 how batties of III Bn/FAR 257 (from the Jaeger Div)

. 22<sup>nd</sup> Sch Div (GM Rudolf Müller) - 12 bns, 1/4 sqdn, 22 batties, 5 ½ TM batties (comps), 3 tech comps; 88 light, 24 heavy & 18 fixed guns

. 43 Sch Bde (GM Edler von Merten) - SchR 3 (3), 26 (3)

. 98 K-Sch Bde (Col. von Sloninka) - K-SchR I (3), II (3)

. 1/4 1 Sqdn/Reit Tyrol K-Sch Bn; Comps 4/SB 1, 5/SB 3, 3/Special SB 18

. 43 FA Bde (Col. Johann Schmidt, acting) - RFKR 53 (4), RFHR 53 (3), Hvy FAR 43 (4); 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 17, 5 Batty/FHR 22; 1, 2 & 5 How Batties/Arty School Bde; 4 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 3, 4 [Can] Batty/RFAR 92, 11 [How] Batty/Fort AR 7; 1 ½ TM batties, 18 fixed guns; 1 how batty of III Bn/FAR 257 (from Jaeger Div); 8 Ers & 302 Bav TM comps and the two TM comps of the Jaeger Div - 95 & 426

. 55<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Prinz zu Schwarzenberg) - 12 bns, 2 high mtn comps, 1/4 sqdn, 27 batties, 2 TM batties, 3 tech comps; 108 light, 16 heavy, 14 fixed guns

. 26 Mtn Bde (Col. Freih. von Zeidler-Daublebsky) - IR 7 (3), BH IR 4 (3)

. 38 Inf Bde (Col. Graf Zedtwitz) - BH IR 2 (3); Bns II/7, IV/BH 4

. Sturm Bn 55; High Mtn Comps 8, 11; 1/4 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 14; Comps 2/SB 4, 3/SB 11, 4/Special SB 61

. 93 Res FA Bde (Col. Edler von Stering) - FKR 43 (4); 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 16, 1 & 2 Batties/RFHR 57; Mtn AR 3 (5), 16 (9); 3 How Batty/Mtn AR 17; 1 & 3 [How] Batties/Hvy FAR 6, 7 [Hvy How] Batty/Arty School Bde, 57 [How] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 5; two TM batties

. Jaeger Division (Col. von Wodtke) - 7 bns, 12 batties [3

detached to 3<sup>rd</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> ID], [2 TM comps detached to 22<sup>nd</sup> ID], 1 tech comp; 36 light guns

. 5 Ers Bde - HQ of DR 4 [Gd Res Jaeger & Gd Res Schützen Bns], HQ of UR 2 [Jaeg Bn 2, Res Jaeg Bn 1], HQ of Bav Chevleg Regt 8 [Res Jaeg Bns 8, 20, 21]; three storm bns supposed to join Div were still in Army Group Conrad, q.v., and the Württemberg Mtn Bn was detached to the Alpenkorps . FAR 24 (6 can, 3 how batties); III Bn/FAR 257 was attached but its 3 batties were detached to the Austrians as shown above

. A Landsturm pioneer comp

. Col. Baumann's Heavy Arty Bde - 3 [Hvy Can] Batty/Arty School Bde; 1, 2, 3 [Hvy How] Batties/Hvy FAR 42; 15 [Hvy Can] Batty/Fort AR 1; 12 [Hvy Can] Batty/Fort AR 7; 8 & 9 [Hvy How] Batties/Fort Arty Bn 5; ½ 2 & 3 [24 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 1; 28 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 2; 15 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Hvy FAR 3; 13 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 6; 21 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 7; 26 heavy, 14 very heavy, 35 fixed guns

. Corps troops - 39, 47, 53 & 56 Air Comps; Pioneer Bn 35 (had gas TM); Air Det 39

b) Stein's Group (III Bavarian Corps)

Commander = Bav G.Lt Freih. von Stein

C/Staff = Bav Lt Col. Haack

Had 40 ½ bns, 4 sqdns, 130 batties, 128 TM batties (comps), 11 tech comps, 2 air comps (dets), 3 balloon platoons; 442 light, 156 heavy, 4 very heavy, 5 fixed guns

. k.u.k. 50<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Gerabek) - 11 1/4 bns, 1 high mtn comp, 2 sqdns, 30 batties, 24 TM platoons, 7 TM comps, 3 tech comps, 1 air det; 104 light, 24 heavy & 5 fixed guns

. 3 Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Tlaskal) - Bns IV/30, IV/33, III/46, IV/80; FJB 25; k.k. Lst Bn 155; High Mtn Comp 12

. 15 Mtn Bde (Col. Koschak) - Bns II/18, IV/37, I/61, I & II/BH 1

. Storm Comp 50; 4 & MG Sqdns/Tyrol Reit K-Sch Bn

. 1 & 8 Comps/SB 13; Pioneer Comp 311; Air Det 2

. 29 FA Bde (Col. Mazza) - FKR 29 (4), FHR 29 (6), Hvy FAR 29 (4); 4 Batty/RFKR 50, 3 Batty/RFHR 50; Mtn AR 13 (6); 4 Can Batty/Mtn AR 24; 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 201, 2 [Hvy How] Batty/Hvy FAR 27, 2 [Hvy How] Batty/Hvy RFAR 50, 1 [Hvy Can] & 34 [Hvy How] Batties/Fort AR 7, 51 [Hvy How] Batty/Fort AR 3, 1 [15 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 6; 24 TM platoons, 5 fixed guns; TM Bn 5; TM Comps 301 & 347

. 12<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Lequis) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 24 batties [incl. 6 attached], 1 TM comp, 3 tech comps, 1 air det, 1 balloon platoon; 122 light & 28 heavy guns

. 24 Bde - IR 23 (3), 62 (3), 63 (3); Mtn MG Dets 251, 1 &

- 2 Bav; attached were Mtn MG Dets 254 & 255
  - . 4 Sqdn/UR 2; 2 & 3 Comps/PB 6; TM Comp 12; Air Det 232
  - . 12 Arko - FAR 21 (9); Fuss Arty Bn 94 (3); six batties from FAR 233 [117<sup>th</sup> ID]
  - . Attached - I Bn/FAR 500 (3), I Bn/FAR 601 (3); 2 & 3 Batties/RFKR 50, 4 Batty/RFHR 50; Mtn AR 7 (5); 3 [Hvy Can] & 4 [Hvy How] Batties/Hvy FAR 7, 4 [Hvy Can] Batty/Hvy RFAR 48, 3 [Hvy How] Batty/Hvy RFAR 201
- . Alpenkorps (Bav. GM Ritter von Tutschek) - 11 bns, 35 batties [incl. 3 attached], 1 TM Bn, 3 TM comps, 2 tech comps, 1 balloon platoon
  - . 1 Bav Jaeg Bde - Bav Leib IR (3); Bav Jaeg Regt 1 [Bns 1 & 2, Res Bn 2]; [German] Jaeg Regt 2 [Bn 10, Res Bn 14]; Mtn MG Dets 204 & 205
  - . Bav Arko 7 - FAR 204 (9), Mtn Arty Bn 6 (3), Fuss Arty Bn 43 (3)
  - . Mtn TM Comps 174, 175; Pioneer Comps 102 Bav, 283
  - . Attached Inf - Musketen Bn 2, Württemberg Mtn Bn
  - . Attached Arty - Mtn Arty Bn 4 (3), FAR 68 (9), II Bn/Fuss Arty Regt 7 (2), two heavy mor batties; TM Bn 11 (3 comps), TM Comp 345; 1 Batty/RFKR 50, 3 Batty/RFKR 201, 1 Batty/FHR 6, 1 & 6 Batties/RFHR 50, 3 & 4 Batties/RFHR 62, 3 Batty/RFHR 201; Hvy FAR 19 (3); 4 [Hvy Can] Batty/Hvy RFAR 62, 5 [Hvy How] Batty/Hvy FAR 9, 1 [Hvy How] Batty/Hvy FAR 27; 2, 5 & 6 [Hvy How] Batties/Fort Arty Bn 9; 20 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Hvy FAR 2, 5 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 5
  - . Also attached - 3 Comp/k.u.k. PB Bn 5
- . 117<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Seydel) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 12 batties [9 detached], 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps; 24 light guns
  - . 233 Inf Bde - IR 157 (3); Res IR 11 (3), 22 (3)
  - . 1 Sqdn/CR 8; TM Comp 117; Pioneer Comps 233, 263
  - . 117 Arko - FAR 233 [detached to 12<sup>th</sup> ID & Alpenkorps]; Bav. Fuss Arty Bn 11 (3)
  - . Attached - 1, 2 & 5 Can Batties/Mtn AR 18; 5 Can & 6 How Batties/Mtn AR 26
- . Corps troops (16 guns) - 1st Pioneer Comp 5; seven MG flak platoons, 1 balloon platoon; half of an Aus-Hung. flak batty

c) Berrer's Group (LI Corps)

Commander = Württ. G.Lt von Berrer; C/Staff = [Prussian] Lt Col. von Heymann

Had 20 bns, 2 sqdns, 77 batties, 2 TM batties (comps), 4 tech comps, 1 air det<sup>408</sup>, 1 balloon platoon; 212 light, 88 heavy, 10

408TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Really there was just one air det in LI Corps; # 204.A is listed in error both under the Corps and Div to which it was attached in both sources.

*very heavy, 2 fixed guns*

- . 26<sup>th</sup> [1<sup>st</sup> Württemberg] ID (Württ. G.Lt von Hofacker) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 12 batties & 1 TM comp [detached], 2 tech comps
  - . 51 Inf Bde - Gren Regt 119 (3); IR 121 (3), 125 (3)
  - . 2 Sqdn/UR 19; TM Comp 26 [with 220<sup>th</sup> ID]; 1 & 5 Comps/PB 3
  - . 58 Arko [with 220<sup>th</sup> ID] - FAR 29 (9); II Bn/Fuss AR 5 (3)
  - . Attached - Mtn AR 26 (5) with 20 light guns
- . 200<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ernst von Below) - 11 bns, 1 sqdn, 43 batties [including the 12 batties of 26<sup>th</sup> ID], 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps, 1 air det; 174 light, 18 heavy, 10 very heavy, 2 fixed guns
  - . 2 Jaeger Bde - Jaeger Regts 3 [Snowshoe Bns 1 Bav, 2, 3, 4 Bav], 4 [Jaeg Bn 11; Res Bns 5 & 6], 5 [Res Jaeg Bns 17, 18, 23]; Mtn MG Dets 202, 206, 209, 239, 242; Res Mtn MG Det 4
  - . 2 Sqdn/UR 1; Mtn TM Comp 173; Pioneer Comps 105, 282
  - . Attached - Musketen Bn 1; Air Det 204.A; Mtn Arty Bn 7 (3), FAR 600 (6), II Bn/FAR 601 (3); I & III Bns/Res Fuss AR 7 (2 batties each); 26<sup>th</sup> ID arty (see above); 1, 2 & 4 Batties/RFKR 201; 1, 2 & 3 Batties/FHR 4; 2 Batty/RFHR 50; 2 [How] Batty/Hvy FAR 2; 2 & 3 [How] Batties/Hvy FAR 8; 1 & 2 [How] Batties/Hvy FAR 46, 1 [Can] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 15, 6 [How] Batty/Fort AR 1, 18 [How] Batty/Fort AR 6, 23 [How] Batty/Fort AR 7, 2 [How] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 5, 6 [How] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 15, 4 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 2, 16 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 3, 33 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 5, 14 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 6, 4 [38 cm How] Batty/Fort AR 5, 1 [38 cm How] Batty/Fort AR 7
- . Corps troops (18 guns) - Air Det 204.A (to 200<sup>th</sup> ID); one Aus-Hung. flak batty; 7 German flak platoons, 1 balloon platoon



d) Group Scotti (k.u.k. XV Corps)

Commander = FML Scotti; C/Staff = Col. Ritter von Pohl

Had 20 ½ bns, 1 sqdn, 82 batties, 4 ½ TM batties (comps), 5 tech comps, 1 air comp, 1 balloon platoon; 296 light, 74 heavy & 4 very heavy guns

. 1<sup>st</sup> ID (FML Metzger) - 11 1/4 bns, 42 batties, 2 tech comps; 182 light, 28 heavy & 2 very heavy guns

. 7 Mtn Bde (Col. von Budiner) - Bns II/5, IV/25, IV/53, II/66, III/86; BH FJB 3

. 22 Mtn Bde (Col. Gustav von Hellebronth) - Bn VI/BH 4; FJB 17, 31; Bns I & II/SchR 37

. Storm Comp 1; 2 Comp/PB 8, 5 Comp/PB 10

. 1 FA Bde (Col. Gallistel) - FKR 4 (4), 33 (4), FHR 33 (6), RFHR 201 (4), Hvy FAR 33 (4); 3 Batty/RFKR 48; 4, 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 4, 5 Batty/RFHR 50, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 2; 3 & 5 Can plus 6 How Batties/Mtn AR 13; 1, 2 & 3 Can Batties/Mtn AR 201, 1 Can Batty/Mtn AR 202, 3 [How] Batty/Hvy RFAR 50, 20 [How] Batty/Fort AR 2, 44 [How] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 15, 22 [30.5 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 6; II Bn/FAR 500 (3)

. 5<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Wedel) - 9 bns, 1 sqdn, 20 batties, 1 TM comp, 2 tech comps, 1 air det; 106 light, 46 heavy and 2 very heavy guns

. 10 Bde - Gren Regts 8 (3), 12 (3); IR 52 (3)

. 3 Sqdn/HR 3; TM Comp 5; 1 & 2 Comps/PB 3

. 142 Arko - FAR 18 (9); Fuss Arty Bn 67 (3)

. Attached - Mtn MG Dets 252, 253; FAR 503 (6); Air Det 219.A; 1 & 2 Batties/RFHR 62, 4 Batty/RFHR 201; 1 & 2 Can and 3 How Batties/Mtn AR 7; 4 & 5 Can and 6 How Batties/Mtn AR 18, 2 Can Batty/Mtn AR 201; Hvy FAR 4 (4); 2 [Can] & 4 [How] Batties/Hvy RFAR 201; 54 [How] & 19 [30.5 cm Mor] Batties/Fort Arty Bn 5

. Corps troops (8 guns) - 5 Batty/RFKR 50; seven TM platoons; 2 Comp/Special SB 1; two German flak platoons and 1 balloon platoon

TOTALS for 14<sup>th</sup> Army - 123 bns, 7 3/4 sqdns, 334 ½ batties, 44 TM batties (comps), 10 air comps (dets), 5 balloon platoons; 1250 light, 396 heavy, 32 very heavy and 81 fixed guns

2) Boroevic's Army Group

Commander = GO von Boroevic

C/Staff = FML von Le Beau

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

Commander = GdI Ritter von Henriquez; C/Staff = Col. Freih. von Salis-Samaden; artillery led by Col. Viktor Paul

Group Kosak

Commander = FML Kosak; C/Staff = Col. Walter Slameczka  
 Had 36 bns, 2 1/4 sqdns, 84 batties, 23 TM batties, 10 tech  
 comps, 2 air comps; 320 light, 96 heavy and 8 very heavy guns

- . 60<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Ludwig Goiginger) - 12 bns and 3 tech comps
  - . 2 Mtn Bde (Col. Panzenböck) - Bns III/8, II/52, III/55,  
II/70; FJB 12, BH FJB 8
  - . 10 Mtn Bde (Col. Kofron) - Bns IV/20, I/21, V/47, I/90,  
III/BH 1; BH FJB 4
  - . Comps 3/SB 3, 5/SB 5, 7/SB 8
- . 35<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Podhoranszky) - 12 bns, 1 1/4 sqdns, 2 batties  
 (12 light guns), 2 tech comps
  - . 69 Bde (Col. Guha) - IR 51 (3), 64 (3)
  - . 70 Bde (GM Funk) - IR 62 (2), 63 (4)
  - . 6 Sqdn/HR 4; Pioneer Platoon/HR 15; 6 Comp/SB 5, 8/SB 14
  - . 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 35
- . 57<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Edler von Hrozny) - 12 bns, 1 sqdn, 9 batties, 1 TM  
 batty, 1 tech comp; 48 light & 4 heavy guns
  - . 5 Bde (Col. Edler von Hartmann) - IR 22 (2), 57 (3); k.u.  
Lst Bn I/2
  - . 18 Bde (Col. Laxa) - IR 87 (3); Bns II/34, III/69; FJB 9
  - . 2 Sqdn/HR 11; 7 Comp/SB 6
  - . 57 Res FA Bde (Col. Pengov) - RFKR 57 (1-4 & 6 Batties),  
Res FHR 57 (4); 2 [How] Batty/Hvy RFAR 57
- . Group artillery, under HQ of Col. Dobringer's 19 FA Brigade;  
 had 352 guns plus 20 TM batties...
  - . 13 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Bogusz) - FKR 13 (1-4 & 6  
Batties), FHR 13 (6), Hvy FAR 13 (4)
  - . 7 FA Bde (Col. von Scheucher) - FKR 7 (1-4 & 6 Batties),  
FHR 7 (6); 3 Can Batty/Arty School, 4 Batty/FHR 3, 5 Batty/  
FHR 6, 5 & 6 Batties/FHR 8, 2 Batty/FHR 19, 4 Batty/FHR 21,  
1 & 2 Batties/FHR 44, 5 & 6 Batties/RFHR 62, 3 [How] Batty/  
Hvy RFAR 62; 3 & 6 Can plus 2 How Batty/Mtn AR 24; 1 Can  
Batty/Mtn AR 28, 3 Can Batty/Mtn AR 204; 1 & 2 Can Batties/  
Hon Mtn Arty Bn [HMAB] 20, 1 Can Batty/HMAB 41, 1 Can Batty/  
HMAB 42, 1 Can Batty/HMAB 70, 2 Mtn Can Batty/Arty School  
Bde
  - . Heavy Can Batties - 4/Hvy FAR 16, 4/Hvy FAR 21, 4/Hvy FAR  
44, 11/Fort AR 2, 1/Fort Arty Bn 6
  - . Heavy How Batties - 1 & 2/Hvy FAR 16, 2 & 3/Hvy FAR 21,  
2/Hvy FAR 25, 2/Hvy FAR 32, 1 & 3/Hvy FAR 38; 1, 2 & 3/Hvy  
FAR 44; 1/Hvy FAR 45, 1 & 3 Hvy FAR/201, 5/Fort AR 2, 47/  
Fort AR 7, 45/Fort Arty Bn 1, 60/Fort Arty Bn 3, 3/Fort Arty  
Bn 9, 27/Fort Arty Bn 15
  - . 30.5 cm Mor Batties - 25 & 27/Fort AR 1, 17/Fort AR 7, 11/  
Fort Arty Bn 5, 6/Fort Arty Bn 6
- . Under Group HQ - Air Comps 12, 58; Comps 6/SB 5, 3/SB 8, 1/  
Special SB 6

## XXIV Corps

Commander = GdI von Lukas; C/Staff = Lt Col. Röder

Had 23 ½ bns, 2 sqdns, 33 batties, 2 TM batties, 6 tech comps, 1 air comp; 174 light & 12 heavy guns

- . 24<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Urbarz) - 11 ½ bns, 2 sqdns, 112 batties, 1 TM batty, 3 tech comps; 174 light & 12 heavy guns
  - . 47 Bde (Col. Skoday) - IR 9 (4), 45 (2)
  - . 48 Bde (Col. Edler von Bischoff, acting) - IR 10 (2 ½), 77 (3)
  - . 3 & MG Sqdns/Reit SchR 3; Comps 1/SB 3, 3/SB 10, 5/PB 3
  - . 24 FA Bde (Col. Uherek; he and the HQ were with IV Corps, below) - FKR 24 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 24 (5); 1, 3 & 4 Batties of Hvy FAR 24
- . 53<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM von Stöhr) - 12 bns, 3 tech comps
  - . 127 k.u. Lst Bde (Col. Hajek) - k.u. Lst IR 6 (3), 19 (3)
  - . 128 k.u. Lst Bde (Col. Karpellus) - k.u. Lst IR 1 (2), 3 (3); k.u. Lst Bn V/4
  - . Comps 2/SB 3, 7/SB 13, 7/SB 14
- . Corps artillery (120 guns & 1 TM batty) under Col. Merkel's 106 FA Bde HQ...
  - . 21 FA Bde (Col. Mally) - 1, 2 & 4 Batties/FKR 21; 1 & 6 Batties/FHR 21
  - . Also - FKR 19 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 19 (5); 2, 3 & 4 Batties/RFKR 62, 6 Batty/FHR 3, 5 Can Batty/Mtn AR 24, 2 Can Batty/Hon Mtn Arty Bn 41, 1 How Batty/Mtn AR 11
- . Corps air unit - Air Comp 19

## IV Corps

Commander = GdK Prince Schönburg-Hartenstein; C/Staff = Col.

Hittl

Had 25 bns, 2 sqdns, 43 batties, 1 TM batty 2 tech comps, 2 air comps; 138 light, 55 heavy & 8 very heavy guns

- . 43<sup>rd</sup> Sch Div (FML Fernengel) - 13 bns, 1 sqdn, 5 batties, 1 tech comp; 30 light guns
  - . 59 Inf Bde (Col. Kosel) - IR 24 (3), 41 (4)
  - . 86 Sch Bde (GM Meisel) - SchR 20 (3), 22 (3)
  - . 6 Sqdn/Reit SchR 1; 4 Comp/SB 7
  - . FHR 43 (5)
- . 20<sup>th</sup> Hon ID (GM Freih. von Lukachich) - 12 bns, 14 batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 60 light & 16 heavy guns
  - . 39 Hon Bde (GM von Stadler) - Hon IR 3 (3), 4 (3)
  - . 81 Hon Bde (Col. Dobak) - Hon IR 1 (3), 17 (3)
  - . 6 Comp/SB 14
  - . 20 Hon FA Bde (GM von Pohl) - HFKR 20 (1-4 & 6 Batties), HFHR 20 (6), Hvy HFAR 20 (4)
- . Artillery under Col. Uherek's 24 FA Bde HQ (95 guns)...

- . 3 & 4 Batties/FKR 44, 4 Batty/FHR 28, 5 Batty/RFHR 53, 5 & 6 Can Batties/Mtn AR 1; 1 & 2 Can and 1 How Batties/Mtn AR 24; 1 How Batty Mtn AR 3
- . Heavy Can Batties - 4/Fort AR 3, 13/Fort AR 6, 1/Fort Arty Bn 2; also three 15 cm naval cannon
- . Heavy How Batties - 1/Fort AR 1, 40/Fort AR 2, 4/Fort AR 6, 2 & 26/Fort AR 7, 39/Fort Arty Bn 15
- . Heavy Mor Batties - 10 [21 cm]/Fort AR 5, 5 [30.5 cm]/Fort AR 3, 23 [30.5 cm]/Fort AR 7, 32 [30.5 cm]/Fort Arty 2
- . Corps cavalry - 6 Sqdn/Reit SchR 3

## II Corps (in the Army's reserve)

Commander = GdI Kaiser; C/Staff = Col. Podhajsky

- . 9<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Edler von Greiner) - 12 bns, 1 tech comp
  - . 17 Bde (Col. Chwostek) - IR 91 (4), 102 (3)
  - . 60 Bde (Col. Schenk) - IR 30 (3), 80 (2)
  - . 5 Comp/SB 2
- . 28<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Schneider Edler von Manns-Au) - 13 bns, 1 sqdn
  - . 55 Bde (Col. Rada) - IR 11 (3), BH 3 (3)
  - . 56 Bde (GM Eugen Straub) - IR 28 (3), 47 (4)
  - . Res Sqdn/DR 3
- . 29<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Steiger) - 12 bns, 1 sqdn, 1 tech comp
  - . 57 Bde (Col. Dörfler) - IR 74 (3), 94 (3)
  - . 58 Bde (GM Novottny) - IR 42 (3), 92 (3)
  - . 1 Sqdn/Reit SchR 1; 4 Comp/SB 2

Also in the Army's reserve were two flak batties & two flak platoons (a total of 12 light guns); Air Comps 51 & 57

TOTAL for 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army = 121 ½ bns, 8 1/4 sqdns, 163 batties, 26 TM batties, 20 tech comps, 7 air comps; 644 light, 163 heavy & 28 very heavy guns

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

Commander = GO Freiherr von Wurm

C/Staff = Col. Edler von Körner

Artillery commander = Col. Freiherr von Janecka

## XVI Corps

Commander = GdI Kralicek; C/Staff = Col. Graf

Had 40 bns, 1 1/4 sqdns, 55 batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 216 light, 68 heavy & 4 very heavy guns

- . 58<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Erwin Freih. von Zeidler) - 13 bns, 1 1/4 sqdn, 13 batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 54 light & 16 heavy guns
  - . 4 Mtn Bde (Col. Noë) - Bn III/85; SchR 23 (3); k.k. Lst Bns 42, 75
  - . 5 Mtn Bde (Col. Prey) - IR 96 (4); FJB 2, 23; k.k. Lst Bn

## IV/39

- . 2 Sqdn/DR 7, 1/4 3 Ma Sqdn/DR 4; 4 Comp/SB 6
  - . 58 Res FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Hussarek) - RFKR 58 (1-4 & 6 Batties), RFHR 58 (5), Hvy RFAR 58 (4)
  - . 63<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM Ritter von Soretic) - 12 bns, 1 tech comp
    - . k.k. 1 Lst Bde (Col. Kliemann) - k.k. Lst IR 1 (3), 2 (3)
    - . k.k. 187 Lst Bde (GM Edler von Mihanovic) - k.k. Lst IR 22 (3), 51 (3)
    - . 6 Comp/SB 13
  - . 14<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Szende) - 14 bns, 14 batties, 1 TM batty; 60 light and 16 heavy guns
    - . 27 Bde (Col. Graf Beck) - IR 71 (4), 72 (3); FJB 11
    - . 28 Bde (Col. Pollak) - IR 48 (3), 76 (3)
    - . 14 FA Bde (Col. Kapretz) - FKR 14 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 14 (6), Hvy FAR 14 (4)
- Corps artillery had 54 light, 20 heavy & 4 very heavy guns...
- . 16 FA Bde (Col. Hanikir) - FKR 16 (4), FHR 16 (4)
  - . 28 FA Bde (Col. Freih. von Augustin) - FKR 28 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 28 (5), Hvy FAR (4); 5 [Can] Batty/Fort AR 1, 10 [Can] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 2, 7 [Can] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 3, 12 [How] Batty/Fort Arty Bn 5, 10 [15 cm Mor] Batty/Fort AR 1, 6 [24 cm Mor] & 9 [21 cm Mor] Batties/Fort AR 4

## VII Corps

- Commander = FML Freih. von Scharicz; C/Staff = Col. von Panos  
 Had 38 bns, 3 sqdns, 41 batties, 4 TM batties, 9 tech comps, 1 air comp, 2 balloon comps; 132 light, 59 heavy & 12 very heavy guns
- . 44<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (GM Schönauer) - 12 bns, 1 sqdn, 6 batties, 1 TM batty; 36 light guns
    - . 44 Sch Bde (Col. Kranz) - Mtn SchR 1 (3), 2 (3)
    - . 87 Sch Bde (Col. Edler von Schuschnigg) - SchR 2 (3), 21 (3)
    - . Res Sqdn/DR 10
    - . 44 FA Bde (Col. Edler von Ellenberger) - 1, 2 & 6 Batties of FKR 44; FHR 44 (4)
  - . 17<sup>th</sup> ID (GM Ströher) - 14 bns, 1 sqdn, 12 batties, 1 TM batty; 48 light & 16 heavy guns
    - . 33 Bde (Col. Edler von Kirschhofer) - IR 39 (4), 61 (3)
    - . 34 Bde (GM Wolf) - IR 43 (4), 6 (3)
    - . Res Sqdn/HR 16
    - . 17 FA Bde (Col. Svoboda) - FKR 17 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 17 (4), Hvy FAR 17 (4)
  - . 48<sup>th</sup> ID (FML von Gabriel) - 12 bns, 1 sqdn, 8 batties, 1 tech comp; 48 light guns
    - . 11 Mtn Bde (Col. Hugo Fischer von See) - IR 79 (4); Bn I/10; BH FJB 6

- . 12 Mtn Bde (Col. Hostasch) - IR 73 (3); Bns I/98, II/100; FJB 22
- . 1 Sqdn/Tyrol Reit K-Sch Bn; 7 Comp/SB2
- . Res FKR 48 (4), Res FHR 48 (4)
- . Corps artillery (43 heavy & 12 very heavy guns; 2 TM batties)
  - . Hvy Can Batties - 8/Fort AR 1, 18/Fort AR 2, 3/Fort AR 6; ½ of 5/Fort Arty Bn 3
  - . Hvy How Batties - 1/Hvy FAR 52, 2/Fort AR 7, 5/Fort Arty Bn 3, 3/Fort Arty Bn 4; one turret howitzer
  - . Hvy Mor Batties - 26 [15 cm]/Fort AR 5, 16 [15 cm]/Fort Arty Bn 3, 28 [15 cm]/Fort Arty Bn 5, 8 [21 cm]/Fort AR 4, 2 & 9 [30.5]/Fort AR1, 26 [30.5 cm]/Fort AR 2, 29 [30.5 cm] Fort Arty Bn 15
- . Other Corps troops - Air Comp 35; Balloon Comps 1 & 13; Comps 7/SB 1, 1/SB 11, 6/SB 12, 4/SB 13, 4/SB 14, 3/PB 4, 7 Ma/PB 2, 1 Ma/PB 3

## XXIII Corps

Commander = FML von Csicseric; C/Staff = Lt Col. Szahlender  
 Had 34 bns, 1 sqdn, 74 batties, 3 TM batties, 7 tech comps, 1 air comp; 234 light, 112 heavy & 14 very heavy guns

- . 41<sup>st</sup> Hon ID (FML Schamschula) - 12 bns, 14 batties, 1 TM batty; 60 light & 16 heavy guns
  - . 40 Hon Bde (Col. Freih. von Benz-Albkron) - Hon IR 12 (3), 32 (3)
  - . 82 Hon Bde (Col. Ritter von Sypniewski) - Hon IR 20 (3), 31 (3)
  - . 41 Hon FA Bde (Col. Capp) - HFKR 41 (1-4 & 6 Batties), HFHR 41 (6), Hvy HFAR 41 (4)
- . 10<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Ritter von Gologorski) - 12 bns, 1 sqdn, 14 batties, 1 TM batty, 1 tech comp; 60 light & 16 heavy guns
  - . 20 Bde (Col. Edler von Lunzer) - IR 21 (3), 98 (3)
  - . 21 Bde (GM Friedrich von Weisz) - IR 15 (3), 55 (3)
  - . 6 Sqdn/Reit SchR 3; 8 Comp/SB 4
  - . 10 FA Bde (Col. Czapp) - FKR 10 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 10 (6), Hvy FAR 10 (4)
- . 12<sup>th</sup> ID (GM von Puchalski) - 10 bns
  - . 23 Bde (Col. Latinik) - IR 56 (3), 100 (2)
  - . 24 Bde (Col. Edler von Reindl) - IR 3 (3), 20 (2)
- . Corps artillery (114 light, 52 heavy & 12 very heavy guns)
  - . 9 FA Bde (Col. Alfred Edler von Filz) - FKR 9 (1-4 & 6 Batties), FHR 9 (6), Hvy FAR 9 (3)
  - . 35 FA Bde (Col. Ritter von Sostaric) - FKR 35 (6), FHR 35 (4), Hvy FAR 35 (4)
  - . Hvy Can Batties - 7/Fort AR 1, 16/Fort AR 2; 2, 4, 6 & 9 Batties/Fort AR 6; 14/Fort AR 7
  - . Hvy How Batties - 7 & 63/Fort Arty Bn 1; 43/Fort Arty Bn

5; 7 [42 cm]/Fort AR 4  
 . Hvy Mor Batties - 27 [15 cm]/Fort Arty Bn 9; 4 & 7 [21 cm]/Fort AR 4; 10 [30.5 cm]/Fort AR 1; 1 & 3 [30.5 cm/Fort AR 7  
 . Corps troops - Air Comp 28; Comps 1/SB 1, 3/SB 2, 3/SB 6, 3/SB 7, 5/PB 7, 1 Ma/PB 5

Trieste Sector (Counter-Admiral Freih. von Koudelka) - 6 bns, 9 artillery groups; 64 light & 16 heavy guns  
 . Sea Bn Trieste, Lst Bike Bn; Vol Bns Marburg IV, Laibach VI, Trieste VII; Police Bn Trieste; 12 coast defense dets, four naval MG groups  
 . 9 artillery groups with guns of various calibers

#### Army reserves

. 21<sup>st</sup> Sch Div - Moved on 1-4 November to Conrad's Army Group (q.v. for units)  
 . Also - 1 Sqdn/DR 7; 24 cm Can Batty 2 (2 very heavy guns); Air Comps 4, 34, 41, 42, 46; 1 & 2 Comps/Special Sapper Bn 18

TOTALS for 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army - 27 bns, 7 1/4 sqdns, 171 batties, 8 TM batties, 20 tech comps, 7 air comps, 2 balloon comps; 646 light, 255 heavy and 50 very heavy guns

#### Directly under Boroevic's Army Group HQ...

. 106<sup>th</sup> Lst ID - Moved on 1-4 November to Conrad's Army Group (q.v. for units), except for HQ of 106 Lst Arty Bde (in XXIV Corps, above)  
 . Fiume Sector (FML von Istanovic; one and ½ bns, ½ batty; 2 light guns) - k.u. Lst Bn V/26; k.k. Lst Watch Comp Volosca; several gendarmerie, Lst gendarmerie "assistenz", border police and border finance watch dets; one 9 cm fixed cannon platoon  
 . Also - One flak batty, five flak platoons (14 light guns)

TOTALS for Boroevic's Army Group - 260 ½ bns, 16 ½ sqdns 338 batties, 34 TM batties, 40 tech comps, 8 air comps, 2 balloon comps; 1366 light, 418 heavy & 78 very heavy guns

TOTALS for Southwestern front - 383 ½ bns, 24 3/4 sqdns, 627 ½ batties, 78 TM batties (comps), 27 tech comps, 18 air comps (dets), 2 balloon comps, 5 balloon platoons; 2616 light 814 heavy, 110 very heavy, 81 fixed guns

#### D. Strategic reserves (under the AOK)

They had 41 bns, 2 sqdns and 2 tech comps. The FA Bdes of these ID were stationed at the front and described above under the corps to which they were attached.

- . 4<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Pfeffer) - 14 bns, ½ sqdn, 1 tech comp
  - . 7 Bde (Col. Edler von Köckh) - IR 88 (4), 99 (3)
  - . 8 Bde (Col. Freih. von Hospodarz) - IR 8 (3), 49 (3)
  - . Storm Bn 4; ½ 2 Sqdn/DR 15; 1 Comp/SB 2
- . 13<sup>th</sup> Sch Div (FML Edler von Kalser) - 12 bns, ½ sqdn, 1 tech comp
  - . 25 Sch Bde (Col. Edler von Bolzano) - SchR 1 (3), 24 (3)
  - . 26 Sch Bde (GM Ritter von Zygadlowicz) - SchR 14 (3), 25 (3)
  - . Storm Bn 13; ½ 2 Sqdn/DR 15; 6 Comp/SB 11
- . 33<sup>rd</sup> ID (GM von Iwanski) - 15 bns, 1 sqdn
  - . 65 Bde (GM Freih. von Mor-Merkl) - IR 19 (4), 26 (4)
  - . 66 Bde (Col. von Magerl) - IR 12 (3), 83 (4)
  - . 3 Sqdn/HR 4

TOTALS for the units facing Italy - 574 bns, 49 SS dets, 1 cav half regt, 42 ½ high mtn (mtn guide) comps, 28 ¾ mounted sqdns, 855 ½ batties, 89 ½ TM batties (comps), 43 fort arty comps, 97 ¼ tech comps, 25 air comps (dets), 2 balloon comps, 5 balloon platoons; 3308 light, 889 heavy, 131 very heavy and 772 fixed guns; 536 fixed MG

## ***B. The twelfth battle of the Isonzo, 24-27 October***

### **1. The breakthrough at Flitsch and Tolmein**

#### **a. The first day of battle**

The rainy weather that had lasted for weeks didn't improve on 24 October. Light sprinkles began the night before; although the skies temporarily cleared up, they were followed by heavy gusts of rain and by snow storms on the higher elevations. Mountains and valleys were covered by clouds. But the artillery preparation wasn't affected much since the batteries had already registered on their targets. The frightful symphony of the artillery battle opened punctually around 2:00 AM along the entire front which was to be attacked. First gas shells were fired against the identified enemy batteries and against the first position. The enemy guns answered immediately, and their numerous and powerful searchlights nervously sought out our batteries and our foremost lines. The Italian fire soon weakened and the activity of the searchlights diminished. The gas had



obviously been quite effective, and prevented the enemy artillery from carrying out their planned "counter-preparatory fire" against our crowded jumping-off points.<sup>409</sup> This would have caused heavy casualties among the attacking infantry and considerably delayed our entire operation.

As planned, after a two-hour pause in the bombardment, at 6:30 AM all of the allied batteries opened destructive fire against the Italians' positions, the known locations of their HQ, ammunition dumps, approach routes and the much-feared guns stationed in caverns. After half an hour the trench mortars joined in. Everywhere the artillery preparation had the desired impact. The enemy response was quite feeble; in particular the fog in the valleys kept the cannon and machine guns which they'd deployed in protected flanking positions from striking the oncoming infantry. This was a great help to the attackers.

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<sup>409</sup>Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 117

Krauss' Group

For the offensive in the Flitsch area GdI Krauss intended above all to start with a thrust in the Isonzo valley.<sup>410</sup> Therefore he now sent forward in the valley GM Rudolf Müller's 22 Sch Div, deployed in depth; they were supposed to burst through all three Italian positions and advance in one bound to the Stol. To eliminate enemy resistance in the valley between Flitsch and the river the German Pioneer Battalion # 35 deployed here with their very effective gas trench mortars. The bulk of FML Edler von Wieden's Edelweiss Division would follow behind 22 Sch Div; after reaching Saga they'd continue the thrust west through the Ucea valley. The Division's 216 Inf Bde (led by Col. Spiess) would throw the enemy off the Rombon, capture Pluzne and the Prevala ravine, and cooperate with the attack of 59 Bde of 10<sup>th</sup> Army toward the Nevea ridge. 55 ID, supported by the left wing of 22 Sch Div, were instructed to break through the foremost Italian position on the Vrsic on the first day, and then to capture the eastern part of the Polounik ridge between Jama pl. and Krasji vrh, as well as the ridge by Planina za Kraju. Their further objective was Karfreit, from which they could send detachments ahead to the Stol ridge, Creda and Mt Mia. Also they were supposed to occupy Mt Matajur, if it hadn't already been taken by Stein's Corps. The German Jaeger Division would follow the main attacking group in the valley and advance through Saga to Karfreit.

Around 9:00 AM the leading detachments of 22 Sch Div stormed forward from their positions and were soon able to capture the first Italian trenches between the steep slope north of Flitsch and the road. Farther south they found no one living, because the German gas had overcome everyone.<sup>411</sup> After overwhelming some detachments of the enemy 50 ID which were still offering resistance, the "Marburg" Sch Regt 26 and Tyrol Kaiser-Schützen stormed the ruins of the town of Flitsch.<sup>412</sup> After parts of the

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410Krauss, "Wunder von Karfreit", p. 13

411Heydendorff, "Der Gaswerferangriff bei Flitsch am 24. Oktober 1917" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1934 edition, pp. 311 ff.)  
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The chemical attack in this battle was much more successful than on other fronts because the Italian gas masks were so poor, effective for just an hour and a half or less (Falls, p. 35).

412For the brilliant initiative displayed in leading his gallant Regiment, the commander of Sch Regt 26 - Lt Col. Florian Freih. von Pasetti, won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order. Both Sch Regts (3 and 26) were greatly

"Graz" Sch Regt 3 were deployed, the advance continued and around 1:00 PM the Division also broke through the second position. Pluzne was captured by evening; the spearhead of the attacking phalanx, now reinforced by the majority of 98 K-Sch Bde, had advanced to the destroyed bridge near Pod Celom. Parts of Sch Regt 3 now occupied the third position as well. The infantry of 22 Sch Div were prevented from advancing to Saga during the night because of the darkness, the wildly raging Boka Brook, and the fire of their own artillery - whom they couldn't contact - upon the narrow part of the valley at Pod Celom. They had brought in a total of 3000 prisoners, 36 guns and 50 machine guns.

Because of the driving snow and the impossibility of crossing the ice-covered rocky terrain, Col. Spiess' 216 Inf Bde couldn't penetrate the Italian position on the Rombon. The artillery, which under other weather conditions would have been an adequate force, weren't able to help very much. The infantry could only reach the undamaged barbed wire with great difficulty, and finally were pulled back to their starting points. The 59 Mtn Bde suffered similar misfortune in the Seebach valley. To help 216 Bde, one and a half battalions from the force in the valley were diverted through Pluzne toward the rear of the defenders of the Rombon. The 217 Inf Bde of Wieden's Division came up in the valley to Flitsch. The German Jaeger Division marched through the Soca valley, and their leading troops reached Za Otoke.

GM Schwarzenberg's 55 ID were less blessed with luck than the 22 Sch Division. Because of the bad weather, which also had reduced the accuracy of the artillery fire, the 55<sup>th</sup> didn't begin their attack until around 9:30 AM. The assault took place right after a mine was exploded under the Vrsic, where it did lead to the capture of the foremost trenches. But the snow storm and the icy condition of the ground, along with strong Italian fire, prevented the Austrians from rolling up the position as far as the Vrata. The thrust of the Division's main attacking group over the Dol pl. toward the ridge at Planina za Kraju encountered a fully-garrisoned and gallantly-defended rearward position, and couldn't break through. It was even difficult for the attackers to hang on here against counter-thrusts which the Italian 43 ID launched in the first hours of the evening. But the IV Battalion of the distinguished Carinthian IR "Khevenhüller" # 7 were able to advance to a point directly under the spine of the Polounik ridge (between Jama pl. and Krasji vrh).

Although because of the difficulties narrated above the 55 ID weren't able to reach their objectives for the day, their advance

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distinguished on this day.

did have a significant result. The first reports from the 43 Italian ID exaggerated the extent of their setback near Planina za Kraju, and because the telephone connection was destroyed they were unable to set the record straight. This led the HQ of 50 Italian ID to evacuate the positions they'd hitherto held at Cezsoca and on the Jama pl., as well as the third position at Saga. This was a great boon for the troops of Krauss' group who were attacking in the valley. The route leading up to the Stol had been left open.

#### Stein's Group

In the sector of the principal attack, near Tolmein, the infantry were already attacking at 8:00 AM. GM Gerabek's 50 ID, stationed on the right wing of Stein's Corps, first carried out some secondary assignments along their extended front between the Krn and the Vodil vrh. They were supposed to pin down the enemy north of the Isonzo, keeping them from intervening on the flank of the attacking Germans; this would make it easier for 12 ID and the Alpenkorps to advance toward their first major goal, Mt Matajur.

After exploding a mine, the northern group of 50 ID were able to wrest the Krn plateau from the enemy and to cut off the Krn summit (Point 2245). Farther south, Col. Edler von Tlaskal's 3 Mtn Bde broke through the position on the slope and at 11:00 AM had already reached Krn village. Col. Koschak's 15 Mtn Bde, adjacent on the left, advanced along the Mrzli vrh ridge despite furious enemy artillery fire; they took Point 1186 and used one battalion to roll up the Italian position south as far as Gabrije. This helped to revive the attack of 12 German ID's right wing, which hadn't been able to break through from Dolje in their first onset. Now the 46 Italian ID pulled back into their second position, which ran from the Kozljak over the Pleca and Vrsno to Selisce. In a brilliant thrust, and by rolling up the enemy lines to the north and south, Koschak's Brigade also captured the southern part of this rearward position.

GM Lequis' 12 German ID had readied their IR 63 at Dolje and IR 23 in front of the Tolmein Schlossberg; IR 62 were in reserve southeast of Tolmein. After the k.u.k. 15 Mtn Bde at Gabije and the Alpenkorps at St Daniel made it possible for the Division to break through, they thrust up the valley on both banks of the Isonzo. Besides taking the first two positions, they captured batteries and at 1:00 PM had already reached Idersko. Here the regiment on the northern bank crossed over to the south, and without pausing the 12 ID pushed toward Karfreit where the last

available reserve of Italian IV Corps - the leading brigade of 34 ID - tried to offer resistance.

Meanwhile 15 Mtn Bde of the k.u.k. 50 ID had also continued to advance on the northern bank, and by evening had reached Ladra and Idersko. 7000 prisoners and 90 guns fell into the hands of the gallant 50<sup>th</sup>, which had played a decisive part in the success of the first day with their brilliant advance.

Half a battalion and a mountain battery of 50 ID had joined 12 German ID, whose leading regiment attacked sharply; around 4:00 PM they pushed into Karfreit and took 2000 Italian prisoners. These overwhelming events made it impossible to carry out the order by 43 Italian ID that their reserves should thrust south from Drezenca against the flank of their opponents in the Isonzo valley. To secure the left flank in the direction of Luico, a reinforced German battalion climbed up to Golobi, where they held on with difficulty against a larger enemy force.<sup>413</sup>

At Karfreit numerous Italian detachments which had fled from the Krn area fell into German hands, along with the commander of 43<sup>rd</sup> Division (G.Lt Farisoglio). Despite their exertions thus far - 12 ID had already advanced 15 km, deep behind enemy lines - the Germans continued to advance. At 11:30 PM the advanced guard reached the pre-war border south of Robic; despite numerous actions they had marched 23 km. The main body took up quarters for the night in Creda and Staro Selo. In the first day the Division's prizes of victory included 15,000 prisoners, 100 guns and a great amount of military equipment. Without worrying about their flanks or rear they had thrust deep into the heart of the network of enemy positions in one of the boldest and most successful feats of the World War.<sup>414</sup>

Meanwhile the Bavarian GM Ritter von Tutschek's Alpenkorps had also successfully completed their difficult assignment. Simultaneously with 12 ID, they struck from the Sv. Maria sector against Heights 1114, with two regiments in the front line and one in reserve.

The foremost Italian position at St Daniel and Woltschach was quickly overrun in the first onslaught. Then began the climb onto two mountain ridges (through Kovalic pl. and Point 732). The column on the right - the Bavarian Leib IR and the attached Württemberg Mtn Bn - advanced dexterously, attacking both

413Fiedel, "Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments von Winterfeldt (2. Ober-schlesisches) Nr. 23" (Berlin, 1929), pp. 202 ff.

414Krafft, Vol. I, p. 59

frontally and from the flanks. By noon they'd managed to break through the second position at Kovacic pl. and Foni, while capturing numerous batteries. Once the Hevnik Heights had also fallen, the attack was directed against Point 1114, which the Italians had built up into a fortress. Heavy artillery fire kept the defenders - a brigade of 19 ID - pinned down in their shelters; then the Bavarian storm troops broke into the circular fortifications. At 5:30 PM Point 1114, the key point of the Italian position on the Kolovrat, was in German hands.<sup>415</sup> But the conquerors found themselves in a very precarious position, because the 1<sup>st</sup> Bavarian Jaeger Regt, advancing on the left, were stuck in the woods and underbrush in front of Point 732. All their attempts to envelop or move around this position, continuing until nightfall, failed to alter the situation. The reserve regiment (2<sup>nd</sup> German Jaeger) followed the successful right-hand column onto the Hevnik.

The reserves of Stein's Group - 117 ID - came up behind the Alpenkorps. Because of heavy traffic on the roads, they didn't reach Tolmein until early on the 25<sup>th</sup>; here they rested briefly before continuing their march.

#### Berrer's Group

Berrer's Corps, which was supposed to capture the Jeza Heights, deployed with one division in line and one in reserve. At the front were GM Ernst von Below's 200 German ID in the center of the Tolmein bridgehead. The terrain they attacked was just as difficult as that which confronted the Alpenkorps. Here also each of the assault regiments in the first wave had to climb a ridge to reach their objective. Some of the Italians in the foremost trenches had pulled back the evening before. Now the German infantry, following a curtain of artillery fire, quickly traversed the valley bottom at Ciginj and stormed the first row of entrenchments. In the attack on the heights, the 4<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Regt on the right were stuck in front of the second position near Point 428, but fortune favored the 3<sup>rd</sup> Jaeger on the left. In close cooperation with their neighbors to the south, the latter Regiment continued fighting until 2:00 PM when they secured the ridge line. Pivoting to the north, an hour later they captured an outlying hill of the Jeza; in the evening they took the Jeza Heights themselves, though fortified with all available technical means. Thus 200 ID had taken possession of the second principal point in the network of Italian positions, along with 99 guns, 75 machine guns, 45 trench mortars and thousands of prisoners. The

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415"Das Königlich Bayerische Infanterie-Leibregiment im Weltkrieg 1914-1918", pp. 314 ff.

5<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Regt, in the Division's reserve, followed their comrades and in the evening were on the Jesenjak ridge. The 26 German ID had an exhausting march along the Idria road, which was overburdened with heavy traffic; most of them didn't reach St Luzia until during the night.

Scotti's Group

Under FML Scotti's XV k.u.k. Corps, the southernmost attacking division of 14<sup>th</sup> Army was the k.u.k. 1 ID of FML Metzger. They were concentrated in the extreme left portion of bridgehead which they'd hitherto been defending. Like 50 ID, the 1 ID had been involved in positional warfare on the upper Isonzo for the past two and a half years; they had received neither an extensive rest period nor an opportunity for training. Now they faced a difficult double assignment - an attack to the west to break through the enemy positions, and an advance to the southwest to open the way over the river for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. The first task, to thrust past Cemponi and Jazne into the second position between Bizjaki and Avska and then to advance to Kostanjevica, was allotted to 7 Mtn Bde. The 22 Mtn Bde would first storm the Hrad vrh and then lay hands on the Isonzo bridges between Ronzina and Loga; four battalions and two mountain batteries of 57 ID followed them directly to provide support.

Already during the night the attacking battalions of 1 ID had crossed no-man's land to the foot of the mountains. The up-hill assault which followed on the 24<sup>th</sup> was very costly, because the many Italian positions in the forest couldn't be destroyed by either the trench mortars (because of the long range) or by the artillery (because of the difficulty in spotting them). Nevertheless, between 10:00 and 11:00 AM the first storm detachments of Col. Budiner's 7 Mtn Bde were already breaking into the enemy's first position near the wayside shrine at Point 631 and farther north. Here the Brigade regrouped for a further attack, over the furrow of the valley toward the second position. Meanwhile Col. von Hellebronth's 22 Mtn Bde had also penetrated the forward Italian trenches (by Point 606) and around 4:00 PM took the Hrad vrh.

When Budiner's Brigade advanced toward the second position they encountered, in addition to the Alpini battalions of 19 ID which they'd thrown out of the first lines, a fresh brigade from the reserves of XXVII Corps. Nonetheless the storm troops struck forward sharply, penetrating the trenches and rolling the enemy up toward the south.<sup>416</sup> Then, after an effective artillery preparation, the trenches between Pusno and Srednje were stormed by the Brigade's main body around 6:00 PM; they were secured in hand-to-hand combat which lasted into the night. FML Metzger's

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416Lieutenant Arpad Bertalan of BH FJB 3 distinguished himself in exceptional fashion during the storm of the Italian positions; he won the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order.



excellent 1 ID had penetrated deeply into the enemy's second position. The Italians held only the lofty and strongly fortified Globacak. In the first day of the battle, 1 ID had climbed a total of 900 meters and burst through two Italian positions to a depth of 5 km; this was "a first-class contribution" to the overall operation.<sup>417</sup> They could report the capture of 77 guns, 32 heavy trench mortars, and more than 4600 prisoners.

The German 5 ID had soon learned of the favorable progress of Metzger's Division; they came forward and camped for the night with two infantry regiments and mountain artillery at Cemponi, and with the rest of their units at St Luzia. The detached group from 57 ID reached the eastern slope of the Hrad vrh and Selo late that night.

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

FML Kosak's group, stationed on the northern wing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, were less fortunate during their attack. The right wing of FML Ludwig Goiginger's 60 ID were able to advance past the opposing trenches in the forest-covered valley, and captured about 450 Italians of 45 ID. FML von Podhoranszky's 35 ID conquered the enemy's entire first position south of Hoje, bringing back 43 officers and 1230 men of the 64 Italian ID as prisoners. But 60 ID were struck by strong counterattacks and soon had to withdraw to their starting-point. In the afternoon the southern wing of 60 ID and 35 ID tried to go forward once more, so as to at least approach the trenches on the Avscek. But the attack wasn't sufficiently supported by our artillery due to shortage of ammunition, and couldn't break through the undamaged enemy. The operation, in which heavy casualties were suffered, at least pinned down the substantially larger Italian forces in this sector.

Farther south IR 30 of 60 Inf Bde were able to establish themselves near the church on the ridge of Sv Tomaz. The storm troop operations of 24 ID encountered a strong garrison and heavy defensive fire in the Italian positions. Parts of 53 ID were able to take several enemy trenches near Kuscarji and held onto their gains. 20 Hon ID had similar success on Mt S Gabriele.

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<sup>417</sup>Krafft, Vol. I, p. 81. FML Joseph Metzger, who died in 1921, was posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order for his brilliant leadership of his Division.

Reaction of the allied leadership

The allies could be fully satisfied with the outcome of the first day of the battle. The Italian front had been ripped apart along a 35 km stretch. The third position had already been passed at Flitsch (in the direction of Saga). West of Karfreit the attackers in fact were west of the entire fortified zone. The remaining Italian divisions at the front, which in the Krn area were still holding their first position, thus were already cut off. With this success one of the principal objectives of the operational plan had been accomplished, and obviously the escape routes of parts of the Italian Army stationed on the eastern bank of the Isonzo had been cut.<sup>418</sup> The troops on the Kolovrat Ridge were masters of the central points of the defenders' network of positions. The unexpected number of prisoners and the enormous booty were indicators of the extent of the success and of the enemy's demoralization.

The HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army at Krainburg had received reports of the brilliant initial victories of their divisions. But they weren't aware until evening that 12 ID had driven past Karfreit and that the important Heights # 1114 and the Jeza had been captured. Nevertheless, since the assault was preceding relentlessly toward its goals GdI Below saw no reason to issue additional orders.

Initially the commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army - GdI Henriquez - planned to renew the attack by Kosak's Group on the 25<sup>th</sup> with the help of the reserves. But there was a shortage of ammunition, and the combat strength of 35 ID had sunk so low that during the night the Division had to even give up the enemy position they'd captured.<sup>419</sup> Therefore Henriquez decided it would be wiser to make his main effort on the western bank of the Isonzo. Here the main body of 57 ID would assemble on the 25<sup>th</sup> next to 1 ID (where their advanced group was stationed already), and would attack between the Isonzo and the line Selo-Kostanjevica. 28 ID would move into the area vacated by 57 ID when they crossed the river, with one brigade at Kal (east of Selo) and the other at Dol (in the Cepovan valley). Behind them the main body of 9 ID (17 Inf Bde) would join IR 80 which had already deployed north of the

418 Horsetzky, "Zum Durchbruch von Tolmein 1917" (in "Schweizerische Monatsschrift für Offiziere aller Waffen"; Frauenfeld), 1927 issues # 2 and 3

419 IR 51 reported that it had just 15 officers and 155 riflemen; IR 62 had 58 officers and 806 officers. The two battalions of IR 62 had just 300 men; the largest unit, IR 64, still had 55 officers and 1413 riflemen.

Chiapovano Inf.-Podlesce road.

### Reaction of the Italian leadership

The information which reached the higher enemy HQ concerning the catastrophe, which had stricken the northern wing of the Italian Isonzo front with elemental force on the 24<sup>th</sup>, was tardy and incomplete. Powerful artillery fire by the allies' cannon had reached far to the rear to strike HQ and road junctions, breaking all communications.

Based on reports of the successful Austro-German attacks at Flitsch and Tolmein, VII Corps was ordered to occupy the Kolovrat Ridge facing north in accordance with previous plans. The King himself gave personal instructions to the Corps commander (G.Lt Tettoni) at 11:00 AM. Thereafter 3 ID sent their leading brigade to the ridge line north of Drenchia, holding the other two brigades back in the Cosizza valley. Under 62 ID one brigade occupied Mt Matajur and the other went to Luico where they collided with the side detachment of the German 12 ID. In the thick fog G.Lt Tettoni failed to order the brigade to drive back his opponents' weak detachment and then to thrust 700 km deep into the Isonzo valley against the advancing Germans.<sup>420</sup>

The last intact reserves of IV Corps, the second brigade of 34 ID, were marching toward Bergogna; in the evening they were ordered to occupy the Stol and block the valleys at Creda and Stupizza. 7 Alpini Group, which arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup> at Nimis (3 km east of Tarcento), were sent to the Pta. di Montemaggiore.

2<sup>nd</sup> Army, with 26 divisions, was overly large. To provide a unified command for the endangered northern wing, VII Corps and the two corps which had already been pummeled by the allies (IV and XXVII) were placed under G.Lt Montuori, who had been the temporary leader of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army until 23 October. The high command also gave him 53 ID from their reserves. This Division would be used to block the Natisone valley at Stupizza. General Capello, who moved with his HQ from Cormons to Cividale, reassigned the three divisions on the east bank of the Isonzo that had repulsed Kosak's Group (65, 22 and 64 ID) from XXVII to XXIV Corps.<sup>421</sup>

420"Report of the Investigating Commission", Vol. II, p. 137

421Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 148. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The text of this sentence is that which appears in my copy of Volume VI (p. 535). In corrections which were published thereafter in an appendix to Volume VII, the authors stated that the end of the sentence should read "from XXIV to XXVII Corps." However, in the order of battle for the start of October 24 the three

During the evening, as one report after another arrived at Udine, concerns mounted about the northern wing of the front on the eastern bank of the Isonzo, which had stood fast. Around 9:30 PM the high command ordered that the troops on the Bainsizza plateau should be led back to the main line of resistance. During the night the southern wing of XXVII Corps along with the XXIV and II Corps withdrew to the line Globocak - Vrh - Mt Santo. Thus the gap in the front widened by a further 19 kilometers. To firmly anchor the bulwark of this new defensive line on the left, 47 ID (consisting of two Bersaglieri brigades) were sent marching toward the Globocak. Furthermore the high command

- . gave G.Lt Capello XXX Corps (16 and 21 ID) from the strategic reserves (they would go to Nimis),
- . prepared to send 60 ID to Borgogna<sup>422</sup>,
- . held two divisions in Tyrol were ready to entrain, and
- . ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to have two divisions from the reserves in their area available to support 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

One hour before midnight the high command designated the lines upon which energetic resistance would be offered in case of further retreats:

- 1) Pta. di Montemaggiore - Stol - Sarijski vrh - Staro Selo - Mt Matajur - Kolovrat Ridge - Jeza - Globocak
- 2) Pta. di Montemaggiore - Mt le Zuffine - Mt Lupia - Mt Mia - Mt Matajur - Mt S Martino - Mt Hum - Globocak, and
- 3) Pta. di Montemaggiore - Mt le Zuffine - Mt Carnizza - Mt Juanes - Mt Madlessena - Mt Purgessimo - Castel del Monte - Korada.

*All three defensive lines were supposed to begin at the Pta. di Montemaggiore, which illustrates the great importance which Cadorna attached to this mountain. Finally the Chief of Staff ordered that the fortifications on the Tagliamento should be made ready and two new bridgeheads constructed.<sup>423</sup> But all of these measures to create a defensive front in the rear would prove futile.*

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divisions in question appear under XXVII Corps already! Thus the "correction" seems to be incorrect.

422Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 151

423Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 486 ff.

**b. The breakthrough is complete (25-26 October)**The northern part of Krauss' Group (25-26 October)

Under Krauss' Group the vanguard of 22 Sch Div resumed their advance around 3:00 AM after the difficult crossing of the Torrente Boka. The enemy - weak remnants of 50, 34 and 46 ID reinforced by several fresh battalions - restricted their efforts to blocking the Ucceca valley and occupying the Stol; therefore the Schützen advanced guard were able to reach Saga without fighting. The Italians had just hastily evacuated the town, leaving many guns behind. Then the detachment from 22 Sch Div set up a position at Serpenizza to block the Isonzo valley toward the east.

Coming up behind the advanced guard, the commander of 98 K-Sch Bde (Col. Sloninka) instructed K-SchR I and Battalion I of KJR 3 to conquer the Stol. This group was following the main body of 22 Sch Div. 217 Inf Bde of the Edelweiss Division were to advance to Ucceca. 216 Inf Bde were ready to thrust after the enemy when the latter evacuated their positions. 55 ID were instructed by I Corps HQ to make a decisive advance on Karfreit. The German Jaeger Division, now joined by the three Storm battalions which had arrived from Tyrol, would follow the Austrians through Flitsch in the Isonzo valley.

Fortunately the weather finally improved. The sun appeared to warm the tired and thoroughly drenched soldiers.

Sloninka's group climbed forward in three columns and by noon had taken the outlying hills of the Stol (the Hum and Prvi Hum). This menace caused the enemy to begin to retreat at 6:00 PM.<sup>424</sup> The Kaiser-Schützen pushed ahead without pausing; in the first hours of the afternoon they wrested Ridge # 1450 from the Italian rear guards, taking 400 prisoners. At 3:00 AM on 26 October they stood on the summit of the Stol (Point 1668) which, as Cadorna had pointed out just 36 hours earlier, was an extremely important position.<sup>425</sup> In his work about the breakthrough on the Isonzo<sup>426</sup>, GdA Krafft subsequently wrote, "The unbelievable had happened! In a bold and quick operation the gallant Schützen had stormed the mighty mountain position with just negligible artillery support. They had literally carried out their

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424Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 136 ff.

425Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 488

426Krafft, Vol. I, p. 106

assignment, which was to keep moving without a break day and night until they possessed this point, which was of decisive importance for the success of the attack out of the Flitsch basin."

Now Battalion I/KJR 3 immediately advanced further on the ridge line, west toward the Pta. di Montemaggiore. The Kaiser-Schützen climbed to the south; at 7:00 AM they drove into Bergogna, where they captured 5000 surprised Italians along with considerable booty. GM Müller was following with the main body of his Division over the Stol Ridge toward Bergogna. Knowing that a quick advance would cut down on casualties, he continued to advance to the west after resting for several hours in the early afternoon. The foremost troops of 43 Sch Bde drove back Italian rear guards at Platischis. Then, although they were delayed by the destruction of a road, they pushed on to Mounts le Zuffine and Cavallo; the Schützen occupied these heights shortly before the arrival of an Italian regiment (from IV Corps) which was hastening up. The other parts of 43<sup>rd</sup> Brigade spent the night in Platischis. 98 K-Sch Bde reached the village of Montemaggiore late in the evening.

GM Wieden, who'd advanced with Col. Edler von Mollinary's 217 Inf Bde through the Uccia valley, had already broken through the position in the valley around 11:00 AM. After Battalion I/14 took an outlying part of the Skutnik Heights and a Kaiser Jaeger company stormed Mt Caal (# 1296), enemy resistance collapsed in the Uccia valley.<sup>427</sup> After a tiresome march, 217 Inf Bde reached the village of Uccia in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>; after a short rest in the night, they resumed their advance the next day while it was still dark. The I Battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> "Hessen" Regiment climbed to the summit of the Skutnik (# 1719) in the early morning hours; then two battalions of the Regiment with a mountain battery pushed into the upper Resia valley. On the 26<sup>th</sup> they reached Mt Sounovich and Stolvizza. The remaining battalion of IR 14, with a battalion from KJR 3 and two mountain batteries, advanced toward Resiutta on what appeared on the map as a road but actually was a path which grew increasingly poor. They reached the Nizki vrh. To somewhat concentrate the units of Krauss' Corps, which currently were fanning out, and to reduce the number of divisions piling up in the Karfreit basin, this column was to be followed by the German Jaeger Division (commanded by Prussian Col. von Wodtke) along with the mobile artillery. The II and IV Battalions of KJR 3, with one mountain battery, were sent to march past the P. di Tanamea and the

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427"IR. 14, Ein Buch der Erinnerung", p. 127. Schemfil, "KJR. 3 im Weltkrieg", p. 472

Forcella Musi toward Venzone.

Early on the 26<sup>th</sup> parts of this Regiment occupied the Tamea Pass. The 7 Alpini Group had been stationed in isolated detachments on the Pta. di Montemaggiore, but when they saw several opposing columns approaching they decided to retreat. Even before the evening twilight the I Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kaiser Jaeger were thus able to drive the Italian rear guard from the mountain and occupy the summit.<sup>428</sup> This development would have a major impact on the decisions of the Italian high command. The HQ of the Carnic Group, greatly disturbed by the successes of Krauss' Corps, had already in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> sent their sparse reserves into the Resia valley, along with the 8 Alpini Group which the high command had placed at their disposal. These units totaled six battalions and four batteries.

During the 26<sup>th</sup> the German Jaeger Division were greatly delayed by abandoned Italian guns and lines of prisoners on the road; in the evening they reached the valley east of Uccia village. By now it had been determined that the road which on the map led from Uccia over the Nizki vrh into the Resia valley was merely a steep mule-track, so the mobile artillery were sent back to Serpenizza. They would rejoin their Division later through the Natisone valley.<sup>429</sup>

In front of 216 Inf Bde the Italians pulled back during the night of 24-25 October and had occupied a rear position on the Vratni Vrh. Parts of IR 59 advanced west of the Vratni Vrh toward the Prevala Gap, but had to recognize from the powerful resistance that the enemy here were determined to stand fast. Meanwhile the Italians on the Vratni Vrh were completely surrounded; early on 26 October they recognized it would be impossible to continue resisting and the entire garrison - 40 officers and 880 men - surrendered.<sup>430</sup> In the first three days of fighting the 216 Inf Bde had brought in 2000 prisoners and 4 guns.

59 Mtn Bde, adjacent to the north, had no success with the attack they launched in the Seebach valley on the 25<sup>th</sup>. They would have to wait until the Prevala Gap, still firmly held by the enemy,

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428Schemfil, "KJR. 3 im Weltkrieg", p. 480. By the same author, "Der Fall des Monte-Montemaggiore bei der Herbstoffensive 1917 gegen Italien" (in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; 1934 edition, pp. 518 ff.)

429Pflieger, "Holsteinisches Feldartillerie-Rgmt. Nr. 24" (Oldenburg, 1922), p. 167

430Hoen, "IR. 59 im Weltkrieg", p. 607

was taken by Spiess' 216<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Then the Italian position on the Nevea Ridge would inevitably collapse.

At daybreak the 55 ID found that the position which they'd assaulted the day before with indifferent success had now been vacated; they thrust into the basins of Ravna and Drezenca. The heights of Krasji vrh, Vrsic and Vrata fell after actions with Italian rear guards. In the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> the Division was in Idersko and Karfreit, after capturing 4000 prisoners, 70 guns and 1000 bearers from the Italian 43 ID. On the next day they reached Sedula and Borjana (east of Borgogna) without seeing action.

#### The rest of 14<sup>th</sup> Army - 25 October

On the 25<sup>th</sup> the northern group of 50 ID occupied the Krn summit and, in conjunction with parts of 55 ID, the Kozljak Heights. In the afternoon 3 Mtn Bde assembled on the other side of the mountain; much of their time was consumed by transporting prisoners, whose total had already passed 10,000. The main body of 15 Mtn Bde reached Bobic in the evening; the I and II Bns of BH IR 1 climbed Mt Mia. At this time (the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>) the 50 ID were re-assigned to Krauss' Group so they could help them make a powerful advance through Platischis toward Tarcento.

The target of the main body of the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army on 25 October was the heights which circle Cividale on the north and northeast.

Under Stein's group the 12 German ID first brought up their reserves from the rear to enter the front line by Golobi, so as to reinforce the side column which here was engaged with a significantly larger enemy force. The battalions fighting in the Natisone valley south of Robic had to repulse the attack of some freshly-arrived regiments of 53 Italian ID. The German Alpenkorps, which had brought their own reserves up to Point 1114, also had to fend off attacks early in the day (from troops of the 19 and 3 Italian ID). Meanwhile their left column, which on the day before had hung back at Point 732, broke through the enemy position and by 11:00 AM climbed the end of the ridge that is crowned by the Slemen Chapel (Point 869).

Now it was time to roll up the Italian position on the Kolovrat. First some detachments of the Alpenkorps took the Kuk (# 1243) in a skillful advance, in part over terrain that was shielded from enemy fire. Meanwhile the battalions of 12 German ID stationed at Golobi had to repulse numerous attacks by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bersaglieri



Brigade of 62 ID. Next the Alpenkorps detachments and the battalions at Golobi captured most of the Bersaglieri. The foremost Alpenkorps battalion pushed ahead, east toward Mt Matajur. A company from 12 ID had already climbed the northern part of this massif at 7:30 AM. By evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> the 12 ID had taken 10,000 prisoners, who streamed to the German lines from all sides and especially from the north where parts of IV Italian Corps had been cut off.

117 ID, following in the second line, reached Kamno and Selisce in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Under Berrer's group, the right column of 200 German ID, which had hung back the day before, was already on the Jeza Heights at daybreak. During the day the 200<sup>th</sup>, partly in cooperation with the southern group of the Alpenkorps, mopped up the area south of Heights 1114. By evening the Division was at Trinco, Prapotnizza and Clabuzzaro, and was ready to attack next day toward Mt S Martino and Mt Hum. The mobile artillery of 200 ID and of the Alpenkorps were sent through Idersko toward Luico. Berrer's second division (26 ID), which was scheduled to enter the front line on the 26<sup>th</sup>, set up quarters for the night with one regiment apiece at Jesenjok, Ciginj and Modrejce.

Scotti's group continued their efforts to capture the Globocak Heights and Mt Hum on the 25<sup>th</sup>. As they continued to thrust southwest they would make it easier for 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to advance past the Bainsizza plateau. The right-wing division of the latter Army (57 ID of Kosak's group) was already on the western bank of the Isonzo.

The k.u.k. 1 ID attacked the Globocak in difficult fighting with parts of XXVII Italian Corps, which cost FML Metzger's troops a sixth of their strength (killed or wounded); the heights were stormed around 11:00 AM. 7 Mtn Bde did not advance much beyond the captured position. 22 Mtn Bde moved ahead to occupy St Paul. The prizes of victory for the gallant 1 ID included 4000 prisoners and 60 guns. The foremost battalions of 57 ID reached Ronzina; this Division's main body was spread out farther back as far as Selo.

The German 5 ID entered the line north of the k.u.k. 1 ID, so that they could take Mt Hum from the east on the 26<sup>th</sup>. But already on the 25<sup>th</sup> their leading regiment crossed the Judrio and worked their way up nearly to Mt Hum, although greatly hampered by enemy fire. The other two regiments reached Srednje and Pusno, respectively. The mobile artillery remained back at

Ciginj; they would advance either through Idersko-Luico or through Doblar as the situation warranted.

#### New orders from 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ

Thanks to the successes won by Below's Army on 25 October, the two forces which had achieved the breakthroughs at Flitsch and Tolmein had come together to form a large attacking phalanx. The Germans' Army HQ at Krainburg were rather accurately informed of the situation by the reports and intelligence which they received. They believed that the reserves opposite 14<sup>th</sup> Army (at most just two brigades) were not a strong force; more powerful units (four brigades) had reinforced the front opposite 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. Because of the enormous losses of the Italian artillery their beaten divisions were estimated to have very little capability. The enemy's increasing weakness was an invitation for a sharp pursuit. Therefore the next goals of Krauss' group, assigned in the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>, were Resiutta and then the line of heights from Pta. di Montemaggiore through Mt le Zuffine to Mt Carnizza. The other three groups were to take the edge of the mountains - Mounts Juanes and Madlessena (Group Stein), Mt Purgessimo (Group Berrer), and the heights around Castel del Monte (Group Scotti). Here the HQ of Southwestern front expected strong new resistance from the enemy.

In the Army's reserves, the 13 Sch Div were to reach Woltschach on the 26<sup>th</sup>; they'd be assigned to Stein's group to replace 50 ID, which was being given to Krauss. The 33 and 4 ID, which on the 25<sup>th</sup> had come up to Grahova and St Veitsberg, would have to stay in these villages on the 26<sup>th</sup> due to traffic jams near Tolmein which were still being cleared up.

The continuing attack in the Natisone valley would be conducted by German 12 ID of Stein's group and by the k.u.k. 50 ID, which now belonged to Krauss' group. Their inner wings should advance past Supizza and Heights 872 southeast of Mt Juanes.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> Army on 26 October

Under 15 Mtn Bde, the foremost part of 50 ID, the two battalions of BH IR 1 thrust down from Mt Mia toward the Natisone valley. They struck the Italians, who themselves were attacking toward the border, in the flank and rear and thus won a victory. The enemy withdrew. Now the forward battalions of Lequis' Division advanced, followed by a regiment from Luico plus the mobile artillery. The Germans reached Supizza and Loch at 2:00 PM; some of their detachments continued to fight with the retreating

XXVIII Italian Corps, and by evening had climbed Point 872. Two more battalions from 15 Mtn Bde went around the Predol ravine on the north and occupied Mt Lupia, Robedisce and Prossenicco. One company of 50 ID which had been sent ahead to reconnoiter reached Mt Juanes in the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>, drove away the detachment from the right wing of IV Corps which had been stationed there, and found the armored fortification which appeared on our maps to be incomplete and empty. The company linked up with the Germans who'd arrived on Point 872. The rest of 15 Mtn Bde were near Logje, Podbela and Creda; 3 Mtn Bde concentrated at Karfreit and Lada in the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Meanwhile events were also unfolding rapidly east of the Natisone. Even before sunrise a battalion of the Alpenkorps were climbing Mt Matajur, which had been occupied by a brigade from the 62 Italian ID. Parts of the battalion, after an action with the stubborn enemy, stormed the summit and took 100 officers and 4500 men prisoner; in addition 14 guns and numerous machine guns were captured.<sup>431</sup> Thus another key point in the area of the breakthrough had fallen to the allies.

The Alpenkorps now advanced southwest in three columns toward their next objective, Mt Madlessena. After taking many enemy rear guard positions in the Riecca valley, as evening approached the Division arrived north of Azzida, where they encountered parts of Italian XXVIII Corps which had deployed here to block the area where several valleys opened up into the plains. The regiment of 12 ID which had stayed behind at Luico advanced over the southern slope of Mt Matajur (which meanwhile had been captured) and joined their division at Pulfero, from which a mixed detachment was also sent forward in the direction of the village of Azzida.

117 ID marched on the 26<sup>th</sup> from Kamno to Robic. The leading regiment of 13 Sch Div came up to Woltschach, while the Division's main body were still back in the Idria valley.

Under Berrer's Corps the 200 ID captured Mt S Martino in the morning after a short and almost bloodless action; then they advanced past Mt S Bardolomeo. Farther west the Alpenkorps were approaching Azzida. G.Lt von Hofacker's 26 (Württemberg) ID had entered the front. Their foremost regiment reached Merso d. sp., but the other units were spread out along the ridge crowned by Mt S Maria Mna. as far back as Crai.

Under the k.u.k. XV Corps the leading regiment of GM von Wedel's  
431Sproesser, pp. 282 ff.

German 5 ID attacked in the morning. More hindered than helped by their own artillery fire, nevertheless they stormed Mt Hum, which was defended by the Italian 3 ID. 80 officers (including two brigade commanders) and 3500 men with 61 guns and 51 machine guns fell into the hands of the successful German regiment<sup>432</sup>, which was accompanied in the attack by a battalion of 200 ID from the north. 5 ID resumed their advance in the afternoon; their leading detachments took Mt S Giovanni. The mobile artillery were still in the valley stretching north from Doblar.

Advancing southwest, the k.u.k. 1 ID captured Kambresko around 11:00 AM. By evening they were at Britof on the Judrio and at St Jakob northeast of the Korada, where the Bersaglieri of 47 ID (XXVII Corps) had established a defensive position. Adjacent to the southeast, from the Planina Heights and the village of Plava to Paljevo, were the seven intermingled divisions of the XXIV Italian Corps (10, 49, 22, 30, 64, 65 and 68 ID). GM Hrozny's k.u.k. 57 ID advanced toward them on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Since morning on this day they were under the II Corps HQ of GdI Kaiser, who was still bringing the 9<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Divisions over the Isonzo.

#### Actions of the Isonzo Armies

The retreat of the Italian XXIV and II Corps, which started in the night of 24-25 October, enabled the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to also advance. Early on the 25<sup>th</sup> Kosak's Group repeated the attack which had failed to break through on the first day of the battle, and this time encountered only rear guards who didn't offer prolonged resistance. The main forces of the XXIV Italian Corps, which were hastening to the rear through Canale in the Isonzo valley, were very heavily pummeled by the air companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Armies, which dropped a total of 6 ½ tons of bombs during 119 flights. In the evening the right wing of k.u.k. 60 ID reached Loga, and the inner wings of 60 and 35 ID were in front of Vrh. Now GdI Lukas' XXIV Corps were also able to advance until 24 ID were in front of Bate and 53 ID by Sveto. The 43 Sch Div of IV Corps took Madoni and sent scouting detachments ahead toward Vodice and Mt Santo. During the night the enemy south of the western end of the Cepovan valley also started to withdraw.

On 25 October GO Boroevic had ordered the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to advance energetically through Auzza and Ronzina. Therefore on this day, while 57 ID moved up to Ronzina and Selo, they were followed by 28 and 9 ID which marched into the area

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432Schöning, "Leib Grenadier Regiment König Friedrich Wilhelm III. (1. Brandenburg-isches) Nr. 8" (Oldenburg, 1924), p. 256

north and west of Kal, and by 29 ID which reached Chiapovano Inf.

In the night of 25-26 October almost all of the Italian XXIV Corps pulled back to the western bank of the Isonzo, and on the 26<sup>th</sup> the main body of the II Corps also moved over the river between Zagora and Mt Santo. Therefore the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army were able to start their pursuit on this day. They became engaged in heavy fighting with Italian rear guards - 35 ID around the Kuk (Point 711), 24 ID around the Jelenik (# 788) and 53 ID around the Kobilek (# 627). The booty taken by Kosak's group in the three days of the battle included 200 guns and 15,500 prisoners. XXIV Corps reported the capture of 24 guns, 34 machine guns and more than 1260 men.

Under II Corps, 57 ID were stationed by Nekovo Grn. and Dl. in the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup>; behind them 28 ID were by Ronzina and Auzza, 9 ID in Avscek and Levpa and 29 ID in Kal. Under Kosak's group, 60 ID were climbing from Canale to Liga and Mia. Zell (on the Kolovrat); 35 ID reached the Isonzo between the towns of Morsko and Bodrez. 24 ID of XXIV Corps came forward almost to Descla; 53 ID were engaged in heavy fighting until evening on both sides of the road from Ravne to Vodice. A scouting detachment of the latter Division, along with SchR 22 of 43 Sch Div which had hastened far ahead of the other troops, wrested Heights 652 south of Vodice from 8 Italian ID, which were still on the eastern bank. The main body of 43 Sch Div reached Slatna, Gargaro and Britof. 20 Hon ID reported that the enemy opposing them on the western slope of Mt S Gabriele were still busily working on their positions.

The enemy in front of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army were very alert on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and reacted to the slightest movement with a heavy barrage of fire. In particular the northern wing of the k.u.k. XXIII Corps east of Selo, where in fact an operation was planned, was the target of these sudden artillery bombardments. On the 26<sup>th</sup> it was noticed that a large number of Italian supply trains and batteries - as well as infantry - were moving to the rear. To pin down the enemy GM Ströher's 17 ID, carrying out a plan that had been prepared in advance, attacked around 4:00 PM. They captured the heights of the Fajti hrib and part of the adjacent position farther south from XI Italian Corps and brought in 3500 prisoners.

By evening of the third day of the battle the network of Italian positions between the Rombon and Mt Santo had been completely broke by the two victorious armies of Below and Henriquez on a front 50 km wide. The greatest depth of the penetration was 20

km (between the Krn and Mt Juanes). The allies were already standing in front of the third and last of the lines where Cadorna had ordered on 24 October that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army were to offer energetic resistance. And on the Pta. di Montemaggiore and Mt Juanes some detachments of Krauss' Corps, moving ahead without a pause, had penetrated this line. Thus the Italian high command were being forced to make decisions that would have wide-ranging importance.

## 2. Cadorna decides to retreat

### 25 October

Early in the afternoon of 25 October the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army G.Lt Capello - whose health had again taken a turn for the worst - came to Udine to make a report. At this time his Army was losing one mountain position after another to the unrelenting attacks of the Aus-Hung. and German troops. Capello advised Cadorna to stop sending fresh units into the lost battle, and instead to quickly disengage the armies from their opponents and lead them back behind the Tagliamento. Cadorna agreed with this idea, but instructed Capello to submit his situation report in writing.

Capello now pointed out that the enemy had deeply penetrated the sector of IV Corps, were exerting pressure on Luico, and had taken Jeza. Thus the front on the Bainsizza plateau was also becoming untenable. He also reproached the conduct of the troops, some of whom frankly had offered only "laughable" resistance.<sup>433</sup> To preserve the regiments still available for the fatherland, Capello believed that the most painful solution at this moment was also the best - to withdraw under cover of rear guards at least to the Torre and if need be as far as the Tagliamento.

After Capello was assured that the high command was preparing an order to retreat, he returned to Cividale to prepare his own guidelines for the withdrawal to the Tagliamento. During this movement temporary resistance would be offered first along the current front line, then in the third defensive position chosen by the high command, and finally on the Torre. Because of his illness, after publishing these instructions Capello relinquished command of his Army to G.Lt Montuori, who hitherto was leading its left wing.

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433Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 490

Meanwhile the high command at Udine were hesitating to start the retreat. They expected that it would have a negative impact on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which was still stationed east of Görz and on the Comen plateau, and that it would inevitably lead to the loss of the heavy guns. At 8:30 PM on the 25<sup>th</sup> they asked the new 2<sup>nd</sup> Army commander G.Lt Montuori whether he believed a retreat was unavoidable. After consulting his corps commanders, Montuori reported that a final attempt to resist on the line Pta. di Montemaggiore - Mt Purgessimo - Korada might still be feasible. Therefore Cadorna didn't issue the orders (already prepared) for the retreat, and instructed 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to defend this line to the utmost.<sup>434</sup>

To make it easier to control the overly-large 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, it was divided under two groups. The IV, XXVIII, VII and XXVII Corps were placed under G.Lt Etna; the XXIV, II and VI Corps farther south were given to General Ferrero. VI Corps were instructed specifically to retreat into the Salcano bridgehead. The VIII Corps east of Görz were re-assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Contrary to Capello's warnings about keeping the reserves out of the fighting, they were to be used to strengthen the front. 21 ID would join the IV Corps, and 23 and 25 ID the XXVIII Corps. One brigade apiece of 60 ID were assigned to VII and XXVII Corps, 30 ID to XXIV Corps and 16 ID to G.Lt Etna's group HQ. The HQ of XIV Corps seems to have been temporarily pulled out of the front. One brigade of 13 ID was stationed behind XXIV and II Corps. Thus of the 195 reserve battalions deployed behind 2<sup>nd</sup> Army at the start of 24 October, 131 had now been committed.

Cadorna ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to start moving the heavy artillery to the Treviso area and pulling their front back to the line of the Vallone valley and to the Isonzo bridgeheads (including Görz.)

### 26 October

When no further bad news arrived at Udine early on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Cadorna began to regain confidence. Nevertheless the high command continued systematic preparations to retreat to the Tagliamento. G.Lt Tassoni's Carnic Group were assigned 63 ID from the strategic reserves. It was also planned to give 20 ID and 2 Cav Div to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, so that the completely battered 34 and 50 ID could immediately be withdrawn for rebuilding. The commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army intended to create a reserve by sending 16 ID (which had been attached to his left group) to Torreano and 10 ID (from XXIV Corps) along with the second brigade of 13 ID to

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434 *Ibid.*, p. 495

Corno di Rosazzo and Manzano.

But the high command soon received new information which compelled Cadorna in the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> to release orders for the eventuality that a retreat could not longer be avoided. The withdrawal, however, wouldn't start until specifically authorized. Cadorna intended to start retreating as soon as his opponents captured the Pta. di Montemaggiore, because the distance between this mountain and the bridges over the Tagliamento at Cornino and Pinzano was only half as great as the distance which 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would have to travel from their foremost battle line to the bridges at Codroipo and Latisana.<sup>435</sup>

According to Cadorna's orders the Carnic Group, which had already started to send their heavy batteries back to Spilimbergo on the 26<sup>th</sup>, were to retreat into the "Carnic Fore-Alps" (meaning the mountains south and west of the upper Tagliamento). But the works on Mt Festa # 1071 (4 km west of Venzone) and the heights east of the Tagliamento by Resiutta were to be held under all circumstances. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would withdraw to the western bank of the Tagliamento between the foot of the mountains and the bridges west of Codroipo, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army into the area farther south down to the sea. During the retreat, which was to take place under cover of strong rear guards, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies were to pause temporarily on the Torre. The assignment of 20 ID to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was canceled. This Division and 33 ID were concentrated as a "Special Corps" and hurriedly sent to secure the bridges over the middle Tagliamento. Thus all available troops were committed except for 4 ID (stationed behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army) and one brigade of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

4<sup>th</sup> Army had also begun their movement to the rear when they sent their heavy artillery in the plains to Pederobba and Montebelluna. They were preparing to withdraw if necessary to a line which ran from the watershed between the Tagliamento and the Piave (where it linked up with the front of the Carnic Group) through the positions of Pieve di Cadore, the source of the Maebach valley, the Colle Duran (# 1736), the positions by Agordo, S Martino di Castrozza and the Remitte Heights (# 1785; north of Lamon) to the northern part of the Asiago plateau.<sup>436</sup>

Finally Cadorna reported to the War Minister about the ongoing catastrophe, the counter-measures initiated, and his intention to

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435 From a letter which Marshal Cadorna sent GdA Krafft on 22 October 1926.

436 Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 168 ff.



offer resistance at the edge of the mountains. He didn't conceal the magnitude of the casualties thus far, or that the majority of ten regiments had given up without fighting. To make up for the casualties he asked that replacement troops should be sent to the Piave.<sup>437</sup>

In the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> Cadorna told army commanders Montuori and the Duke of Aosta that they were hold onto the positions on the edge of the mountains north of Cividale, at Görz and on the Vallone regardless of casualties. But, as Cadorna informed GdA Krafft in a post-war letter, since the loss of the Stol he was only trying to gain time; it wasn't possible for an army of a million men - along with the equipment they'd accumulated for two and a half years - to immediately retreat through a plain just 50 km wide.<sup>438</sup>

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437Vigano, "La nostra guerra" (Florence, 1920), p. 341. Report of the Investigating Commission, Vol. I, p. 174 and Vol. II, p. 472.

438Krafft, Vol. II, p. 278

27 October

When Cadorna learned - soon after midnight on 27 October - that the Pta. di Montemaggiore had fallen, he abandoned all hope that the front could be held any longer. He decided to bring 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies along with the Carnic Group back to the Tagliamento. 4<sup>th</sup> Army would withdraw far enough so that they would not have to march any further than their comrades if all the forces had to eventually retreat again to the final defensive line running from the Altissimo through Mt Grappa to the Piave.<sup>439</sup>

The Carnic Group didn't receive the order to retreat until around 2:30 AM; it was to be implemented in accordance with the guidelines issued earlier. Twenty minutes later the order for 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to withdraw was sent by wire. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were informed at 3:20 AM. They were enjoined in particular that in order to save the entire situation they should continue for now to defend the line (already mentioned many times) running through Lusevera, Mt le Zuffine, Mt Madlessena, Mt Purgessimo and Korada to Mt Sabotino. Then they would retreat, beginning on the left wing. The Korada and Mt Sabotino were to be held "until the last" to enable VI and VIII Corps to withdraw undisturbed. The final orders were issued to 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies, which were instructed to agree among themselves about where their wings should meet in the sector between Mt Civetta (Point 1320, southeast of Alleghe) and the Cima Maora (southeast of Borgo). Furthermore 4<sup>th</sup> Army would begin preparations to defend Mt Grappa.

In an addendum the bridgehead at Codroipo was assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the one at Pinzano to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The 3 and 4 Cavalry Divisions, coming up from the interior, were sent to Pordenone and Motta di Livenza. The HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were to move to the former city, and those of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the latter. In the afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup> Cadorna himself moved with his operational detachment to Treviso. The other parts of the high command went to Padua.<sup>440</sup>

### **3. Pursuit actions by Below's Army (27 October)**

Plans of the opposing sides

The rapid advance of Below's and Henriquez's Armies to the west and southwest gave rise on 26 October to a belief in Baden that

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439Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 498

440Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 197 ff.

if the enemy in front of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army didn't soon withdraw it would be possible to inflict heavy damage on them while they were still east of the Tagliamento. The pre-requisite for continued success was to keep 14<sup>th</sup> Army moving by bringing up the reserves. But the divisions in the rear, especially the strategic reserves, couldn't move forward because of the very heavy traffic on the roads in the Isonzo valley. Therefore the k.u.k. high command sought to strengthen 14<sup>th</sup> Army by narrowing their area of responsibility. They ordered at 1:00 PM on the 26<sup>th</sup> that the Army's southern border would be moved north, to a line between Torrente Cosizza - Natisone and Cividale. 14<sup>th</sup> Army's assignment was "to reach the line Gemona-Cividale with a strong right wing."

But this change would pinch Berrer's and Scotti's groups, which were in contact with the enemy, out of the front to accommodate 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. Therefore HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army objected, and the HQ of Southwestern front modified the new border between the sectors of Generals Below and Borojevic so that it would run along the line Judrio - Colobrida - Firmano - Orzano, then through the center of Udine to Tomba and S Odorico on the Tagliamento to Pozzo.

Under the same order from the high command, those parts of I Corps which were supposed to thrust past the Prevala ravine into the Raccolana valley, along with the Edelweiss and German Jaeger Divisions which had entered the Resia valley, would be placed under 10<sup>th</sup> Army. This Army's boundary line would run through the Skutnik Heights, Mt Sounovich, Mt Musi and Mt Plauris. The change would be effective as soon as 10<sup>th</sup> Army, advancing to Amaro and Stazione per la Carnia, would be able to supply the additional troops through Chiusaforte. But 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ considered the loss of the two divisions to be a very unwelcome diminution of their strength.<sup>441</sup>

The enemy in front of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army weren't to be allowed to withdraw systematically. Therefore at the decisive moment FZM Freih. von Wurm's Army should attack with concentrated strength through Görz toward Cormons. 106 Lst ID, stationed in reserve, would join the advance. This operation was consistent with a suggestion from Ludendorff, who felt it worthwhile to make an effort to destroy the enemy while they were still engaged in the mountains.

G.Lt Montuori, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, had ordered that on the 27<sup>th</sup> each of his corps should leave ten strong battalions with light artillery as rear guards in the positions on the edge

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441Krafft, Vol. I, p. 135

of the mountains. All other troops, starting with the artillery, would first pull back behind the Torre. When the units of the 14<sup>th</sup> German and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Armies - after a relatively quiet night - resumed their advance very early on the 27<sup>th</sup> they encountered these rear guards, and in some places also elements of the enemy's main body which hadn't yet begun to retreat.

### The actions

Under Krauss' Corps, GM Wieden sought mainly to reach Resiutta and Venzone as quickly as possible and thus cut off the enemy stationed in front of 10<sup>th</sup> Army, in accordance with the orders which 14<sup>th</sup> German Army HQ had issued on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Wieden's group drove forward in three columns. Both the right column advancing through Stolvizza (two battalions of IR 14) and the German Jaeger Division advancing from Uceca through Gnivizza were aiming for S Giorgio as their goal. The third battalion of IR 14 and one Kaiser Jaeger battalion were serving as an advance guard to the Germans. At S Giorgio strong enemy forces, including parts of 63 ID which had just arrived, occupied a blocking position. The Italians also had many batteries, to which the attackers could oppose just five mountain guns with very limited ammunition. The right column wrested the Tolsti vrh Heights and Point 982 from the enemy, hoping to use the area as a base for a *coup de main* against the fortification at Chiusaforte.<sup>442</sup> The advanced guard of the main column opened an action east of S Giorgio in the evening, while the leading troops of the German Jaeger Division were reaching Gost. In the left column Battalion II/KJR 3 had to retake the Tanamea Pass from an Alpini battalion which had hastened to the front. Then they advanced to Musi and that night, despite a storm, were almost on the Forcella Musi. Battalion I/KJR 3 advanced west along the crest from the Pta. di Montemaggiore, but because of the fearful weather didn't get much past the Mali vrh (# 1558).<sup>443</sup>

To the right of Wieden's Division, on the 27<sup>th</sup> the 216 Inf Bde renewed their effort to occupy the Prevala Gap. But the operation failed again due to strong enemy resistance and to the very severe winter storm which descended upon the heights. Many of the troops exposed to the elements froze to death.<sup>444</sup> But 59 Mtn Bde of 10<sup>th</sup> Army were able to break through four parallel positions in the Seebach valley despite enemy resistance and heavy rain showers. After darkness fell the troops of 36 Italian

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442"IR. 14, Ein Buch der Erinnerung", pp. 128 ff.

443Schemfil, "KJR. 3 im Weltkrieg", p. 80

444Hoen, "IR. 59 im Weltkrieg", pp. 610 ff.

ID retreated as they had been ordered; they evacuated the Raccolana and Dogna valleys as well as Pontebba. Soon thereafter the 26 Italian ID also abandoned their positions on the Carinthian crest between Pontebba and Mt Peralba.<sup>445</sup>

Elsewhere in Krauss' group the 22 Sch Div tangled on the 27<sup>th</sup> with rear guards of the IV Italian Corps. Toward evening the 98 K-Sch Bde took Monteaperta; 43 Sch Bde, supported by several detachments of 50 ID, stormed Mt Jauer. The main body of 15 Mtn Bde (in Gerabek's Division) advanced toward their objectives, the towns of S Gervasio and Attimis. They encountered troops from the Italian 21 and 34 ID, who'd originally been told to counterattack to keep the Austrians from crossing the Canebola ridge into the plains. Otherwise the Italians, consistent with the orders for the retreat, restricted their activity to defending Mounts Nagrad and Carnizza. By evening Koschak's Brigade plus an advanced Battalion (III/7) of 55 ID wrested these positions from the enemy despite stubborn resistance and an almost total lack of artillery support. The victorious battalions now saw the Italian plains before them.

3 Mtn Bde reached Platischis and Prossenicco. 55 ID spent the night at Borjana and Creda, in the Corps' reserve.

The two middle corps of the German 14<sup>th</sup> Army advanced generally west toward the roads between Colloredo and the northern edge of Udine. Stein's Corps was allotted the sector north of the line Togliano-Ziracco-Grions-Feletto-Plaino; Berrer's Corps advanced farther south and were supposed to capture Cividale. Nevertheless, parts of both corps strove to reach this city. In many places the actual direction of the attacks on 27 October was determined by lower-level commanders.

G.Lt Stein wanted the main body of 12 German ID to advance from Mt Juanes toward Faedis; one regiment, after fighting against rear guards, reached this town by evening. Other parts of the Division camped for the night in Masarolis; the artillery with some infantry were at Sanquarzo (east of Cividale). Under the Alpenkorps, a company had already stormed heavily fortified Mt Madlessena at 10:00 AM. Thus the last bulwark covering Cividale from the north had fallen. Three Alpenkorps battalions now attacked the city, which was defended by rear guards of XXVIII Italian Corps. The Germans entered Cividale at 3:00 PM, shortly after the enemy hastily abandoned the burning town. In the evening GM Tutschek was able to assemble all the parts of the Alpenkorps at the foot of the mountains between Campeglio and

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445Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 180 and 205

Tagliano. The German 117 ID moved up from Robic to Stupizza. The leading troops of 13 Sch Div reached the area Robic-Suzid; the other parts of the Division were stuck far behind by traffic jams that still hadn't cleared up.

Under Berrer's Corps the 200 ID, which was supposed to attack Cividale, intended to wait until the strong fortifications on Mt Purgessimo (east of the city) had been taken by German 26 ID, approaching from the north. But the latter Division's deployment and preparations to attack were delayed. Overcome by impatience, one of 200 ID's Jaeger regiments seized the heights west of the mountain. This caused enemy resistance to rapidly evaporate. Even before Mt Purgessimo was stormed by the Württembergers of 26 ID, the 200 ID turned toward Cividale which they entered behind the 3 battalions from the Alpenkorps. During the night parts of the 200<sup>th</sup> pushed ahead further through streaming rain to Ziracco, Grions and Remanzacco. 26 ID finally enveloped Mt Purgessimo from the west and in the early afternoon captured it from the rear; then they also marched through Cividale. Advanced parts of the Division advanced as far as Selvis and Premariacco. Besides extensive booty the Württembergers took 6000 prisoners.

The initial assignment of Scotti's Corps on the 27<sup>th</sup> was to capture the heights that were crowned by the Castel del Monte. For this purpose the 5 German ID attacked along the ridge line. The k.u.k. 1 ID would first mop up the enemy in the Judrio valley and then - if necessary - advance toward Castel del Monte from the east. Thereafter the Corps would push through Firmano and Orzano toward Udine.

*Around 4:00 PM the leading regiment of 5 ID by themselves captured the strongly fortified Mt Spigh from a rear guard of the VII Italian Corps, of which more than 3000 troops laid down their arms. 1 ID was supposed to relinquish the Kolovrat ridge to II Corps and shift to the western bank of the Judrio, but they found that all bridges over the highly swollen mountain stream had been destroyed. Furthermore they were bombarded by enemy artillery from the Korada, and couldn't make an adequate reply because they had just two mountain guns immediately available. To avoid unnecessary casualties the Division waited at Britof and Melina until darkness fell. Then they advanced to the area where they were supposed to spend the night (Colobrida - S Pietro di Chiazzacco - Miscek); they did reach their objectives, without fighting but very late in the night. Some parts of the Division didn't finish their march until the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile in the late afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup> the lead regiment of 5 German ID drove forward sharply to storm*

*Castel del Monte and captured 600 more prisoners. The regiment camped for the night on this battlefield. The other two regiments advanced to Janich and Mt S Giovanni. The artillery came up on the road through the heights to a point just south of Jeza. Thus 5 ID was spread out through an area 20 km long.*

#### 4. Developments by Borojevic's Army Group

At noon on 26 October the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army were already of the opinion that the enemy in front of them were retreating, and that prolonged resistance wouldn't be encountered up to the line Korada - Planina - Verhvolje - Mt Sabotino. If the Korada and Planina Heights fell, the defenses farther east would also collapse. Therefore II Corps were urged to quickly take the Korada and Group Kosak to conquer the Planina. XXIV and IV Corps would move up to the Isonzo downstream from Plava.

It was quite difficult to issue commands in the narrow area between the Judrio and Isonzo, where after the shifting of 1 ID there were five divisions squeezed together. The higher HQ were far in the rear, and telephone connections were often interrupted. But the lower-ranking generals at the front led their troops after the enemy on their own initiative, without waiting for orders.

GdI Kaiser, commanding II Corps, instructed FML Schneider-Manns-Au to assault the Korada with 57 and 28 ID.<sup>446</sup> The former unit was already on the Kolovrat Ridge. 28 ID had crossed the Isonzo at Auzza during the night of 26-27 October and then climbed up toward Kambresko. 9 ID would follow this group in reserve. 29 ID were stopped at Auzza on the 27<sup>th</sup>, so that in case of need they could reinforce 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Under Kosak's group, three battalions of 60 ID had forged ahead early in the day from Liga and Mia. Zell along the ridge toward the Korada.<sup>447</sup> Now they were followed by 57 ID. The main body of 60 ID advanced on the eastern slope of the Kolovrat Ridge. Early in the morning 35 ID had already sent detachments over the Isonzo at Morsko in boats, but the main body crossed the river at noon by Canale and advanced along the road and railroad. Around 6:00 PM they encountered and attacked a strong enemy force.

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446TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This paragraph and the two which follow were substantially corrected with pen and ink changes to fix errors which were noted when Volume VII was published (see page 854 of Vol. VII). The translation reflects the corrections rather than the original published text of Volume VI.

447Even before the arrival of the latest orders, the HQ of Kosak's group had instructed 60 ID to advance to the Korada while the main body of 35 ID moved against the Planina Heights (Point 653).



The Korada was defended by the Bersaglieri of 47 ID (XXVII Italian Corps); the attack made just slow progress because of strong enemy artillery fire. Moreover, our own infantry lacked ammunition because of the traffic on the roads. Since Italian deserters reported that their side was in great confusion, around 9:00 PM FML Goiginger ordered that all troops engaged between the Judrio and Isonzo should mount a joint attack to take the Korada. Thus 57 and 60 ID would advance on the ridges from the northeast, while 35 ID and at least the leading brigade of 9 ID would envelop the heights from the south. But these orders were overtaken by events.

For meanwhile the defenders of the Korada had learned of the fall of Mt Purgessimo; as ordered by HQ of XXVII Corps, they began to retreat around 9:00 PM to Pradamano (southeast of Udine). Then when 57 ID along with attached parts of 60 ID stormed the Korada they were able to overcome the last resistance of the Italian rear guards and take possession of the summit. 60 ID spent the night at Kamenca, 35 ID at Lozice. In front of them the Italian XXIV Corps fell back, including the rear guards which had been left on the eastern bank of the Isonzo.

Against these rear guards and against the Italian 67 ID which was covering the retreat of their II Corps, the k.u.k. XXIV Corps pushed ahead toward Plava with the inner wings of both their divisions. FML Urbarz's 24 ID took Heights 535 south of Paljevo from the enemy after a hard action; in the evening they captured Plava, where one of the brigades was already able to cross the Isonzo during the night over a bridge that hadn't been destroyed. In the morning 53 ID drove the enemy from the Rohot Brook and then by attacking from the south and east they took the steep Kuk (# 611) despite being pounded by Italian artillery fire from the west. High water in the river delayed construction of a bridge, so the Division shifted their right-wing brigade that evening toward Plava so they could cross the Isonzo on the 28<sup>th</sup> behind 24 ID. The rest of the Division camped for the night near Vodice.

Under IV Corps the 43 Sch Div cleared enemy rear guards off Monte Santo and by evening stood everywhere along the eastern bank of the swollen Isonzo. 20 Hon ID stayed on the heels of VI Italian Corps, which crossed to the western bank through Salcano, and in hand grenade fighting took from them all the positions on the western slope of Mt S Gabriele.

There were three divisions of II Corps in the rear. 28 ID spent the night at Podbreg and Kambresko, 9 ID on the road in the valley between Ajba and Ronzina, and 29 ID in Auzza and Levpa.

The booty taken by 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to date included 42 heavy, 25 medium and 220 light guns. The IV and XXIV Corps together had brought in 3500 Italian prisoners.

Under 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army, early on the 27<sup>th</sup> the 17 ID first had to repulse a strong Italian counterattack which was launched, after powerful artillery preparation, against the positions they'd captured the day before. With the help of a sudden accurate barrage from our own artillery the Hungarians were easily able to fend off the enemy. Then 17 ID started preparations to resume their thrust.

Meanwhile signs were multiplying that the enemy were about to retreat; these included numerous explosions behind the Italian front and the march of long columns of supply trains and artillery to the rear. Therefore in the afternoon FZM Wurm ordered a general attack on the Comen plateau, starting with an advance in echelon by VII and XXIII Corps to take the eastern edge of the Vallone.

17 and 48 ID started to attack around 4:00 PM; as on the previous day, they were supported by air units. Since the enemy artillery fire was weaker than usual, the infantry were able to advance in one bound to the Pecinka (# 291) while capturing almost 9000 prisoners. Then 44 Sch Div attacked and wrested the Volkovnjak (# 284).

The ease of this success was partly due to the fact that the Duke of Aosta, following the orders of the high command for the retreat behind the Tagliamento, had ordered his corps on the 27<sup>th</sup> to pull back to the western edge of the Vallone after darkness fell; each one was to leave a brigade behind as a rear guard. The evacuation of the Doberdo plateau was to take place the following night (of 28-29 October). But the temporary halt on the Vallone was canceled when bad news arrived from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's sector.

The VIII Italian Corps were instructed to evacuate Görz and pull back behind the Isonzo. They couldn't conceal their retreat from the watchful 58 k.u.k. ID. The Croatian IR 96, fighting some lively actions, pushed forward and soon after midnight were in possession of Görz; they raised the Imperial standard over the ruined castle. Under 14 ID, that night the FJB 11 stormed over the Isonzo on the still burning bridge at Mainizza; their patrols established a firm foothold on Mt Fortin.

## 5. The results of the twelfth battle of the Isonzo

By the evening of the fourth day of the battle the Italians were in retreat everywhere on the battlefield between Mt Peralba and the sea; 160 km of their front, as it had existed until 24 October, had collapsed. Their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had suffered a devastating defeat, having already lost tens of thousands of prisoners and many hundreds of guns to their victorious opponents.<sup>448</sup> This Army was showing all the signs of dissolution. Furthermore almost all of the strategic reserves had been used up, which deprived the Italian high command of any possibility of influencing the course of the operations. The only chance of salvation now lay in the quickest possible retreat behind the Tagliamento, which was swollen by rain storms to a mighty barrier.

The allies had won one of the most impressive victories in military history. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Krauss's Corps were continuing to advance toward Resiutta, Venzone and Gemona; their left wing was in front of Tarcento, at the edge of the mountains. Both of Below's middle corps were by Cividale, already in the plains; their advanced guards hurried through the rainy night toward the Torre. The left wing of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army had taken from the enemy the strong mountain positions of Castel del Monte, Korada and Mt Santo. Because of the defeat of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the Italians were also retreating from the Carinthian crest and the plateau of Comen, opening the way for Krobotin's and Wurm's armies to join the pursuit. Moreover, the allies still had strong reserves available on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Nine divisions which hadn't fought yet (117 German ID, 13 and 21 Sch Divs, 106 Lst ID, and the 4, 9, 28, 29 and 33 ID) were following the troops in the foremost line. In addition the 55 ID were temporarily in the second line. Because so many troops were available the high command were fully justified in setting their sights on objectives west of the Tagliamento.

### Brilliant planning and implementation

The unexpected magnitude of the victory was primarily due to the very conscientious material and psychological preparations for the breakthrough, which went into the tiniest details. The responsible officers at the HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army - and at HQ of the k.u.k. I Corps which played such a special role - took

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448According to the Aus-Hung. press report of 27 October, by that date 60,800 prisoners and 500 guns had been taken, and 26 airplanes shot down.

advantage of their vast wartime experience. They realized that they could never burst through a defensive zone consisting of multiple positions by concentrating in sector after sector, but only with one great blow which would penetrate the final line of forts and artillery into open country. All of their measures aimed toward this goal. Thus the divisions in the foremost lines were assigned objectives deep in enemy territory to ensure that during their unexpectedly quick advance they didn't lose time by waiting for fresh instructions. While striving for their goals the divisions didn't worry about their neighbors. The bold spirit of battle which motivated commanders at all levels lent enormous elan to the entire operation. In zealous competition the Aus-Hung. and German divisions won successes that had been considered impossible to achieve in such a short time over such difficult terrain. The initiative displayed by lower-ranking commanders down to the level of shock-troop detachments led to great triumphs.

The highest compliments to the attackers were paid by the former enemy themselves through the Italian investigating commission, which included an objective evaluation of their opponents' activities as part of their industrious study. They noted the vast military experience of the Central Powers' armies, their thoroughness in preparing and concealing the upcoming attack, and the skill with which the competition between Aus-Hung. and Germans troops was exploited; these factors had already led to major successes against Russia, Serbia and Romania. They noted the advantages of having control of the area of the breakthrough in the hands of one already-distinguished Army commander. Finally they praised the boldness of individual units.

The investigating committee went on to state<sup>449</sup>, "Since we won the final victory, we can recognize frankly that our opponents' plan of attack was brilliant and very courageous, and that it was carried out with unprecedented clearness of vision and decisiveness. Surprise, a pre-condition of any military operation, was achieved not so much by the choice of the area to be attacked as by the quickness with which the initial success was exploited. The enemy knew how to utilize their first victory, although it was much greater than they'd expected; they continued their pursuit without rest and without concern for the rules of military science, pushing their men to the utmost limits of their endurance. It can't be denied that our troops failed to rally in the rearward positions. But we must acknowledge that our opponents displayed great strategic insight in taking advantage of the situation and always making their main efforts

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449Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. II, p. 552

at points which were most dangerous to us."

The allies' preparations for the offensive were based on the premise that they faced an unshaken enemy who were determined to offer prolonged resistance. The thoroughness of these preparations (as acknowledged from the Italian side), along with the excellence of the troops and their zeal while attacking, guaranteed that probably a success would in fact have resulted even against a foe which fought more stubbornly than in fact was the case in October 1917. But to the surprise of the attackers the Italians many times defended themselves only feebly. This favored the allied advance and increased the magnitude of their success.

#### The collapse of Italian morale

The causes of the psychological collapse of the Italian Army dated back to the entry of the Kingdom into the World War. At that time the Army had mobilized but the people weren't convinced of the necessity of armed intervention. Cadorna's methodical leadership lengthened the war and hadn't gained any decisive success. After eleven battles on the Isonzo the deepest penetration (from Sagrado to Kostanjevica) was just 12 kilometers! This was too little to show after 2 ½ years of war. And the Army had paid a heavy cost in casualties - around 300,000 dead and 740,000 troops wounded between the start of the war and the eleventh battle of the Isonzo.<sup>450</sup> As in all armies, the best officers and bravest soldiers were among the casualties. When the high command created a large number of new regiments, there was a lack of the trained leaders who were so badly needed. Thus the new units watered down the overall cohesion of the Army. The result was that individual regiments were already performing feebly during the tenth Isonzo battle.

The eleventh battle had also failed to put an end to the war. When it was over, and the troops were told to stay in their permanent positions, the prospect of spending another winter in the trenches caused deep depression in some units. Defeatist propaganda from the interior, nourished by the Russian revolution, further undermined troop morale and increased the number of deserters. It was estimated that as of 1 November 1917 there were 66,000 deserters far behind the lines.<sup>451</sup> The morale of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army - the target of the allied offensive - was further reduced because of the unpopularity of many generals, in

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<sup>450</sup>This summary is drawn from Table 33 of Volume II of the Report of the Investigating Committee.

<sup>451</sup>Krafft, Vol. I, p. 164

particular the very energetic but cold-hearted Army commander G.Lt Capello. These were clearly the reasons why many regiments completely failed during the twelfth Isonzo battle and why in many instances troops surrendered to even weak allied detachments after a short resistance.

Another cause of the defeat was the constant changing of commanders. By October 1917 a total of 307 generals and colonels had been punished by removal from their commands. There were 24 changes in corps command during 10 months. One infantry regiment (the 144<sup>th</sup>) was being led in October 1917 by its 41<sup>st</sup> commander since the start of the war. Thus it's no wonder that when units were in critical situations their leaders often lacked the courage to take action on their own responsibility.<sup>452</sup> The Italian high command had recognized for a long time that morale was declining but their attempts to find remedies - as demonstrated by events during the twelfth Isonzo battle - were without success.

This brings us to the question of generalship. Without going into specific cases in which lower-ranking commanders could have exercised better judgment, we will address only the issue of the disposal of the army-level and strategic reserves. Although Cadorna, as narrated above, was accurately informed about the area where the allied attack was imminent, he kept his strong reserve forces too far to the south. Then, as the allies penetrated deep into the lines, the reserves were released in dribbles, and almost always just in an attempt to halt their opponents. The Italian high command had no intention of altering the situation with a strong, concentrated counterattack. Apparently Cadorna hadn't understood the concepts demonstrated in the other great defensive battles of the World War. Anyway, he had already lost confidence that his Army had the capability of carrying out such a difficult operation.<sup>453</sup>

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452A very full summary of the psychological condition of the Italian Army appears in the Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. II (pp. 442-537) and in Cabiati's "Ottobre 1917" (pp. 96-105). TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Another result of the constant upheavals in the chain of command was of course that the troops didn't get to know or trust their leaders. The problem was aggravated by the continual shuffling of brigades between various divisional HQ.

453Based on a letter from Marshal Cadorna to GdA Krafft on 30 September 1926

## ***C. The battle of Codroipo-Latisana, 28 October-1 November***

### **1. The advance to the Tagliamento**

#### **a. Prospects and orders**

##### The allies

During 27 October the allied commanders gained the impression that the enemy wanted all their units east of the Tagliamento to shortly withdraw behind this river. Their belief was founded on the quick withdrawal - at some points a flight - by the defeated 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, the silence of the radio stations hitherto in front of the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies, and the burning and demolition by the enemy of the enormous supply of military equipment they'd accumulated over time on the Comen plateau. Glare from the fires after the explosions could even be seen in the evening from Adelsberg. If the divisions of the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army, now far in advance, could keep moving they should quickly reach at least the Tagliamento, while the Italian main body were still south of the area where the breakthrough had occurred. Great new successes seemed to be on the horizon.

Therefore at 7:30 PM on 27 October Archduke Eugene issued an order to 14<sup>th</sup> Army and to Boroevic's Army Group, in which he stated: "Quick capture of the crossing points over the Tagliamento west of Codroipo might enable us to cut off the enemy's retreat. Therefore the left wing of 14<sup>th</sup> Army should advance through Udine in the direction of Codroipo. Orders for the advance of GO Boroevic's Army Group once they pass the line Udine-Cervignano will be issued when they do so, based on the situation at that time."

This command apparently was the result of an agreement earlier on the 27<sup>th</sup> between the HQ of the German 14<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Armies, according to which the left wing of 14<sup>th</sup> Army would aim at the bridges at Codroipo. The original line of advance by 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army was supposed to go through Codroipo, but since they were still engaged between the Korada and Mt Santo it would have been difficult for them to arrive at Codroipo in time to prevent the retreating 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army from crossing the swollen river.<sup>454</sup> Now the sector boundary between 14<sup>th</sup> Army and Boroevic's Army

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454Krafft, Vol. I, p. 159

Group was shifted from the line Udine - S Odorico - Pozzo south to the railroad Udine - Codroipo - Casarsa. To enable Below's Army to deliver a powerful thrust, Archduke Eugene reinforced him with 4 and 33 ID from the strategic reserves. For the same purpose GO Borojevic was holding 29 ID ready to transfer to 14<sup>th</sup> Army, along with - when possible - the HQ of IV Corps.

Here it should be recalled that the agreements concluded in Kreuznach provided for armed assistance by the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army only until the Tagliamento was reached. But GdI Below had always intended to lead his Army over the river in the event of a major victory.<sup>455</sup> Therefore, without obtaining approval from the German OHL he ordered his corps at 10:00 PM on 27 October to take the bridges over the Tagliamento at Ragogna, Dignano and Codroipo before the enemy could destroy them. For this purpose the groups would advance as follows:

- . Group Krauss: Colloredo - S Daniele (southern edge) - Vacile
- . Group Stein: Plaino - Silvella - Gradisca
- . Group Berrer: Chiavris - S Marco - Coderna - Arzenutto
- . Group Scotti: Along the railroad line (mentioned above) from Udine through Codroipo to Casarsa di Delizia.

In the afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup> GdI Henriquez still didn't have precise information about developments in the sectors of his corps. But he no longer thought it probable that the Italians would resist on the Korada and Mt Sabotino. He gave his Army the assignment of "pursuing the enemy to the southwest and into the plains, with the left wing passing directly by Cormons." Thus II Corps were supposed to take the heights between Ipplis and Corno di Rosazzo. The main body of XXIV Corps would advance on the heights north of Cormons, while only weak detachments were sent toward Hum and Podsabotin. Kosak's group, between these corps, was to advance through Nebola and then shift either to the right or left as the situation warranted. 29 ID, which would eventually be re-assigned to 14<sup>th</sup> Army, was staying near Levpa and Kal. IV Corps stayed by Salcano, and would also be re-assigned after both of the Isonzo armies had established a link between themselves west of the Isonzo.

For the 28<sup>th</sup>, FZM Wurm ordered XVI Corps to thrust through Görz to Cormons, while VII Corps decisively exploited their success to date by advancing to the Vallone and XXIII Corps moved ahead to Monfalcone. The advance of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army would unfold even though the Army was to be weakened by the high command's order (on 27 October) that 21 Sch Div and 106 Lst ID with their artillery brigades were to be sent to Tyrol as soon as the enemy

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455Krafft, Vol. I, p. 158; also Vol. II, p. 75



began to withdraw opposite Wurm. The k.u.k. AOK issued this order at a time when FM Conrad was requesting reinforcements so at the right moment he could join the offensive, as he had already on the 26<sup>th</sup> reported to Baden he intended to do.<sup>456</sup> But a thrust from south Tyrol couldn't take place for ten to fourteen days. Since it was desired that the Italians should fear a more immediate threat in this area, the German radio stations in south Tyrol continued to operate as a deceptive measure.

The instructions issued by the allies' upper command levels in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> envisioned the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army reaching the Tagliamento bridges between Ragogna and Codroipo as quickly as possible. 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army should advance from the hilly terrain of the Coglio southwest to the edge of the heights between Ippolis and Cormons. 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army should pursue the enemy directly to the west. The weak 10<sup>th</sup> Army were sent through Amaro and Tolmezzo into the area where the Tagliamento has its source. Furthermore the first measures were initiated to also fall upon the enemy's flank from the plateau of Sieben Gemeinde.

### The Italians

On the Italian side, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies were to pull back in stages to the Tagliamento as ordered by Cadorna. The Carnic Group were to retreat, without pausing, into the foothills of the Venetian Alps in the bend of the Tagliamento. But Cadorna wasn't planning a long defense behind the Tagliamento, which was only momentarily a major barrier thanks to the high level of the waters. He only wanted to give the battered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army a short pause to catch their breath and then - as he had envisioned ever since 24 October - he would lead all his forces back onto the mountain massif of the Grappa and behind the Piave. He believed that the four intact corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army weren't strong enough by themselves to hold the 75 km line along the Meduna and Tagliamento Rivers between Mt Corda (10 km northwest of the village of Meduno) and the sea. Also he feared a simultaneous attack by Conrad's Army Group from south Tyrol, which if successful would cut off the retreat of any Italian forces still in eastern Venetia. Therefore he would fight on the Tagliamento only to gain time.<sup>457</sup>

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456GdA Krafft writes that a thrust from south Tyrol had also been suggested at Baden by the HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ on the 27<sup>th</sup> (Krafft, Vol. I, pp. 135 and 156). But no trace of this suggestion has been found in the documents of the k.u.k. AOK.

457Based on Cadorna's letter to GdA Krafft dated 30 September 1926.

General Montuori divided his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army into three groups, which were supposed to hold an intermediate position until early on 28 October. On the left General Etna's group (IV Corps plus 16 and 21 ID) was adjacent to the Carnic Group and held the area from Trasaghis to Qualso. His 2 CD guarded the valley of the Torre between Tarcento and Nimis. The central group under General Conte Petitti (XXVIII, VII and XXVII Corps) were to hold their ground behind the Torre from Qualso to Pradamano and also on the hills down to Manzano. From here as far as Podgora General Ferrero's right wing group (XXIV, II and VI Corps) held a front facing north between Manzano and Podgora to cover the withdrawal of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, whose HQ were established temporarily at Codroipo, was withholding the order to retreat to the Tagliamento.

The Duke of Aosta, commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, recognized in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> that the allies' breakthrough at Cividale placed his force in serious danger of being cut off. Therefore he declined to carry out the planned evacuation of the Karst plateau in stages, and devoted all his efforts to protecting his quick retreat behind the Tagliamento against threats from the north and east. For this purpose the 4 ID, reinforced to four brigades, were to cover the Army's march in bridgeheads on the lower Torre and on the Sdobba (the lower part of the Isonzo). Furthermore, four brigades (one from each of the corps) were placed under a unified command to hold a second rear-guard position farther in the rear (from S Maria la Longa through Palmanova and Torre Zuino to the mouth of the Aussa).

According to Cadorna's order, the defense of the Tagliamento as far as Trasaghis was the responsibility of the Carnic Group. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were responsible from this point down to and including the bridges by C. Pte. d. Delizia (west of Codroipo), and then 3<sup>rd</sup> Army south to the sea. The Special Corps (20 and 33 ID) were, as mentioned earlier, being sent by rail to Pinzano so they could protect the especially important crossing points between this village and Cornino.<sup>458</sup>

## **b. The Italians retreat in the Carnic and Julian Alps (28-29 October)**

On 28 October the allies advanced rapidly everywhere in the area between the Plöcken Pass and the sea, despite atrocious stormy and rainy weather.

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458Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 189 ff.

Under 10<sup>th</sup> Army the troop movements which GO Krobotin had initiated for the attack were still in progress when the enemy on his front began to retreat behind the upper Tagliamento in the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup>. The Italian withdrawal didn't remain hidden from the watchful 94 ID of FML Edler von Lawrowski, who'd been instructed to advance if his opponents retreated toward Paluzza. That evening III Bn of the Bohemian IR 18 stormed the Gr. Pal<sup>459</sup>, and during the night which followed the 25 Mtn Bde were already advancing through the Plöcken Pass to Timau. In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> the 94 ID - now placed directly under 10<sup>th</sup> Army HQ - entered the towns of Paluzza (25 Mtn Bde) and Paularo (57 Mtn Bde), which had been evacuated by the enemy. They were now ready to pivot to the west; the group led by Col. Edler von Fasser, still stationed on the Carinthian crest between Mt Peralba and Lake Wolayer, would be the pivot for this maneuver.

The eastern wing of 10<sup>th</sup> Army had been placed under GdI Hordt. 29 Mtn Bde, ordered to thrust through the Aupa valley to Moggio, took Pontebba on the 28<sup>th</sup> and reached Grauzaria on the 29<sup>th</sup>. 59 Mtn Bde were sent toward Resiutta. Their northern group captured the Somdogna ridge on the 28<sup>th</sup> while the southern group pushed into the Raccolana valley, where the leading troops reached Saletto. On the next day the Brigade spent the night at Chiusaforte; the garrison of this strong Italian fortress had been ordered to hold out to the last man, but instead had surrendered to k.u.k. FJB 30.<sup>460</sup>

On 29 October the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army HQ took over the Italian Carnic Group (as XII Corps) to ensure that the retreat would continue under a unified command. Under XII Corps the 26 ID reached Ampezzo by evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>; 36 ID and the main body of 63 ID came to the right bank of the Tagliamento south of Villa Santina and Tolmezzo. The bridge over the Fella at Stazione per la Carnia was destroyed. Parts of 63 ID plus several Alpini battalions crossed the Tagliamento at Braulins and then blew up the bridge.<sup>461</sup>

In conjunction with the retreat of the Italians' XII Corps, the right wing of their 4<sup>th</sup> Army began to pull back from the front on

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459TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original edition gave FJB 8 credit for storming the Gr. Pal; per the errata issued with Volume VII this was corrected to show Bn III/18.

460Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, p. 222

461Murari, "Un episodio di guerra nella prealpi carniche" (Milan, 1935), p. 92

the 29<sup>th</sup>, abandoning the Winkler and Tilliach ridges.

On the northern wing of Below's Army, Group Krauss continued their difficult march through the mountains on the 28<sup>th</sup>, seeking to reach the lower Fella valley and the plains at Gemona and Tarcento.

The Edelweiss Division, reinforced by the German Jaeger Division, were able on the 28<sup>th</sup> to capture several mountain positions north of S Giorgio with their right-hand column; the group in the valley captured this town itself. Next day GM Wieden first hurled back some Italian rear guards, then in the evening took Resiutta. This opened the way into the Fella valley. KJR 3, serving as the left-hand column, advanced through Musi; on the 28<sup>th</sup> they captured the heights farther west (the Forcella Musi) which blocked the path down to Venzone. On the 29<sup>th</sup> the advanced guard of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kaiser Jaeger had reached the Costa Mageron.<sup>462</sup>

The snow storm slackened in the Rombon area, enabling 216 Inf Bde to finally secure the Prevala Gap on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The gallant defenders, whose retreat was cut off by the advance of 59 Mtn Bde, gave up; around 200 Italians along with 6 guns fell into the hands of IR 59, which had overcome extraordinary trials on this wild, rocky terrain.<sup>463</sup> The main body of Spiess' Brigade then followed Group Wieden and spent the night of 29-30 October in Saga.

The 22 Sch Div continued their march from Monteaperta and Platschitis on the 28<sup>th</sup>; first they reached Villanova and sent one battalion apiece to the ridge by Kreuz (Point 1093, three km south of Gemona) and to Vedronza. Then, without any artillery, they moved against the group of Italian fortifications on Mt la Bernadia, the key to which was the armored work at Lonza. It turned out that the forts had no guns; they were taken by the quickly advancing Schützen after a short action. Advanced guards thereupon pushed ahead to Tarcento, where they found the wild waters of the Torre to be an insurmountable obstacle, since the enemy had blown up the bridge. Several Alpini battalions still stationed on the opposite bank fired over the stream.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> the 98 K-Sch Bde of Müller's Division advanced to Montenars. The battalion from the ridge near Kreuz (# 1093) pushed into Gemona and thus brought the central point of the "North Friuli" fortified camp into our possession. Soon afterwards the Italians blew up their works on Heights 571 (east

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462Schemfil, "KJR. 3 im Weltkrieg", p. 486

463Hoen, "IR. 59 im Weltkrieg", pp. 613 ff.

of Ospedaletto). During the night, as already noted, the Tagliamento bridge at Braulins also flew into the air. In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> the main body of 22 Sch Div managed to build a makeshift bridge at Tarcento and brought the leading troops over the Torre in the direction of the heights near Buja, crowned by several small villages.

The 50 ID had to leave behind all their horses because of the swollen torrents; on the 28<sup>th</sup>, while engaged in unimportant skirmishing, they reached the goals they had been set for the 27<sup>th</sup> - S Gervasio and Attimis. On the next day they were only able to send two battalions ahead to Martinazzo. The Division's main body had to wait at S Gervasio for crossing-points to be completed over the high waters of the Torrente Cornappo. 55 ID, which spent the night of 28-29 October at Platschitis, followed 22 Sch Div on the 29<sup>th</sup> and came up to Nimis and Molmentet.

GdI Krauss, who entered Nimis on the 29<sup>th</sup>, could look upon the efforts and achievements of his troops with great satisfaction. In six days of fighting and marching through difficult mountain terrain their right wing had driven the enemy past the Fella and the Tagliamento, while the left wing had forced open the outlet into the plains.

### **c. The Italian front is broken along the Torre (28 October)**

#### 14<sup>th</sup> German Army

On 28 October the main body of Below's Army, which had already broken through at and east of Cividale, achieved significant new successes.

G.Lt Stein had assigned the sector from Majano to Pagnacco to the 12 German ID, and the area farther south as far as Udine to the Alpenkorps. The advance of these widely-extended divisions was very difficult because of the swollen streams which raged through the valleys both in front of and behind the troops. On the other hand, the enemy's rapid retreat at first made it easy for the Germans to advance. 12 ID came up without fighting from Faedis to Savorgnano and Primulacco, where they were halted by the Torre. The Alpenkorps were supposed to advance from Ronchis and Ziracco to the hills by Torreano, but were only able to reach Belvedere and Salt with their foremost detachments. The troops at Salt were able to seize an undamaged bridge with a quick assault, and then pushed forward to Godia. The German 117 ID

occupied the quarters which the Alpenkorps had left behind. 13 Sch Div reached the area Robic-Suzid.

Both divisions of Berrer's group continued to march forward without pausing through the stormy, rainy night of 27-28 October so they could reach the objective assigned by Army HQ, a line between Plaino and the northern edge of Udine. 200 ID advanced through Grions. At dawn their vanguard crossed the Torre, which here was fordable, overran the enemy at Beivars, and thus ripped asunder the front of VII Italian Corps. After repulsing a mounted cavalry attack, the leading battalion (18<sup>th</sup> Reserve Jaeger) reached the northern edge of Udine around 10:00 AM. Inside the city, which had been evacuated by most of the population, Italian soldiers and a skulking rabble were plundering the empty residences and shops. The Battalion now entered Udine; it was difficult to process the numerous Italian prisoners, especially since detachments of the enemy XXVII Corps were trying to drive the Germans back out of the city from the south and west. But after the arrival of reinforcements the occupation of Udine was complete. That evening the 200 ID were stationed farther northwest, at Feletto Umberto and Colugna.

Simultaneously with 200 ID, at dawn the German 26 ID crossed the Torre east of S Gottardo. Here the Corps commander G.Lt Berrer, driving to the foremost line in a truck, was killed in action.<sup>464</sup> 26 ID extended their penetration of the Italian front and were at Udine in the evening. The Division's commander, G.Lt Hofacker, took Berrer's place in charge of the group.

The deep penetration by 200 and 26 ID had split the Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army into two parts. The groups of Etna and Petitti (IV, XXVIII, VII and XXVII Corps) fell back during the 28<sup>th</sup> to the line Tarcento - Tavagnacco - S Vito di Fagagna. But in the evening Ferrero's group (XXIV, II and VI Corps) were still on the line Buttrio in Piano - Manzano - Podgora. Thus there were no combat troops on the road from Udine to Codroipo; but along this route supply and artillery detachments of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were hastening, along with countless wagons carrying the possessions of anxious civilians, toward the bridges over the Tagliamento at C. Pte. d. Delizia (which were in the sector of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army). Mass panic and faulty traffic control caused the vehicles to jam up during the night in front of the bridges. The traffic jam soon extended back along the entire highway through Codroipo as far as Campoformido, creating an obstacle 20 km long.

Scotti's Corps and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army pushed against G.Lt

464Krafft, Vol. II, p. 40

Ferrero's right-wing group of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army. Scotti was instructed to advance through Udine toward the Tagliamento between Rivis and the railroad bridge at C. Pte. d. Delizia. The main body of his 5 German ID came forward without fighting to Remanzacco and Orzano; one regiment even reached Udine. Because of various delays the k.u.k. 1 ID didn't start moving toward their objectives (Selvis and Cerneglons) until 4:00 PM, and their foremost troops only reached Firmano; thus the Division fell substantially behind 5 German ID.

2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army

Under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, after the capture of the Korada the II Corps and Kosak's group assembled on the 28<sup>th</sup> in the area where the Recca flows into the Judrio. In GdI Kaiser's II Corps the 57 ID reached Dolegna and Vercoglia. 28 ID reached Prepotto, Colobrida and Senico, although parts of the Division still hung back on the Isonzo at Ajba. Because of the high waters the military bridge at Auzza had to be taken apart. Meanwhile the 60 ID of Kosak's group, climbing down from the Korada, marched to Venco. 35 ID, which had to drive back enemy troops still holding out southwest of Plava early in the day, advanced to S Lorenza di Nebola.

Under GdI Lukas' XXIV Corps, early on 28 October all of 24 ID had crossed to the western bank of the Isonzo at Plava. The Corps advanced through Verhovlje to the heights north of Cormons and took 60 Italian officers and 3000 men as prisoners. 53 ID, following the 24<sup>th</sup>, fought their way forward as they climbed the heights at Quisca and Hum. They were in touch with 58 ID, which was advancing on the right wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army. The IV Corps stayed in place except for sending Honved detachments to climb Mt Sabotino.

Ferrero's group opposite 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army had, as ordered, taken a stand facing north along the Pradamano-Görz rail line. XXIV Italian Corps made up the left wing as far as Cormons; II Corps were stationed from here to a point west of Lucinico, and VI Corps held a hook-shaped position around the latter village.

Although the lines of G.Lt Montuori's Army had been broken at Udine, he wanted to still offer resistance on the Torre and on the Pradamano-Lucinico line until the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>, apparently so his supply trains could escape. Therefore he instructed that any local penetrations by the allies should be sealed off; as yet there would be no general retreat. The divisions engaged with the enemy would finally start to withdraw behind the Tagliamento in the night of 29-30 October. Montuori intended to have Etna's and Petitti's groups retreat in one bound, while Ferrero's group carried out two marches. The latter group would share the roads to Viscone and Versa with 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. Montuori asked the high command if 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could also make use of the bridges west of Codroipo, but Cadorna refused.<sup>465</sup>

Thus the retreat of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, and of its right wing in particular, would be carried out under very difficult

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circumstances, especially since high water had damaged the bridge at Bonzicco and the military bridges at S Odorico and Rivis. Still wanting to enable his right wing to cross the river near Codroipo, Montuori made an agreement directly with the HQ of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.<sup>466</sup> Meanwhile a steady stream of vehicles, fleeing soldiers and local civilians was already heading to the bridges. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's retreat was beginning to look like a rout.

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

Under 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army, FML Freih. von Zeidler's 58 ID (of XVI Corps) mopped up Görz in street fighting. With an envelopment movement to the north they captured the Podgora Heights, the scene of severe fighting in earlier Isonzo battles. In this action, which continued until dawn on the 29<sup>th</sup>, the Division took more than 2000 prisoners, plus 16 guns and 20 machine guns. High water in the Isonzo kept 14 ID on the eastern bank by Mainizza. The 44<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Divisions of VII Corps reached the river between the mouth of the Wippach and S Pietro d. Isonzo. Under 17 ID in the center, IR 39 were able to quickly cross to the western bank before a new cloudburst descended on the Isonzo. In XXIII Corps, adjacent to the south, the leading troops of 41 Hon ID had already taken the Monfalcone railroad station at 7:00 AM. By evening the Honved Division were at Turriaco, 10 ID in front of the demolished bridges at Pieris, and 12 ID at S Canziano. Since the Italians had broken the dam in the Isonzo at Cassegliano, the river had flooded the area farther south.

In front of Wurm's Army the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army were hastening to the rear; they already had the Isonzo behind them by 10:30 AM on the 28<sup>th</sup>. By evening the troops were pausing for a brief night-time rest as follows - XI Corps at Castions di Strada, XXIII at S Giorgio di Nogaro, VIII north of Palmanova, and XIII Corps farther south. The 1 CD and 4 ID held a rear guard position on the lower courses of the Torre and the Isonzo. But east of the northern wing of this rear guard almost all of Ferrero's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army group were still in place.

### Further plans of the opposing forces

The long pause by Ferrero's group was consistent with the plans of Cadorna, who believed it was still possible to bring 3<sup>rd</sup> Army back to the shelter of the western bank of the Tagliamento without sustaining significant damage. This was also the intention of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's commander, the Duke of Aosta. He told VIII Corps that if the allies eventually attacked the flank from

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466Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 243

Udine they were to be met with a counter-thrust. 1 CD was responsible for protecting the flank between Mortegliano and the Tagliamento. In addition, each of the four corps were to detach one brigade to constitute a second rear guard. These wide-ranging defensive measures were justified. Aosta's situation was already quite dangerous due to the flow of a mass of disorganized troops and supply trains from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army into his area, the menace to the bridge at Madrisio from high water (which also prevented the planned construction of four emergency bridges), and especially the rapid advance of the Germans through Udine.

In contrast to the somber mood in the Italian camp, spirits were high at the HQ in Baden and Marburg, as well as in the immediate entourage of Emperor Charles, who along with the Chief of the General Staff was visiting the higher-ranking commanders on the Isonzo front on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup>. But precise information about the developments on the 28<sup>th</sup> was still lacking. It was known that Cividale, the Korada and Görz had been taken. From Italian wireless messages it was inferred that Udine and Osoppo would soon be evacuated. Also it was learned from an Italian Army report that the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had been shattered in the Julian Alps; this report included an unusually harsh complaint by Cadorna concerning the conduct of many of this Army's troops. Since the AOK learned that the enemy wished to reinforce the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, they agreed with HQ of Southwestern front that the reserves which had hitherto been held back (13, 4 and 33 ID) should be sent as quickly as possible to our own northern wing.

Now from all sides there was a call for cavalry, bicycles and armored cars to aid in the pursuit. Requests came from I Corps HQ, and also from 5 German ID as that unit approached Cividale. But the k.u.k. high command no longer possessed any mounted cavalry divisions. The few bicycle companies were stationed either in the Puster valley or on the coast, and there were hardly any armored cars. No doubt some resources could have been made available (at least from our allies) if plans had been made earlier. But no one had expected a success of this magnitude. Moreover it's questionable whether mounted cavalry could have moved quickly enough through the narrow valleys.

*Archduke Eugene intended - as he informed the high command and Generals Boroevic and Below on the 28<sup>th</sup> - that after reaching the line Udine-Cervignano both Isonzo Armies should continue to advance due west; the border between the 14<sup>th</sup> German and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Armies would be a line from the southern edge of Udine through Tomba and S Odorico to Pozzo. Below's divisions*

*maneuvering south of this line would come under GO Boroovic's command until they were replaced by the latter's own units coming up from the rear. The Archduke also planned to resume direct control over Krauss' Corps.*

Thus the principal goals of the allied generals on the 28<sup>th</sup> were to immediately pursue the Italians toward the west, to capture the crossing-points on the Tagliamento, and to reinforce the northern wing of the attacking front. The HQ at Baden and Marburg already intended to continue the pursuit over the Tagliamento. But it seems that on the 28<sup>th</sup> the Chief of the General Staff was not very receptive to this idea, as he informed the HQ of Boroevic's Army Group during a visit to Adelsberg.<sup>467</sup>

#### **d. Pursuit continues in the plains (29 October)**

##### 14<sup>th</sup> German Army

HQ of the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army didn't issue any new orders for the 29<sup>th</sup>. It was hoped that although the troops were a day's march behind the Italians, the latter would be held up by the traffic jams on the Tagliamento and thus it would still be possible to do some damage along the river.<sup>468</sup> Early on the 29<sup>th</sup> GdI Below and his immediate associates left Krainburg and moved to Cividale. Meanwhile his central and left wing corps were continuing their pursuit.

Early on the 29<sup>th</sup> Stein's group still hadn't received the Army order issued in the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>. Their two foremost divisions were advancing respectively north and south of the line Fagagna-Rodeana-Spilimbergo; they were supposed to seize the crossing-points on the Tagliamento. Caporiacco was reached by the 12 German ID, and Fagagna and S Vito di Fagagna by the Alpenkorps. Behind them the 117 ID came up to Savorgnano and Primulacco, the 13 Sch Div to Povoletto and Ronchis.

G.Lt Hofacker became aware early on the 29<sup>th</sup> of the Army order of the 27<sup>th</sup>, which instructed his group to advance between the lines Plaino - Silvella - Gradisca and Chiavris - S Marco - Arzenutto. In light fighting the 200 ID reached Cisterna and Flaibano; scouts found that it was still impossible to ford the Tagliamento and that the bridge at Bonzicco was destroyed. With hardly any fighting the 26 ID came up to Meretto di Toma and sent advanced guards forward to the Tagliamento.

Thanks to the rapid tempo of the troops, the northern and central

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<sup>467</sup>Based on diary entries of GM Anton Ritter von Pitreich, who at that time was Chief of the Operational Detachment of Boroevic's Army Group HQ.

<sup>468</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, p. 48

groups of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army were able to carry out their retreat without feeling much pressure from their opponents. But the fugitives were throwing away all equipment that encumbered them, including weapons; to the pursuers this was an obvious indication of the extent of their success. Since the high waters had destroyed the bridge at Bonzicco, G.Lt Montuori ordered Etna's group to Cornino and Petitti's group - which originally was supposed to cross over at Bonzicco - to the bridge at Pinzano; he sent Ferrero's group toward Codroipo. Now the main body of IV Italian Corps crossed the Tagliamento at Cornino; XXVIII Corps, along with the remnants of VII Corps, crossed at Ragogna. There was still a bridgehead east of the river; it was held by two divisions of IV Corps (16 and 34 ID), deployed on the Ledra Canal and by S Daniele di Friuli, and farther south by XXVII Corps as far as Villanova. The 2 Cav Div, which sought with several gallant attacks to check the German divisions advancing from Udine, in the evening was also on the Ledra Canal (near Majano). The Special Corps prepared for rear guard actions on the western bank of the Tagliamento between Peonis and Pinzano.<sup>469</sup>

The southern group of Montuori's Army had to deal with the thrust by Scotti's group. FML Scotti, who'd ridden forward from Slap to Kambresko on the 28<sup>th</sup>, had lost contact with 5 German ID. The commander of this Division, GM Wedel, had to deal with the possibility of an Italian thrust against his flank because the k.u.k. 1 ID was lagging far behind; therefore he planned to first concentrate at Udine early on the 29<sup>th</sup> while sending outposts to guard toward the south and southwest. Meanwhile the leading regiment (the 12<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers) had already broken through toward Codroipo; although held up by traffic on the roads, they threw back an Italian cavalry brigade and in the evening reached Basagliapenta. IR 52, lightly engaged, came up to Campoformido. But south of Udine the third regiment (8<sup>th</sup> Leib Grenadiers) became involved in a lively action, in which a battalion from 1 ID intervened. The main body of 1 ID reached the eastern edge of Udine.

Far behind the front, on the 29<sup>th</sup> the divisions of the strategic reserve (33 and 4 ID) were finally able to begin their advance. They marched as far as Tolmein and Woltschach.

The thrusts by 26 German ID and by Scotti's group in the direction of Codroipo greatly complicated G.Lt Ferrero's plans for the retreat. Therefore XXIV Corps took up a position with a division of Bersaglieri by Pasian di prato, two infantry

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<sup>469</sup>Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 217 ff.

divisions between Mortegliano, Pozzuolo and Campoformido, and two more divisions between Basagliapenta and Meretta di Tomba. This was necessary to cover the withdrawal through Codroipo by the two other divisions of this Corps, along with II and VI Corps plus the northern wing of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

But these somewhat intricate movements weren't carried out as foreseen. South of Udine the Bersaglieri of 47 ID were quite roughly handled by their opponents, and occupation of the other intended rear guard positions was rendered impossible by the regiments of the 26<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> German Divisions. By evening three Italian divisions were stationed between Basagliapenta and Mortegliano. After darkness fell, the Bersaglieri broke off from the action in which they'd been engaged west of Pradamano. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Bde of 1 CD were at Pozzuolo while the Division's 1<sup>st</sup> Bde - as mentioned above - had been thrown forward to Codroipo. Three divisions from XXIV Corps and one from II Corps forced their way through the completely-clogged streets of Codroipo and over the bridges to the western bank of the Tagliamento. Around midnight the main body of II Corps were approaching Mortegliano; farther south VI Corps were marching on both of the roads leading to Codroipo.

And both of the northern corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were also aiming for the bridges west of Codroipo. So that they could quickly and safely cross the river, the Duke of Aosta asked Cadorna to have the right wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army hold on for as long as possible in their covering position facing north. Thus the XI and parts of VII Corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were moving ahead of VI Corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The main body of VIII Corps had to spend the night of 29-30 October, just like the previous night, north of Palmanova. The two southern corps (XIII and XXIII) reached the Tagliamento during the 29<sup>th</sup> and began to cross over at Madrisio (on a hurriedly restored bridge) and at Latisana. The march to the rear was covered toward the east by the four brigades of the rear guard on a line between Palmanova and the mouth of the Aussa. In the evening twilight these brigades pulled back to the Stella and relinquished responsibility for covering the rear to 4 ID, which had taken up a position on the Cormor Brook.<sup>470</sup> The VI, II and VIII Corps were still closer to the enemy in the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> than was this rear guard.

#### Borojevic's Army Group

Borojevic's Army Group continued their advance on the 29<sup>th</sup>, while fighting engagements at some points during the pursuit. Because

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470Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 257

of the acute shortage of horses for the supply trains and artillery, the troops were supposed to live off the land while teams of captured or requisitioned animals were being improvised to move guns and wagons.

Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army the II Corps reached Cerneglons and Pradamano with 28 ID, Buttrio and Oleis with 57 ID. The night quarters of Group Kosak were: Percotto, Camino and Soleschiano for 60 ID; Corno di Rosazzo and Venco for 35 ID; Nebola and Vercoglia for 9 ID. The 24 ID of XXIV Corps were halted at S Giovanni di Manzano because of the destruction of the bridge. 53 ID - which took 1800 prisoners and 40 guns during their pursuit actions - entered Cormons where they were greeted by the population.

At noon the 58 ID of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army also entered Cormons; by the end of the fighting at the Podgora Heights (early on 29 October) they had reported the capture of 2000 prisoners, 16 guns and 20 machine guns. The other Division of XVI Corps (14 ID) had crossed the Isonzo by Mainizza; in light fighting their advanced guard came up to Fratta, but the area where the Division camped for the night reached back to Farra. The main body of GM Ritter von Soretic's new 63 ID marched through Görz. At their head Emperor Charles himself, accompanied by his Chief of the General Staff and by GO Boroevic, rode on horseback into the recaptured city. VII Corps were halted at the destroyed bridges. Finally toward noon the railroad bridge at Sagrado was usable; here the infantry of 44 ID and half of 48 ID crossed the river by evening. Meanwhile in early afternoon a plank bridge was ready for XXIII Corps at Peiris. The first men to cross made up an *ad hoc* detachment from 10 ID, which marched through Cervignano to Torre Zuino. Then one infantry regiment of 10 ID also crossed the river during the 29<sup>th</sup>. The HQ of the Trieste Sector initiated the first measures to extend the coastal defenses past Duino.

In the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> the parts of the Italian forces stationed in Friuli found themselves in an extraordinarily critical situation. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had been completely torn asunder. Their main body - twelve divisions, some of them reduced to tiny remnants - were deployed in an arc on the Tagliamento between Ampezzo and Spilimbergo. Four infantry divisions plus the 2 CD were covering the crossing points over the river at Cornino and Pinzano in a bridgehead position on the eastern bank. The "North Friuli" fortified camp (in which most of the works didn't have any guns) was also supposed to cover the approaches to the Tagliamento, but it had already been penetrated at Gemona and

Tarcento.<sup>471</sup>

All twelve divisions of the southern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were still on the eastern bank of the Tagliamento between Codroipo and the Torre. Along with the two northern corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, they were supposed to cross the river on the bridges at C. Pte. d. Delizia. Thus five Italian corps (XXIV, II, VI, XI and VIII) were menaced from the flank by Groups Hofacker and Scotti between the Tagliamento and Udine, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army - which had already advanced to the Torre and the Natisone - was on their heels. There was less concern for the two southern corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (XIII and XXIII), which had already begun to cross the river at Madrisio and Natisone and moreover had two rear-guard forces to protect them from pursuit by 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army. The burning question which faced the Italian generals in the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> was whether they could save the five corps in the deep sack extending to the east.

## **2. The attempt to cut off the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army**

### **a. Decisions and orders for 30 October**

#### The Central Powers

Because of poor telephone connections, the higher-level allied HQ didn't have a clear picture of the situation as it had developed by the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>. Bad weather made it difficult to communicate by wireless broadcasts. Moreover the HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army were still in Sesana and Unt. Loitsch, those of Boroevic's Army Group in Adelsberg, of 10<sup>th</sup> Army in Villach and of the Southwestern Front at Marburg. Only GdI Below had moved his HQ forward - to Cividale on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Here he received an important suggestion for the continuing offensive from G.Lt Hofacker.

Hofacker had recognized that his group and that of G.Lt Stein were in a very favorable advanced position, deep in the enemy's front, and that parts of the Italians' 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and all of their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were still standing east of the Tagliamento. He believed that after Codroipo was captured it would be possible to cut off substantial parts of the enemy host with a thrust south to Latisana. With this in mind, Hofacker proposed to send 200 ID

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471Heydendorff, "Die Rolle der Tagliamento-befestigungen 1915-1917" in Mil. wiss. Mitt. (Vienna, 1934 issues, pp. 390 ff.)



toward Codroipo, while 26 and 5 ID pivoted to the south on both sides of the Stella. He had already taken the initiative of discussing this plan directly with 5 ID, which had lost touch with their own group HQ (FML Scotti's).

HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army approved most of Hofacker's plan. But they still intended to also pursue the completely defeated 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army onto the western bank of the Tagliamento. A thrust to the south on this bank would naturally lead to an even greater success than Hofacker envisioned. But since it wasn't certain that the Germans could quickly cross the wide river bed, now filled with rising waters, the operation on the eastern bank toward Latisana would also be undertaken. GdI Below issued the necessary orders for his plan - which would take both possibilities into account - at Cividale around 10:00 PM on 29 October.

Below instructed the groups of Generals Krauss, Stein and Hofacker to continue their pursuit over the Tagliamento between the foot of the mountains and S Vito "until the Italian armies are destroyed." He assumed this responsibility on his own authority, although he had as yet to receive permission to advance over the Tagliamento from the OHL. Scotti's group (reinforced by 117 ID from Stein's) were to "thrust past the line Basagliapenta-Pozzuolo-Lauzacco in the general direction of Latisana." Furthermore the 4 and 33 ID of the strategic reserves were instructed to move ahead to Robic and Karfreit.<sup>472</sup>

Due to the faulty communication connections to the HQ of Southwestern Front, Boroovic's Army Group and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, this order which GdI Below issued in the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> wasn't known to them, although it would have a major impact on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. The Front HQ at Marburg also had no knowledge of the gains which 14<sup>th</sup> Army had won on the 29<sup>th</sup>. They knew only that the Germans had advanced past Cividale and that Henriquez's Army had reached the Torre. Archduke Eugene now planned to continue the advance over the Tagliamento; however, he wouldn't assign new goals until he was informed about 14<sup>th</sup> Army's situation. Thus neither Baden nor Marburg issued new orders on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The high command only provided for the transfer of 43 Sch Div to their east Galician homeland. 9 ID were assigned to IV Corps to replace the Galician Schützen. This Corps plus 29 ID were placed under Southwestern Front HQ rather than Boroovic, and sent ahead to Udine.

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<sup>472</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, pp. 66 ff. and 72 ff. Hofacker, "Die Krisis der italienischen Armee im Oktober 1917" (in Militär-Wochenblatt; Berlin, 1921, Issue 12)

As Borojevic's Army Group moved closer to the line Udine-Cervignano, he chose to regard as an order the intention of Southwestern Front HQ that his armies should continue to advance directly to the west. Therefore he instructed 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to advance into the area south of the line Orzano - central Udine - Tomba - S Odorico - Pozzo, and 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army into the area south of the line Cormons - Medeuzza - S Maria la Longa - Mortegliano - S Vidotto. These orders would inevitably cause the columns of the inner wings of Below's and Henriquez's Armies to collide on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

### The Entente

The primary goal of the Italian high command was naturally to have the divisions still east of the Tagliamento retreat behind this protective barrier, while avoiding any actions that weren't necessary for the security of the operation. Then the most battle-worthy units would defend the western bank, allowing the damaged parts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to move behind the lines to the area between Brenta and Bacchiglione for rehabilitation.<sup>473</sup> For now 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were to pay greater attention to the mountain front, particularly the sector between Mt Festa (which was crowned by a fortification armed with guns) and the village of Ragogna.

Cadorna was also concerned about the Tyrolean front, where a breakthrough could lead to the total encirclement of his forces. Therefore 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would shift a corps of two divisions to Brescia and another of three divisions to Thiene, Bassano and Cittadella, in the area south of the Sieben Gemeinde.

Cadorna still intended to continue the retreat to the Piave. He planned, as mentioned earlier, to build a new defensive front behind the lower course of the Piave and through the heights between Mt Grappa and the Altissimo. Then 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would hold the front from the sea to the Montello with four corps (including VI Corps, taken from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army). 4<sup>th</sup> Army would be stationed between the Montello and Mt Grappa, also with four corps plus four divisions which had been promised by the French. 1<sup>st</sup> Army would still hold the positions farther west.

News of the catastrophic defeat of the Italians caused consternation in the capitals of the two Western powers, and within their high commands. In Paris the Italian setback was compared to the Battle of Sedan. With some guilt for not heeding Italy's earlier requests for armed assistance, the Entente

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<sup>473</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 513

countries now prepared counter-measures.<sup>474</sup> They decided to send units to the Italians, while reinforcing their own attacks already under way in Flanders and northeast of Soissons so as to draw German troops out of Italy if possible. The first contingents of the French and English divisions left for Venetia on 29 October. The French Chief of the General Staff, General Foch, visited the HQ of the Italian high command in person on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **b. The thrust to Codroipo and Latisana (30-31 October)**

The rapid advance of the allies through Udine greatly troubled G.Lt Ferrero, since they threatened to interfere with the withdrawal of his three corps over the bridges west of Codroipo. With the consent of the Duke of Aosta, Ferrero instructed VIII Corps (of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army) to protect his group while they crossed the river. 59 ID of VIII Corps took up a bridgehead position on the line Villaorba-Basagliapenta-Lestizza. Several units - including March formations totaling 4000 men - were assigned to guard the bridges themselves. The main body of VIII Corps (7 and 48 ID) plus 1 CD were supposed to relieve the pressure against Codroipo with counterattacks; they made up three groups which advanced in the direction of Campoformido, Orgnano and Pasiàn Schiavonesco.<sup>475</sup>

#### 30 October - Actions of 14<sup>th</sup> Army and the k.u.k. II Corps

Under Hofacker's group the main body of 200 ID stayed in their quarters during the 30<sup>th</sup>, although parts moved closer to the Tagliamento. 26 ID advanced from Meretto di Tomba toward Codroipo. On their right, one battalion from each division moved along the river bank. These two battalions broke through the enemy guarding the bridges, deployed south of the permanent works. They stormed boldly through the massed Italian soldiers who'd been waiting to cross the river and reached the crossing points. They found the highway bridge already destroyed. Just before the arrival of the Germans the enemy blew up the railroad bridge as well as the military bridge which had been erected farther south. The two battalions captured 12,000 prisoners.

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<sup>474</sup>Foch, Vol. II, Section XXXVI. H.M., "La vérité sur la guerre 1914-1918" (Paris, 1930), Vol. II, p. 93. Herbillon, "Souvenirs d'un officier de liaison pendant la guerre mondiale" (Paris, 1930), pp. 155 ff. Palat, "La part de Foch dans la Victoire" (Paris, 1930), p. 118

<sup>475</sup>Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 241 ff. Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 272

After the bridges were destroyed neither side could cross the river, especially since warm winds were causing more rain to fall, further raising the river level. Only 67 ID of XXIV Corps had been able to reach the western bank on the 30<sup>th</sup> before the explosions. The Italian columns which came up later were forced to turn to the south.

Meanwhile 26 ID were engaged in hard fighting around Codroipo. G.Lt Ferrero, whose HQ were in the city, personally led the defenders. Finally the Württemberg troops won the victory after darkness fell; they took in 15,000 prisoners and an enormous amount of military equipment. The remnants of 59 Italian ID, which had offered most of the resistance, fell back to the south.

Group Scotti had been instructed to carry out the thrust to the southwest. They sent 5 German ID forward in two columns through Rivolto and Flambro toward Rivignano, 117 ID through Pozzuolo and Talmassons toward Torsa, and the k.u.k. 1 ID through Mortegliano. 5 ID engaged in lively actions with Italian columns which were still marching from east to west; very often halted by abandoned enemy gear which clogged the roads, the Germans didn't reach Rivolto, Bertuolo and Flambro until evening. Here their attack lost its impetus. An advanced regiment of 117 ID hastened far ahead of the main body; in front of Pozzuolo they came upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Cavalry Bde (from 1 CD), which were waiting for a brigade from VIII Corps to counterattack toward the north. Under the k.u.k. 1 ID the 7 Mtn Bde were already advancing from S Gottardo to Mortegliano at dawn; 22 Mtn Bde followed them at a considerable distance.

From the east, the k.u.k. II Corps was approaching the area where Scotti's group were advancing. The commander, GdI Kaiser, was following an order issued by HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army in the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>, under which his right wing should move from the southern edge of Udine through Tomba toward the stretch of the Tagliamento between S Odorico and Rivis. But during the night Kaiser had learned of Scotti's thrust to the southwest. To keep the columns from becoming entangled, he halted both his divisions on the Udine-Palmanova railroad and reported the problem to 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which had come to Udine.

GdI Below, who was surprised by the rapid arrival of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, immediately decided to have 117 and 1 ID turn further to the west, into the area north of the Udine-Codroipo railroad. But 5 ID, the nearest to Latisana, would do so only if they had the impression that no substantial parts of the enemy force were

still east of the Tagliamento.<sup>476</sup>

Based on this order, FML Scotti held the main body of 117 ID in Udine. In the evening, after leaving one regiment in the city as a temporary garrison, they moved ahead to Basagliapenta and Blessano. Under 1 ID the 22 Mtn Bde were diverted to Pasian di Prato. The leading regiment of 117 ID were drawn into a serious action around Pozzuolo; they were opposed by Italian cavalry who stubbornly defended the town. The opposing units were reinforced by parts of 5 German ID from Carpeneto, by 10 Mtn Bde (of the 60 ID in Group Kosak) from the east, and by a brigade of VIII Italian Corps from the south. The Italians held on gallantly until evening - especially the cavalry who fought both on foot and horseback - but around 5:00 PM they succumbed to the allied onslaught. 10 Mtn Bde, which was particularly distinguished, took 800 prisoners this day. At Mortegliano the 7 Mtn Bde of 1 ID encountered a Bersaglieri regiment from 47 ID; after a heated struggle which was costly for both sides, the Austrians finally threw their foes out of the village in the evening. The center and left columns of VIII Italian Corps canceled their counter-attack when they encountered German troops west of Pozzuolo.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> about 20,000 Italians had surrendered to Scotti's group, which by turning to the west had made some room for II Corps south of the railroad. In the evening that Corps' 28 ID reached Campoformido, Carpeneto and Basaldella; 57 ID, passing 10 Mtn Bde which had camped at the scene of their victory, came up to Pozzuolo and Terrenzano. Only the very tired 7 Mtn Bde of 1 ID stayed at Mortegliano. 5 German ID, still some distance away, weren't affected by these movements.

Thus the judicious measures of Generals Below, Kaiser and Scotti prevented the advancing columns from becoming entangled. But another beneficiary of Below's decisions, as will be narrated below, was the enemy!

### 30 October - Actions of the Isonzo Armies

The goal of Kosak's group was the eastern bank of the Tagliamento between Rivis and a point up to (but not including) C. Pte. d. Delizia. Even before the advance began, 10 Mtn Bde of 60 ID captured 30 officers and 2000 Bersaglieri of 47 ID, trying to withdraw from the north. As noted above, this Brigade then intervened successfully in the action at Pozzuolo; they spent the night just east of the town, with 2 Mtn Bde to the northeast. 35 ID came up to Risano and Percotto. 9 ID, which already belonged

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<sup>476</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, p. 88

to IV Corps, reached the area around Manzano.<sup>477</sup>

XXIV Corps were aiming toward the bridges at C. Pte. d. Delizia. Their 24 ID reached Lavariano and Persereano, while 53 ID - greatly delayed by the destruction of the bridges over the raging Torre and Natisone Brooks - came up to the towns of Trivignano and Viscone.

Thus the two southern corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, unhindered by collisions with their neighbors, were able to make progress toward the west. But in general the Army's front, with the divisions between Campofornido and Viscone deployed in echelon toward the left, was turning sharply to the southwest. Under IV Corps, which were to be held back in Southwestern front's reserve, the 29 ID and 20 Hon ID stayed where they'd been the previous day (at Chiapovano and Salcano). 43 Sch Div prepared to march back to the railroad stations to entrain.

1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army advanced south of the line Cormons - Trivignano Udinese - Mortegliano - S Vidotto. Since there were few roads here which led from east to west (due to a broad zone of swamps), and since air units didn't see enemy troops east of the Palmanova-Grado line, each corps sent just two divisions forward. Thus three divisions stayed farther back (at Palmanova, Strassoldo and south of Cervignano).

Without fighting, the XVI Corps reached Viscone, Chiopris and Borgnano with 58 ID, and Palmanova with 14 ID. The 63 ID stayed near Görz. Under VII Corps the 44 and 48 ID were at Bagnaria and Strassoldo in the evening, with the foremost troops in Gonars. 17 ID stayed back at Gradisca. Under XXIII Corps the advanced detachment entered S Giorgio di Nogaro on the 30<sup>th</sup> and sent patrols forward to Zellina and Carlino. The main body of 10 ID reached Cervignano. Due to the lack of bridges on the Isonzo the 12 ID began to ferry their troops across at Isola Morosini. 41 Hon ID were still at Pieris and Turriacco on the eastern bank of the Isonzo.

#### 30 October - The situation at day's end

For the southern wing of the Italian forces 30 October marked the high point of the crisis of their retreat over the Tagliamento. The loss of the bridges west of Codroipo forced the columns heading in that direction to detour toward the last available

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<sup>477</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The 9<sup>th</sup> ID didn't learn until 1 November that they had been assigned to the IV Corps (in reserve), as noted farther below.

crossing-points (by Madrisio and Latisana). Thus the thoroughly-intermingled units of II, VI, VIII, XI and XXIV Corps were crammed together in the area between Varmo, Torsa, Muzzana and the Tagliamento. They were protected only at Flambro and Talmassons by the brigade from VIII Corps which had gone back from Pozzuolo, and west of S Giorgio di Nogaro by parts of 4 ID. The XIII and XXIII Corps had crossed to the western bank by Madrisio and Latisana.

A thrust like the one envisioned by G.Lt Hofacker would most probably have cut off the retreat of the Italians still stationed on the eastern bank. But the attack which Scotti's group actually carried out toward Latisana could also have caused the most dire consequences for the enemy if 5 German ID had reached their goal (Rivignano) and the other two divisions hadn't been diverted.

In the evening of this day GdI Below was in general correctly informed about the situation of his own Army and of the k.u.k. II Corps. Although he didn't know that the bridges west of Codroipo were blown up, he had little hope anyway that it would still be possible to take these crossing-points undamaged. The course of the fighting on 30 October, and especially the number of prisoners captured (60,000), led him to conclude correctly that a large part of the enemy forces were still east of the lower Tagliamento and that they could no longer retreat through Codroipo. Since Below wasn't aware of the existence of a bridge by Madrisio, he believed that the Italians could fall back only through Latisana.

Now the commander of 14<sup>th</sup> Army returned to the idea of a thrust to Latisana which could inflict heavy new damage on the enemy. Below believed that he couldn't let slip this chance to win a success, even though he knew that this maneuver would bring his left wing deep into the area where the 2<sup>nd</sup> and even 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Armies were supposed to advance. He couldn't consult with the HQ in Marburg or Adelsberg because wire connections were still lacking. Below therefore decided to carry out the flank thrust on his own responsibility. He was encouraged by a message from the German OHL which somehow had reached him and which stated that "the arrival of parts of 14<sup>th</sup> Army in front of Latisana could be of decisive importance for the destruction of the Italians."<sup>478</sup>

FML Scotti was now instructed to continue the pursuit to Latisana on the 31<sup>st</sup> with 117 and 1 ID. The 5 German ID, which had

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478Krafft, Vol. II, p. 99

advanced to the ford at Varmo, were re-assigned to Hofacker's group, which they would assist by attacking the bridges at C. Pte. d. Delizia from the south. The HQ at Udine didn't know that on the 30<sup>th</sup> the 200 ID had already been ordered by Hofacker to advance from S Odorico south behind 26 ID so as to thrust toward Latisana between the Tagliamento and the Stella.

And yet another group would thrust toward Latisana on the 31<sup>st</sup>. FML Goiginger, commanding 60 ID, had learned in the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> about the instructions to Scotti's group. His analysis of the situation was the same as that of 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, so he also decided to take maximum advantage of the enemy's confusion with a thrust to the southwest "up to Treviso." Since he was not in communication with his own group HQ (Kosak's), as the senior-ranking divisional commander he issued the following orders - his own 60 ID would advance through Pozzuolo and Flambro to Varmo, 35 ID through (the western part) of Mortegliano and Talmassons to Rivignano, and the neighboring 24 ID of XXIV Corps through (the eastern part) of Mortegliano, Torsa, and Ariis to Campomolle. 9 ID should follow up to Risano. So that this thrust wouldn't be isolated, he furthermore asked II Corps to join him.

#### The actions on 31 October

Thus early on the 31<sup>st</sup> flanking thrusts were initiated toward the south and southwest by Hofacker's 200 and 5 ID, both of Scotti's divisions and - as ordered by Goiginger - four divisions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. All other parts of Boroevic's Army Group were advancing straight to the west.

Meanwhile the troops of the enemy's southern wing continued without interruption to retreat to Madrisio and Latisana, where they crossed the Tagliamento. The rain had stopped but the level of the river was still high. To cover the retreat, four brigades were detached to serve as rear guards along the line Belgrado-Romans and along the Stella.<sup>479</sup> As the allies advanced they encountered these rear guards.

The leading elements of 200 ID, advancing south to the west of Codroipo, reached Gradiscutta in light fighting. 5 ID - parts of which had already thrust to Madrisio in the evening - also came up to Gradiscutta, hoping to cross the river and pivot toward S Vito al Tagliamento in support of 26 ID.

Scotti's group didn't set out until late in the morning due to the extreme exhaustion of the troops. They were repeatedly

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<sup>479</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 517



halted by other columns which were marching from the east to the west. Therefore 117 ID only reached Flambruzzo and Ariis, although some advanced troops hastened as far as Madrisio. Under the k.u.k. 1 ID, 22 Mtn Bde from Pasian di Prato didn't get past Pozzuolo. Based on an earlier order, 7 Mtn Bde marched from Mortegliano to Campofornido and Pasian di Prato. Thus 1 ID failed to join the thrust to the southwest.

But 60 ID gained considerable ground. They advanced through Romans, which the Italian rear guard had already evacuated, to Madrisio. Their 10 Mtn Bde entered the town at 8:30 AM before the fires set by the enemy could consume the entire bridge. The fires were extinguished and that night repairs were initiated to the western end of the bridge, which had been blown up. Early on 1 November the pioneers working on this project were just 30 meters from the western bank, troubled only by some weak enemy artillery fire. But meanwhile shortly after midnight the HQ of 60 ID at Flambro had received new orders from group HQ, which in turn were reacting to instructions filtering down the chain of command. The Division was specifically ordered to shift to the north past the Codroipo - C. Pte. d. Delizia road. Inexplicably, FML Goiginger didn't exploit his momentary advantage; he abandoned the effort to cross the river even though nothing more stood in its way. Thus we lost an opportunity to break through the Italian defenses on the western bank before they were consolidated and thus to cut the enemy's line of retreat.

60 ID were halted before achieving this new victory because the orders which GO Borojevic issued late on 29 October to set out the guidelines for the advance to the Tagliamento were now finally taking effect. Borojevic's decisions were supported by Archduke Eugene, who ordered on the 30<sup>th</sup> that while moving up to the river each army was to stay in the sector to which it was assigned. Thus the southernmost route to be taken by 14<sup>th</sup> Army was the road through Pordenone, Prata and Fontanella to Tezze. According to further instructions issued by the Archduke (later on the 30<sup>th</sup>), if divisions of 14<sup>th</sup> Army did shift into the sector of Borojevic's Army Group they would come under the General-Oberst's command; as replacements GdI Below would receive an equal number of divisions from the second echelon. But these orders weren't coordinated with the instructions being issued for the thrust to Latisana. Therefore on the 31<sup>st</sup> all the corps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army had to alter their lines of march.

II Corps HQ learned during the night of 30-31 October about Below's and Goiginger's plans for the thrust to Latisana. They were strongly tempted to join this promising operation. But GdI

Kaiser believed he couldn't disregard the repeated and emphatic orders from the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army that he was to march to the west regardless of the activities of 14<sup>th</sup> Army. So as not to interfere with the thrust to the south, he did decide to have his corps delay their advance until Scotti's divisions had passed; then II Corps would move through Campoformido to reach the Tagliamento between S Odorico and Ravis. In the afternoon he met with HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> Army at Udine. The Army's Chief of Staff G.Lt Krafft demanded that Kaiser should leave the area along the Tagliamento open for 14<sup>th</sup> Army and that II Corps should continue to wait so as to avoid new collisions between the columns, and Kaiser agreed. Meanwhile 28 ID had reached Tomba, Blessano and Bressa anyway, while 57 ID came up to Orgnano, Campoformido and Basaldella. Thus II Corps had acted in accordance with the requests of 14<sup>th</sup> Army while still maintaining their march toward the west.

FML Kosak had issued orders covering the advance of his group on 31 October to a line on the Tagliamento between Ravis and C. Pte. d. Delizia, but only 60 ID received the order in time (around 2:30 PM on the 30<sup>th</sup>). Although FML Goiginger could have shared the instructions with the other two divisions, he instead sent the whole group toward Latisana on his own responsibility, as narrated above. Kosak's Group HQ weren't aware of this shift when they issued further orders for 1 November, which 9 and 35 ID received soon after 2:00 PM on the 31<sup>st</sup>, and which the HQ of 60 ID at Flambro received around 3:30. Now 9 ID were supposed to immediately halt in the Pozzuolo-Risano area, while 35 ID shifted toward Basagliapenta and Nespoledo. 60 ID, which hadn't reported that they'd been moving southwest, were already at this time preparing to retrace their steps. At 3:00 PM FML Kosak finally learned from 9 ID that his divisions had changed course; he sent staff officers to 35 and 60 ID with strict orders from the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army to return to their original lines of march. These were the orders which FML Goiginger received shortly after midnight and which caused him to return north.<sup>480</sup>

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480TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The details of this confusing episode, as given in Volume VI, were considerably re-written in the "corrections" published in Volume VII; the translation follows the corrections. It's obvious that there were arguments post-war regarding the responsibility for the lost opportunity to cut off the Italians, and presumably the arguments weren't settled merely by revising the text of the official history. The intent of the corrections seems to have been to absolve Kosak of blame and to shift more responsibility to his superiors and to his subordinate Goiginger. Regardless of which version is true, the story seems to justify the Germans'

FML Urbarz's 24 ID from XXIV Corps had joined Goiginger's advance; they marched from Lavariano through Mortegliano and Torsa to Ariis. Here they collided with 44 Sch Div of VII Corps, which had captured the town from enemy rear guards. The bridge over the Stella had been blown and couldn't be repaired until late that night. Therefore 24 ID camped overnight along with parts of 44 Sch Div in Ariis and Torsa.

Since FML Urbarz was out of touch with XXIV Corps HQ, as the senior divisional commander he ordered 53 ID early on the 31<sup>st</sup> to march through Castions di Strada and Muzzana toward Latisana. Therefore GM von Stöhr, commanding 53 ID, diverted his foremost troops from Bicinicco to Castions di Strada, where they soon collided with parts of XVI Corps. But a detachment from 53 ID on captured trucks were able to reach Palazzolo, where they reinforced an action already in progress between the advanced detachment of 10 ID and enemy rear guards. After XXIV Corps HQ had issued three orders in succession switching the Division's goal back and forth between Latisana and Codroipo, they finally took up quarters for the night at Mortegliano and Castions di Strada.

The divisions of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army weren't hampered in their advance by contradictory orders, but still were affected by the stream of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army troops heading for Latisana from the north. Thus the path of XVI Corps' 14 ID, marching from Palmanova toward Codroipo, crossed that of XXIV Corps' 53 ID near Castions di Strada. Therefore 14 ID switched the area where they were to spend the night from Flambro to Gonars. In the evening 58 ID took up quarters in the area around Palmanova. We have already mentioned the progress of VII Corps' 44 Sch Div; their night-time camps stretched back as far as Corgnolo. West of Palazzolo the advanced detachment of 10 ID encountered the rear guards of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army, who had evacuated the Stella sector prematurely but were being sent back to the front. Although these troops, from 4 and 61 Italian ID, were pushed back, they later took up a position just in front of Latisana, where they covered the withdrawal of the last soldiers of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies.

In the evening of the 31<sup>st</sup> the other divisions of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army were still located where they had been the day before. Around

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reluctance to entrust their units to the Austro-Hungarian chain of command. Ultimately the problem was that - with some honorable exceptions - the k.u.k. generals failed to lead "from the front" like their allies, and were out of touch with the unfolding situation.

9:00 PM on the 31<sup>st</sup> the railroad bridge at Pieris could once more be used by infantry, and 41 Hon ID began to cross over. 12 ID were shipped over the Isonzo on the 31<sup>st</sup>, aided by motor boats from the Navy. On this day a landing detachment from the cruiser "Admiral Spaun" occupied Grado, which the enemy had left two days previously.<sup>481</sup>

On 1 November the situation at Latisana was completely cleared up. Under attack from the foremost troops of 10 ID, after heavy street fighting the Italian rear guard fell back onto the western bank and blew up the bridges in the afternoon. Since the explosion was premature, one battalion was cut off and taken prisoner.

### **c. The outcome of the battle**

The allies had won another enormous victory in the Battle of Codroipo-Latisana. By 2 November the German 14<sup>th</sup> Army alone had taken a total of 200,000 prisoners.<sup>482</sup> Uncounted heaps of military equipment were found in the towns, along all the main roads, and also on some minor routes. By a rough estimate about 1700 guns had been taken. Weeks and months would pass before all the booty was gathered and put to use. But food supplies, horses and vehicles served immediately to make up our own deficiencies; they made it possible for the armies to advance without waiting for logistical support. It cannot be denied that the hungry soldiers advancing from the barren Karst lands all too often paused to enjoy the rich food supplies. But measures were quickly taken to prevent individuals from stealing other items. As noted previously, Italian troops and prisoners also engaged in plunder.

This great success was due primarily to the rapid thrust by several divisions through Udine to Codroipo after they emerged from the mountains, and to the capture of the bridges at C. Pte. d. Delizia. A large number of Italian units, some of which had already lost their cohesion, were thus pressed together against the Tagliamento. In the evening of 29 October our commanders near the front realized that these units could possibly be destroyed. Today we can see that if the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army had

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481 Kriegsarchiv (Marinarchiv), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918", p. 842

482 By the end of October Krauss' group took 45,000 prisoners, 340 guns and several hundred machine guns. The k.u.k. 50 ID claimed 25,000 prisoners and 120 guns.

halted while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army and Below's two left-wing corps thrust south early on 30 October they could have won a great new victory. The many roads leading from the line Palmanova-Codroipo toward the south would have greatly facilitated such an operation. But it didn't materialize because of the inadequate communications back to the higher-level HQ of Army Group Boroevic and of the Southwestern front, still far behind the front. Even the thrust which did take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> - though with just three divisions - lost its impetus during the day. Thus large parts of the enemy forces were able to reach the safety of the western bank of the Tagliamento, which had swollen to a great stream, through Madrisio and Latisana.

On 31 October the allies tried again with considerably stronger forces to pin down the Italians who remained on the eastern bank. But they would have been able to cut off substantial portions of the Italian armies only if they had arrived at the Latisana bridges very early in the morning. They didn't reach Madrisio until the evening, by which time the east bank was almost entirely clear of enemy troops. Here the allies had struck into thin air.

When Hofacker's and Scotti's groups, along with 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, advanced toward Codroipo and Latisana they were shifting much of their strength over the sector boundaries, which were unclear throughout the day, and toward the south. In the evening of the 31<sup>st</sup> all parts of the two groups from 14<sup>th</sup> Army had entered the sector of Boroevic's Army Group, and three divisions from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Area had crossed into the area where Wurm's Army were supposed to advance. Since the enemy had evacuated the entire eastern bank of the Tagliamento, and at the last moment prevented us from using the crossing point at Madrisio, there was no reason for this tight concentration of units to continue. Furthermore the attempts to cross the river on 1 November (by 26 German ID at Codroipo, 200 ID northwest of Gradiscutta and 5 ID at Madrisio) were all unsuccessful.<sup>483</sup> GdI Below wouldn't agree to Archduke Eugene's order that the 14<sup>th</sup> Army's divisions which had entered Boroevic's sector should be replaced by units of the latter's

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<sup>483</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, pp. 129 ff. At this time 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ stated that it wasn't permissible for such strong German forces to come under Aus-Hung. command. When the k.u.k. AOK protested to the German OHL, the latter agreed that when German divisions entered the zone of a neighboring Aus-Hung. army the Southwestern front command naturally had the right to place them under that army's HQ. But in fact there was no instance of a German division actually taking orders from an Austrian army HQ.

Army Group as they reached the front.<sup>484</sup> And now considerable friction developed because both the Isonzo armies were also nearing the Tagliamento. This confusing situation, aggravated by the uncertain chain of command, was finally cleared up in the first days of November (as described in the next section).

*Although the final outcome of the battle wasn't completely satisfactory, the extent of the victory shouldn't be underestimated. Deeply moved, in a general order issued on 2 November Emperor Charles thanked all the combatants who'd served in the now liberated coastal lands. In particular he addressed the Isonzo armies by remembering "all of the glorious deeds accomplished by the commanders and troops against Italy since Pentecost 1915." Reaching back further into the past, he continued: "Around the camp fires in Friuli my armed forces are reliving proud memories of a long-past but triumphant era in which my unforgettable grand uncle - Emperor and King Franz Joseph - spent his youth as a soldier. This era is also forever associated with the names of Archdukes Charles and Albrecht of my family, and with the name of Radetzky..."*

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484 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 105

## ***D. The allies force their way over the Tagliamento***

### **1. The advance of 10<sup>th</sup> Army plus Groups Krauss and Stein to the Tagliamento, 30 October-1 November**

While the southern wing of Below's Army and Boroevic's Army Group inflicted another heavy defeat on the enemy at Codroipo and Latisana in the last days of October, farther north other allied divisions were also seeking to reach and cross the Tagliamento.

#### 10<sup>th</sup> Army

10<sup>th</sup> Army HQ intended that the main body of FML Lawrowski's 94 ID should assemble between Comegliano and Villa Santina, with a side-group at Tolmezzo. Until a link was re-established with XX Corps of Army Group Conrad, Fasser's group would stay at Sappada and Forni. Hordt's group would first move up to Moggio and Resiutta. GO Krobotin intended to maintain this situation until his neighbor on the left, Wieden's group, finished their advance through the Fella valley and surmounted the worst of the logistical problems caused by widespread destruction to the road network. When the k.u.k. high command learned of Krobotin's intentions they ordered him again on the 29<sup>th</sup> to advance into the Cadore basin; the main body of his Army - deployed as described above - should push into the Tagliamento valley while Fasser's group moved over the Col Rementerera and through Sappada. To ensure that this operation was coordinated with 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the high command removed 10<sup>th</sup> Army from the control of Conrad's Army Group and on 31 October placed them under Archduke Eugene.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> the 25 Mtn Bde of 94 ID reached Comegliano.<sup>485</sup> 57 Mtn Bde fought rear guards from the Italian 36 ID at Cedarchis. On the next day Lawrowski's Division took Tolmezzo and Villa Santina. Further advance was prevented by the enemy, who had 26 ID stationed at Ampezzo while 36 ID took up a position on the southern bank of the Tagliamento between Preone and Cavazzo where they dominated the valley and the crossing points with their fire. Fasser's group at Sappada were opposed by the right wing detachment of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, entrenched on Mt Terzo pic. (Point 2334) and Mt Curie (Point 2035). Fasser drove the advanced troops of this enemy force out of Granvilla on 1

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485TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: On Beilage 29 the unit shown at Comegliano is erroneously labeled 29 rather than 25 Mtn Bde. The 29<sup>th</sup> Bde is also (correctly!) shown at Moggio.

November. Under Hordt's group the 29 Mtn Bde reached Moggio and 59 Mtn Bde Resiutta.



Krauss' group

63 ID, stationed on the right wing of XII Italian Corps, held the foot of Mt S Simeone between Cavazzo and Trasaghis. Along with the guns of the fort on Mt Festa, they prevented any day-time traffic on the partly destroyed roads in the valley leading from Stazione per la Carnia to the west.

On 28 October GdI Krauss had already ordered Wieden's group to take the railroad between Raccolana and Stazione per la Carnia, to send a stronger detachment to Tolmezzo, and to advance south with their main body on both sides of Mt S Simeone, capturing the fortifications atop this mountain with a *coup de main*. 22 Sch Div were to advance to Gemona, taking Osoppo and the bridge at Braulins. The Austrians didn't know that the bridge had already been blown up.

Now GdI Krauss, however, couldn't establish communications with Wieden's group. To facilitate their exit from the Fella valley, early on the 30<sup>th</sup> he ordered 22 Sch Div to advance north. Meanwhile on the 30<sup>th</sup> Wieden had almost reached Stazione per la Carnia with the northern column of the Edelweiss Division, but could move no further due to the heavy Italian fire from the western bank. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Kaiser Jaeger entered Venzone. The German Jaeger Division were still on the road between Ponte and Resiutta. GM Wieden planned to send the Germans along the northern slope to Tolmezzo, whence they would advance through Cavazzo and over Mt S Simeone. The Edelweiss Division (217 Inf Bde) should advance south in the Tagliamento valley.

Soon after midnight of 30-31 October, GdI Krauss finally received a situation report from GM Wieden, in which he learned how difficult it would be to cross the river next to the destroyed bridge at Stazione per la Carnia. Since Krauss had also learned about 10<sup>th</sup> Army's planned thrust into the Tagliamento valley, he ordered Wieden's group to cancel the advance over Mt S Simeone and instead to march with all their troops south along the eastern bank to Artegna (Edelweiss Division), Ospedaletto and Venzone (Jaeger Division). On the 30<sup>th</sup> parts of 22 Sch Div had occupied Ospedaletto and Osoppo without fighting, but were hit by heavy enemy fire from the western bank; Krauss told the Division to rest on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

Even before dawn on the 31<sup>st</sup> GM Wieden was able to lead both of his divisions to their assigned positions; although the road in the valley had been partly blown up and was endangered by enemy fire, there were hardly any casualties. Only parts of the Jaeger

Division were left behind, and came up during the next day. On 1 November the Edelweiss and Jaeger Divisions enjoyed some well-earned rest. On this day the 22 Sch Div shifted south to Tomba and Mels, so that if necessary they could help the 50 and 55 ID.

Both of the latter divisions had been sent by GdI Krauss toward the bridges at Cornino and Pinzano on 30 October. If they could secure these crossing-points, 55 ID were to send a brigade over to the western bank on each bridge. 50 ID would follow on both bridges and then assemble south of 55 ID in the area Pinzano-Valeriano-Olterugo. The 55 ID would furthermore reconnoiter vigorously toward the northeast.

Meanwhile 55 ID sent Battalion IV/BH IR 4 ahead during the 30<sup>th</sup>; after a heavy local action they wrested Majano from the enemy and then - supported by a battery and machine guns of the German 12 ID - they also took the strong position at Susans and thrust forward to the railroad bridge by Cornino. The gallant Battalion sent around 1500 prisoners back to their Division - which meanwhile arrived in Tarcento - along with 6 guns and 31 machine guns as booty. 50 ID, which found the armored work of Tricesimo to be without defenders and guns, fought a brigade of the Italian 16 ID near Tomba, where they captured the crossing point over the Ledra Canal. Still moving forward, they reached Centilini and neared Majano.

#### Stein's group

G.Lt Stein had intended to reach the Tagliamento without fighting and perhaps even cross the river, but his hopes were disappointed on the 30<sup>th</sup>. The German 12 ID were supposed to cross the river at Pinzano and then pivot to the south, but at S Daniele and farther north they encountered very heavy resistance which they couldn't overcome until 4:00 PM. About 10,000 prisoners and 50 guns of the 16 and 34 DI, as well as of 2 CD, were left in the Germans' hands.

The heights by S Daniele and Susans were important strong points of an Italian bridgehead position, in which the 43<sup>rd</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Divisions were covering the retreat of the other parts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. This line had now been broken by Battalion IV/BH IR 4 at Susans and by the German 12 ID at the villages of S Tommaso and S Daniele. The enemy were fleeing over the railroad bridge at Cornino, a plank-bridge north of Pinzano, and a stone highway bridge at Pinzano itself. They were pursued by Battalion IV of BH IR 4, who now stormed ahead onto the railroad bridge, but heavy fire stopped the gallant Bosniaks' impetuous and victorious

advance at the middle of the river. Meanwhile 12 German ID had come to a halt in front of the high ground of Mt Ragogna, occupied by a brigade from the Italian Special Corps. Thus at the last moment the Italians kept the allies from crossing the river. In the two following days they were able to set up a position on the western bank between Trasanghis and the bridges at C. Pte. d. Delizia with the main body of Special Corps and the remnants of Corps VII, XXVIII and XXVII. The battered IV Corps were pulled back into reserve behind the Special Corps.

The Alpenkorps of Stein's group were supposed to cross the Tagliamento at Dignano and Bonzicco. Deployed in two columns, they reached the river on the 30<sup>th</sup> without encountering the enemy. Then two battalions with four batteries pivoted north and took part in the successful action of 12<sup>th</sup> Division. The main body of the Alpenkorps initiated preparations to cross over at Bonzicco. Behind them the 13 Sch Div reached Pagnacco and Feletto, northwest of Udine.

#### The allies pause along the Tagliamento

GdI Below anxiously awaited tidings of the first combat crossing of the Tagliamento. But regrettably none of his divisions had enough river-crossing gear. The Germans' equipment wasn't sent from Romania until 28 October. The Aus-Hung. military bridge trains were stuck far behind in the endless columns of vehicles and couldn't come forward for now; moreover, many of them didn't have enough horses. Since the swollen waters of the Tagliamento were flowing at a speed of 6 to 8 sm, and the western bank was occupied in strength by the enemy, the chances of success didn't seem particularly good. If the crossing did take place, however, then the Army would advance with a strong right wing along the foot of the mountains toward Vittorio; some parts would re-enter the mountains, but only far enough to prevent any flanking fire from the high ground against the units in the plains. Krauss' group were told on the 30<sup>th</sup> to concentrate on crossing the river at Gemona and Cornino. Thereafter they would push to Sacile, while Stein's group headed for Pordenone.<sup>486</sup>

On 31 October the 55, 50 and German 12 ID continued their actions around the Tagliamento crossing-points. 55 ID, sent toward Cornino, first reached Buja and Mela. Meanwhile 3 Mtn Bde of 50 ID reached the railroad bridge; they intended to cross the river here and thrust to Pinzano, thus opening the way for the rest of their Division. Soon afterwards the 26 Mtn Bde of 55 ID also approached the railroad bridge. In the afternoon both brigades

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486Krafft, Vol. II, p. 117

attacked the island of Colle Clapat, where the enemy were entrenched; the assault failed. During the night a new attempt by one battalion from each brigade suffered the same fate. These setbacks demonstrated that nothing could be achieved at Cornino without an adequate artillery bombardment.

On 31 October the German 12 ID with 15 Mtn Bde of 50 ID attacked from the south and east toward the bridges at Pinzano, which were covered by an enemy force in a well-prepared position on Mt Ragogna. Parts of 3 Mtn Bde intervened from the railroad bridge to support the operation in an effective direction. But this attack also suffered from lack of powerful artillery support; the batteries didn't have enough ammunition. Thus the Bologna Brigade, helped by many batteries stationed on the western bank, were able to hold onto Mt Ragogna. They had been ordered to stand their ground "at any price, offering resistance for as long as possible."<sup>487</sup> The bridges would be blown up only in a moment of very great danger.

The fighting on the eastern bank was finally decided on 1 November. 50 ID stormed the summit of Mt Ragogna and thrust toward the middle bridge. But the German 12 ID, although they'd reinforced their left wing, made just slow progress toward the southern bridge. Around 11:30 AM the enemy blew up both bridges. The Bologna Brigade, which until then had defended Mt Ragogna heroically, now ceased their resistance; 50 officers and 3000 men laid down their arms. Then parts of 12 ID with an advanced regiment of 13 Sch Div tried to ford the Tagliamento just south of the destroyed stone bridge but found that although the water level was slowly falling the river was still impassable. In the rear of Stein's group the main body of 13 Sch Div reached S Daniele on 1 November and 117 German ID reached Flaibano.

At Cornino the enemy had already evacuated the small island of Colle Clapat before daybreak and destroyed the second part of the railroad bridge which led from the island to the western bank. A battalion of 3 Mtn Bde occupied Colle Clapat, which would provide a useful jumping-off point for the continuing operation.

Scotti's group, in reserve, stayed in place to rest on 1 November with 1 ID in the area around Udine, 4 ID near Cividale and 33 ID at Karfreit.

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487Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 256 ff.

## **2. The situation of Boroevic's Army Group clears up (1 November)**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army assembled in the area around Codroipo, from which they would move west over the Tagliamento. But their further approach to the river was hindered by the German troops and supply trains which occupied all the villages near the bank in force. Therefore on 1 November the II Corps stayed in the area they'd reached the day before. Under Kosak's group 35 ID came up to Gradisca, 60 ID to Pozzo, Goricizza and Beano. XXIV Corps took up quarters in Passariano and Rivolto.

In front of these Aus-Hung. troops, Hofacker's German group from 14<sup>th</sup> Army were standing on the Tagliamento; 26 ID were west of Codroipo, 200 ID farther southwest, and 5 ID at Madrisio. According to the order issued by Archduke Eugene on 31 October, Hofacker's group were now supposed to come under the command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. Although they were advised of this order, in fact it wasn't carried out.

On 1 November the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army moved from Unt. Loitsch to Cormons. This gave them a very welcome opportunity to confer with a high-ranking staff officer from German 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ. In the evening it was decided at Cormons that the German troops in 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army's area who were still trying to cross the river would stay in place for now and take orders from GdI Below. The divisions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army would deploy right behind them and prepare to advance after the Germans. Once over the river the German divisions would shift north into the sector of their own Army.<sup>488</sup> Thus a face-to-face meeting quickly put an end to the confusion.

The HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army had already ordered their divisions on 30 October to push energetically over the Tagliamento. But at first the only troops to advance past the river would be in VII Corps (made up of 14, 44 and 48 ID) and XXIII Corps (10 ID and 41 Hon ID); these units would be made as mobile as possible at the cost of the others (12, 17, 58 and 63 ID). The latter group, as well as XVI Corps HQ, should stay in the area south of Palmanova on both sides of the pre-war border.

On 1 November the 14 ID of XVI Corps reached Passariano and Flambro; 58 ID took up quarters between Palmanova and Gonars. 63 ID, still west of Görz, sent one brigade apiece as garrisons to Udine and Palmanova.

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<sup>488</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, p. 135

Under VII Corps the 44 Sch Div reached the Tagliamento north and south of Madrisio. After the departure of 60 ID a pioneer company from German 117 ID had still been working on the damaged bridge, but were soon forced to halt due to casualties. The enemy had become watchful and hindered any movement along the bank with their fire, which also set back the German 5<sup>th</sup> Division's preparations to cross. The k.u.k. 48 ID stood along the pre-war border at Strassoldo, while 17 ID were still on the Isonzo (by Sagrado).

10 ID, advancing at the head of XXIII Corps, spread out along the eastern bank after the conquest of Latisana. 41 Hon ID spent the night between S Giorgio di Nogaro and Cervignano. 12 ID had finished crossing the lower Isonzo on ferries and moved ahead to Terzo and Aquileja.

IV Corps, placed in the reserves of Southwestern front, were stationed on 1 November with 29 ID back at Chiapovano and Lokve, with 20 Hon ID in the Görz area and with 9 ID (which just now learned that they belonged to the Corps) at Pozzuolo.

Opposite Borojevic's Army Group the Italian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (VIII, XI, XIII and XXIII Corps) were organizing the defense of the western bank of the Tagliamento between the bridges at C. Pte. d. Delizia and the sea. The two southern corps of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (XXIV and II) - as well as VI Corps which now belonged to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army - were stationed farther north between Casarsa and S Vito al Tagliamento. The XXV Corps - now commanding 4, 7 and 58 ID - were standing ready at Portogruaro.

### **3. The thrust over the river**

#### **a. Measures of the opposing commanders**

##### The Central Powers

On 1 November no Italians were stationed any longer on the eastern bank of the Tagliamento downstream from Villa Santina. But the enemy were maintaining an alert watch on the western bank and until now had been able to thwart any attempt to cross the river. If the allies wanted to continue their advance they had to devote all their efforts to getting over the Tagliamento quickly before the Italians could build up their defenses.

Meanwhile on 29 October Ludendorff had asked the HQ at Baden how they intended to continue the campaign if five German divisions had to leave due to the tense situation on the Western front. In turn the HQ of Southwestern front were consulted, and they reported that in this case they would still go on with the offensive over the Tagliamento so as to exploit the victories won to date and to shorten the front. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> Army had advanced the farthest, the German divisions shouldn't leave until the river-crossing succeeded; otherwise the tempo of the advance would slacken. Therefore on 1 November GdI Arz wired GFM Hindenburg that in his opinion and that of the Southwestern front HQ "the operation should be allowed to continue up to the Piave."

During these days FM Conrad also contacted the high command at Baden with ideas about the participation of his Army Group in the offensive. He didn't believe that the Italians would be able to make a stand east of the Piave. But if they intended to offer resistance west of this river, the best way to defeat them would be to thrust past the Sieben Gemeinde. The strongest possible forces should be made available for this assault. Thus the Marshal was returning to his *idee fixe*, which he was eager to finally implement.

The high command did intend to do everything possible to fling the enemy from the Piave. But currently they had no plan to send additional reinforcements to the Army Group in Tyrol other than 21 Sch Div and 106 Lst ID (whose transfer had already been initiated), even though it was already obvious that as the front held by Boroevic's Army Group shrank he had no room to deploy all his divisions. The intention of the German OHL to remove at least five German divisions seems to have made the staff at Baden unwilling to risk sending further units from Friauli to Tyrol; they didn't want to weaken the forces advancing in the plains.

Knowing that it was likely that French and English troops would appear in northern Italy early in the month, GdI Ludendorff shared his opinions about the continuing offensive with the k.u.k. AOK on 1 November. He recommended that the troops should march ahead to the Livensa "advancing in close order so that at any time they could go into battle." The inner wings of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Armies should be kept strong and sent over the heights on the northern edge of the plains. The objective of 10<sup>th</sup> Army should be Belluno. South of 14<sup>th</sup> Army one of the Isonzo armies would also advance, at first in echelon. The less mobile divisions should build bridgeheads on the western bank of the Tagliamento. In Conrad's Army Group the 11<sup>th</sup> Army should be strengthened; they, along with 10<sup>th</sup> Army, would be sent toward

the heights north of Bassano and south of Feltre and Belluno. Finally Ludendorff said that he urgently wanted to have troops from the Isonzo armies relieve German units in the East. Already on 29 October he'd suggested that six to eight of the Aus-hung. divisions from the second echelon should be made available for this purpose, so that several German divisions could move from the East to the West.

GdI Arz agreed with the suggestions for 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies, and for building bridgeheads on the Tagliamento. He furthermore indicated that "for now the goal of our operations in Venetia is to reach the line of the Piave."

But GdI Arz wouldn't agree to give up any of his forces. He asked Hindenburg to leave all seven German divisions on the Southwestern front since "as is well-known, it is in the mutual interest of both the Central Powers that.....the operations in Venetia should be brought to a conclusion that is as definitive and favorable as possible." If it was urgently necessary to find units for the Western front, Arz felt that because of the shortage of coal and gasoline it would be best to draw them from the German divisions on the Italian front; however, he desired that two or three of these divisions should remain in Venetia. But he could never agree to relieve German forces in the East with divisions from the Isonzo armies. He told Hindenburg that this would be regarded by the k.u.k. Army as "a severe insult and a lack of confidence in our capability." It would be intolerable "for us to be permanently defended in the Italian theater of operations by German troops!"

As instructed by the Emperor, on 2 November GdI Arz ordered the Southwestern front that when advancing from the Tagliamento to the Piave they should keep the southern wing - moving along the shortest route - as strong as possible. Then on the Piave they should do "the greatest damage in their power to the northern wing of the enemy's forces with a quick and powerful thrust toward the north or northwest." Thus the k.u.k. high command would make the main effort on their own left wing, hoping to thus drive the enemy from the Piave. They didn't plan to shift units from Venetia to Tyrol as suggested by FM Conrad and by the German OHL.

According to orders issued by Archduke Eugene on 30 October, each of the armies would cross the Tagliamento within their own assigned sectors. 14<sup>th</sup> Army's southernmost line of march would be the road Pozzo-Pordenone-Prata-Fontanella-Tezze. GO Boroevic would advance farther south. A line running through Mounts



Simeone, Faeit and Ciuf to Mt Naiarda was designated the border between 14<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies.

On 2 November Archduke Eugene effectuated the transfer of the Edelweiss and 22 Schützen Divisions from Krauss' Corps to 10<sup>th</sup> Army. Now thus reinforced, the Army could advance as instructed to Pieve di Cadore, first driving the enemy from the heights southwest of Tolmezzo. Apparently it was hoped that this operation would provide direct help to Below's hitherto fruitless attempts to cross the Tagliamento.

### The Entente

In these same days and hours some important decisions were also being made at the HQ of the Italian high command. The French Chief of the General Staff Foch, who had his first conference with Cadorna in Treviso on 30 October, told him that the French 10<sup>th</sup> Army under General Duchène were coming by train with the first four divisions. The two Chiefs of Staff then agreed that a new front would be built up on the Piave; the Entente divisions would occupy the Montello, which Cadorna considered the most dangerous sector. But later that day Cadorna received intelligence that his opponents were assembling strong forces in the Trent area, causing him to fear that the Austrians would attack in the Judicarien. Therefore he got Foch to have the first two French divisions detrain at Brescia and the next two at Verona. This would make it possible to cancel the planned transfer of one of the corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Army to Brescia.<sup>489</sup>

On the next day (31 October) the English Chief of the General Staff, Robinson, arrived in Treviso and promised that the first two British divisions would be sent. He and his French colleague recommended that Cadorna should oppose their adversaries' attempt to cross the Tagliamento. If this failed, resistance must be offered on the Piave and south of Trent with the help of the French and English divisions which would march to these sectors. Foch and Robertson didn't fail to note that the troops of the

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489TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Despite Cadorna's concern, at no time during the war did any Austro-Hungarian commander seriously plan an offensive through the Judicarien area, presumably because of logistical problems. Two German generals - Hindenburg and Krafft - recognized like Cadorna that a victory here would have caused grave difficulties for Italy. See Lichem, "Spielhanstoss und Edelweiss" (Graz, 1977), p. 218. Lichem himself felt that the failure to strike here was a "lost opportunity" (this was the title he gave to a short chapter about the Judicarien front).

Western powers were coming just to back up the Italians, and that the fate of Italy would be decided by the conduct of its own Army.<sup>490</sup>

Meanwhile on 30 and 31 October Cadorna had issued all the necessary orders to prepare for the retreat. He once more stated that on the Piave the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would hold the sector from the sea up to and including Pte. Priula (southwest of Susegana) with four corps. The six Entente divisions would deploy from here to Vidor. Farther west the three corps of 4<sup>th</sup> Army should take up a position as far as the Sieben Gemeinde plateau. Cadorna furthermore arranged for the withdrawal of 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies; during the retreat the border between them would be a line of heights east of the upper Piave (Rozzo - Mt Cridola - C. Duranno - Crep Nudo - Mt Cavallo) and then Vittorio and Nevesa. As planned earlier, after the withdrawal 2<sup>nd</sup> Army would leave the front to be placed in reserve.

Because 4<sup>th</sup> Army had few roads available, they were urged to accelerate their retreat, first sending back the artillery; they could abandon their supply trains and heavy equipment. The XII Corps on the left wing of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were specifically ordered to hold their ground long enough for 4<sup>th</sup> Army to fall back through Lorenzago, which it was estimated would take eight days. The four cavalry divisions were sent to the area Vivaro-Aviano-Cordenons (west of the Meduna). Combined as a Cavalry Corps, their mission would be to thrust back at any opposing units which crossed the Tagliamento in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's sector.

The border between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies was set along the line C. Pte. d. Delizia - S Vito al Tagliamento - Villotta - Motta di Livenza - Oderzo - Ponte di Piave. Once the retreat from the Tagliamento started the HQ of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army would also be responsible for protecting the withdrawal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; for this purpose they were given authority to use the Cavalry Corps.<sup>491</sup>

On 1 November, when the Italians succeeded in repelling several attempts by Aus-Hung. and German troops to cross the river, Cadorna got the impression that his enemies' pressure was slackening off. He began to take fresh courage and on 2 November ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies to stay on the Tagliamento as long as possible, gaining time to restore order to their units. He even considered whether to order his forces to offer prolonged

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490Palat, "Foch", pp. 120 ff. Foch, XXXVI ff. Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", pp. 261 ff.

491Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 249 ff. and 260 ff. Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 515 ff.

resistance along this river. But developments later on 2 November and in the two following days would prove that this idea was hopeless.

### **b. The assault crossing at Cornino and Pinzano, 2-4 November**

After Mt Ragogna was taken on 1 November, Generals Krauss and Stein ordered their divisions to force their way over the Tagliamento in the following night. The German Jaeger Division were to do so at Trasaghis and Braulins and then thrust to the south, making it easier for 55 ID to get over the river at Cornino. 50 ID were instructed to cross the river at Pinzano. Under Stein's group the 12 German ID, followed by 13 Sch Div, would also gain the western bank by Pinzano; then they'd turn south to assist the Alpenkorps and 117 ID at Bonzicco. Still farther south, Hofacker's group were to force a crossing at C. Pte. d. Delizia.

But on 2 November the corps commanders learned that none of the crossing attempts had been successful. It was clear that they could gain their goals only through a carefully-planned operation.

GdI Krauss now decided to shift the Jaeger Division still further north, to Amaro where one of their battalions had already made an unsuccessful crossing attempt. Once over the river the Division was to advance south on both sides of Mt Simeone, making it easier for the main body of Krauss' group to cross at Cornino. Meanwhile scouts reported that it might be possible for a few men to advance over part of the destroyed bridge at Cornino that lay just under the water. The Corps commander himself initiated the necessary preparations. He brought up 50 ID's artillery and then had these guns and those of 55 ID fire upon the terrain that lay beyond the ruined bridge.

Around 6:00 PM the distinguished Battalion IV/BH IR 4 made their way across the waters by using ladders plus protruding beams from the wreckage of the bridge to create a makeshift footpath. Despite lively Italian fire, they stormed the entrenchments on the western bank and the village of Cornino. One company even thrust southwest to Flagogna and onto Mt Albignons.<sup>492</sup> Although

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<sup>492</sup>Redl, "Die Tagliamentoforcierung bei Cornino und das Bataillon IV/bh. 4" in Mil. wiss. Mitt.; Vienna, 1923 issue, pp. 157 ff. Krafft, Vol. II, pp., 137 ff. Krauss, "Das Wunder von

much larger Italian forces from the Special Corps made furious counterattacks, the dead-tired Bosniaks managed to prevail. They were the first troops to establish themselves firmly on the western bank.

During the night and the next day the 38 Inf and 26 Mtn Bdes followed Bn IV/BH IR 4 on the same perilous and time-consuming route; one battalion took almost three hours to cross the river. On 3 November the 38<sup>th</sup> Bde pushed forward to S Rocco, Sompcornino, Manazzons and Mt Santo (Point 474); 26 Mtn Bde took the hamlets of Colle and Campeis. 70 Italian officers and 2500 troops were taken prisoner, and 10 guns captured. Now it was possible to start building a firm foot-bridge.

The thrust of the Bosnian battalion had apparently diverted the attention of the enemy stationed by Pinzano. Therefore pioneers of the German 12 and k.u.k. 50 ID were able to begin work on a plank-bridge that same night at C. Pontaiba; it was ready at 3:00 PM on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, after which one battalion from each division was able to cross by the end of the day.

Meanwhile the two divisions which were to reinforce 10<sup>th</sup> Army had started their march to the north. But in the evening of 3 November it was learned from an intercepted radio message that XII Italian Corps had withdrawn; therefore the northward movement of 22 Sch Div was halted at Gemona and the Division was once more placed under GdI Krauss. Since intelligence analysis furthermore determined that the Italian 26 ID (on the left wing of their XII Corps) intended to fall upon the northern flank of Krauss' group, Archduke Eugene ordered 10<sup>th</sup> Army to attack immediately and to disrupt this enemy plan.

GdI Below knew that the new defensive front of XII Italian Corps (the line between Cornino and Vigo near Lorenzago) had already been broken at Cornino. In the evening of 3 November he decided to continue the pursuit with a strong right wing "toward and beyond the line Longarone-Vittorio-Tezze." The specific goals for each group were:

- . The sector Mt Citta (7 km northeast of Longarone) - Vittorio for Krauss' units (50 and 55 ID, the Jaeger Div, and 22 Sch Div);
- . The adjacent sector as far as Conegliano for Stein's units (German 12 ID, Alpenkorps, 13 Sch Div); and
- . The area as far as Tezze for Hofacker's units (German 26 and 117 ID).

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Karfreit", pp. 63 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Also Schachinger, "Die Bosniaken kommen!" (Graz, 1989), pp. 190-208.

Hofacker's group would first leave the sector of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army; his 117 ID would relieve the Alpenkorps at Bonzicco and construct a bridge east of Spilimbergo. 26 ID were to move to S Vito di Fagagna. Held in readiness were the Army's reserves - Scotti's group (1, 4 and 33 ID) in the Cividale-Udine-Savorgnano area, the 200 German ID at Moruzzo (10 km northwest of Udine) and 5 German ID at Udine and Pagnacco.

Meanwhile the 55 ID assembled at Cornino, the first unit to have all their infantry on the western bank. Farther south three battalions<sup>493</sup> from 12 and 50 ID held a bridgehead covering the crossing-point at C. Pontaiba. Renewed attempts to cross the river at Bonzicco failed once more, so the plank-bridges at Cornino and Pinzano were still the only routes to the other side. Orders issued by Generals Krauss and Stein in the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> now regulated the crossing process and the pursuit. 55 ID would advance to Cavasso and Toppo, and 50 ID to Sequals and Lestans; following them through Cornino the Jaeger Division would head through Flagogna, Anduins and S Francesco to Tramonti di mezzo. It was intended that the latter Division would march through the heights; thus their next task would be to advance through Claut to Longarone and eventually through Belluno to Feltre. 22 Sch Div would follow the Jaeger through Cornino. At C. Pontaiba the Tagliamento would be crossed first by German 12 ID, then by 50 ID, the artillery of 55 ID and finally the 13 Sch Div.

Early on 4 November the 55 ID, still without artillery, thrust forward to Travesio where they had to overcome strong resistance; in the process they forced 2200 Italians to surrender, and captured 6 guns. Then they continued to advance, reaching their objectives for the day (Cavasso and Toppo) and cutting off the two lines of retreat into the plains that had been available to XII Italian Corps, stationed farther north in the mountains. Parts of this Corps were attacked and pinned down at Peonis by the leading regiment of the German Jaeger Division, which after crossing the river had moved in this direction rather than west toward Anduins.

After the first regiment of German Jaeger crossed over, around 1:30 PM the plank bridge at Cornino collapsed. This interrupted traffic until morning of the next day.

At first movement was prohibited on the bridge at Pinzano, so that it could be made strong enough to also carry vehicles.

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493A second German battalion had managed to reach the western bank.

Starting at 4:00 PM the 12 German ID, the mountain artillery of 55 ID, and another German Jaeger regiment came over the Tagliamento.

Meanwhile the Bohemian Bn II/18 of 50 ID, which had already crossed on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, reached Lestans after an action with Italian armored cars. Northwest of the village they captured Point 255, even though they were outnumbered 4:1 by an enemy group composed of bicyclists and cavalry. Two German battalions from 12 ID, which likewise had arrived on the western bank on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, broke through the wavering front of the Italian 33 ID toward the south; they advanced past Baseglia and nearly to Spilimbergo. The main body of 12 ID assembled between Valeriano and Pinzano, so that during the night they could march toward Tauriano.

Elsewhere in Groups Krauss and Stein the following units were waiting the order to cross the Tagliamento - 22 Sch Div at Susans, 50 ID east of the bridge at C. Pontaiba, 13 Sch Div at S Daniele and the Alpenkorps at Giavons and Rodeano. Under Hofacker's group, which had been relieved by 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, the German 26 ID reached Meretta di Tomba and Flaibano on 4 November. 117 ID took the place of the Alpenkorps on the river bank by Bonzicco, but were unable to force a passage. The five divisions of the Army's reserve were still in their quarters in the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup>.

On 4 November General Etna, commanding the northern group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army, told the Special Corps (reinforced with 16 ID) to recapture the outlet from the valley at Paludea and Travesio. But when the counterattack made no progress the Corps were pulled back behind the Cellina.<sup>494</sup> This sealed the fate of the 36 and 63 ID of XII Italian Corps, especially since they were already under attack from the north by the k.u.k. 10<sup>th</sup> Army.

Under this Army the Edelweiss Division once more passed through the narrow part of the valley; they moved at night to avoid casualties from enemy troops who were still firing from the fortifications on Mt Festa. 216 Inf Bde reached Tolmezzo early on the 4<sup>th</sup>. 217 Inf Bde, which had taken a detour through Mogessa, arrived at Illeggio in the evening of the same day. Also in the evening the 59 Mtn Bde reached Villa Santina and Tolmezzo. 29 Mtn Bde marched as far as Stazione per la Carnia.

Now Krobotin's plan was to turn toward the Cadore only after 94 ID captured Mt Corno and (to support Hordt's group) Mt Lovinzola. GdI Hordt was to thrust with the 59 Mtn Bde and Edelweiss

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<sup>494</sup>Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 312

Division through Pozziss to Tramonti, while a detachment advanced along Lake Cavazzo toward the south. 29 Mtn Bde had sent their four "Trachom" battalions<sup>495</sup> (V, VI and VII/104 plus I/Hon IR 316) to 7<sup>th</sup> Army in the Forest Carpathians, receiving two Landsturm battalions as replacements; the Bde stayed in reserve at Moggio.

Based on Archduke Eugene's order to 10<sup>th</sup> Army for an immediate attack, the 94 ID had already taken Mt Corno from 26 Italian ID on the 4<sup>th</sup>; although suffering substantial casualties, the Austrians then drove troops of 36 ID from the southern bank of the Tagliamento near Preone. Thus the XII Italian Corps were under heavy pressure from the north and south; they now had to withdraw with 36 and 63 ID to S Francesco, hoping to slip way through Tramonti and the Forcella Clautana. To assist them, the southern group of 26 Italian ID were supposed to deploy in a blocking position, facing south at Navarons. The northern group of this Division pulled back to the Mauria Pass and came under the command of 4<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>496</sup>

### **c. Crossing attempts by Boroevic's Army Group between 2 and 4 November**

As desired by the HQ of Southwestern front, and contrary to the original plans, divisions of Boroevic's Army Group relieved Hofacker's group prior to crossing the Tagliamento. By early on 4 November, under 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army the II Corps had occupied the sector along the river between S Odorico and Ravis with 28 ID; half of 57 ID were stationed behind them. Kosak's group, reduced to just 5400 riflemen, deployed between Ravis and Goricizza. Under XXIV Corps the 24 ID were stationed by the eastern ends of the bridges at C. Pte. d Delizia; 53 ID stood farther south, by S Vidotto. 5 Inf Bde of 57 ID were east of Codroipo in the Army's reserve. Half of 63 ID (187 Lst Inf Bde) were stationed at Udine.

1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army had occupied the eastern bank of the river with the following units - 14 ID of XVI Corps between Bugnius and Varmo, 44 Sch Div of VII Corps at Madrisio, and 10 ID of XXIII Corps at Latisana. Of the other divisions, the 58<sup>th</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> hadn't moved since 1 November. 1 Lst Inf Bde of 63 ID came forward from Görz to Palmanova. 41 Hon ID marched to Palazzolo and Muzzana. 12 ID took up quarters at Cervignano and farther

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<sup>495</sup>"Trachom" battalions were made up of troops who'd recovered from their wounds.

<sup>496</sup>Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, pp. 301 ff.

south. 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army also established their HQ at Cervignano (on the 3<sup>rd</sup>). GO Borojevic moved on the 4<sup>th</sup> from Adelsberg to the village of Pradamano, 6 km southeast of Udine. IV Corps, as the reserve of Southwestern front, had moved with 20 Hon ID to Cernoglons and Buttrio, and with 29 ID to Premariacco; 9 ID stayed at Pozzuolo.

GO Borojevic's desire to force a passage over the Tagliamento already in the night of 3-4 November couldn't be carried out in such a short time. Here and there, especially in 28 ID's sector, it was possible to bridge the river's shallow eastern arm. But the deeper western arm, full of raging water and under the enemy's fire, still had to be passed. The main effort was now directed to XXIV Corps' sector; they were given all the technical companies, the scanty bridging equipment and, as it arrived, the heavy artillery. The Corps' 24 ID, although numbering just 1600 riflemen, would strike first. The other corps were instructed to support the operation of the XXIVth by feigning attempts to cross.

Our guns began to bombard the enemy's position on the river bank west of Codroipo around 7:00 PM on 4 November. The first unit to advance in FML Urbarz's Galician 24 ID was IR 45; some of the men waded the river, others made use of the limited equipment (seven skiffs and Italian pontoons). They crossed south of the railroad bridge, where the ice-cold waters were still 1.3 meters deep at some points. After 11:30 PM they were followed on the same route by IR 77 and by two Landsturm regiments from 53 ID. The enemy fire, which at first had been lively, now slackened as our infantry established a firm foothold on the western bank and captured the watch-houses by the bridge along with their guns. It was soon clear that the Italians were only holding the western bank with rear guards.

And in fact that morning, after Cadorna learned of the deteriorating situation in the area west of Cornino, he had already ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies to start retreating to the Piave in the night of 4-5 November.<sup>497</sup> The deep thrust of the k.u.k. 55 ID to the Medusa had been the final blow which convinced Cadorna that a further stand on the Tagliamento was impossible. As narrated below, the 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army had already begun their retreat from the Dolomites on 3 November, so now all the enemy combat units were in motion within the wide area between the Cismone and the Tagliamento. After a four day pause on that river a new phase of the campaign was starting.

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497Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, p. 297



***E. The pursuit to the Piave and through the Dolomites,  
5-10 November*****1. Measures of the opposing commanders**The Entente

Even before 4 November, when Cadorna released the order to retreat, he had already initiated all necessary measures for a systematic withdrawal of the Army and for the creation of a strong defensive front on the western bank of the Piave. Thus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> he had converted the uncoordinated configuration of the units standing in a cordon along the Tagliamento into a deep deployment which should facilitate the retreat to the Piave.<sup>498</sup> The rear guards which were to protect 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies were instructed that when the movement began they would pause first on a line from the Cellina Brook through Casarsa to the lower course of the Tagliamento, then on the Livenza and finally on the Monticano.

The new defensive sector was to consist of several parallel lines, which would include the installations which already existed in the fortified camp of Treviso. To occupy the first line as soon as possible the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (which was assigned the area from the sea to the Pte. Priula) would send ahead one brigade into each of its four corps' sectors. 4<sup>th</sup> Army were making similar arrangements for their assigned area, which stretched from the Pte. Priula through Mt Grappa to S Marino in the Brenta valley. Furthermore the two left corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were to reach the sector between Ponte di Piave and Pte. Priula before 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, since the latter had farther to march. The artillery were to deploy quickly at the appropriate points. For this purpose all the guns of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were re-assigned to 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were reinforced by 50 machine gun companies which had just been formed in the interior.

When the order to retreat was issued on 4 November to both of the armies on the Tagliamento, Cadorna was becoming more concerned about 4<sup>th</sup> Army; although this force had been instructed 36 hours earlier to withdraw, their I Corps on the right wing were still near Pieve di Cadore. Now it was feared that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, whose left wing had already been thrown far back, would retreat so rapidly that the Austrians and Germans could appear on the Piave at Valdobbiadene ahead of I Corps. In this case the Corps, which

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498Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 520

were supposed to occupy the Montello, would have to be diverted through Feltre and the Brenta valley; this would cause a loss of three days. To prevent such a development, on 4 November Cadorna again urged 4<sup>th</sup> Army to accelerate their retreat. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, on the other hand, were supposed to halt for up to two days on the Livenza and on the Monticano. But Cadorna was aware that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's tempo would be considerably influenced by their opponents. Therefore in a worst-case scenario he intended to have II and XXIV Corps occupy the Montello; these commands had already arrived south of the Montello on 4 November, but they were very badly in need of recuperation. Finally, on 5 November the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies were instructed to stay on the Livenza until the high command ordered their retreat to resume; this would permit 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to occupy the Piave sector smoothly.<sup>499</sup>

The further deterioration of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's situation had compelled Cadorna on 3 November to send a letter to the Prime Minister, in which he described the Army's catastrophe with complete frankness; he also left no doubt about the collapse of morale. He declared to the government that if he was able to bring 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies back to the Piave in good order he intended to play his last card on this river, accepting a decisive battle. A further retreat to the lower Adige or to the Mincio - which 1<sup>st</sup> Army would have to join - could lead to the loss of most of the artillery and rob the Army of their remaining fighting power. At the conclusion General Cadorna wrote that it seemed appropriate to him to suggest "that, leaving military considerations aside, the government should consider measures that are above my level and outside my sphere of authority."<sup>500</sup> Some esteemed military historians, including Generals Caviglia and Segato, are of the well-grounded opinion that the last sentence of Cadorna's report can only be interpreted as a suggestion to initiate peace negotiations.

Meanwhile on 5 November there was a meeting at Rapallo to discuss armed assistance for Italy; it was attended by representatives of the governments of England, France and Italy plus the Chiefs of the General Staffs Foch and Robinson - each accompanied by two other generals - and General Porro to represent Cadorna. Because the Italian high command had new concerns about a possible Austro-German thrust through the Tonale Pass and the Val Camonica, Foch ordered that the entire 10<sup>th</sup> French Army should detrain west of Lake Garda. Porro furthermore asserted that the

<sup>499</sup>Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 547 ff.

<sup>500</sup>Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie del Piave" (Milan, 1934), p. 4.

Segato, "L'Italia nella guerra mondiale" (Milan, 1927), Vol. I, p. 515.

377 Italian battalions at the front were opposed by 661 battalions already and that 12 to 15 German divisions were coming to Tyrol by train; the French and British Chiefs of Staff with justice dismissed these theories. Porro also asked for "guarantees that the defense of the Piave would be successful", meaning that he wanted English and French divisions to make up a group of mobile reserves; thereupon it was decided that this supporting army would consist of eight divisions, four from each of the Western powers.<sup>501</sup> Apparently Cadorna's desire to have even more allied forces sent to Italy, which was turned down by Foch and Robertson, further weakened his position - already shaken by the defeat and by his veiled suggestion that negotiations should be initiated with Austria-Hungary.

### The Central Powers

The assault crossing of the Tagliamento had created a situation in which the victorious allies had to make fresh decisions.

On 3 November GdI Ludendorff informed the k.u.k. AOK that he intended to continue the offensive in Venetia only as far as the Piave. Thereafter the German troops would be withdrawn from Venetia, assuming that the Entente didn't send more than 8 to 10 divisions to Italy. Ludendorff also revealed for the first time that the German OHL were planning to win victory in the West in spring 1918. "For this purpose the German troops must be as strong as possible. We will welcome the participation of k.u.k. divisions, and of artillery at any time."

The HQ at Baden didn't reveal that the OHL were limiting their objectives, since they didn't want to diminish the tempo of the pursuit by letting the troops know that the German divisions were to be relieved and withdrawn.<sup>502</sup> Archduke Eugene, who wasn't aware of Ludendorff's intervention, ordered on 4 November that the offensive should continue at least as far as the Brenta. Therefore the divisions already over the Tagliamento, as well as those still to cross that river, were to stay on the Italians' heels and make it impossible for them to make a stand on the Piave.

In further detail, GO Borojevic was instructed to quickly advance (although at first with just a few divisions) so as to push the enemy already withdrawing from 14<sup>th</sup> Army further to the west. The General Oberst was to capture Venice and cooperate with the

<sup>501</sup>Palat, "Foch", p. 124

<sup>502</sup>Based on a letter from GM Alfred Waldstätten to the Military Archives, dated 27 March 1936.

naval command to establish coastal defenses. 14<sup>th</sup> Army, whose area of responsibility on the north was diminished in favor of 10<sup>th</sup> Army, were "to thrust without pausing to the line of the Brenta", thus cutting off all the lines of retreat of the 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army (which led south through Belluno and Feltre and from the area between the Cismon and Brenta). 10<sup>th</sup> Army were to advance through Longarone and Pieve di Cadore to Belluno, Feltre and Primolano; later, together with the left wing of Conrad's Army Group, they would take control of the southern edge of the Sieben Gemeinde plateau between Mt Buso (Point # 810) and Mt Cengio (# 1351). The three divisions of the strategic reserve (9<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>) would march at a greater distance behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army.

FM Conrad had already reported to Baden on 29 October that he intended to advance with about five divisions from the area on both sides of Asiago toward Valstagna on 10 November. Furthermore, 18 battalions of XX Corps could attack over the Rolle Pass toward Fiera di Primiero if necessary. On the roads farther east a detachment in battalion strength had already been deployed to follow the withdrawing enemy; at a later point the high command could assign them to 10<sup>th</sup> Army.

*GdI Below objected to the order which restricted the area where 14<sup>th</sup> Army should advance, since he already had placed Krauss' group with four divisions on the road along the foot of the mountains and further north. He was also concerned that the advance of his Army would stall when they reached the difficult sector between Ponte nelle Alpi, the Lago di S Croce and Vittorio if forces from the north didn't move behind this area. Below believed that 10<sup>th</sup> Army and XX Corps couldn't reach Longarone quicker than the northern wing of his 14<sup>th</sup> Army, and therefore asked that he be given authority to use the road - now in 10<sup>th</sup> Army's sector - which ran from Meduno over the Forcella Clautana to Longarone. This would enable his units which reached the western bank of the Piave to thrust to the south.*

GdI Arz, who came to Udine on 5 November with Emperor Charles, agreed with Below about the importance of reaching Longarone quickly. But otherwise he didn't care whether troops of 10<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> Army used the road there from Meduno. Archduke Eugene therefore assigned the road to 14<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>503</sup>

## **2. The pursuit to the lower Piave**

### **a. From the Tagliamento to the Livenza, 5-7 November**

#### 5 November

As narrated earlier, 10<sup>th</sup> Army HQ had sent one of their few units, the 94 ID, through Lorenzago toward Pieve di Cadore. Their actions will be described in conjunction with the capture of the Cadore. Hordt's group, consisting of 59 Mtn Bde and the Edelweiss Division, were supposed to thrust very quickly into the Tramonti basin so as to cut off the retreat of enemy forces still stationed farther east. 59 Mtn Bde were at the head of the column for this advance, and encountered considerable difficulty while crossing from Grasia (in the valley where the Tagliamento has its source) to Tramonti di sopra. By evening on the 5<sup>th</sup> the Edelweiss Division were able to reach the southern bank of the Tagliamento opposite Tolmezzo with parts of 216 Inf Bde. Behind them were 217 Inf Bde and (in the Army's reserve) the 29 Mtn Bde, both of which reached Tolmezzo.

Under 14<sup>th</sup> Army, Krauss' group had received an order, in accordance with Below's plans, to send troops from their right wing quickly through the mountains to Longarone. Then they would push downstream along the western bank of the Piave to quickly break up any resistance by the enemy. Krauss' group received reinforcements - the Württemberg Mountain Bataillon (which was attached to the Jaeger Division) and the three German Sturm battalions (which were attached to Divisions 22, 50 and 55).

GdI Krauss ordered the Jaeger Division to leave a minimum force at Avasinis and in front of Mt Corno, while the main body advanced through Gerchia and Chievolis to Longarone. In the Corps' main body, which was to advance along the foot of the mountains, 55 ID were to reach Montereale and 50 ID Arba; forward troops from the 55<sup>th</sup> would go to Aviano, and those from the 50<sup>th</sup> to Ponte di Giulia and S Leonardo. 22 Sch Div would follow the

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<sup>503</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, p. 179

other two divisions to Travesio and Manazzons.

Meanwhile on the 5<sup>th</sup> a regiment of the Jaeger Division took much of the stubbornly-defended enemy position between Avasinis and Mt Corno. The Division's main body, following another order whose origins cannot be determined,<sup>504</sup> advanced through the Azzino valley toward S Francesco. At Pielungo they encountered the majority of the 36<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Italian Divisions and prevented them from pushing through to the southwest. This enemy column now shifted west into the Tramonti basin, while a smaller column made their way from S Francesco through S Vincenzo.<sup>505</sup>

The advance of 55 ID, which awaited the arrival of their artillery, was delayed by the collapse of the makeshift bridge at Cornino. Nevertheless their advanced guards, along with those of 50 ID, were able to cross the Meduna at Colle. Two other battalions of 55 ID, sent from Meduno toward Barcis, drove back the southern group of 26 Italian ID at Navarons and Poffabro. One battalion advanced along the edge of the heights to Montereale. The 50 ID and 22 Sch Div reached their objectives for the day.

In Stein's group the 12 German ID marched in two columns through Tesis and Vivaro; they crossed the Torrente, in which the waters were receding, to S Leonardo and S Foca. Here they encountered the Italian Cavalry Corps, withdrawing from Montereale to the south; striking the cavalry in the flank, they drove them back to the west. A side detachment of 12 ID hastened south along the western bank of the Tagliamento to help Hofacker's group cross the river at Bonzicco. But the enemy had already withdrawn from this area, and parts of the 117 ID were able on the 5<sup>th</sup> to reach the western bank on the re-constructed bridge. The rearward divisions of Stein's group (Alpenkorps, 13 Sch Div) and of Hofacker's group (German 26 ID) stayed in their quarters, as did the five divisions of the strategic reserve.

Borojevic's Army Group also crossed the Tagliamento on a broad front during 5 November. II Corps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army were instructed to quickly send detachments to Pordenone so as to aid the advance of 14<sup>th</sup> Army, but they were able to ship only one battalion of 28 ID to the western bank. Under Kosak's group several battalions of 35 ID crossed the river, while 60 ID united both of their brigades at Goricizza. On this day XXIV Corps continued the process of fording the Tagliamento, which they'd started in the previous night. By afternoon the railroad bridge

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504Krafft, Vol. II, p. 175

505Cabiati, "Ottobre 1917", p. 314

was passable for infantry. By evening the 24 ID had reached Azzano Decimo and Tajedo. 53 ID, which had to overrun several small fortifications on the western bank in the morning, concentrated the bulk of their infantry in the evening in S Vito al Tagliamento. They sent a side detachment down the river to the left to assist 14 ID (on the northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army) as the latter crossed over.

But because boats were lacking the 14 ID were able only to send across a scouting detachment. In the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> the Division was still near Gradiscutta. 44 Sch Div, on the other hand, managed to fight their way over the river in action with enemy rear guards at Madrisio; by evening they reached Bagnarola and Cordovado; detachments pursued the Italians past Sesto. 10 ID used boats to cross the river north and south of Latisana, and advanced to Portogruaro and Fossalta. Half of DR 7 (squadrons hitherto stationed on coast defense) were attached to this Division for the pursuit; they rode forward to the Lison Brook. 41 Hon ID were shipped over the Tagliamento at the same time; their infantry reached Concordia and Giussago. The Army Group's other divisions stayed in their quarters, waiting for traffic to clear on the roads.

On the enemy's side, both armies marched back behind the Livenza on the 5<sup>th</sup> without fighting; here they were supposed to pause for one or two days. In the evening 3<sup>rd</sup> Army held the river between Torre di Mosto and Mansuè with Corps XXIII, XIII, XI and VIII plus the 4 ID (which once more had been designated the rear guard). One brigade from each of the corps had already been sent back to their future defensive sectors on the Piave. The XXV and VI Corps were back in the area around Treviso to recuperate. The most battle-ready parts of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (XXVII, XXVIII and Special Corps plus the main body of the Cavalry Corps) had also pulled back behind the Livenza after a brief halt on the Cellina. 3 CD were stationed at Aviano. The southern group of 26 ID held blocking positions at Poffabro and on the Forcella Clautana. The 36<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Divisions, already enveloped on all sides, were trying to reach the Tramonti basin. The other corps (VII, XXIV and II) were marching back behind the Piave along the line Sacile-Conegliano-Montebelluna.

#### 6-7 November

On 6 November parts of the allied forces advancing in the plains reached the entire course of the Livenza. Under XXIII Corps the leading brigades of the 41<sup>st</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Divisions began to cross the river between Torre di Mosto and Corbolone. On the next day (7

November) six companies of the tireless 10 ID were shipped over near S Stino di Livenza, which they held against a counterattack by an Italian brigade. 12 ID came up to Latisana by the 7<sup>th</sup>; they had sent forward a detachment which were to be transported by the Navy's lagoon flotilla via the Can. Niceloso to the mouth of the Livenza. Under VII Corps the 44 Sch Div reached Motta di Livenza in the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup>, and sent SchR 21 over the river on the 7<sup>th</sup> in an improvised operation. Farther behind, 14 ID came up to Sesto and Cordovado on the 6<sup>th</sup>, and entered the front on the 7<sup>th</sup> to the left of 44 Sch Div. 48 ID reached Madrisio on the 7<sup>th</sup>. XVI Corps were still farther back with 58 ID at Flumignano and Gonars, 17 ID at Ajello and Campolongo, and 1 Lst Inf Bde at Palmanova.

Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army the 64 Hon ID (formerly 53 ID)<sup>506</sup> of XXIV Corps advanced to Quartarezza and Frantina. One of their brigades had earlier reached Motta di Livenza; since the brigade had entered VII Corps' sector, they were pulled back from this town. Thus an opportunity was lost to already cross in the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> over the bridge at Motta di Livenza, which hadn't been completely blown up. The vanguard of 24 ID entered Meduna di Livenza on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On the next day both of the divisions of XXIV Corps moved closer to the river, and two battalions of 24 ID succeeded in reaching the western bank to the west of Meduna di Livenza. II Corps' 57 ID reached Passiano and Tiezzo while 28 ID reached Loppola; the latter Division had shifted IR 28 to Visinale. On the 7<sup>th</sup> two battalions of 57 ID were able to overcome resistance by Italian rear guards northwest of Meduna di Livenza and establish a firm foothold on the western bank. One division apiece from Kosak's group had followed the XXIV and II Corps; on the 7<sup>th</sup> the 60 ID camped for the night at Vilotta and Sbrajovacco, 35 ID at Fiume and Orcenico. Under IV Corps, on the 7<sup>th</sup> the 20 Hon ID were still at Buttrio, 29 ID at Pozzuolo; 9 ID came up to Codroipo. Half of 63 ID (187 Lst Inf Bde) stayed in Udine as a garrison.

The leading troops of 14<sup>th</sup> Army's southern wing could also reach the Livenza on 6 November. 117 ID of Hofacker's group, after crossing the Tagliamento at Bonzicco, reached Pordenone and Tamai without fighting. Their advanced guards entered Brugnera, where on the next day the Division crossed the river after an action with 49 Italian ID. 26 ID, following the 117<sup>th</sup>, came up to Porcia and Pordenone on the 7<sup>th</sup>. In Stein's group the German 12 ID advanced on 6 November from the Cellina toward Fiaschetti,

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<sup>506</sup>Since the 53 ID's infantry consisted entirely of Hungarian Landsturm regiments, the unit from now on was called 64 Hon ID. The 71 ID on the Romanian front received number 53.



Sacile and Cavolano. Toward evening they started a lively battle, lasting into the night, against the rear guard of 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army (parts of the Special Corps and of 49 ID plus horsemen and armored cars). Then on the 7<sup>th</sup> the Germans were able to take Sacile by envelopment from the south.<sup>507</sup> They were followed by 13 Sch Div, which reached Roveredo in piano on the 7<sup>th</sup>; the Alpenkorps crossed the Tagliamento at Pinzano.

Two divisions of Krauss' group continued to advance in the plains. As ordered, on the 6<sup>th</sup> the 50 ID marched to S Martino and S Leonardo, and 55 ID to Madrisio; their forward troops even crossed the road which leads from Roveredo in piano to Aviano. On the next day the 50 ID's 15 Mtn Bde, advancing toward Polcenigo, pushed ahead of 50 ID; they very quickly overcame the resistance of 16 Italian ID (of the Special Corps) in Polcenigo. New actions soon thereafter burst out north of the source of the Livenza; 15 Mtn Bde and the artillery of 50 ID were engaged, joined by troops from 55 ID and German 12 ID and by German air units. After four hours of combat the enemy were thrown back, leaving 1000 prisoners in the hands of the victors. 15 Mtn Bde pursued them to Caneva, and sent an advanced guard ahead to Villa di Villa. 3 Mtn Bde reached the area east of Polcenigo. Thus all of 50 ID had moved ahead of 55 ID; the latter division took up quarters in Budoia and Aviano.

Thus the allies had already forced their way over the Livenza at several points on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Therefore Cadorna pulled both of his armies back from the river after a day's halt. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were to establish a new front on the line Colle Umberto - Pianzano - Gajarine - Portobuffole. And strong parts of the main rear guard went back to the upper course of the Monticano, so that two parallel lines were established. In 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, which had determined the tempo of their own retreat, the rear guards took up new positions in the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> between Oderzo and Ceggia, and behind the Can. Piavon. Most troops of the four corps of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were already stationed behind the Piave downstream from Pte. Priula. II Corps, as the garrison of the Montello, had already been assigned on the 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Army, which now took over XXIV Corps as well. The XII Corps would also join 4<sup>th</sup> Army, since their line of retreat led into that Army's sector.<sup>508</sup>

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507Krafft, Vol. II, p. 185 and pp. 190 ff.

508Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, p. 337

**b. Capture of the 36<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Italian Divisions**

But meanwhile the fate of XII Italian Corps' 36 and 63 ID had already been sealed in the Tramonti basin.

Since the German Jaeger Division still couldn't dis-engage from these divisions - which they checked again at Gerchia on 6 November - GdI Krauss instructed 22 Sch Div, which arrived at Meduno on the 6<sup>th</sup>, to advance through Longarone to Belluno. The Württemberg Mountain Battalion was attached to the 22<sup>nd</sup>. GM Müller now decided to move through Chievolis, Forcella Clautana and Longarone to Belluno with 43 Sch Bde, the Mountain Battalion and two mountain batteries. Meanwhile 98 K-Sch Bde would advance to Belluno through Maniago, Andreis and Barcis, then through the Caltea valley and over the ridge south of Mt Tremol (# 2007), and finally through Farra. Soon after these movements began GM Müller heard sounds of fighting from Tramonti di sotto. He turned in this direction and hurled back some parts of both the trapped Italian divisions which had already reached the area. 1200 Italians were taken prisoner. Afterwards GM Müller's column camped for the night at Chievolis; 98 K-Sch Bde reached Maniago that evening.

Meanwhile Hordt's group had completed the encirclement by advancing toward the Tramonti basin; the main body came through Grasia, and Battalion II/59 from Preone through S Francesco and S Vincenzo. After an action at Selva Piana which lasted until the morning hours of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the latter Battalion, along with Battalion V/7 from 59 Mtn Bde, forced 5000 Italians to lay down their rifles and to give up 24 guns. At Pielungo the I Battalion of KJR # 4 captured 30 officers, 800 men and 34 guns. About 3000 more Italians surrendered to small German Jaeger detachments at Tramonti and Campone. The total number of prisoners came to 10,000. A small enemy force escaped into the narrow mountain valley in the direction of Selvis, but they later suffered the same fate.<sup>509</sup>

In the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> a high mountain company of 10<sup>th</sup> Army were sent against the garrison of Mt Festa; here also the Italians realized that further resistance was useless, and they blew up the fortification. By continuing to bombard the narrow Tagliamento valley the defenders had prevented the allies from using the valley road and forced their units in the area to make time-consuming detours. The garrison of the fortifications withdrew to the south, but finally fell into the hands of the

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<sup>509</sup>Murari, pp. 257 ff.

Jaeger Division. This unit advanced on the 7<sup>th</sup>, as ordered the day before, to Meduno and Cavasso.

The main body of Hordt's group spent the night in Tramonti "di sopra" and "di sotto", while 217 Inf Bde were at Grasia. Hordt's further operations, as well as those of 22 Sch Div, will be discussed later in connection with the conquest of the Cadore.

### **c. From the Livenza to the lower Piave, 8-10 November**

In the latest stage of the pursuit, the HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army were striving to make their main effort on the northern wing, and therefore shifting more troops toward Belluno in the upper valley of the Piave; thus they could have sufficient strength to advance through Feltre toward Bassano. GdI Below furthermore desired to avoid sharing his authority in the upper Piave valley with the HQ of 10<sup>th</sup> Army, which were also aiming at Feltre (through Belluno).<sup>510</sup>

Below thus planned to build up the forces advancing at the foot of the mountains so as to roll up the front on the western bank of the Piave from the north. But this wasn't consistent with the order issued on 2 November by the k.u.k. high command, which envisioned making the main effort with the southern wing of Boroevic's Army Group; these units were in the plains and had the shortest distance to advance to the Italian position on the Piave, which they could render untenable from the south. To be sure, the AOK at Baden refrained from forcefully insisting on implementation of this scheme, although they did resist attempts to send more units from the Venetian plains to Conrad's Army Group. And they intended to withdraw one and a half divisions from Boroevic's Army Group so they could be assigned to the Eastern front.

To streamline the chain of command, on the 7<sup>th</sup> GdI Below ordered that Krauss' overly-large group should be divided. As of the 8<sup>th</sup> it was to consist of just 22 Sch Div, the Jaeger Division and the Alpenkorps. FML Scotti's XV Corps HQ, which had been in reserve, would take command of 55 and 50 ID, as well as 1 ID which was following them. Furthermore, 200 ID was sent to Hofacker's group; the three other divisions in the Army's reserve (German 5, Aus-Hung. 4 and 33 ID) were still to remain at Udine. But before receiving this order GdI Krauss had already wanted to send 5 ID from Aviano to Farra (10 km east of Belluno). Since this was consistent with 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ's much-desired reinforcement of the

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<sup>510</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, pp. 187 ff.

right wing, they decided that 55 ID should stay in Krauss' group. Instead it was the Alpenkorps which joined Scotti's reorganized group at noon on 9 November.

Meanwhile Krauss' group gained considerable ground on the 8<sup>th</sup>. In the afternoon the 15 Mtn Bde entered Vittorio (which their foremost unit, Battalion II/18, had already taken around 9:00 AM). The 3 Mtn Bde marched to Caneva. 55 ID, which finally entered the plains, also reached Vittorio late in the evening. That night the Jaeger Division took up quarters in St Lucia and Aviano, the Alpenkorps in Tauriano and Valeriano. In Stein's group the 12 German ID entered Godega di S Urbano and Cordignano after driving back some Italian rear guards; 13 Sch Div, parts of which also took part in this action, stopped for the night in Orsago and Sacile. The 117 ID of Hofacker's group, advancing from Brungera through Gajarine, also encountered resistance (at Monticano), which they overcame that night. Following in the second echelon were 26 German ID, whose leading troops reached Codognè, and 200 ID which advanced to the Tagliamento bridge at Bonzicco.

Farther south, under 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army, the Prague IR 28 of 28 ID had forced their way over the Livenza at Portobuffole. The further advance of II Corps was greatly complicated by the numerous streams, over which the crossing points had been destroyed, and the lack of bridging equipment. Nevertheless, in the evening of 8 November advanced guards were standing along the Monticano, and at several points patrols had already waded the stream. The Corps' main body reached Cornaro and Basalghelle with 28 ID, Mansuè and Fossabiuba with 57 ID. Under XXIV Corps, which crossed the Livenza near Meduna, the leading troops of 24 ID - along with detachments from 57 ID and 64 Hon ID - battled their way over the Monticano and advanced as far as Frassene. 64 Hon ID camped that night east of Gorgo. Under Kosak's group the 35 ID stayed in place while 60 ID advanced to Pravidomini and Villutta.

On 8 November the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army subdued the area between the Livenza and the Can. Piavon. VII Corps drove back the Italian 4 ID, and then reached Fossalta and Chiarano with the two forward divisions (44<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>); by evening the 48 ID were at Cordovado. Under XXIII Corps the advanced guard of 10 ID also had to fight some actions in pursuit before they came up to Cessalto. In the evening they stormed this village, aided by IR 48 of 14 ID which intervened from the northeast. 41 Hon ID, which followed 10 ID over the only plank bridge by S Stino, reached Ceggia after darkness fell. 12 ID, marching far in the rear, took up quarters

in Portogruaro. IV Corps, as the reserve of Southwestern front, came up to the area Codroipo-Basagliapenta-Mortegliano.

In the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> the majority of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Armies were already standing on the western bank of the Piave. Only the Special Corps and the 62, 23, 67 and 4 ID remained east of the river as rear guards.<sup>511</sup> Since the arrival of Krauss' group at Vittorio had severed the connection between the main body withdrawing in the plains and I Corps (which was still in the upper Piave valley), there was no longer any point in seeking to further delay the allies east of the river. Therefore the rear guards were ordered to evacuate the eastern bank on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

On this day of gloomy, rainy weather all of the leading troops of Boroevic's Army Group reached the Piave. XXIII Corps came up to the river between Grisolera and S Dona di Piave; the neighboring VII Corps came up farther north, as far as Salgaredo. XXIV Corps and the foremost troops of II Corps occupied the river dam between Ponte di Piave and Cimadolno. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the main bodies of the first-line divisions closed up to the Piave. 28 ID also occupied several islands south of Cimadolno. In the rear the 35 ID advanced to Pasiano on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Furthermore HQ of IV Corps - along with 29 and 9 ID - came forward so that on the 12<sup>th</sup> they could relieve the greatly-weakened XXIV Corps. Then the latter Corps would move back to Motta di Livenza and Mansuè; they would be joined by 20 Hon ID, coming up to Azzano Decimo.

Now the higher command HQ moved forward. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the HQ of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army arrived at Pasiano, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> those of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army arrived at Portogruaro. Also on the 11<sup>th</sup>, GO Boroevic took up quarters in S Vito al Tagliamento. HQ of Southwestern front, which originally wanted to move to Klagenfurt, sent their billeting officer to Udine, where the front Chief of Staff GM Konopicky had already arrived in the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Under 14<sup>th</sup> Army, the 117 of Hofacker's group crossed the Monticano on the 9<sup>th</sup> and then advanced toward Tezze and Susegana. But before they could start to attack the bridgehead by the Susegana railroad station it was evacuated by the Italian rear guard, who also blew up the railroad bridge. The highway bridge was consumed by flames. 26 ID camped for the night at Codognè and Francenigo, and 200 ID at Pordenone. Stein's group reached the Piave on the 9<sup>th</sup> with 13 Sch Div opposite the Montello. The German 12 ID advanced to Pieve di Solighetto and S Pietro di Feleto. On the next day this Division encountered a brigade of

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511Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, p. 357

IX Italian Corps in front of Vidor. They were unable to overrun the enemy as planned, but in the night of 10-11 November the Italians also evacuated the northern bank here and blew up the bridge. Under Scotti's newly re-organized group, on the 9<sup>th</sup> the 50 ID advanced in the Soligo valley to Miane and Cison di Valmarino with 15 Mtn Bde and to Vittorio with 3 Mtn Bde; on the next day the Division secured the narrow part of the Piave valley between S Vito and Vas. The Alpenkorps camped for the night in Aviano on the 9<sup>th</sup> and in Serravalle, Vittorio and Cordignano on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The leading troops of 1 ID reached Aviano on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

In Krauss' group the 55 ID advanced on the 9<sup>th</sup> from Vittorio toward Belluno, but soon encountered an enemy rear guard position on the southern end of the Lago [Lake] di S Croce, which they were unable to capture on this day. The enemy withdrew on the 10<sup>th</sup>. At the northern end of the lake our Division captured an Italian battalion which had been driven to the south by 98 K-Sch Bde during its thrust to Farra. 55 ID spent the night of 10-11 November at Castion, south of Belluno; they couldn't yet enter Belluno itself because the bridge had been destroyed. The Jaeger Division on the 9<sup>th</sup> had reached Vittorio and Cordignano, where they rested on the next day.

GdI Below, who'd spent two days in Pordenone, moved his HQ forward on the 10<sup>th</sup> to Vittorio.

### **3. The intervention of Conrad's Army Group**

#### **a. 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army in the Cadore**

After the collapse of the Julian front, and with the Italian position on the Carinthian crest starting to crumble, their Dolomite front also began to waver. Here G.Lt Nicolis di Robilant's 4<sup>th</sup> Army were stationed along a wide arc from Mt Peralba (on the western border of Carinthia) to the northern slope of the Sieben Gemeinde plateau; they had three corps with a total strength of 90 battalions and 904 guns.<sup>512</sup> On the eastern wing the I Corps guarded the area between the Carinthian crest and the Tofana with 1 ID, and the sector around the Falzarego Pass with a group of five Alpini battalions. IX Corps held the area between the Col di Lana and the S Pellegrino valley with 18 ID, and the Rolle Pass sector with 17 ID. XVIII Corps had stationed 56 ID in

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<sup>512</sup>Report of the Investigating Committee, Vol. I, Table 4.

"Rivista di artiglieria e genio" (October 1933 issue), p. 1385

the Fassana Alps, the 15 and 51 ID in the Sugana valley.

On the Aus-Hung. side GdI Roth's XX Corps (49 and 52 ID) held the Dolomite front. They had 49 battalions<sup>513</sup> and 16 Stand-Schützen detachments with 409 guns (of which 229 were stationary). 18 ID of 11<sup>th</sup> Army guarded the Sugana valley with 12 battalions (including 3½ of Landsturm and volunteer riflemen), 3 Stand-Schützen detachments and 106 guns (of which 36 were stationary).

The 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, supported by the Cadore-Maè fortified area, had been assigned important tasks at the start of the war but had made hardly any progress after more than two and half years of campaigning. Neither the often-repeated attacks into the Puster valley nor the thrusts into the Fleims valley since mid-1916 had succeeded. The Italians had scored some local successes only at a few points along this high-mountain front (such as in the Tofana area, on the Col di Lana and the Rolle Pass, and at parts of the Fassana crest), and their importance didn't compensate at all for the casualties that had been suffered. The Italian army in the Dolomites waited until the last moment to retreat because they didn't want to abandon these slight territorial advantages they'd won with so much difficulty.

On 26 October Cadorna had already issued preparatory instructions to 4<sup>th</sup> Army for the contingency in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies might have to retreat behind the Tagliamento. If so, the Dolomite front would be pulled back to the line "of maximum resistance" which ran from Rozzo through the fortifications of Vigo and then along the ridges of Mounts delle Marmarole, Antelajo and Pelmo to the Rolle Pass. These instructions were followed on 27 October by the actual order to retreat.

But at first G.Lt Robilant didn't carry out the withdrawal as ordered; he merely made preparations to construct and occupy the new line and to pull back equipment. It was his opinion that the evacuation of the current positions and the retreat could be implemented very quickly at any time.

The Italian high command soon afterwards had to deal with the probability that they wouldn't be able to hold the new front on the Tagliamento for very long. Then the Cadore could no longer be retained. To initiate preparations for this eventuality, Cadorna summoned the commanders of 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies to a

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513The total included twelve Landsturm battalions plus five infantry battalions formed from recovered wounded, which could only be employed in quiet sectors.

conference at Treviso on 29 October.<sup>514</sup> Details were worked out at another meeting of the generals on 31 October. But despite these conversations Robilant still believed that the retreat of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies would pause for a considerable time on the Tagliamento, and therefore he hesitated to abandon the ground gained in two years of toil. This caused Cadorna great concern. As narrated above, the withdrawal of the Italian Carnic Group (XII Corps) behind the upper Tagliamento had already forced 4<sup>th</sup> Army on 29 October to bend back their eastern wing. To Cadorna it seemed questionable whether this Army could still pull back from the Dolomite front in time if the Italian forces on the Tagliamento did continue their retreat.

Based on these considerations, on 31 October Cadorna ordered 4<sup>th</sup> Army to accelerate their withdrawal; nonetheless, in the first days of November the Army made their arrangements methodically and slowly. On 2 November G.Lt Robilant still felt obliged to inform the high command that he could only secure the rear of the Tagliamento front in his present position. He couldn't hope to stand very long on the line "of maximum resistance" (which he would occupy in the future) because an infrastructure to supply the troops was lacking.

The hesitation of 4<sup>th</sup> Army to begin the retreat, although it was now unavoidable, continued because it wasn't clear to G.Lt Robilant that the situation had deteriorated since 31 October and that his forces in the Dolomite would have to hastily withdraw. Now Cadorna intervened decisively to avoid the dangers which Robilant apparently couldn't recognize. The difficult problem of coordinating the withdrawal of 4<sup>th</sup> Army with the forced retreat of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could now be solved only by having the former move very quickly while abandoning the equipment they could no longer save.<sup>515</sup>

Based on these considerations, on 2 November the Italian high command instructed 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to immediately order a retreat to the new position, so that next morning the Army's corps would be deployed in echelon behind this line. The eastern wing and center of the forces in the Dolomites finally began to move on 3 November; I Corps withdrew in the valleys of the Ansiei, the Boite and the Torrente Maè, and IX Corps in the Agordo area. Even so, 4<sup>th</sup> Army didn't reach the goals assigned by the high command for this day. Meanwhile the front on the Tagliamento became untenable. As Cadorna had decided that prolonged resistance would be offered on the Piave, during 3 November the

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514Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie del Piave", p. 23

515Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), pp. 526 ff.



HQ of 4<sup>th</sup> Army received an order to continue their retreat to the latter river.

General Robilant now complained that if 2<sup>nd</sup> Army retreated too quickly they would imperil the withdrawal of his 4<sup>th</sup> Army from the mountains. Although Cadorna did try to slow down 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's retreat, on 4 November he also pointedly informed the commander of the forces in the Dolomites that 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were being forced to withdraw by the enemy and that the danger to the 4<sup>th</sup> Army's line of retreat in the Piave valley was a direct consequence of their own delay in implementing orders from the high command. It was essential that they should quicken their pace by all possible means.

The retreat of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army was finally in full swing in the night of 4-5 November. Protected in the east by the reinforced 26 ID of XII Corps, the columns of I Corps headed for the fortified area by Cadore and Maè, while those of IX Corps moved from the areas of Agordo and the Primör toward the vicinity of Fonzaso. For now the XVIII Corps continued to hold their old positions on the Fassana crest and in the Sugana valley. Only the Corps' 56 ID, stationed on the northern wing, had to evacuate their trenches to conform with the withdrawal of IX Corps; the Division pulled back to the heights south of the Val Cia and to the line Canale S Bovo - Imer, guarding the flank of XVIII Corps against any threat from the north.

It was high time for the Italians to retreat, since the Aus-Hung. 10<sup>th</sup> Army were already advancing into the Cadore from the valley where the Tagliamento has its source.

### **b. Preparations for the offensive by Conrad's Army Group**

Because of reports from the Isonzo, on 26 October FM Conrad was already asking the high command whether a transfer of some divisions from the coastal lands to south Tyrol was now possible and useful. But on this day the staff at Baden still felt that all available units should stay united on the decisive front. Nevertheless, on 27 October Conrad's Army Group HQ asked 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies, as well as XX Corps, to study two plans:

- . for a general advance from the present positions, involving thrusts by strong groups within the sectors of each command, or
- . for an assault with just one concentrated force, to be created in 11<sup>th</sup> Army's sector with units drawn from the

entire Army Group.

In the second scenario, XX Corps would give up a large number of their battalions and all available equipment. As noted above, the k.u.k. high command were informed of this planning.

This concept was based on the supposition that no fresh units would be available soon; the thrust would be localized but carried out so as to quickly hit the enemy at a sensitive point and to decisively assist the main effort. Therefore it would be necessary to hastily assemble the striking group and ensure they had sufficient supplies, and to thrust ahead in an area that - once taken - could be permanently held, and that would provide a favorable starting point for future offensives.

Reliable intelligence indicated that the Italian XX Corps, stationed on the northern part of the plateau, had been reduced in strength from 145,000 men (during the Ortigara battle) to just 56,000. This substantial reduction of the Italian forces between the Astico and the Sugana valley, as well as the considerations described in the preceding paragraph, made the Asiago sector a desirable target. If we could reach the southeastern edge of the plateau in a powerful advance, the enemy would have little chance of holding onto the Piave front.

The operations of Conrad's Army Group would be based on this evaluation of the situation. On 27 October the Field Marshal informed FZM Scheuchenstuel and GdI Roth that he intended to carry out an attack in Tyrol with the units currently available. Three divisions would assemble west of Asiago:

- . 19<sup>th</sup> ID, which was already stationed there, and in which the less reliable troops would be replaced prior to the offensive;
- . a division which 11<sup>th</sup> Army would assemble from its own components; and
- . a division to be built from nine battalions of XX Corps.

The artillery reinforcements for the sector would be 43 medium and heavy guns from 11<sup>th</sup> Army and 12 light and 2 heavy guns from XX Corps.

This order had just been issued when new information arrived from Baden - the great success on the Isonzo would make it possible to transfer one or two divisions to south Tyrol; therefore the Army Group should initiate all necessary preparations to attack with these units from the Sugana valley as soon as possible. In response, FM Conrad stated that he had already prepared to attack from Asiago, at the point where he could most quickly reach the plains, and asked the high command to approve this direction for the offensive. Now he could broaden the area to be attacked,

since five divisions would be involved; he also could aim for a more distant objective, Valstagna in the Brenta valley.

On 28 October the AOK reported that 21 Sch Div and 106 Lst ID had been chosen to move to south Tyrol and that they would start to entrain that evening.<sup>516</sup> Four air companies would also move from the Isonzo to Tyrol. The units would arrive in south Tyrol by 8 November - one division would detrain south of Trent and the other in the Sugana valley, and both would be assigned to 11<sup>th</sup> Army. The offensive would begin on 10 November.

Orders were issued on 28 October to reorganize 52 ID.<sup>517</sup> By 2 November this Division would assemble in the Adige valley north of Trent, and by the 5<sup>th</sup> they would complete their movement to the Asiago plateau.

But the assembly of this Division presented serious difficulties. The battalions were scattered in widely-separated positions on the 80 km long front in the high mountains, and had long been employed in positional warfare without being relieved. For the most part they could be brought together only by marching on foot, in some areas on snow-covered roads. Similarly the preparation of the units in 11<sup>th</sup> Army's area involved extensive relieving and shifting of troops; because of the worsening shortage of horses the movements could be carried out only with the makeshift methods with which the k.u.k. forces had been familiar for a long time.

Already on 28 October there were signs that the Italian front in the Carnic Alps would soon be evacuated; particularly significant was the destruction of the radio station of 26 Italian ID at Paluzza. This intelligence caused Conrad to order 49 ID in the Dolomites to take prompt advantage of the break-up of the Italian position; when the enemy did fall back, raiding parties should thrust forward to prevent large-scale destruction of the roads. On this day the 10<sup>th</sup> Army opened their pursuit in the direction of the upper Tagliamento.

On 29 October FZM Scheuchenstuel received preparatory orders for the offensive. First he was supposed to break through the Italian lines between Canove and the Katze Heights (Point 1223,

<sup>516</sup>The 21 Sch Div had 6000 riflemen, the 106 Lst ID had 5200. Their orders of battle were unchanged.

<sup>517</sup>The new organization of FML Heinrich Goiginger's 52<sup>nd</sup> ID - 13 Mtn Bde (Col. Ritter von Paic; Bns III/49, III/59, III/74, II/92, II/K-SchR 2), Col. Hohenberger's Bde (Bns I & II/KJR 2, III/KJR 3, III/BH IR 4)

north of Asiago); then the area under attack would be expanded on both sides through Gallio and Fondi as far as Mt Lemerle. The heights west of Valstagna were to be captured so that traffic could be interrupted in the Brenta valley. The attacking group under the command of GdI Krautwald would consist of Divisions # 6, 19, 52, 21 and 106.

The allies' progress in Venetia and the ever clearer indications that the Italians were about to retreat on the Dolomite front compelled FM Conrad to issue a new order. In it he announced his intention of sending the main body of XX Corps through the Rolle Pass and Cison valley toward the Fonzaso-Feltre sector if the enemy did evacuate the Cadore. 49 ID should send forward some strong raiding patrols with artillery. Conrad laid less emphasis on an advance into the Piave valley because of the strong Italian fortifications and the expected wide-scale destruction of the roads. Accordingly, on the 30<sup>th</sup> he also suggested that 10<sup>th</sup> Army should be removed from his jurisdiction and assigned to Archduke Eugene so that they could advance in coordination with 14<sup>th</sup> German Army. This re-assignment was approved by the AOK.

### **c. The pursuit in the Dolomites, 4-10 November**

As November began and the allies continued to advance in Venetia, it became ever more probable that the Italians would dismantle their front in the Dolomites. From the enemy's behavior it was concluded that they would also soon evacuate the Cadore.<sup>518</sup> Therefore GdI Roth prepared to stay on the Italians' heels from the start of their retreat. He ordered the units remaining to XX Corps (after the departure of 52 ID) to re-group by 10 November and to have pursuit columns ready. Col. Edler von Maendl's group (21 Mtn Bde) should thrust with three battalions and one battery over the Kreuzberg to Auronzo, and with one battalion from Schluderbach through Misurina into the Ansiei valley.

Farther to the southwest a number of small groups would open the pursuit under the command of GM Korzer (96 Inf Bde). One battalion apiece were to be sent to penetrate through Peutelstein and the Falzarego Pass to Cortina d'Ampezzo; from here they'd advance into the Boite valley toward Pieve di Cadore. One battalion (with a battery) would advance through Buchenstein,

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<sup>518</sup>Once again the Aus-Hung. intelligence service provided valuable help by intercepting enemy communications. They discovered on 2 November that all the Italian wifeless stations in the sectors of I Corps, IX Corps and 56 ID had stopped broadcasting.

another over the Fedaja Pass to Alleghe, and two more battalions through S Pellegrino to Cencenighe in the Cordevole valley. The last-named column were to also send a detachment from Falcade to support the advance of the main body through the Rolle Pass. This force of 12 3/4 battalions from 49 ID under FML Edler von Steinhart would thrust from the Travnigolo valley through the Rolle Pass and Imer into the Cismon valley. From 52 ID, three battalions and one battery would pursue in the valley of the Vanoi, and two battalions in the western part of the Fassana Alps.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army pulls back

The Italians' Dolomite front began to break up on 4 November. On this day advancing Aus-Hung. patrols occupied positions which had been hotly-contested for years on the Drei Zinnen and Mt Piano, in the Tofana sector, and on the Colbricon. The 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army were in full retreat on the next day. As patrols followed the withdrawing enemy they found camps with burning barracks and magazines; everywhere military equipment had been abandoned. Widespread destruction of bridges and roads hindered the pursuit; our columns, urged to thrust forward with great energy, were many times forced to even leave their pack animals behind. On 5 November the pursuers occupied Cortina d'Ampezzo, the Col di Lana, Caprile and S Martino di Castrozza.

In the night of 4-5 November the Italian 17 ID had withdrawn over the Rolle Pass and moved back to Fonzaso; their march was covered by 56 ID, which blocked the valleys of the Cismon and the Vanoi while starting to evacuate their own positions in the Fassana Alps. The other two divisions of XVIII Corps (15 and 51 ID) held firmly onto their trenches in the Sugana valley, which was the pivot of the entire Italian line as it pulled back. Four battalions and three mountain batteries were sent back from here to garrison Mt Grappa.<sup>519</sup>

On 5 November FM Conrad decided to abandon the plan of sending strong forces through the Rolle Pass, since the enemy had given up this area. The troops thus made available would assemble in the area around Trent, and then would be sent as soon as possible to join the attack group by the Sieben Gemeinde. Only 9 Mtn Bde would advance over the Rolle Pass into the Primör and later to Fonzaso.<sup>520</sup> The troops of XX Corps now available were to take the shortest route to the railroad; here they would receive

<sup>519</sup>Cabiati, "La ricossa" (Milan, 1934), p. 51

<sup>520</sup>Colonel Lercher's 9 Mtn Bde commanded K-SchR III (3 bns) plus Bns IV/12, IV/84 and IV/87, and eight batteries.

appropriate equipment and move to the Trent area, where 49 ID would be re-organized.<sup>521</sup>

With this important decision the Army Group HQ finally renounced the ideas of inflicting substantial damage on the western wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army (which was still hanging back) with a powerful thrust along the Cismon River, and of bringing strong forces into the area of Primolano and Feltre.

The Italian columns pulling out of the Dolomites, covered by rear guards, were able to carry out their retreat without interference from their opponents. The majority of IX Italian Corps, withdrawing from the Agordina area and the Primör, reached the area round Fonzaso and west of Belluno in the evening of 5 November; their rear guards deployed on the "line of ultimate resistance." On the eastern wing of 4<sup>th</sup> Army the main body of I Corps reached the Piave valley at Pieve di Cadore and farther north. In the following days the movement of the masses of troops was assisted in some places by the railroads (although the lines couldn't carry much traffic) and by hastily-assembled columns of trucks. Until 10 November their withdrawal was still protected by the strong units left on the "line of resistance" along with the fortress troops of the Cadore. To guard against the Austro-Germans pressing from the east toward the upper Piave, fresh troops (initially a Bersaglieri brigade) were sent to help 26 ID of XII Corps which was stationed in the mountains east of the river.

#### The Austro-Hungarian advance

In fact the dangers caused by the delayed retreat of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army were quite serious. The 10<sup>th</sup> k.u.k. Army followed the enemy as they withdrew from the Carnic Alps; the main body first reached the upper Tagliamento while Col. Fasser's group advanced to Sappada. On 29 October, as narrated above, the Army had already been instructed to push west into the Cadore. Although 10<sup>th</sup> Army consisted mostly of a hodgepodge of stationary units,

521From 10 November the following was the organization of FML Edler von Steinhart's 49<sup>th</sup> ID:

- . 56 Mtn Bde (Col. Gustav von Krammer) - Bns III/73, III/K-SchR III; k.k. Lst Bns 29, 160, 161

- . 179 Inf Bde (Col. Covin) - Bn II/SchR 5; k.k. Lst Bns II, III, 168, 171

- . Also - Sturm Bn 49; nine high mountain comps; twenty one and a half batteries

The Division was supposed to be ready for action on 12 November.

insufficiently supplied by makeshift methods, on 5 November they were ready for the attack to the west - despite the difficult mountain terrain, the damaged roads, the bad weather, and the stubborn resistance of enemy rear guards.

Col. Fasser began to descend into the upper Piave valley on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, overcoming substantial resistance; on this day FJB # 8 captured the mountain pass southwest of Sappada and approached the Col Rementera, on the eastern front of the Cadore-Maè fortress.<sup>522</sup> The main body of Fasser's group conquered the fortified Mt Terzo picc. on the 5<sup>th</sup> and were right in front of S Stefano di Cadore. On the same day the main body of 94 ID stormed the Passo della Morte ["Pass of Death"] in a heavy action. South of the upper Tagliamento the encirclement of most of Italian XII Corps, which has already been described, was in progress. After this enemy pocket was reduced, the allied generals would be able to also send the majority of 10<sup>th</sup> Army out of this area and into the Cadore.

Immediately after getting the order to pursue, early on 6 November the 9 Mtn Bde sent Battalion IV/84 over the Rolle Pass and two Kaiser-Schützen companies into the Vanoi valley. In the evening of the same day they reached Fiera di Primiero and Cavria, and on the next day came to Mezzano and Canale S Bovo.

The pursuing columns of 96 Inf Bde, advancing into the Cordevole and Boite valleys, gained ground only slowly from Italian rear guards who withdrew step-by-step. Alleghe and Borca were occupied on the 6<sup>th</sup>. The column in the Cordevole valley reached Agordo after an action at Listolade on 8 November. But then at the pre-war fortification blocking the road at Sasso di S Martino they encountered the line where the Italian rear guards had been instructed to offer stiff resistance. As ordered, the enemy held out until the 10<sup>th</sup>. Finally on 11 November scouts found the positions abandoned; the way into the Belluno basin lay open. In similar fashion the battalions pursuing in the Boite valley were pinned down; they finally linked up with 94 ID after the latter arrived at Pieve di Cadore. The pursuit had been greatly delayed by the fortifications and by the substantial damage inflicted on the roads and bridges by enemy demolitions.

Ten battalions of I Italian Corps had left the Pieve di Cadore

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<sup>522</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The text always refers to a "fortress" of Cadore-Maè. It actually consisted of a number of widely-separated pre-war installations which covered all the approaches to the upper Piave in this area. They are shown on Beilage 30.

area on 6 November, but substantial parts of this Corps were left as rear guards. The evacuation of these troops, along with the fortress garrison and 26 ID (of XII Corps), became ever more necessary as 10<sup>th</sup> Army advanced. On this day Col. Fasser's group, reinforced by a battalion of 21 Mtn Bde<sup>523</sup>, were already nearing the northern front of the fortress (the works at Vigo). 94 ID were preparing to attack the eastern front on both sides of the Passo di Mauria.

On the next day (7 November) the first signs were detected that the enemy were also ready to retreat in the Sugana valley. XVIII Italian Corps drew back their principal battle line on both sides of Strigno, although they left strong rear guards in the old positions.

9 Mtn Bde, after concentrating their troops on the 6<sup>th</sup>, pursued on the 7<sup>th</sup> in two columns (over the Rolle Pass and in the Vanoi valley). But on the 8<sup>th</sup> the pursuit already came to a halt. The rear guard of 56 Italian ID (six battalions strong) had entrenched in prepared positions just north of the point where the Cismon and the Vanoi come together, on the heights of Viderne (Point 1585), Totoga (1706) and Remitte (1785). 9 Mtn Bde were thus compelled to open the way by sending a column in an enveloping maneuver over the mountains east of the Cismon. Thus valuable time was lost.<sup>524</sup>

#### The victories of 10<sup>th</sup> Army

10<sup>th</sup> Army won brilliant successes on 7 November. Their 94 ID stormed the enemy positions on both sides of the Passo di Mauria after eleven hours of combat, and forced the isolated Italian detachments to lay down their arms. Energetically exploiting their advantage, the Division immediately thrust ahead to Lorenzago, forcing the fall of the strong fortifications at Vigo. The garrisons of the Vigo works, along with numerous stragglers, surrendered either to 94 ID or to Col. Fasser's group (who intervened from the north). A substantial amount of military equipment was also taken.

On 8 November Lawrowski's Division continued to advance south on both banks of the Piave. After further fighting they occupied

<sup>523</sup>The 21 Mtn Bde's "Trachom" Battalions I, III and VIII of IR 104 returned into the Puster valley after the Brigade reached S Stefano; like the other Trachom Battalions they had been ordered to move to 7<sup>th</sup> Army.

<sup>524</sup>Wisshaupt, "Vom Colbricon bis Fonzaso", in Mil. wiss. Mitt. (Vienna, 1927 edition), pp. 523 ff.



the town of Pieve di Cadore early in the afternoon, capturing 4700 more men and 21 guns. The adjacent column from XX Corps, pursuing through the Boite valley, took another 1200 prisoners. Detonations thundered for hours as the Italians blew up fortifications, ammunition dumps, bridges and roads. An enormous amount of booty was still found in the abandoned positions and camps. From the start of 94 ID's victorious advance until the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> they had brought in more than 10,000 prisoners and 97 guns, and they'd won this success despite strenuous marches and difficult fighting.

The Italian rear guards and stragglers who continued to retreat in the Piave valley between Pieve di Cadore and Longarone now faced a new danger from the east. The 22 Sch Div, which had taken part in the encirclement of the 36<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Italian Divisions, sent 43 Sch Bde (reinforced by the Württemberg Mountain Battalion) to advance toward the town of Longarone, while 98 K-Sch Bde pushed through Farra and Ponte nell' Alpi toward Belluno. Despite the lateness of the season, the bad roads, and the barrenness of the thinly-settled mountain valleys, both columns had been given ambitious goals which they achieved thanks to their brilliant *elan*.

On 7 November the northern column approached the Forcella Clautana, which was taken the next day at dawn by the quickly-moving Württembergers. By evening their Battalion reached Cimolais, while 43 Sch Bde camped for the night around Claut. Before daybreak on the 9<sup>th</sup> GM Müller opened the attack against the Italian switch position west of Cimolais, which the enemy already evacuated around 8:00 AM when they realized that a column was enveloping them. This quick success made it possible to continue the pursuit at a faster tempo than originally intended. Thus an advanced guard, consisting of a battalion from the south Styrian SchR 26 and the Württemberg Mountain Battalion, pushed ahead to Longarone, even though the Piave valley was the next day's objective in the plans. German bicycle troops in the van reported that there were many Italian troops and supply trains in the Piave valley; the bicyclists rode forward rapidly but couldn't prevent the destruction of the bridge over the river. They were followed by two companies on foot (one Styrian, one Württemberg), which crossed the swollen waters on a partly-submerged dam and blocked the road through the valley south of Longarone.<sup>525</sup>

GM Müller kept bringing up the main body of 43 Sch Bde, despite

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<sup>525</sup>Schittenhelm, "Wir zogen nach Friaul" (Stuttgart, 1936), pp. 67 ff.

the exhaustion of the troops, because he was fully aware of the situation at Longarone. Meanwhile the danger to the advanced companies on the western bank of the Piave subsided as the darkness of night fell and confusion increased in the enemy ranks. At dawn on 10 November, as the fighting was reinforced by the battalions of 43 Sch Bde and a column from 94 ID which came down the Piave from the north, 10,000 Italians of I Corps laid down their arms. These troops were mainly from the fortress garrisons. Also taken were 100 machine guns, 17 guns and a large amount of equipment. Once again a relentless pursuit by competing allied units and their energetic commanders had won a brilliant success. However, during the night some of the soldiers of I Italian Corps still pressed together in the valley pocket were able to cross the mountains west of the valley road on side paths and thus save themselves from captivity.

Meanwhile 22 Sch Div's southern column (98 K-Sch Bde), which had been sent toward Ponte nelle Alpi, had thrown back two Alpini battalions and a strong group of mountain artillery at Barcis on 7 November. After a very difficult mountain march, in the night of 9-10 November GM Sloninka was arriving east of S Croce Lake. Here in a sharp action the Kaiser-Schützen took 600 prisoners and drove the enemy to the south where - as already narrated - they were disarmed by 55 ID, which was marching from Fadalto through Ponte nelle Alpi to Belluno.

GdI Hordt's group (the Edelweiss Division and 59 Mtn Bde) fought pursuit actions around the Tramonti di sopra on the 8<sup>th</sup> (described earlier), and then spent the night in the area between the Forcella Clautana and Chievolis. On the next day the Edelweiss Division reached the Cimolais-Claut area, and the 59 Mtn Bde Barcis. The 29 Mtn Bde, following 94 ID in the Army's reserve, were held up by that Division's supply trains, which were having a hard time since the road through the Passo di Mauria had been damaged by the enemy. The 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade finally began to march from Forni di sopra to Lorenzago on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

#### The situation in the Sugana and Piave valleys on 9-10 November

While the fate of the enemy rear guards in the Piave valley was thus being decided in the east, in the night of 8-9 November the XVIII Italian Corps began to retreat in the Sugana valley. The withdrawal of these troops was carried out with the greatest possible haste, since the divisions of the Corps, along with 17 ID of IX Corps, were supposed to make up the garrison of Mt Grappa.

On 9 November the k.u.k. 18 ID were ready to pursue in the Sugana valley; their leading troops reached Ospedaletto and Pieve Tesino. On 10 November the 1 Mtn Bde were sent toward Castel Tesino so they could open the route along the Cismon for 9 Mtn Bde. But under pressure from a column which Lercher's Brigade deployed to envelop the enemy east of the Cismon, the Italian rear guards also began to retreat here in the night of 9-10 November. Around noon the 18 ID - marching but not fighting - had already reached Castel Tesino and Grigno.

In the Piave valley, GM Müller's group resumed their advance to the south; despite their exhaustion after fighting in the night, they displayed fresh energy. After marching 24 km they reached Belluno late in the evening of 10 November. Now 10<sup>th</sup> Army were being pinched out from the front; they began to restore the normal chain of command to their units between Longarone and Lorenzago.

*The main body of 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army were heading for the Grappa positions on this day. Although their retreat had been difficult due to their late start, it had finally been carried out without very significant casualties. Disaster had befallen the parts of XII Corps which had withdrawn from the Carnic Alps into the Piave valley, as well as the fortress garrisons. But the cohesion of 4<sup>th</sup> Army hadn't been greatly shaken. Occupation of the Montello, originally a responsibility of I Corps, had to be re-assigned to II Corps since the road leading there through Vittorio and Vidor was already barred by the Austro-Germans.*

## ***F. The thrust toward the area west of the Piave***

### **1. Decisions and orders by the Central Powers**

As the allies neared the Piave on 9 November, the enemy's lively fire from the western bank and their zealous construction of entrenchments very soon gave the impression that the Italians were determined to offer prolonged resistance. Therefore no thought was given to hastily improvising a crossing operation, especially since there was a serious shortage of bridging equipment and of all types of ammunition. The northern wing of 10<sup>th</sup> Army started to push into the Belluno basin before the 10<sup>th</sup>. Since Krauss' group had already come up to Feltre, in an area which was also the target of the eastern wing of Conrad's Army Group, it was essential to make some changes to the chain of command.

On 9 November the HQ of the Southwestern front proposed to the AOK that an attack on two fronts should be carried out to reach the Brenta. There would be a systematic assault over the Piave, where the river's lower course seemed to offer the best possibility of success, along with a thrust from the line Feltre-Castelletto (6 km north of Arsiero). The latter operation would be carried out west of the Brenta by parts of Conrad's Army Group (as already planned for the 12<sup>th</sup>), and between the Brenta and Piave by Krauss' group. Because of the difficulty of supplying so many units in mountain terrain lacking in resources, Archduke Eugene felt that 10<sup>th</sup> Army shouldn't be brought up to the front, but for the time being should stay in the Cadore.

Because of the condition of the Italian Army, which "should be exploited everywhere energetically and quickly", the k.u.k. high command approved this plan. They emphasized in particular the importance of the attack between the Brenta and Piave, which should be coordinated as closely as possible with that of Conrad's Army Group. The staff at Baden added in a note that they still considered 10<sup>th</sup> Army to still be "quite fit for action."

In the discussions which followed, all the commanders agreed about the importance of a thrust to the south between the Brenta and the Piave. Differences of opinion arose only about how strong the attacking force should be and who would lead it, and the role to be played by 10<sup>th</sup> Army (or, more specifically, that Army's HQ). The decision process was delayed by the fact that

from 5 to 18 November the Chief of the General Staff stayed at Trieste as part of the Emperor's entourage, and took part in his daily visits to the troops. At this time the German Emperor and the King of Bulgaria also visited the zone of operations for several days.

Meanwhile the HQ of Southwestern front issued orders on 11 November for continuing the offensive. If Borojevic's Army Group and the main body of 14<sup>th</sup> Army were unable to cross the river by surprise, they should carry out a systematic assault over the Piave toward the southwest. Krauss' group, reinforced by the Edelweiss Division, were to remain under the 14<sup>th</sup> German Army, and would carry out the attack between the Brenta and the Piave. The rest of 10<sup>th</sup> Army plus XX Corps (which was coming out of the Dolomites) were to halt at Longarone and farther north, and remain ready for a future advance. When the k.u.k. AOK were informed of these orders, they again emphasized the importance of the task assigned to Krauss' group, and assigned the capture of Mounts Tomba and Grappa to them as an objective.

But the question of the employment of 10<sup>th</sup> Army still wasn't finally settled. Their commander Freiherr von Krobatin, who was promoted to Field Marshal on 5 November, wished to control XX Corps and Krauss' group for the offensive between the Brenta and Piave. Surprisingly, on the 13<sup>th</sup> FM Conrad also raised objections to the chain of command in this sector, which the AOK refuted; they pointed out that the primary task of Krauss' group was to help our armies on the Piave to cross the river, and therefore the group should remain under 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ. Now FM Conrad, who'd received reports about the arrival of Anglo-French forces in Lombardy, also had concerns about the area on both sides of Lake Garda - concerns shared by the Chief of the General Staff - and requested reinforcements.

Meanwhile a suggestion was received from GFM Hindenburg that the high ground north and east of Verona should be captured; this would make it impossible for the enemy to halt along the Brenta, the Bacchiglione or the Adige. For this purpose he offered to send the German 195 ID, which had become available in the Vosges and which was accustomed to the mountains. Hindenburg further suggested that this Division should be placed along with the German Jaeger Division and the Alpenkorps under the Carpathian Corps HQ (currently in Bukovina, where it wasn't needed); they could attack east of Lake Garda, and parts could also fight west of the Lake if justified by the situation. He hoped that this operation would cause the Entente to withdraw further units from the Western Front for the support of the Italians.

But the AOK at Baden still intended to make the capture of the Grappa massif their principal objective. Since more units were stationed in Venetia than necessary, the AOK ordered that three divisions should shift to the Feltre area; here, along with the 195 ID which would come to Trent, they could be employed either between the Brenta and Piave or even farther west as the situation demanded. First Archduke Eugene (who joined his HQ at Udine on 14 November) further reinforced Krauss' group with the 94 ID, which was re-constructed to include the best fighting battalions of 10<sup>th</sup> Army plus strong artillery.<sup>526</sup> Krobotin's other 16 battalions would go to Belluno where they'd be made mobile enough to deploy in quiet sectors of Tyrol.

Meanwhile the commanders of the three armies on the Piave issued general orders for the assault crossing, although the details still had to be worked out. To support them from the sea, the naval command held some vessels in readiness at Trieste - two old armored ships (*Wien* and *Budapest*), two cruisers (*Spaun* and *Aspern*) and twelve torpedo boats. As suggested by GO Boroevic, to ensure that the operation would start with a massive simultaneous assault all three armies were to strike on 16 November.

This target date was relatively late because of the difficult logistical situation. The HQ of Southwestern front would have to keep a third of the divisions in the plains to the east of the Tagliamento in order to make the others as mobile as possible by makeshift measures. But the process of bringing up ammunition for even this diminished force, along with bridging and communication equipment, left much to be desired.<sup>527</sup> For on 10 November there were just two bridges over the Isonzo at Görz; a

**526**The new order of battle of FML Lawrowski's 94<sup>th</sup> ID was:

- . 25 Mtn Bde (GM Ritter von Wasserthal) - Bn III/18; FJB 8 & 30; a combined FJB; k.k. Lst Bn 10; three high mountain comps
- . 57 Mtn Bde (Col. von Watterich) - Bns V/7, VI/KJR 2; k.k. Lst IR 26 (3); five high mtn comps
- . Sturm Bn 94
- . 94 Res FA Bde (Col. Mostböck) - 28 batties from Mtn AR 3, 5, 17 and 203; also one FK batty and 7 hvy how batties

**527**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: According to Krauss, another problem was that Boroevic deliberately held back the bridging equipment so he could give priority to moving artillery, but the guns were useless if they couldn't get over the rivers. However, Krauss had an extreme animosity toward Boroevic, whom he found at fault at every available opportunity. (Krauss, "Die Ursachen unserer Niederlage" [Munich, 1923], pp. 240-241.)

third wasn't expected to be complete until the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>528</sup> On 5 November the creation of a "Southwestern Military Railroad" HQ was ordered; they would be responsible for the rail system in Venetia. At this time a makeshift transportation system was running; it utilized some rolling stock captured west of the Isonzo (4 locomotives and 400 box-cars) plus automobiles fitted with wheels to move on the rails, and some "Generatorzügen." On the southern wing of the front the Navy helped by shipping supplies over the lagoons on flat-bottomed barques. Naturally the forces which suffered from the greatest supply shortage were Krauss' group, which had been following the retreating enemy without interruption, and 10<sup>th</sup> Army in the high mountains.

#### Appendix - The Railroads in Venetia in mid-November

Before the start of the offensive - when the objective was merely to reach the line Cividale-Görz - the chief of the k.u.k. field railroads was holding ready enough workers and equipment to reconstruct the Wocheiner rail line in the direction of Görz, which would be the focal point of a new transportation network to back up the new, rather inaccessible front. When the extent of our success became evident several days after the breakthrough, the railroad command expected that they could soon restore both of the major lines to the west from the current rail-heads at Reifenberg and Prosecco through Görz and Monfalcone. But they had little hope that they could quickly make the third line (Tarvis-Pontafel-Gemona) operational; it ran through the mountains and was more vulnerable to sustained damage.

After the Italians retreated, it became evident that the first two railroads mentioned above - running through a battlefield that had been contested for two and a half years - had been quite thoroughly damaged, even down to the rail-beds. Most of the repair crews therefore had to be sent to them, while more limited resources were devoted to the Pontafel line, which had suffered surprisingly little harm. But despite all efforts, when the armies reached the Piave on 9 November the rail-heads were still at Tarvis, Podmelec, Reifenberg and Prosecco. Thus at the mouth of the Piave the front was 100 km from the end of the rail lines, and west of Vittorio it was about 150 km distant. The number of motorized and horse-drawn columns available was sufficient to carry just a limited amount of supplies.

Finally on 17 November a bridge was finished at Pontafel and rail traffic could move as far as Udine. After the bridge at Pieris

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<sup>528</sup>For further information about the transportation problems in Venetia, see the appendix at the end of this section.

was restored on the 20<sup>th</sup>, limited traffic was finally possible up to Latisana. The first trains could travel on the main line between Görz and Udine on 29 November. On 1 December the rail-heads were moved forward to Vittorio, Conegliano and S Stino di Livenza. Thus it wasn't possible for trains to approach the vicinity of the front until three weeks after the allies reached the Piave.

## 2. Defensive measures of the Italians

An important change occurred on the enemy side during these days. In the evening of 8 November the King of Italy removed Cadorna from his post, thus fulfilling a demand which the new Prime Minister (Orlando) and the two Chiefs of Staff of the Western Powers had already made at the Rapallo conference of 28 October. Cadorna's successor was G.Lt Diaz, hitherto the commander of XXIII Corps.

When Cadorna handed his office over to Diaz on the 9<sup>th</sup>, the retreat into the new defensive front was already substantially complete. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was standing fast behind the Piave between its mouth and the Montello Heights, which were held by II Corps. Farther west, 1<sup>st</sup> Army were still stationed in their old positions between Lake Garda and the Brenta; only their extreme right wing had been bent back. The intervening part of this new, slightly curved front (between the Brenta and Piave) had not yet been occupied. But here Cadorna had already constructed dug-outs, roads, cable-hoists and a water supply on the Grappa massif in November 1916.<sup>529</sup> Thus as the troops from 4<sup>th</sup> Army arrived they would find at least a rudimentary defensive position.

As figures shown above have indicated, the Italian casualties had been unusually large since the start of their opponents' offensive. Nevertheless, it seemed that the intact units they had available would still be sufficient to hold the new front between the sea and Asiago; it was just 130 km long, or about 220 km shorter than the positions they'd held on 24 October. Thus the departure of most of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army from the line didn't cause a problem, especially since significant reinforcements were arriving from the Western Powers. Therefore King Victor Emanuel was able to deliver a confident speech at Peschiera on 8 November; the occasion was the presentation for his signature of the pact which had been drafted at the Rapallo conference, and which created a "Supreme War Council" to be established at

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<sup>529</sup>Cabiati, "La riscossa", p. 32



Versailles.<sup>530</sup> Cadorna was named a member of this Council, alongside Generals Foch and Wilson, as the permanent military representative of Italy.

At this time there was still no agreement regarding the strength of the force being sent to help the Italians. The Western Powers' representatives were willing to provide 12 divisions, but Orlando demanded 15 and Diaz 20. To anticipate, ultimately six French and five English divisions would come to upper Italy. General Foch insisted that the way to Feltre should be defended for as long as possible and that Mt Grappa should be held regardless of circumstances; G.Lt Diaz responded with concerns about the Montello, defended by a weak garrison. Since furthermore Italian public opinion was upset because the Franco-English troops were stationed so far behind the battlefield, it was decided on the 12<sup>th</sup> to bring them forward. Three French divisions were sent to the Valdagna-Vicenza area, while the English would assemble farther south on the line Vicenza-Montegalda. Only one French division would still be stationed west of Lake Garda.<sup>531</sup>

The new Italian high command under G.Lt Diaz now faced the task of halting their opponents along the line already chosen by Cadorna. Diaz adopted his predecessors' plans in their entirety, and firmly opposed secret attempts by the new government to compel him to pull the Army back to the Adige and the Mincio.<sup>532</sup>

Thus the units of the allied Central Powers were striving to advance into the plains west of the Piave, while the Italians were determined to offer prolonged resistance in their new positions. The result was a large new battle in mid-November upon the edge of the mountains east of Asiago, and on the lower course of the Piave. It first burst out west of the Brenta, and then spread to the Grappa massif before the western bank of the Piave was finally drawn into the fiery conflict.

### **3. Attacks by the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army on the Asiago plateau, 10-16 November**

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530Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie del Piave", p. 11. Painlevé, "Foch et Pétain", p. 268.

531Palat, "Foch", p. 128

532Cabiati, "La riscossa", pp. 38 ff.

**a. The northern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Italian Army retreats**

As a natural result of the situation caused by 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army's retreat from the Dolomites, the 1<sup>st</sup> Army would now have to withdraw some distance with their XX Corps (stationed on the northern wing), whose flank was exposed by the evacuation of the Sugana valley. To maintain a connection between the new Italian front on the Grappa and the old one on the Asiago plateau, at first the plan was to occupy the shortest possible line, south of the Frenzela Ravine. This line of resistance could be held by a relatively small number of troops, freeing up units which at this time the Italian high command needed so desperately on Mt Grappa and on the Piave. The commander of XX Corps, responsible for the defense of the sector, also advocated standing here.<sup>533</sup>

But to the north of the Frenzela Ravine lay Mt Meletta, a bulwark provided by nature. The mighty mountain had been captured by the k.u.k. 6 ID in June 1916 after stubborn and costly fighting, but soon had to be evacuated when the Austrians pulled back their front. Then the Italian XX Corps worked for a year to build up the Meletta positions as a back-up to their main line. This area was supplied with everything needed for prolonged resistance - fortifications and installations dug into the rock on the northern and western sides, along with locations for guns, new roads, and water supplies. Retention of the Meletta massif would prevent the Austrians from spreading out on the northern part of the plateau and from threatening the Brenta valley from the west. Furthermore, the Italians could counter troops thrusting from Asiago to the southeast by striking their northern flank. And since the positions south of the Frenzela Ravine were still insufficiently strong, the Italian generals finally decided to incorporate the Meletta into their new defensive front. They were aware of the drawbacks - more men would be needed to hold the longer lines, and the massif jutted out as a dangerous salient from the other positions. Based on a conference with the Army commanders at Treviso on 29 October - when Cadorna ordered that on 4 November the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies should retreat behind the Piave - he also instructed 1<sup>st</sup> Army to prepare to pull back their right wing from the line Gallio - Cima Maora to the Meletta massif.<sup>534</sup>

The start of the retreat on the northern part of the plateau and in the Sugana valley, originally scheduled for 6 November, was finally postponed until the 7<sup>th</sup> so as to give the troops of XVIII

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533Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie del Piave", p. 25

534Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p. 534

Corps more time to deploy on Mt Grappa.<sup>535</sup> After the magazines were emptied and the artillery pulled back, XX Corps withdrew in echelon during the nights through 10 November. Rear guards left in the old positions until the 9<sup>th</sup> gave the impression that there was still a full garrison in the trenches. The 29 Italian ID entered the Meletta positions at dawn on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Two Alpini battalions from 52 ID guarded the road leading through Barricata to Marcesina; four other Alpini battalions blocked the Brenta valley and maintained the connection with 4<sup>th</sup> Army.

#### **b. The situation of the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army**

FM Conrad attentively kept track of the progress of the allied armies as they advanced in Venetia. Perhaps there would still be an opportunity to send fresh units to Tyrol so that the thrust into the plains, originally scheduled for 10 November, would be more effective. Conrad's awareness of what an important role this operation could play was evident in the situation report which he sent to Baden on 4 November, in which he stated that it "could decisively promote the intentions of the AOK."

But because the offensive was scheduled to start in just a few days, there was already very little time for the requested reinforcements to arrive in Tyrol. As Conrad mentioned in his report, he wanted to completely defeat the Italians before they could receive effective help from the English and French; therefore it was essential that strong forces be provided in Tyrol. With them he could either effectively carry out the planned thrust to Bassano or - in case the enemy retreated to the Adige - reinforce the increasingly important sector on both sides of Lake Garda. Conrad felt that these suggestions were all the more justified by the situation in Venetia when he was informed by Archduke Eugene on 4 November that reaching the line of the Brenta was the minimum objective.

But this time once again Conrad didn't receive the reinforcements he'd requested. In fact, on 5 November his Army Group HQ as well as 10<sup>th</sup> Army were ordered to hold units in readiness to move to Bukovina - five "Trachom" battalions plus the k.u. 28 Lst Mtn Bde (with five more battalions). Also turned down was a request for some March formations from Borojevic's Army Group to build up the battalions of the attacking group (which had an average strength of just 650 riflemen each).

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<sup>535</sup>Cabiati, "La riscossa", p. 56

Intelligence reports received on 5 November and the conduct of the enemy - who were clearing snow from their positions in the rear - made it clear that the Italians' withdrawal on the northern part of the plateau was imminent. No doubt an immediate attack by 11<sup>th</sup> Army was desirable to interfere with the enemy's occupation of their new front. But it couldn't be undertaken because of the attacking troops' current state of preparation; in fact on the 4<sup>th</sup> the HQ of 11<sup>th</sup> Army had requested that their assault should be postponed. Now that the enemy had started to evacuate the Cadore, it was anticipated that they would also soon evacuate their positions in the Sugana valley and north of Asiago. It was highly probable that they would finish their retreat before the date chosen to start our offensive. And if the Italians now set up their new defensive front between Asiago and Valstagna, *i.e.* south of the Frenzela Ravine, Conrad's planned thrust in the direction of Valstagna would have no effect. Therefore on 6 November the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ were ordered that if the enemy prematurely abandoned the northern part of the plateau the main blow should be directed not toward Valstagna, but over Mt Bertiaga - thus not to the east but toward the southeast.

These different scenarios couldn't be adequately addressed during the preparations for the attack. The necessity of being ready for both options was a cause for the setback that occurred when the Italians offered prolonged resistance on the Meletta massif.

As far as Army Group HQ at Bozen could determine on 8 November, GO Graf Scheuchenstuel's objections against opening the attack on the 10<sup>th</sup> were fully justified. The troops would be tired because of their accelerated march, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> the attacking group would still lack 6½ battalions and 100 guns. According to information received from the HQ of Southwestern front, the attack against the Piave line could hardly start before 12 November. Therefore on the 8<sup>th</sup> FM Conrad issued this order to 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ: "The attack will finally start on 12 November. If the enemy are still deployed as they are now, your direction will be Valstagna. If the enemy fall back, the thrust should take place without fail on the 12<sup>th</sup> with the center over Mt Bertiaga."

In Bozen it was hoped that the preparations would be complete by 12n November, since not only the developments on the plateau but also the general situation made it necessary to adhere to the final schedule which they'd announced to the AOK at Baden.

Now that the first elements of FM Archduke Eugene's armies were approaching the Piave, a thrust from Tyrol was absolutely

necessary to keep the offensive rolling. This was reflected in the order which the k.u.k. high command issued in the night of 9 November (simultaneously with their order to Archduke Eugene mentioned earlier). They told FM Conrad: "Because of the condition of the Italian Army it's necessary to energetically assault them, and as quickly as possible. We've informed Southwestern front HQ that your Army Group will attack south on the 12<sup>th</sup> from the Asiago area. We've instructed them to exert powerful pressure between the Piave and Brenta as close as possible to the same time." It's remarkable that this order refers to a thrust to the south, which hadn't been part of the plans and which in fact wasn't carried out.

Early on 10 November the Italian XX Corps with their 18 battalions (under 52<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Divisions) held the front from the slopes just east of the Brenta through Mt Meletta to Mt Zomo (2 km east of Gallio). Under XXII Corps the 2 ID were stationed from here to a point on the other side of the ruins of Asiago along a line that had long been prepared for resistance. Behind them in reserve were 57 ID. Total strength of XXII Corps was 21 battalions. The area between Asiago and the Astico was held by the 16 battalions of XXVI Corps (11 and 12 ID) in their old positions. These three corps on the eastern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Italian Army were placed under G.Lt nob. Ricci Armani's "HQ of Troops on the Plateau", which had six more battalions in reserve (the latter had been moved from the Pasubio sector on 27 October and placed at his disposal). Thus the Italians had a total of 61 battalions on the plateau, along with about 400 guns.

On the Aus-Hung. side FML Edler von Kletter's group assembled between the northern edge of the plateau and Mt Dorole with 13 battalions; stationed from here to the Astico was III Corps with four divisions (41 battalions). Stationed in reserve of 11<sup>th</sup> Army were 106 Lst ID (9 battalions) in the Ghertele - Mt Rover area, and 49 ID (until now 7 battalions) at Trent. In the next few days a brigade from the latter Division would be sent to Lavarone. Therefore a total of 70 battalions stood ready for the offensive.<sup>536</sup>

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**536**The infantry order of battle had been partly changed since 1 November, the date of the general O/B shown above. It now consisted of:

- . FML Kletter's Group - Col. Schotsch's Group [IR 81 (3), Bn X/14, FJB 7], 12 Inf Bde [IR 35 (3), IR 75 (3); a combined bn; k.k. Lst Bn 172]
- . III Corps -
- . 6<sup>th</sup> ID - 1 KJ Bde [KJR 1 (3), KJR 2 (3)], 11 Bde [IR 17 (3), IR 27 (3)]

As of 10 November the III Corps had available 30,000 riflemen plus 361 guns (282 light, 62 medium and 17 heavy).

### **c. The first onslaught on the Asiago plateau**

#### Actions on 10-11 November

It was already known at dawn on 9 November that the enemy had abandoned their foremost positions near Asiago. Pursuing detachments from III Corps occupied the Katze Heights (Point 1223) and Mt Cimon (# 1768). Based on a report which 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ received around 2:00 PM, it seemed that the enemy were retreating to the line Cm. Echer - Mt di Val Bella - Mt Meletta - Mt Castelgomberto, where they were continuing to clear snow from the trenches. GO Scheuchenstuel therefore ordered FML Kletter to begin his advance as soon as possible so as to cover the northern flank of III Corps. The latter were also supposed to follow the enemy and bring up their artillery, so they could deliver the main attack with concentrated strength toward Mt Bertiaga on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Thus on 10 November the k.u.k. troops advanced between Asiago and the northern edge of the plateau; at first they did gain ground but they were vulnerable to counter-blows from the enemy forces, which were withdrawing but not defeated. A counterattack would disrupt the still incomplete preparations for the systematic offensive.

The troops on the northern wing of Kletter's group, at some points pushing through newly-fallen snow which reached up to their stomachs, had difficulty entering the Italian positions, which until the afternoon were occupied by enemy rear guards (who on the day before had even been working on the trenches as a deception measure). Farther south Kletter's group on this day occupied the Italian positions on Mounts Fiara and Baldo. III Corps started their attack early in the morning despite unfavorable weather (there was heavy snow on the entire plateau). In the previous evening detachments from the k.u.k. 52 ID had already entered the evacuated enemy positions near Canove, while 21 Sch Div occupied those near Camporovere. Advanced guards

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- . 19<sup>th</sup> ID - 181 Inf Bde [under Col. Günste - Bns I/22, I/51, I/102; FJB 20; two high mtn comps], Col. Vidossich's Group [Bns IV and ½ V/22, IV/27, X/59, V/BH 1, IV/KSchR 1]
  - . 52<sup>nd</sup> ID - As on 28 October (see an earlier footnote)
  - . 21<sup>st</sup> Sch Div - Unchanged since 1 November, except for attachment of Schönner's Bicycle Bn

entered Asiago, which had been reduced to rubble. By noon on the 10<sup>th</sup> the attacking group of 6 ID had already taken the town of Gallio and the Kreuz Heights (# 1116) west of Mt Sisemol, when they were thrown back to their starting point by a powerful counter-thrust.

This development made it clear that the attackers would have to be secure against assaults on their flank from the east before they could start the drive to Mt Bertiaga. Therefore 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ ordered that on 11 November FML Kletter and GdI Krautwald should first gain as much ground as possible toward the east on Mounts Meletta and Sisemol. Now III Corps HQ sent 21 Sch Div against Mt Sisemol and 6 ID against Gallio and Mt Longara. The attack on the latter objective was to be supported by three battalions from Kletter's group.

But on 11 November there was once again no progress near Asiago. 6 ID twice captured Mt Longara, but each time they had to give it up due to stubborn counterattacks by larger enemy forces. Here the Italian "HQ of Troops on the Plateau" had deployed their reserve brigade, which decided the action. Only the northern wing of Kletter's group gained noteworthy success; despite deep snow, in the evening they were able with help from a battalion of 18 ID (which had climbed up from the Sugana valley) to throw back the Alpini battalion stationed on the Barricata. The Alpini withdrew toward Mt Lisser after suffering heavy casualties.

After the events of this day of combat, it was easy to recognize that the Italians were digging in for prolonged resistance on the Meletta massif. Despite all the sacrifices of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, they still hadn't created the necessary conditions for a breakthrough into the plains, namely security for the attacking group in the direction of the east and sufficient room to re-group the artillery. Therefore GO Scheuchenstuel reported to FM Conrad, who was visiting the battlefield, that he would have to postpone the decisive assault from 12 November to a future date.

The advance from the Sugana valley

In the morning of 11 November the Army Group HQ wanted to be sure that the units coming out of the Primör and the Sugana valley arrived as soon as possible at Primolano, whence they could intervene in the fighting on the plateau. GM von Vidalé's 18 ID, to which 9 Mtn Bde had been assigned the day before, received an order to take the Cm. di Campo and Col di Lan heights by the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup>, regardless of the exhaustion of the troops; the advanced guards were to reach Arsie and Primolano, where the rest of the Division would concentrate on the 12<sup>th</sup> so they could quickly advance from there through Enego. This order was based on the assumption that the Italians would hardly be able to resist any longer north of Primolano. But on the contrary 18 ID had to overcome sustained resistance from enemy rear guards, which substantially slowed their advance.

9 Mtn Bde, which had opened the Cismon valley on 10 November, resumed their march on the next day in two columns.<sup>537</sup> Three battalions moved east of Cismon on the heights north of Fonzaso, and three more were sent through Lamon toward the armored work on the Col di Lan. Because of the rugged terrain the march was very exhausting. Moreover, because of extensive damage to the roads the pack animals couldn't follow the troops over the pre-war border; thus manpower was used to haul the heavy machine guns and two mountain batteries forward. Most of the batteries were sent back into the Fleims valley, so they could be shipped by rail through Trent into the Sugana valley. After heavy fighting, in the night the eastern column climbed Mt Avena; early on the 12<sup>th</sup> they descended into the valley on the other side where they captured many Italian stragglers at Feltre and Arten. In the west, K-SchR III advanced from the Cismon valley; on the 12<sup>th</sup> they occupied the Col di Lan work, which had still been delivering heavy fire the day before but now had been blown up by its garrison. Then the Kaiser-Schützen descended to Fonzaso.

Because of heavy fighting with Italian rear guards, on the 11<sup>th</sup> the 1 Mtn Bde advanced just slowly. Finally in the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> - after bitter combat in which the Meran Stand-Schützen were especially distinguished - they were able to take the Cm. di Campo armored work. They forced 13 officers and more than 200 men of the defending Alpini battalion to lay down their arms. On the previous day 18 ID's column in the valley (FJB 22 plus four mobile batteries) had already advanced through Tezze to cross the border, which thus had been recovered from this point east as far as the sea. In the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> they linked up with 1 Mtn

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<sup>537</sup>Wisshaupt, "Vom Colbricon bis Fonzaso", pp. 525 ff.



Bde in Primolano.

18 ID wanted to use 13 November to concentrate and to give the troops some rest, which (especially in 9 Mtn Bde) they badly needed after their great exertions of the last few days. The 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade did march forward on the 13<sup>th</sup>, but only as far as Arsie. Thus although the arrival of 18 ID was urgently expected on the plateau, on 14 November only their 1 Mtn Bde were on the scene. They were followed on the next day by 9 Mtn Bde through Primolano and Enego; GdI Krauss had temporarily relinquished his authority over the latter unit.

#### Further actions on the plateau, 12-13 November

New fighting on the plateau had been raging since the 12<sup>th</sup>. That morning the III Corps had been ordered to capture the Italian positions on Mt Meletta, or at least those between Mounts Meletta di Gallio and Sisemol. FM Conrad didn't plan to deliver the blow over Mt Bertiaga until the Meletta massif was captured. Although this would delay the main assault (hitherto scheduled to begin on the 12<sup>th</sup>), he believed that there would be no negative impact on the overall situation since Boroevic's Army Group and 14<sup>th</sup> Army still weren't concentrated on the Piave, and thus it was highly unlikely they'd be crossing the river in the next few days.

Conrad's judgment was validated on the 12<sup>th</sup> when he received a report from the HQ of the Southwestern front; it indicated that the enemy apparently intended to offer serious resistance along the lower Piave, in the area between Feltre and Bassano, and on the Asiago plateau. Thus a systematic offensive would be necessary. As indicated earlier, in this scenario Conrad's Army Group would be expected to attack to the south from the line Feltre-Castelletto (north of Arsiero), particularly in the sector west of the Brenta.

On 12 November the III Corps stood ready to attack again toward the east. Because of the short time-frame they weren't able to make systematic preparations; after the failure of the "advance" on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> they now launched a more powerful assault. At first the attempts against the well-constructed defensive positions, held by unshaken troops, were unsuccessful; finally in the evening the 6 ID - led by GM Ritter von Schilhawsky - were able to capture Mt Longara and the town of Gallio.

In the evening of this day of battle FM Conrad reported to Baden that the thrust of III Corps, which was supposed to disrupt the enemy retreat, had failed to have the desired success. This was

due partly to the Italians' early withdrawal and partly to their stubborn resistance in rear positions that were already prepared. It was still to be determined whether the enemy intended to hold onto the Meletta indefinitely or whether they planned to make their main effort behind the Assa and Frenzela ravines; the latter seemed more likely. This opinion was shared by HQ of the 11<sup>th</sup> k.u.k. Army, which therefore ordered FML Kletter's group, with support from the northern wing of III Corps, to capture the Meletta massif and to mop up the area as far as the Brenta and the Frenzela ravine on the 13<sup>th</sup>. 110 Lst Inf Bde were temporarily placed under FML Kletter for this attack.

As Kletter's group pivoted on this day toward the northern front of the Meletta positions, the task of guarding their rear was entrusted to Col. Schotsch's sub-group. In the morning Schotsch had already occupied the Mt Lisser armored work (Point 1636), which the enemy had evacuated; on the next day he mopped up the entire plateau east of the Gadena valley, thus opening a new route to the plateau - the road, damaged by explosions, through Enego.

The attack on 13 November gained only insignificant local successes. Parts of 21 Sch Div and of 6 ID finally secured the Kreuz Heights (# 1116, south of Gallio), but assaults by the Kaiser Jaeger against the heights east of Gallio remained fruitless. Kletter's group made some progress on the ridges just west of the Meletta, but on the northern front of the mountain the attackers remained pinned down on the slopes.

Thus it was becoming ever clearer that the enemy intended to offer very sustained resistance on the Meletta massif, the capture of which would be the next assignment of 11<sup>th</sup> Army. Meanwhile the generals in Tyrol had new concerns about the Judicarien sector, which Conrad had previously considered a danger spot. The Field Marshal's first defensive measure was to hold four battalions of 49 ID in readiness in the Adige valley, even though they were urgently needed on the plateau. Then he tried to get the high command to send a brigade (and eventually a division) to the Vallarsa - Adige valley - Judicarien area. Simultaneously he altered the chain of command here. XX Corps HQ took over the former "Area III", and were placed directly under Army Group HQ. The HQ of 49 ID were placed over the Adamello and Judicarien sectors. Two high mountain companies, three Landsturm battalions and seven batteries were assigned as reinforcements to XX Corps.

This new command structure would also be advantageous if, as FM

Conrad had suggested, an offensive were to be carried out from the Judicarien. The AOK's order to transfer three divisions from Venetia to Feltre and the assignment of the German 195 ID heightened the Field Marshal's hopes for this area.

Developments from 14 to 16 November

Meanwhile the fighting near Asiago continued on 14 November. On this day the 18 ID, whose intervention in the battle for the Meletta was eagerly awaited, reached the Enego area with 1 Mtn Bde<sup>538</sup> while the group in the valley advanced as far as the village of Cismon. The leading troops of 9 Mtn Bde occupied the Col Tonder (# 1132). Kletter's group didn't move forward on the 14<sup>th</sup>, especially since bad weather and fog prevented artillery support. Similarly the efforts of 6 ID and 21 Sch Div between Mounts Zomo and Sisemol were unsuccessful.

Per a report from the HQ of Southwestern front, the plan was to break the enemy's resistance on the Piave with a powerful thrust between that river and the Brenta. Therefore Conrad ordered 11<sup>th</sup> Army to prepare to launch a simultaneous attack at a point still to be determined between the Brenta and the Astico; it should open on 17 November at the earliest. Thus the plan for a thrust from Asiago to the southeast, which had been the basic concept until now, was abandoned for the time being. But 11<sup>th</sup> Army were still obliged to capture the Meletta massif by the 17<sup>th</sup> as part of the build-up for the main assault, and the costly fighting would have to continue.

Therefore an envelopment assault against the Italian Meletta positions was ordered for 15 November. 6 ID would capture Mt Zomo with their 1 KJ Bde; seven battalions of Kletter's group would advance against the northwestern and western fronts of the Meletta massif. 18 ID were now entering the fight, sending 1 Mtn Bde against Mt Tondarecar (# 1670). Col. Schotsch's group (five battalions), placed under 18 ID, were to thrust past the Gadena valley and the village of Foza into the Italian rear areas. On this day 9 Mtn Bde were still on the march toward Enego.

Preparations by the attacking troops, hindered by unfavorable weather, weren't complete until around 4:00 PM. The attack which then opened led at first to some noteworthy successes on the southern wing of Kletter's group, where parts of Infantry Regiments # 27 and 35 stormed the Italian advanced positions north of Mt Zomo. But the enemy still held the mountain itself. Army HQ didn't receive accurate information about the outcome of the fighting around the Meletta until late in the evening. Because of an erroneous report that 1 Mtn Bde had taken Mounts Tondarecar and Badelecche, GO Scheuchenstuel ordered that the

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538The new order of battle of 1 Mtn Bde was: SchR 36 (3); Res Bn IV/37; FJB 22; k.k. Lst Bn 164; half a bn of the Upper Aus. Vol. Rifle Regt

attack should continue on 16 November, while 18 ID were to already send 9 Mtn Bde toward Foza during the night.

Therefore the fighting continued on the 16<sup>th</sup>. 1 Mtn Bde once again attacked toward Mt Tondarecar in the afternoon, but couldn't break through. Kletter's group repulsed heavy Italian counter-attacks west of the Meletta. Around 9:00 PM, after bitter hand-to-hand combat, KJR 2 stormed Mt Zomo but again had to evacuate the position due to strong counter-thrusts.

After a week of mountain fighting in wintry weather with insufficient supplies, many troops were absent because of illness and the units also had significant combat losses.<sup>539</sup> Under these circumstances 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ decided to avoid further attrition; they would resume the assault on the Meletta only after systematic preparations. Above all they would provide sufficient artillery support. Until now some of III Corps' heavy guns hadn't been employed because they were being held for the planned principal attack. They would be brought up, as would the mobile artillery of 18 ID. Several days would elapse before the latter would reach the area Enego - Mt Lisser.

When FM Conrad reported to Baden about this decision by 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, he once more requested reinforcements so that he could break through the enemy's three lines of resistance on the plateau. Furthermore he asked that the parts of XX Corps which had passed under control of 10<sup>th</sup> Army after the pursuit in the Dolomites (five battalions and two batteries) should be made available for his Army Group, especially since he had given up 28 Lst Mtn Bde. But the AOK declared that they weren't in a position to send further divisions to Tyrol as long as the Italians were holding on along the Piave.

#### **4. The thrust between the Brenta and the Piave**

##### **a. The opposing forces and their assignments**

###### The Central Powers

While the allies prepared to cross the lower Piave, Krauss' group continued to advance toward Feltre on 11 November. On the southern bank of the Piave the 55 ID marched to Mel, where they

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<sup>539</sup>Battalion III/27 had a combat strength of no more than 100 men.

began to build a bridge. The 98 K-Sch Bde occupied the quarters at Castion which 55 ID had left behind. The Jaeger Division spent the night between Ponte nelle Alpi and Lake S. Croce. North of the Piave the main body of 22 Sch Div rested at Belluno; Wieden's Division concentrated between Polpet and Langarone. On the next day the main body of 22 Sch Div resumed their march, but were forced to halt in front of the Torrente Cavorame at Pont because the bridge had been destroyed. The Edelweiss Division followed them as far as Sedico. The troops south of the Piave also had to pause because the bridge at Mel wasn't ready yet.

This was the situation when Krauss' group - which now once more consisted of the same divisions they'd led at Flitsch - received the assignment of advancing south from the line Fonzaso-Feltre and taking the Grappa massif. This would enable the main body of Southwestern front to cross the Piave. Although GdI Krauss was supposed to act in cooperation with 11<sup>th</sup> Army, he wasn't informed of their plans.<sup>540</sup> He believed that the enemy intended to resist along a line running approximately from Mt Tomba through Mounts Grappa and Pertica to Enego. To bring his units up in the correct order, he ordered Wieden's group (22 Sch Div and the Edelweiss Division) into the area between Feltre and Torrente Cison and 55 ID to Feltre and the area farther south. The Jaeger Division were to follow on the Cordevole. Therefore on the 13<sup>th</sup> the 43 Sch Bde marched through Feltre to Arten, Caupo and Rasai; 55 ID crossed the Piave and entered Feltre. The Edelweiss Division, marching north of Feltre, reached Arsie (216 Inf Bde) and Murle (217 Inf Bde) late that night. 98 K-Sch Bde came through Mel to S Giustina, the Jaeger Division through Belluno to the Cordevole. By occupying Feltre and the area between the Cison and Brenta rivers the allies secured the road linking the basins of Belluno and Feltre with the Sugana valley, which would be of great assistance in shifting units from east to west.

By evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> it was determined from reconnaissance and from intercepted Italian wireless messages that - contrary to earlier analyses - the enemy were already stationed on the northern spurs of Mt Grappa and on Mt Cornella (Point 635 northwest of Quero), and that the Italian XVIII Corps with three divisions were advancing north out of the plains. Meanwhile GM Rudolf Müller had already sent SchR 26 toward Mt Peurna (# 1384) and SchR 3 toward Mt Roncone (# 1166), so that these heights could be taken on the 14<sup>th</sup>. To support SchR 3 GM Wieden ordered Battalion II/59, stationed at Giaron, to simultaneously advance

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<sup>540</sup>Per a report by GdI Krauss to the Military Archives on 17 April 1936

to Mt Roncone. In the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup>, two battalions of 55 ID had driven the enemy from St Maria, but their further progress was checked by heavy fire which hit them from the tunnel south of St Maria.

Since he believed that in mountain warfare thrusts in the valleys were the quickest path to success, GdI Krauss had decided on the 12<sup>th</sup> to capture the Grappa massif primarily by attacking in the Brenta and Piave valleys. Thus Wieden's group (which was to be also joined by 9 Mtn Bde) were to send their main body into the Cismon and Brenta valleys toward Bassano, while a regiment advanced on the ridges over Mounts Roncone, Pertica (# 1552) and Grappa (# 1779) to Crespano and Semonzo. One column would branch off at the village of Cismon in the direction of Mt Asolone (# 1522). Schwarzenberg's group (55 ID and the Jaeger Division), supported by the artillery of 50 ID, would force open the way to Pederobba in the Piave valley and on the slopes immediately to the west; weaker side detachments should thrust over Mounts Tomba (# 870), Pallone (# 1217) and Grappa into the plains. Since the offensive couldn't be carried out immediately, and since it was necessary to bring up more batteries, GdI Krauss reserved to himself the authority to fix an opening date.

The four divisions of the group numbered 45 battalions, some of them very much under strength. The artillery (around 60 batteries) were strong but had very little ammunition; moreover when the attack did start they weren't yet in place because they'd been delayed by having to use makeshift measures to cross the streams.

### The Entente

GdI Krauss' analysis of the enemy situation as of the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> was in general correct. XVIII Corps had been entrusted with the defense of Mt Grappa; for "clearly psychological reasons"<sup>541</sup> they had first marched most of their troops through the Brenta and Piave valleys into the plains, from which the units could enter the new positions by advancing toward the enemy. 51 ID were assigned to Mt Asolone, 15 ID to Mt Grappa and 56 ID to Mt Spinuccia (# 1303). 17 ID (of IX Corps), adjacent to the right, were to defend Mt Tomba.<sup>542</sup> As mentioned previously, the task of blocking the Brenta valley was allotted to 1<sup>st</sup> Army's 52 ID. Since the defenses of Mt Grappa were insufficiently deep, at the request of Generals Foch and Wilson the spurs to the north (Mounts Roncone, Peurna and Tomatico [# 1598]) were also

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541Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie del Piave", p. 275

542Cabiati, "La riscossa", pp. 101 ff.

occupied. These positions were garrisoned at once by the Bersaglieri and Alpini of 15 ID (totaling just six battalions and six batteries), who'd descended from the Fassana Alps. But this deployment substantially weakened the garrison of the important Mt Grappa itself.<sup>543</sup>

In total the enemy had 47 battalions with 12 heavy and 40 light batteries stationed between the Brenta and Piave. They were gradually joined during November by 12 more heavy batteries. And these were no longer worn-out troops, such as those whom the allies had driven before them after the breakthroughs at Flitsch and Tolmein, but rather steady units which were determined to bar their opponents from the road into the plains under all circumstances.

### The terrain

The terrain would greatly influence the course of the fighting that now broke out between the Brenta and the Piave. From the highest point, Mt Grappa, two long ridges descend gradually toward the north on both sides of the Stizzone Brook toward Arten and Feltre; their upper portions were free of trees. Thus the narrow upper part of the western slope was easily accessible, and in places could be reached by a trail for pack-animals. The more rugged eastern ridge, along with a ridge stretching east from Mt Grappa through Mounts Pallone and Tomba, surround the Alano basin with rocky cliffs. West of Mt Grappa the terrain sinks past Mt Asolone to a small plateau, which slopes steeply down to the Brenta. Toward the south there is another steep drop between the Grappa massif and the plains. From here a road winds with many curves up to the summit and then to Mt Pertica.

There were two valleys through which the thrusts were to be mounted. The Brenta valley, including the lower part of the Cison valley, is a ravine 20 km long (between Rocca and Villa) and 1000 meters deep; its floor is only wide enough for a highway and railroad except for the stretch between the mouth of the Cison and Il Termine where it widens by several hundred paces. The equally deep ravines of the Val Gadena and Val Frenzela join the Brenta valley from the northwest. The prospects for breaking through along the Piave (between the mouth of the Sonna and Pederobba) were somewhat better, but in this valley's floor there was still little room to maneuver as far as Quero. Finally south of Quero the valley broadened, although it narrowed again near Fener.

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<sup>543</sup>Assum, "La prima difesa del Grappa" (Turin, 1924), pp. 43 ff.



*A storm that began on 11 November brought snow to the higher elevations and rain to the valleys. The weather improved early on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but ice developed on the mountain roads and paths as the temperature dropped.*

**b. The first attack on Mt Grappa, 14-18 November**14-15 November

Despite the order to thrust into the Brenta valley with the majority of his force, GM Wieden had his troops attack toward Mounts Peurna and Roncone on the 14<sup>th</sup>, because he believed that a decision could best be achieved by advancing over the heights. Therefore he also held the Edelweiss Division back in the Arsie-Fonzaso area. In the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> Wieden expressed to GM Müller, who was of the same opinion, his reservations about the thrust in the valley which GdI Krauss had requested. But Müller decided that he would carry out his operation as ordered.

Meanwhile on the 14<sup>th</sup> the two regiments of 43 Sch Bde, which still hadn't been joined by artillery, were with difficulty inching forward nearly to the Italian lines. Finally toward evening SchR 26 were able to wrest Mt Peurna from their stubborn opponents. 98 K-Sch Bde came up to Porzen and Rasai.

Under Schwarzenberg's group the two battalions of 55 ID sent toward Mt Tomatico gained no success. On the other hand the Bosniaks of 38 Inf Bde, advancing in the valley, were able to storm the railroad station at St Maria. But afterwards they were forced to turn toward the heights which rise to the west, because their further advance down the valley was prevented by flanking fire from that direction. After heavy fighting, in the afternoon they wrested the ridges between Points 1178 and 1093 from the enemy, but the Italians were still holding onto Heights # 781. This menace on the flank now also caused GM Schwarzenberg to doubt whether he could continue the offensive in the valley without first securing the high ground. Col. Wodtke's Jaeger Division reached Feltre.

The actions on the 14<sup>th</sup> had resulted in only limited success. In the Brenta valley the advance couldn't even start because the crossing points over the Cismon were destroyed downstream from Giaron, and because machine guns deployed next to the railroad at Il Termine plus artillery prevented the troops from moving forward. Nevertheless GdI Krauss ordered the attack to continue in the manner he had already prescribed; he disregarded the objections of his subordinates and the opinion of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army HQ that he shouldn't neglect to advance on the heights. But he did state that if the attack in the Brenta valley failed the effort shouldn't be repeated; rather the main effort would be shifted to the Piave valley for a thrust past Quero and Mt Tomba.

Apparently for this reason he held back 98 K-Sch Bde in the Corps' reserve. This weakened Wieden's group, which furthermore weren't given 13 Mtn Bde (which arrived at Arsie on the 13<sup>th</sup>) as had been intended; in the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> the Brigade had to be given back to 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

Regardless of his nagging doubts, GM Wieden now decided to thrust with the main body of his Division into the Brenta ravine on the 15<sup>th</sup>. GM Edler von Merten would simultaneously strike with SchR 3 and Battalion II/59 on the main ridge farther west while Battalion I/KJR 4 thrust from the village of Cismon over Heights # 1284 toward Mt Pertica. The enemy, under pressure east of Stizonne, now evacuated Mt Roncone<sup>544</sup>, so GM Merten's main column were able to advance up to Mt Prassolan (# 1484) on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Battalion I/KJR 4 stormed Heights 1284. But the attack by parts of IR 59 in the Brenta valley failed.<sup>545</sup> This further strengthened GM Wieden's conviction that he couldn't break through here with a *coup de main*. Therefore he wanted to further exploit the success already achieved on the heights by sending GM Merten's group over Mounts Pertica and Grappa, and 216 Inf Bde from the village of Cismon toward Heights # 1458 (northwest of Mt Asolone). Only 217 Inf Bde would try to advance in the Brenta valley.

Under 55 ID the column on the heights, reinforced to three battalions, captured Mounts Tomatico and Santo, took 500 Italians prisoner, and in the evening reached Mt Peurna, which had already been secured by SchR 26. But on this day 38 Inf Bde were denied any success against Mt Cornella, which dominated the valley, and against Heights # 781. It seemed that powerful artillery preparation would be necessary before the heights could be taken, and the commander of 38 Inf Bde - Col Graf Zedtwitz - believed that a breakthrough past Quero wouldn't be possible until this high ground which dominated the valley was secured first.

Thus on the 15<sup>th</sup> the planned breakthroughs in the valley had made no progress but the attacks on the heights were successful. Nevertheless GdI Krauss held fast to his opinion that victory must now be sought in the Piave valley, which was apparently the key to the situation. On the one hand, the approaching winter and the miserable lines of communication from the Feltre-Fonzaso basin toward the south made it seem inadvisable to deploy still more troops for a frontal assault toward Mt Grappa. On the other hand, the Piave valley offered some obvious advantages:

. the valley contained an intact highway and railroad;

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544Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie del Piave", p. 275

545Hoen, "IR. 59 im Weltkrieg", p. 628

- . there was room for maneuver in the Alano-Quero basin;
- . supplies could be brought forward for a strong force;
- . the final height along the valley, Mt Tomba, is only 870 meters tall (Mt Grappa is 1779 meters high); and, significantly,
- . it would be possible for our own artillery to provide continuing support against the enemy rear from the S Vito - Vidor area on the eastern bank of the river.<sup>546</sup>

Krauss was further strengthened in his conviction by the fact that a crossing attempt by the German 12 ID at Vidor failed in the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> (as will be described below), and so it seemed all the more necessary to maintain pressure on the western bank.

#### 16-18 November

Therefore on the morning of 16 November GdI Krauss ordered 55 ID to advance to Alano and Faveri. Following them, Wodtke's German Division would capture Mt Tomba. Then both divisions were to establish a position on the line Mt Tomba - Vittorazzi - Curognabach. GdI Krauss intended to have the main body of 22 Sch Div simultaneously follow through Feltre and Pederobba.

On 16 November Krauss' group won significant partial successes, but still not their goal of entering the plains.

On this day 55 ID's column on the heights approached Heights 1611 (also marked on the maps as Mt Fontana secca # 1608). In the valley, after a short but powerful burst of fire - in which the artillery of 50 ID also participated - Zedtwitz's Brigade began their assault at nightfall; after a hard battle that lasted until midnight they wrested the heights northwest of Quero from the 17 Italian ID.<sup>547</sup> An hour and a half after midnight Gräve's German Storm battalion (from the Jaeger Division) stormed the town of Quero itself.<sup>548</sup> Now the way was open to the Alano basin, into which 26 Mtn Bde advanced before daybreak on the 17<sup>th</sup>; they were followed later by the German Jaeger Division, which again was placed directly under Krauss' group HQ. Parts of 55 ID stationed to the west guarded against the enemy who were still stationed on Mt Spinuccia and Heights # 1611.

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<sup>546</sup>See the report to the Military Archive by General Staff Col. Primavesi, at that time Chief of Staff to I Corps (Mödling, 26 April 1936).

<sup>547</sup>In this intense night fighting our troops took 28 officers and 1258 men as prisoners, but their own losses were rather heavy.

<sup>548</sup>Krafft, Vol. II

Under Wieden's group the leading detachments of 217 Inf Bde came only up to the fortification blocking the valley at Il Termine on the 16<sup>th</sup>; here they were halted by undiminished enemy fire. IR "Rainer" # 59 of 216 Inf Bde forced their way ahead with difficulty through the deep valley which leads from Cismon to the southeast. Finally on 17 November the 59<sup>th</sup> were able to take several forward Italian positions, but they had no success against Heights 1458, where the trenches were occupied by the enemy 51 ID.

GM Merten's column on the heights were almost able to reach their objective. Their advanced guard, now consisting of Battalion I/SchR 3 plus two mountain batteries, stormed Mt Prassolan in the morning, capturing 600 men of the Italian infantry battalion stationed there. A company of the Graz Schützen pushed ahead further to Heights 1484, and a smaller detachment even advanced past Mt Pertica. But the company was called back because of the uncertain situation. Meanwhile the last intact battalion of 15 Italian ID occupied Mt Pertica; there were no other reserves behind them.

After restoring order to their intermingled components, SchR 3 resumed the advance around 2:00 PM. They secured Heights 1484, although after an action, then had to stop because the personnel were exhausted. Meanwhile on the enemy side an Alpini battalion came up in the afternoon to Mt Grappa to reinforce the extremely weak garrison.<sup>549</sup> On the 17<sup>th</sup> the gallant 3<sup>rd</sup> Schützen - along with Battalion I/KJR 4 which had already shrunk to 200 men - attacked Mt Pertica but couldn't overcome Italian resistance. Thrusts against Heights 1611 on the 16<sup>th</sup> by SchR 26 also gained no success. The time when Mt Grappa could be taken in a single bound had passed.

Also in the Piave valley, where GdI Krauss hoped to break through mainly by surprising the enemy, he found himself facing an altered situation. As the battalions of the Jaeger Division advanced to deploy in the Alano basin they were pounded by strong artillery fire, especially from Mt Pallone; their commander, Col. Wodtke, thus had to postpone the attack until the 18<sup>th</sup>. When the assault did begin the German Jaeger encountered extraordinarily heavy resistance. They suffered significant casualties as they worked their way toward the crest line of Mt Tomba; the summit (Point 870) remained in enemy hands. The Württemberg Mountain Battalion, which climbed toward Mt Spinuccia, were also unable to

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549Assum, p. 60

drive back the entrenched Italians.<sup>550</sup> The offensive in the Grappa area had ground to a halt. It seemed pointless to continue the thrusts at this time.

### Recriminations

The failure to capture the Grappa massif in one bound was due primarily to differences of opinion regarding where to make the main effort.<sup>551</sup> GdI Krauss, who envisioned a repeat of the Flitsch operation, wanted to take Mt Grappa with thrusts in the two valleys which surround the massif on the east and west. His subordinates resisted this plan and advised an advance over the heights. This conflict of methods influenced the outcome.

Certainly there were serious drawbacks to either method. But it's also certain that here an attack in the valleys would be much more difficult than in the mountains. Unlike the broad valley of the basin by Flitsch and Tolmein, the Piave valley near the Grappa massif is quite narrow, and the Brenta valley is even more so. Other ingredients for a successful valley thrust were lacking - sufficient knowledge of the enemy positions, strong artillery ready to fire, and a supply of effective poison gas shells. GdI Krauss himself soon recognized that there was little chance of winning in the Brenta valley. Although an attack in the Piave valley might have succeeded, it would have done so only if Krauss had immediately imposed his will on his subordinate commanders. Even so, the advance of Schwarzenberg's group to Alano was certainly possible to a large extent because of the successes won on the heights farther west. On the other hand, the actions of Merten's column demonstrated that a powerful

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<sup>550</sup>Krafft, Vol. II, pp. 227 ff.

<sup>551</sup>This question was the subject of lively debate after the war.

See the following: Krauss, "Ursachen", pp. 238 ff. Krafft, Vol. II, pp. 206 ff. and 262 ff. Rudolf Müller, Richard Müller, Wieden and Schwarzenberg, "Bei Flitsch und am Grappa" (Vienna, 1927), pp. 14 ff. Handel-Mazzetti, "Die erste Verteidigung des Grappa im November 1917" in Mil. wiss. Mitt. (Vienna, 1927 edition; pp. 505 ff.). Schrenzel, "Unsere letzte Chance im Weltkrieg" in Mil. wiss. Mitt. (Vienna, 1932 edition, pp. 268 ff.). Assum, pp. 43 ff. Cabiati, "La riscossa", pp. 55 and 101 ff. Caviglia, "Le tre battaglie des Piave", pp. 28 ff.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This unusually long list of citations, and the analysis that appears in the next few paragraphs, are justified by the extreme importance of this episode. The importance is obvious from the title of Schrenzel's article - "Our last chance in the World War"!

attack over the heights between the Brenta and Stizzone toward Mt Grappa could have won a decisive victory. If Merten's column had been followed right away by 98 K-Sch Bde (which instead were held inactive near Rasai) it's highly probable that our troops would have conquered Mt Grappa on 16 November. Then the enemy could hardly have prevented Krauss' group from occupying both valleys from the heights, and from entering the plains.

But also it cannot be denied that the advance of Krauss' group, to which the AOK at Baden attached such overwhelming importance, could have received more effective support than it actually did from the eastern wing of Conrad's Army Group. This would have been the case if 9 Mtn Bde<sup>552</sup> and the main body of 18 ID (1 Mtn Bde, advancing north of the Sugana valley) had been placed under GdI Krauss for a longer period and sent immediately toward Mt Grappa. At a time when every hour was precious, these units could probably have effectively assisted the battle of Merten's column around the summits, and perhaps decided the issue. Their assignment was the responsibility of the high command, which did recognize the advisability of giving them to Krauss (as can be determined by a situation evaluation dated 12 November). But nevertheless the AOK concurred with FM Conrad's request on the same day that after mopping up the area between the Brenta and Cison Rivers both brigades should be moved to the Asiago plateau.

## **5. The attempt to cross the Piave**

Detailed orders had been issued for the large-scale crossing planned for the 16<sup>th</sup>. GdI Below instructed Stein's group to make a powerful effort near Vidor; they would be assisted by Scotti's group. Hofacker's group were to force their way over the river near Nervesa. The ultimate objective of 14<sup>th</sup> Army was the Brenta between Valstagna and Piazzola. Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army all the special weapons and crossing equipment were concentrated in IV Corps' sector so they could break through past S Bartolomeo to Treviso. II Corps were instructed to carry out operations designed to divert the enemy's attention from this principal effort. HQ of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army assigned Preganziol as the objective for VII Corps, and Mogliano for XXIII Corps. Regardless of other developments, the XVI Corps (still far in the rear) were to move up on the 13<sup>th</sup> with 58 ID to Madrisio and with 17 ID to Portogruaro and Teglio Veneto.

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<sup>552</sup>The 9 Mtn Bde actually reached Fonzaso somewhat earlier than did Wieden's group.

Meanwhile several smaller crossings undertaken before the 16<sup>th</sup> seemed to create favorable conditions for the main assault. Under II Corps small detachments were already gradually infiltrating onto Pappadopoli Island since the 10<sup>th</sup>; their strength reached three battalions by evening on the 15<sup>th</sup>. In 44 Sch Div the Mtn SchR 1 reached the west bank at Zenson on the 12<sup>th</sup> and stormed the dam; on the next day, reinforced by parts of Mtn SchR 2, they were able to defend their gains against heavy enemy counterattacks. The 44 Sch Div were relieved on the 15<sup>th</sup> by 48 ID; thus 11 Mtn Bde replaced the Mountain Schützen in the small bridgehead, which was held against constant bombardments and repeated infantry assaults. Farther south the XXIII Corps set up a position on the west bank on the 13<sup>th</sup>, but 10 ID soon had to stop shipping troops over at S Dona because of fierce resistance. 41 Hon ID, on the other hand, were able to cross the lowest stretch of the river at three points; by the 15<sup>th</sup> they had established firm footholds at Cortellazzo, Cavazuccherina, Passarella d. so. and Chiesa nuova in fighting with the stubborn Italian coastal defense detachments.

But the large-scale crossing took place under an unlucky star. The alert enemy had occupied the positions along the bank in strength. Nowhere was it possible to suppress their machine gun nests because we didn't have enough artillery available (and the guns lacked sufficient ammunition) and had almost no trench mortars.<sup>553</sup> Furthermore there weren't enough vessels. Thus the 12 German ID failed when they tried to cross the river near Vidor in the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Since the success of this effort was a pre-condition for the crossing attempt by 13 Sch Div and Hofacker's group at Nervesa, their operations were canceled. GdI Below didn't try to repeat the assault because it would be pointless without sufficient ammunition and river-crossing equipment.

Still more tragic was the fate of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army's operation, in which the main thrust over the river was to be delivered by 29 ID of IV Corps (at the front since the 12<sup>th</sup>). In the night of 15-16 November the I and IV Battalions of the often-distinguished Komotau IR # 92 reached the western bank, stormed S Bartolomeo and Fagare, captured two batteries and took more than 500 prisoners. But then they were hit by a series of strong counterattacks, directed mainly against their flanks, by much larger forces from the XI and XIII Italian Corps; the gallant 92<sup>nd</sup> had to pull back to the Piave dam. A powerful enemy barrage

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<sup>553</sup>The effective German trench mortars had already been recalled by their owners.



prevented reinforcements from being shipped over, and the two battalions fighting on the western bank lacked pontoons. The troops that weren't killed were taken prisoner on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Only a few wounded men escaped by swimming back to the eastern bank.<sup>554</sup> The battalions of II Corps which had advanced onto Pappadopoli Island couldn't cross the deep and rising waters of the western arm of the river.

After the defeat of 29 ID the VII Corps were ordered to cancel the planned thrust from the Zenson bridgehead. Farther south only 41 Hon ID of XXIII Corps continued their slow but tenacious advance in the area near the Piave's mouth. The enemy fought back, keeping the military bridges of 41 Hon ID under continuous fire. They also pierced a dam, submerging the western part of the large island in the Piave under water and keeping the Honved from advancing any further.

To support the river-crossing the battleships *Wien* and *Budapest* sailed from Trieste, accompanied by 14 torpedo boats and 2 seaplanes; they bombarded the Italian coastal batteries at Cortellazzo and repulsed several Italian warships that hastened to the scene from Venice. In the evening our vessels, which had suffered no damage, steamed back to Trieste.<sup>555</sup>

## **6. The systematic continuation of the attacks toward the edge of the mountains**

### **a. Orders of the high command**

In mid-November the first onslaught of the k.u.k. 11<sup>th</sup> Army and of Krauss' group had come to an end on the heights which surround

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<sup>554</sup>The casualties of the I and IV Battalions of IR 92 totaled 764 men dead wounded or drowned plus 600 prisoners ("Der Heimat Söhne im Weltkrieg - der 92er"; 1933 edition, Issue 10).  
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The attackers had been unable to send their 500 Italian prisoners over the river, so the latter suffered further casualties from the fire of their own troops as the battle continued (Lichem, "Gebirgskrieg", Vol. III, pp. 301-303). Lichem points out that calling the Piave operation a "large-scale assault" is misleading; the high command merely sent some isolated battalions and detachments over the river in piecemeal fashion.

<sup>555</sup>Kriegsarchiv (Marinearchiv), "Österreich-Ungarns Seekrieg 1914-1918", pp. 484 ff.

the plains from the north. This development also had a negative effect on the attempt by Borojevic's Army Group to cross the Piave. In order to reach the lower Brenta before the intervention of Anglo-French reinforcements, the high command felt it would be necessary to resume the thrust south between Asiago and the Piave. Since the enemy opposite 11<sup>th</sup> Army possessed several parallel positions, any offensive here would be very difficult; thus the k.u.k. high command decided to once more turn to the area between the Brenta and the Piave.

On 19 November the HQ of Southwestern front reported to Baden that they now planned "to open the Piave from the heights south of Feltre by means of a systematic offensive in echelon, with powerful artillery support from the east and north." 14<sup>th</sup> Army would first capture Mt Tomba, then the heights south of the Curogna Brook, Mt Sulder and finally the Montello. For this purpose Krauss' group would be assigned one or two of the divisions of the strategic reserve that had been sent into the Belluno basin.

Borojevic's Army Group were to prepare for a renewed, systematic river-crossing so they could join the offensive by 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Until then they would "continue to put pressure on the enemy by staying very active and making feint attacks." The Colonel General's target date for his new operation was 29 November. It would be carried out once more by IV Corps and the units stationed farther downstream. For this purpose XXIV Corps was placed at the disposal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army. The XVI Corps remained in the Army Group's reserve; once some ground had been gained on the other side of the Piave they would move up to the Livenza. After 35 ID departed for Belluno, Kosak's group was dissolved; 60 ID was assigned to XXIV Corps. FML Kosak and his HQ received a new assignment on the Eastern front.

In Conrad's Army Group an attack was planned for the 21<sup>st</sup> on the Asiago plateau - through Mt Sisemol to Mt Bertiaga - which should push the Italians back into the Astico valley and the plains. But this operation was envisioned only as a support to the advance of Krauss' group. In the opinion of the AOK a later, and larger, attack by Conrad's Army Group should develop only after the success of the offensive between the Brenta and Piave. If the enemy evacuated the Piave sector and withdrew behind the Brenta or the Bacchiglione, then an attack should be launched east of the Adige valley to force the Italians to also give up both of the latter river lines. The three divisions of the strategic reserve would participate in this operation. But if there was no change in the situation on the Piave, it seemed to

the high command that "any further action from Tyrol would be rather worthless."

In these days was also decided the disposition of 10<sup>th</sup> Army, which for two and a half years had faithfully guarded the Carinthian border and then had rendered outstanding service in the offensive despite the limited offensive capability of the majority of its units and their very inadequate equipment. The Army was now dissolved. The HQ were sent to Trent, where they arrived on 2 November. Their new assignment from FM Conrad was to study the possibility of an attack from the sector of 56 Sch Div in the Adige valley toward Verona, with a total of five divisions. Soon afterwards, on the 28<sup>th</sup>, the HQ of 10<sup>th</sup> Army took over all of the western and southern fronts of Tyrol, with Archduke Peter Ferdinand's group, XX Corps and 56 Sch Div. 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which moved from Trent to Levico, remained in charge of XIV and III Corps plus Kletter's group. The 10<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Detachment were re-designated the "Belluno Line of Communications Group HQ"; together with the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Detachments they would provide logistical support to Krauss' group. The 11<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Detachment were responsible for supplying all the troops in Tyrol, for which purpose they were placed directly under Conrad's HQ.

As for the troops of 10<sup>th</sup> Army, as already narrated the 94 ID came to Krauss' group. From Hordt's group, which originally were supposed to march on foot with all 16 battalions through Primolano to Tyrol, four battalions had to be given up to reinforce 94 ID and the Edelweiss Division. Once the remainder of Hordt's group (three brigades, each of four battalions) reached 11<sup>th</sup> Army's sector they were divided up. 96 Inf Bde relieved 19 ID on the Assa Ravine, 59 Mtn Bde joined XIV Corps, and 29 Mtn Bde became the Army Group's reserve south of Trent. GdI Hordt himself became Military Commander at Hermannstadt.

#### **b. The allied attacks in the second half of November**

The pause in action caused by the temporary suspension of 11<sup>th</sup> Army's offensive was broken by heavy enemy counter-thrusts aimed at recovering the advanced positions they'd lost west of Mt Meletta. Nevertheless the opportunity was taken to relieve the troops who were the most in need of rest. Kletter's group were given the second brigade of 106 Lst ID; in III Corps the 6 ID were reinforced by five battalions from 52 ID and 21 Sch Div.

Further setbacks in front of Mt Meletta

The orders of 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ for the attack on the Meletta massif, now postponed until 22 November, were issued three days earlier. The capture of this complex of heights - which jut far to the north beyond the Frenzela Ravine - was a necessary pre-condition for the main attack of 11<sup>th</sup> Army which would unfold later. Once again Kletter's group were responsible for the assault. The reinforced 106 Lst ID (19 ½ battalions with 11,000 riflemen) were to attack Mt Meletta itself, while 18 ID (11 battalions with 4100 riflemen) took Mounts Tondarecar and Badelecche. 140 guns stood ready for the preparatory bombardment. After the Meletta was secured, III Corps were to capture the heights east of Gallio and then thrust south on both sides of a line running from Mt Sisemol to Mt Bertiaga. The four divisions of this Corps (23,600 riflemen) would thus be responsible for the decisive stroke.

The success of the first part of the operation - the attack on Mt Meletta - was endangered because III Corps was being held back. There was a further disadvantage: about 140 guns of this Corps had been deployed to fire toward Mt Bertiaga and thus couldn't be used against the Meletta. Because the time available for preparations was short, it wasn't possible to shift the guns. This factor would significantly hamper the fighting around the Meletta.

On the Italian side, by the 20<sup>th</sup> the XX, XXII and XXVI Corps had each received a brigade as reinforcements. In addition they could call on several regiments which had been completely broken in the twelfth Isonzo battle but which now were back at full strength. This is an indication of the extraordinarily quick recovery of the Italian Army.

The assault on the Meletta began on November 22 in clear weather. But around 11:00 AM fog developed; it paralyzed the fire support from our artillery, which had been inadequate to begin with. Nevertheless Kletter's battalions tried to secure the Meletta massif with a series of attacks. 18 ID advanced up to the Italian barbed wire on Mounts Badelecche and Tondarecar. FML Kratky's 106 Lst ID were able to capture the foremost summit of Mt Meletta (on the northern side); 6 ID joined the attack here from the west, storming several trenches southwest of the main summit. But the enemy, reinforced by strong reserves, wrested back from the 106<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Divisions all their hard-won gains. Also on the 23<sup>rd</sup> our troops weren't able to overcome the stubborn resistance of XX Italian Corps. Emperor Charles had come to visit 11<sup>th</sup> Army on the 22<sup>nd</sup>; when he left for home in the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> he ordered that the operation on the Asiago plateau

should be temporarily suspended. Thus the battle came to an end in the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>.

The troops had been engaged in combat for two weeks in the mountain winter; they were greatly worn down and urgently needed a rest. The Army Group's casualties between 10 and 24 November were 562 officers and 14,468 men.<sup>556</sup> For the entire month of November the 11<sup>th</sup> Army had lost 23,000 soldiers due to wounds or illness. No doubt the enemy had also suffered severely; from 10 to 25 November they had lost 240 officers and 10,100 men as prisoners alone. Nevertheless the Italian Army had gained new confidence from their successful resistance in the Sieben Gemeinde and Grappa sectors.

The point in time in which a victory by Conrad's Army Group could have a decisive effect on events along the Italian front had expired. Although the Field Marshal still had every intention of capturing the Meletta and driving the Italians back over the Frenzela Ravine, this operation could have no more than a local effect. Nonetheless, 11<sup>th</sup> Army now initiated all the necessary preparations to renew the assault on the Meletta massif on 3 December; at the same time the units which had suffered most grievously in the fighting to date were pulled back for a brief rest-spell.

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55647 officers and 831 men were killed, 262 and 6352 were wounded, 239 and 6723 were ill, and 17 officers and 582 men were missing.

Operations of 14<sup>th</sup> Army

Under 14<sup>th</sup> Army, after the unsatisfactory outcome of the fighting around Mt Tomba GdI Below intervened personally to direct the battle between the Brenta and the Piave, hoping to still force open the way onto the plains. Therefore he ordered on the 19<sup>th</sup> that the Italians' annoying advanced position - which jutted north in the shape of a wedge between the Col dell' Orso and Mt Spinuccia - should be captured. On the 16<sup>th</sup> he had already ordered the conquest of Mt Pallone, from which a flanking assault could later be mounted toward Mt Tomba. Furthermore GdI Krauss' sphere of authority was reduced; the area east of the line Mt Cornella - Mt Tomba, along with the Jaeger Division stationed there, was re-assigned to FML Scotti. The latter in turn created "Tutschek's Corps" out of the Jaeger Division and the Alpenkorps; adjacent to Krauss' group, they were to carry out the breakthrough assault, between the Corps border mentioned above and the Piave.

GdI Krauss commanded that Heights 1611, Mt Spinuccia and Mt Pallone should be captured by the main body of 22 Sch Div (under which the Kaiser-Schützen now were to enter the front), reinforced by the Württemberg Mountain Battalion. Then the Italian line would be rolled up in the direction of Mt Tomba. Wieden's group (the Edelweiss Division plus SchR 3), stationed west of the Stizzone Brook, were to take Mounts Pertica and Grappa, along with Mt Asolone and its northern spurs. On the 20<sup>th</sup> the 25 Mtn Bde of 94 ID were to march from Feltre into the Stizzone valley and capture the Col dell' Orso. 55 ID, relieved from the front, were stationed in the area around Feltre as a reserve to Krauss' group.

At first the attacks of Wieden's group on 20 and 21 November gained no success. But on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the SchR "Graz" # 3 conquered Mt Pertica with a bold thrust and held it against furious Italian counterattacks. This Regiment was then relieved by 57 Mtn Bde, while FML Lawrowski with his 94 ID HQ took command of the sector between Mt Pertica and the Col dell' Orso. In the Brenta valley well-led Storm detachments of IR "Hesse" # 14 took the position in the cliffs near Il Termine, which the Italians had believed to be impregnable. On the next day the Regiment thrust ahead past S Marino; about 480 Alpini, 1 gun, 20 machine guns and 15 trench mortars remained in the hands of the gallant 14<sup>th</sup>. But then even these elite troops were unable to advance any further in the ravine of the Brenta valley. Under 22 Sch Div on 21 November the K-SchR I along with the Württemberg Mountain Battalion took Heights 1611, along with 400 enemy prisoners and 23 machine guns;

then the 98 K-Sch Bde came nearer to Mt Spinuccia. But an operation on the 25<sup>th</sup> which 98 K-Sch Bde directed against the Col dell' Orso moved the front forward only a slight distance.

Fighting continued on Mt Tomba. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Tutschek's Corps, whose western wing was reinforced by SchR 26 and Battalion I/BH 4, were able to conquer the entire line of ridges from the summit to the Piave in a *coup de main*. But the enemy held fast to the southern slope of the Tomba ridge. Further advance here - as well as on the Grappa heights - would require a new and well-planned assault.

The higher-level HQ had also come to this conclusion. In a conference of the chiefs of staff of the various armies, chaired by the HQ of Southwestern front at Udine on the 21<sup>st</sup>, plans were sketched for this new breakthrough attempt. It would take place in the period 28-30 November. Generals Boroevic and Below issued the necessary orders on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

#### The situation at the end of November

But extraordinary logistical problems - primarily a shortage of ammunition - stood in the way of such a quick resumption of the offensive. On 23 November the Southwestern Railroad Command had restored service, thanks to makeshift repairs to the tracks, as far as Fontana Fredda (west of Pordenone) and Portogruaro; but no more than 12 to 16 trains per day could pass by the stations of Pontafel and Cervignano. And it was especially difficult to bring supplies through the area behind the front in the Belluno-Feltre and Fonzaso basins. Here the only supply line led from Fontana Fredda through Vittorio and Belluno, although since 18 November another one was being organized from Toblach into the upper Piave valley. Very little could be shipped through the Sugana valley. Columns of trucks used the available routes; since most of them were fitted with iron wheels, they quickly ruined the roads (which were already soaked by gusts of rain). Boroevic's Army Group hoped that vigorous repairs to the railroads would allow them to be ready to attack on 1 December. But 14<sup>th</sup> Army didn't think they could take the offensive until 3 or 4 December. The final schedule was still to be determined by HQ of Southwestern front.

Meanwhile the approach of winter was becoming uncomfortably evident. In Krauss' group the troops in the trenches, who lacked proper clothing, were exposed to the elements amidst snow and barren rocks. Therefore unit strength declined drastically; for example, on 27 November the Edelweiss Division had only about

2000 riflemen. It was urgently necessary to relieve the divisions at the front so they could have a chance to refresh themselves. Thus after 4 ID (part of the strategic reserve) arrived at Borgo on the 23<sup>rd</sup> they were sent to take the place of the Edelweiss Division. And Wieden's Division weren't actually in their rear-area quarters at Fonzaso and Lamon until the first days of December. The Jaeger Division were relieved by the 5 German ID, which hitherto had been held back at Udine and Codroipo.

The other units of the strategic reserve were used as follows:

- . 33 ID arrived at Feltre on the 21<sup>st</sup> and were placed under GdI Below in the reserves of his 14<sup>th</sup> Army;
- . 35 ID reached Cordignano and were placed under Archduke Eugene;
- . 24 ID at Palmanova stayed in the strategic reserves; and
- . 187 Lst Inf Bde on the 24<sup>th</sup> entered trains that had been standing ready at Krainerend (6 km east of Divaca) for their journey to Bukovina.

Meanwhile GdI Ludendorff learned of the plan to once more seek a breakthrough on the western bank of the Piave. He advised that for this purpose the German 195 ID should be deployed directly west of the river. The k.u.k. AOK concurred, and had the Division move to Feltre. Thus the only strategic reserve left behind 11<sup>th</sup> Army was the Edelweiss Division, which was greatly in need of recuperation. The prospects for a successful breakthrough west of the Brenta continued to diminish. Nonetheless both Conrad's Army Group and Southwestern front held fast to their intention of renewing the attack on 3 or 4 December. But when the operation did start it wouldn't include 14<sup>th</sup> Army, and even the objectives of 11<sup>th</sup> Army would be strictly limited.

## **7. The offensive is halted**

On their return journey from the Puster valley to Baden, Emperor Charles and his Chief of the General Staff conferred on 24 November with GdI Below in Ponte nelle Alpi. The Prussian general was emphatically in favor of continuing the offensive, but he couldn't form a very hopeful judgement of the situation based on the statements of the Emperor, who had ordered a pause in the attack toward Mt Meletta.<sup>557</sup> On the next day the Supreme Warlord also conferred with GdI Krauss in Feltre. The commander of the troops in the Grappa sector declared that he couldn't guarantee the outcome of the fighting in the mountains, but that

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557Krafft, Vol. II, p. 242



he hoped to move forward. It would be necessary for the Isonzo armies to attack simultaneously so the enemy would be kept from throwing his reserves against Krauss' group.<sup>558</sup> The opinions of the commanders in charge of the decisive areas strengthened the Emperor in his determination to continue the offensive. Archduke Eugene and GO Boroevic, who were summoned to a conference held early on 26 November in Villach, therefore received orders from their commander-in-chief before his departure to resume attacking based on the instructions that had already been issued.<sup>559</sup>

But as difficulties mounted daily during the preparations for the assault, GdI Below's staff soon began to doubt whether they could win a quick and decisive victory over the Italians, who obviously were determined to offer prolonged resistance and who were backed up by ten to thirteen French and English divisions which had already arrived. In a memorandum sent directly to the German OHL on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> Army advised of the dangers that were increasing with every day lost while getting ready to attack.

When the OHL learned that the offensive was even being postponed until 3 or 4 December, they were concerned that the allied thrust would encounter the divisions of the Western powers, a substantial part of which were known to be stationed already in the Vicenza area along with an army HQ. Also stronger defenses and hard fighting would have to be anticipated during the combat crossing of the Piave. The staff at Kreuznach furthermore doubted whether the lines of communication to the rear, and particularly the railroads, were adequate yet. For all these reasons - and certainly also because of the grand offensive in the West which was planned for spring - GdI Ludendorff on 29 November asked the AOK at Baden "whether under the altered circumstances it might be more correct to refrain from any further attack and to conclude our common offensive in the Piave sector, which will be very easy to defend; perhaps we could first make some improvements to the position of the right wing and center of 14<sup>th</sup> Army."

The k.u.k. AOK felt that it was still worthwhile to strive to reach the line running from Arsiero through the Astico valley to Poianella and Ospitalle on the Brenta, then down the latter river to a point east of Padua and along the Naviglio Brenta Canal to Venice. The advantage would be the conquest of a wide strip of rich, well-cultivated lands, offering better supplies for the troops who were now stationed in barren mountains, already covered in snow, between the Piave and the Astico. The high

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558Krauss, "Ursachen", p. 241

559Arz, p. 183

command asked for the opinion of the HQ of Southwestern front regarding the feasibility of plans to secure this area. Front HQ in turn asked for a report from 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ (still on the 29<sup>th</sup>).

GdI Below analyzed the situation as still more difficult than it had been three days earlier. He saw little prospect that the new thrust between the Brenta and Piave would succeed, and also didn't anticipate that the attack of Boroevic's Army Group over the Piave would gain much ground. He advised that the offensive should be halted - except for local efforts to improve the trench lines - and that a permanent position should be constructed.

The HQ of Southwestern front endorsed this suggestion. In their report to Baden they added that there was a further disadvantage to the plans for an offensive. Because of the condition of the river and other terrain factors, the principal sectors to be attacked by 14<sup>th</sup> Army (Mt Tomba) and by Boroevic's Army Group (Ponte di Piave) were wide apart. But near to both was a large and battle-ready enemy reserve, the Western Entente divisions. If the AOK approved the proposal to halt the offensive, some positions still needed to be improved - the lines would be moved forward between the Brenta and the Piave, but backward on the Piave (by evacuating the Zenson bridgehead).

Therefore on 2 December Emperor Charles issued the following order to HQ of Southwestern front - "Stop the offensive! Construct a permanent position, but ensure that for the time being the enemy still is deceived into believing a general assault is imminent. The decision to abandon the continuation of the offensive must remain top secret!"

GFM Hindenburg and FM Conrad had already been advised of this decision on 1 December. The change wouldn't immediately affect the Army Group in Tyrol, since 11<sup>th</sup> Army would still try to capture the Meletta. The Southwestern front were furthermore advised that they would be giving up seven divisions, including three Aus-Hung. units. The total included the k.u.k. 24 ID, which hitherto were spread out over the entire territory east of the Tagliamento to mop up the marauders, stragglers and escaped prisoners of war roaming the area. The first German division to depart would be the 195<sup>th</sup>, which had already been called back by the OHL on 30 November; from Feltre they'd march back to Trent to entrain. They would be followed by 12, 5 and 26 ID as soon as possible. For the time being the HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> Army and of the two corps (LI and III Bav) would stay in the Italian theater of operations along with the four veteran mountain divisions (Alpenkorps, Jaeger Division and 200 and 117 ID).

## ***G. Actions around the permanent position in December***

### **1. The capture of the Meletta massif**

#### **a. Goals and preparations of FM Conrad's Army Group**

The Army Group HQ at Bozen were confused in the evening of 23 November when they received an order to "temporarily suspend" further operations on the plateau. Several hours earlier, when the Supreme Warlord visited 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, he'd agreed with GO Scheuchenstuel that the planned assault against the Meletta massif should be renewed as soon as the artillery had been reinforced. FM Conrad's similar suggestion also had apparently been approved. Was the latest teletype message merely a written confirmation of the earlier conversations or a major change based on wider-ranging considerations? FM Conrad sent a wire to Baden on 24 November seeking clarification; he reported that he intended to resume the attack because he couldn't maintain the current situation on the plateau indefinitely. He asked for approval of his plan, and for the help of a fresh unit (either 4 ID or 195 German ID). Army Group HQ responded that the mission of the Army Group in Tyrol was to prevent the Italians from withdrawing any units, "which can be implemented by local actions with massive artillery support." But they couldn't approve the deployment of a fresh division for this purpose. They preferred to hold back the German 195 ID, then stationed in the Adige valley, "for the planned thrust between the Brenta and the Piave, which should be as strong as possible and might lead to a decisive success."

Conrad's plan of also launching a powerful attack west of the Brenta (*i.e.* on the plateau) hadn't been approved, but the Field Marshal at least was permitted to continue the operation against the Meletta heights as a "secondary action." Therefore he ordered that the next goal of 11<sup>th</sup> Army was still "as previously to capture the Mt Meletta complex and to bring our own front up to the Frenzela Ravine." Conrad thus was in accord with 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, which on 23 November had already declared - and informed their subordinates - that the attack would be renewed in a few days after new preparations. The most important of these measures was to bring up heavy batteries through Primolano and Enego into the area around Mt Lisser. But since the road between these places had been destroyed at some points, it would first have to be repaired. Thus fighting would pause for several days,

during which the line already reached would be held, troops would be relieved and refreshed, and order restored to the chain of command.

On 26 November FM Conrad was informed by Archduke Eugene that Boroevic's Army Group would probably try to force their way over the Piave on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and that GdI Below would simultaneously attack the enemy between the Piave and the Brenta. Conrad would have gladly hastened the start of his own operation on the plateau so that he could coordinate his efforts with those of his colleagues. But although six technical companies were laboring day and night on the road mentioned above, it wouldn't be ready prior to 30 November at the earliest. Therefore the heavy batteries couldn't finish moving and deploying until 2 December. Conrad wired back to the Archduke that he could start the attack on the Meletta on 3 December; but if the thrust between the Brenta and Piave forced the Italians to pull back from the Asiago plateau prior to this date, he would then have 11<sup>th</sup> Army thrust with all their strength in the direction of Mt Bertiaga. In a simultaneous report to the high command the Field Marshal again asked to be given, if possible, one fresh division. But this request was once more denied.

Meanwhile 11<sup>th</sup> Army were busily making preparations. Since the long-suffering troops of 6 ID and 106 Lst ID needed to be relieved, but the only fresh unit available was 179 Inf Bde, the arrangement of the forces was complicated and time-consuming. And, especially for Kletter's group, it was difficult to provide opportunities for recuperation for units which had already left the front, since the barren and partly snow-covered highlands didn't have installations to give shelter during the long nights other than some barracks which the Italians had left standing. Moreover, the enemy artillery bombarded and gassed these barracks, so most of the troops had to camp in the open in areas shielded from Italian observers. The only consolation was that the men had no lack of food and clothing due to the enormous booty they had seized, particularly at Primolano.

Meanwhile it was possible at the start of December to complete the most important of the necessary re-deployments. In Kletter's group the four organic regiments of 106 Lst ID departed; they moved to the upper Galmarara valley in the Army's reserves. Their position in front of the Meletta summit was taken over by the battalions of 37 and 181 Inf Bdes, which were placed under the HQ of 106<sup>th</sup> Division. Under III Corps the 56 Mtn at Asiago were first replaced by 179 Inf Bde; then 6 ID in front of Mt Zomo were relieved by 56 and 13 Mtn Bdes as well as by Col.

Vidossich's Brigade. The latter three brigades were commanded by the HQ of 52<sup>nd</sup> Division. 6 ID deployed in the quiet but extended sector between the western edge of Asiago and the Astico valley. Thus FML Kletter's group consisted of 29 battalions, III Corps of 41 and the Army reserves of 9 battalions.<sup>560</sup>

Army Group HQ asked to see 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ's plans for the renewed offensive. GO Scheuchenstuel intended to carry the operation out in two phases. On the first day he'd attack Mounts Badelecche and Zomo and thus push the enemy's advanced position back to a line shaped like a horseshoe. On the next day he would overrun the entire mountain fortress of the Meletta.<sup>561</sup> He intended 3 December to be the first day of the attack, since he couldn't be sure that there would be sufficient support from the heavy artillery prior to that date, and without this support success was questionable and casualties would be heavy. The Army commander added that on 23 November His Majesty the Emperor had personally ordered him "to carry out future attacks with the greatest consideration for the lives of the men."

Army Group HQ concurred with the intended postponement of the assault, but not with the rest of the plan. They informed the Army commander that partial attacks, separated in time and space, weren't acceptable. In the Army Group's opinion the enemy's entire arc-shaped front should be hit simultaneous from the west, north and east with one division apiece. FM Conrad, who well remembered the lively opposition to his instructions one and a half years earlier during the May 1916 offensive from south Tyrol, now wrote to the 11<sup>th</sup> Army commander that "It seems to me that a well-planned assault carried out on all sides with the greatest energy is a better way to avoid casualties than two separate attacks. Army HQ will therefore report how they intend to implement these intentions of Army Group HQ when they launch the offensive." GO Scheuchenstuel responded that he was dividing the operation into two phases so that strong artillery fire could

<sup>560</sup>The upcoming offensive involved all of Kletter's forces - 18 ID (17 battalions) had 1 and 9 Mtn Bdes while 106 ID (12 battalions) had 37 and 181 Inf Bdes. Also engaged was III Corps' 52 ID (14 battalions) with 56 Inf Bde and 13 Mtn Bde. The defending forces were mostly under 29 Italian ID - Bde Perugia, 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Bde and 4<sup>th</sup> Alpini Raggrupamento; also engaged was Bde Liguria on the right wing of 2 ID. (This material appears in the original as part of Beilage 33.)

<sup>561</sup>The heights which the Italians called "Le Melette" for short corresponded roughly to the smaller peaks on the plateau. The principal summit, which appears on Austrian maps as "Mt Meletta", is labeled "Mt Fior" on Italian maps.

be concentrated at the necessary points in each instance. A simultaneous bombardment of the enemy's entire defensive front would dilute the artillery's effectiveness. Otherwise he envisioned the first phase as only a preparation for the second, which would in fact fully correspond to Army Group HQ's desire for "one large-scale assault." Scheuchenstuel's assertions received a mixed reaction at Bozen. There was some apprehension that if the preliminary effort failed, or was only partly successful, the outcome of the major assault would be called into question. But at the suggestion of the Chief of Staff, GM Richard Müller, FM Conrad decided not to further interfere with the plans of his subordinate commander so as to avoid harming the latter's self-confidence and spirit.

In the last days of November there was little fighting worthy of mention anywhere on the Italian front. The plans of Borojevic's Army Group and Below's Army to resume the campaign on the 29<sup>th</sup> were abandoned, as noted above. That evening, in response to an inquiry from Conrad's Army Group, the HQ of Southwestern front stated that they had already informed the high command the day before that the general offensive had been postponed until 3 or 4 December. Therefore the Army Group commander felt it was essential to coordinate his assault with that of his neighbors, and so informed the AOK at Baden. But before they received a response, the Army Group learned that a decision had already been made to halt the general offensive against Italy. The high command ordered that - as requested by the OHL at Kreuznach - the German heavy batteries in 11<sup>th</sup> Army's sector were to be recalled, and that 195 ID were to march back to Trent where they'd entrain. This compelled FM Conrad to ask the AOK whether the operation which he was initiating against the Meletta massif should continue now that the larger offensive on the Piave was canceled. On the next day (2 December) the HQ in Bozen received the official order that the campaign was terminating. But it also stated that local actions to improve our positions should continue.

*On this day the heavy batteries deployed for the attack on the Meletta were supposed to open fire. But fog lying over the landscape made observation impossible on the ground, and forced the aerial observers to return to their bases. Therefore the bombardment was postponed until the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the infantry attack would commence on 4 December.*

**b. The destruction of the 29<sup>th</sup> Italian Division**

After repelling the attacks against the Meletta massif, the commanders of the Italian troops on the plateau were strengthened in their determination to hold onto this mountain complex permanently, even though it jutted ahead of the rest of their defensive lines like a gigantic bastion. While they held it, they could hinder any advance of their opponents from the Asiago basin and also had an opportunity to eventually recover the lost terrain that was dominated by the Meletta massif. Strong forces could be brought here quickly, since a highway for motor traffic and three funicular rail lines led from Valstagna (in the Brenta valley) to Foza, at the center of the fortified area. Therefore 29 ID, responsible for defending the bastion, was reinforced to a strength of 21 battalions by the start of December. The Perugia Brigade held the left sector between Mounts Zomo and Fior. The 4<sup>th</sup> Alpini Raggrupamento<sup>562</sup> was in the center, on both sides of Mt Castelgomberto. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Brigade held the right sector between Mounts Tondarecar and Badelecche; the Brigade had three regiments, of which one was serving as the divisional reserve. The 29<sup>th</sup> Division also commanded more than 160 guns. To their right, on the southern slope of Mt Badelecche, were three battalions from 52 ID; the main body of the 52<sup>nd</sup> were guarding the Brenta valley. XX Corps HQ, which commanded both divisions, furthermore held an infantry brigade as the corps reserve. To the left of 29 ID the 2 ID had deployed their right-wing unit, the Liguria Brigade, on Mt Zomo. The western and northern fronts of the large bastion were very well fortified, with many concrete works plus caverns blown out of the rock. But the eastern front (Mt Tondarecar - Mt Badelecche), which hadn't been occupied until mid-November, possessed hardly any technical improvements. This was the weak point of the entire defensive position, in the center of which Mt Miela (# 1788) stood out like a mighty watchtower, armed with guns.

GO Scheuchenstuel was rather well informed about the enemy situation. According to the final orders issued by his Army HQ on 28 November, as already narrated, the attack was to unfold on two days. On the first day 52 ID were to capture Mt Zomo and 18 ID Mt Badelecche; from the latter point it would be possible to strike north against Mt Tondarecar as well as southeast toward

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<sup>562</sup>The Alpini Raggrupamenti (translated into German as "Obergruppen") were brigade-sized and consisted of two or three Alpini Groups (which were regiment-sized with 3 or 4 battalions apiece).

the Sasso Rosso, which lies more than 3 km from Mt Badelecche. On the second day the main envelopment attack would take place; 181 and 37 Inf Bdes under FML Kratky's command would take the fortifications on the Meletta summit and on Mt Castelgomberto. 52 ID, if they'd already captured Mt Zomo, were to thrust further past Ronchi, while 18 ID advanced "in the direction of Foza and supported the attack toward Mt Meletta with a group which would strike from the southeast to Mt Miela."

This plan of attack, which perhaps went into too much detail, didn't take into account the weakness of the enemy position on the line Tondarecar-Badelecche. But thanks to wise cooperation between the subordinate commanders they were able to concentrate a powerful force opposite this sector. FML Kletter reinforced 18 ID so that by the day of the attack the divisional commander (GM Vidalè) had nine battalions opposite Mounts Tondarecar and Badelecche in the first line (IR 81 [3], K-SchR III [3], FJB 22, FJB 7, and Bn X/14) plus three battalions in reserve (IV/12, IV/84, IV/87). He left just three battalions opposite the line Mt Tondarecar - Castelgomberto (Lst Bn 164, the Upper Aus Vol Rif Bn, and Bn IV/37). Further back the SchR 36 were in reserve. The artillery in this area, led by GM Ritter von Romer (artillery commander of Group Kletter) were also deployed so as to concentrate against the objectives of 18<sup>th</sup> Division. Here there were 58 light, 18 medium and 13 heavy guns plus 16 light and 37 heavy trench mortars.<sup>563</sup> On the other side of the bastion 52 ID stood ready opposite Mt Zomo with 14 battalions. In this sector 70 light, 15 medium and 14 guns along with a number of trench mortars would fire before the infantry onslaught. The other parts of the enemy position, and especially their batteries, would be targeted by 40 light and 24 medium guns and gassed with yellow cross and green cross shells.<sup>564</sup>

#### 4 December

Around 5:00 AM in the morning of 4 December, in clear but turbulent weather, the eastern wing of III Corps and Kletter's group began to gas the enemy's assembly areas. At 7:30 our artillery fire increased against Mt Zomo. At 9:00 fire for destruction was directed against the front between Mounts

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<sup>563</sup>This total includes one Bavarian trench mortar battery of eight pieces.

<sup>564</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Poison gas shells were painted with crosses of various colors for identification. Yellow cross shells contained dichlorethylsulphide and green cross had chloropicrin. See D.B. Nash, "Imperial German Army Handbook 1914-1918" (London, 1980), pp. 105-107.



Tondarecar and Badelecche; it was followed at 10:00 AM by the infantry assault. The first wave of 52 ID's attackers penetrated the position on Mt Zomo. But the Italians quickly responded with a strong counterattack and forced the battalions to withdraw. Thus the effort by 52 ID was soon defeated. The outcome was different for 18 ID. Here the battalions of the assault group threw themselves impetuously against the Bersaglieri, overwhelmed them, and thrust quickly forward past the conquered position without worrying about the arrival of Italian reserves. Soon after noon Army HQ at Levico learned by telegram that Mt Miela had been captured; a few hours later they received the surprising news that the Meletta summit had also been stormed. In a few hours the attackers had gained ground that had been beyond our reach during the preceding weeks of bloody combat. With marvelous dash, Kaiser-Schützen from the III Regiment and the Upper Austrians of Battalion X/14 had pushed over Mt Miela. The Eger-land Feldjaeger of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had advanced a great distance; unnoticed by the Italian reserves coming up from the south or by the Alpini stationed to the north (on Mt Castelgomberto and the Mga. Lora), they struck the surprised defenders of the trenches on the Meletta from behind and forced them to surrender after a wild fight involving hand grenades.<sup>565</sup>

This bold assault made all the directives of the higher-level commanders obsolete. A clear picture of developments couldn't be gleaned from the flood of arriving reports. As the gathering darkness around 4:00 PM brought the fluid fighting to a halt the situation was still uncertain. Anyway it was now determined that despite new attempts by 52 ID Mt Zomo still hadn't been completely secured. The conquest of the Meletta summit was confirmed. But Mt Castelgomberto, surprisingly, was still in enemy hands. On the other hand it was understandable that the Kaiser-Schützen and the Moravians of the 81<sup>st</sup> Regiment were still locked in lively fighting on the southern slopes of Mounts Miela and Badelecche with troops who'd come forward through Foza and Valcapra, where aerial reconnaissance had reported the march of a long column of infantry in the afternoon. The evening report of FML Kletter was upbeat; he called upon the troops of 18 ID to

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<sup>565</sup>See Ehn1 (pp. 69 ff.) for details about the storm of the Meletta. Bold actions by veteran lower-level commanders, acting on their own initiative, were rewarded by the highest of all honors; the Knight's Cross of the Military Maria Theresia Order was won by Major Konstantin Valentini (commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of K-SchR III), by Major Bela von Szilley (from HR 15, but commanding Battalion X/14) and by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Alois Windisch, commanding the Machine Gun Company of Battalion X/14.

pursue the enemy, who were again falling back, toward both of the latter villages. Then on the next day they'd be able to clear the Italians from the Foza - S Francesco and Valcapra - Sasso Rosso ridges. This plan was completely consistent with the desire of Army HQ, which now also ordered III Corps to resume the attack on 5 December and if possible establish a firm foothold on the southern edge of the upper Val Frenzela (Valle dei Ronchi).

The success of the first day's fighting exceeded the brightest hopes. The enemy's mightiest bulwark on the plateau had fallen to one sharp blow. Many thousands of Italians, including two brigadier generals, had to lay down their arms, and many guns had been captured. There was no doubt that the ultimate objective, the Frenzela Ravine, would be reached on 5 December. Therefore thought was already being given to exploiting the victory as much as possible. GO Scheuchenstuel informed his subordinates that he intended "in the next few days to secure the line Mt Sisemol - Stenfle - Col del Rosso - Col d'Echele"; thus he wished that III Corps "on 5 December should already seize Mt Sisemol with the help of German batteries."<sup>566</sup>

#### 5-6 December

In the night a sharp north wind blew icy snow over the high ground. Fighting flared up anew when the morning of 5 December finally dawned. Under III Corps the 52 ID resumed their assault on Mt Zomo. They finally secured the mountain, stubbornly defended by the gallant Liguria Brigade, after difficult fighting which surged back and forth. Opposite Kletter's group the enemy had rallied to offer new resistance at C. Stona, Foza and Carpenedi. Kletter's HQ couldn't take responsibility for sending forward their troops, worn down by the cold as well as by the strenuous fighting, without artillery preparation. Finally around 2:00 PM the infantry of 18 ID moved against the enemy and drove them back everywhere. The Lower Austrian Infantry Battalion IV/84 thrust ahead to the winding road leading to Valstagna; their rapid advance prevented the Italians from blowing up the tunnel at the highest bend of this road. Meanwhile parts of 37 and 181 Inf Bdes, after laboriously climbing over the Meletta, reached C. Stona and threw back the enemy still holding out here - along with the defenders of Costalta - back into the Frenzela Ravine. Then patrols crossed over the Ravine near Il Buso. As these actions raged, at 2:00 PM the Alpini battalion encircled on Mt Castelgomberto ceased their

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<sup>566</sup>The artillery in question were a 15 cm howitzer and two 21 cm mortar batteries, which were highly regarded because of the effective Yellow Cross shells they fired.

hopeless struggle and surrendered to the Upper Austrian Volunteer Rifle Battalion.

Thus the work which started on 4 December was completed in the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup>. More than 16,000 prisoners, 90 guns, over 200 machine guns, 80 trench mortars and a large amount of special equipment remained in the hands of the victorious troops. The 29 Italian ID was wiped out. Only 2000 men from its 21 battalions had escaped. The reserves which the Command of the Troops on the Plateau had brought forward on trucks (the Verona and Regina Brigades) had been unable to alter the fate of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division.

The HQ of 11<sup>th</sup> Army intended that on 6 December the 21 Sch Div and parts of Vidossich's Brigade would take Mt Sisemol. Kletter's group were to establish themselves south of the Frenzela Ravine at Ronchi and to bring up their artillery for a future assault on the Col del Rosso. Meanwhile it was believed that the unexpected victory might still be exploited on an even greater scale, since even a thrust to the southern edge of the plateaus would be possible if Army Group HQ could have one or two fresh divisions available.

On 6 December the weather dried up, but it was still quite cold. As ordered, III Corps sent 21 Sch Div against Mt Sisemol and 52 ID toward Stenfle; parts of Kletter's group attacked near Il Buso. Mt Sisemol was taken after very intense hand-to-hand combat, during which the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of K-Sch Regt I were especially distinguished. A strong counterattack was repulsed; more than 2000 prisoners and many machine guns fell into Austrian hands. But 52 ID were able to capture only an advanced position north of Stenfle, while the attack of 37 Inf Bde near Il Buso couldn't get going because of strong enemy fire. Since the original goals had all been achieved, Army HQ halted the operation and initiated preparations to capture the Col del Rosso at a later date.

## **2. The December actions in the Grappa area**

### **a. The capture of the Col della Beretta and of Mt Spinuccia**

#### The deployment

When the high command's order to halt the offensive arrived by wire on 2 December, Borojevic's Army Group as well as the left

wing of Below's Army were on the Piave, while Below's right wing between the Piave and the Brenta still hadn't reached a line that could serve as a permanent position. Therefore Krauss' group planned to carry out the operation which had been scheduled for 3 and 4 December as part of the general assault, but now just for the purpose of reaching at least the east-west crest line of the Grappa mountain complex. New difficulties, in particular involving the shipment of the necessary ammunition, caused the start of the attack to be further postponed. The relatively quick attrition to the troops also made it necessary to rotate a number of units. As noted earlier, at the start of December FML Pfeffer's 4 ID took the place of the Edelweiss Division; parts of 5 German ID began to relieve the 22 Sch Div. Now on 4 and 5 December the 200 German ID, hitherto stationed along the Piave on both sides of Vidor, was replaced by the k.u.k. 35 ID. The Germans were sent through Cison di Valmarino, S Antonio, Miel and Cesana into the mountains south of Feltre, where they relieved the parts of 22 Sch Div that had stayed on Mt Fontana secca as well as the left wing of 94 ID near the Col dell' Orso. Both German divisions (5<sup>th</sup> and 200<sup>th</sup>) were placed under GM Wedel, the leader of 5 ID. The Alpenkorps stayed in place on Mt Tomba as did 50 ID at Valdobbiadene on the eastern bank of the Piave. Together with 35 ID and 1 ID (the latter was resting near Cison di Valmarino) they made up Scotti's group.

According to the orders of Krauss' group, Wedel's *ad hoc* corps were to throw the enemy out of their positions which ran along an arc jutting north, and included Col dell' Orso, Mt Solarolo, the house at Point 1222 and Mt Spinuccia; then Wedel was to capture the ridges running from Mt Pallone through Mt Meate to Mt Boccaor. 94 ID would conquer the Grappa summit and Mt Coston. 4 ID were instructed to first take Mt Asolone and the Col della Berretta; then their right wing would push ahead to the Casera d'Anna and their group in the Brenta valley (a reinforced battalion from IR 49) would thrust if possible from S Marino to Valstagna. This extension of 4 ID's tasks was added to the plans after the eastern wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army captured the Sasso Rosso (west of the Brenta) on 5 December and reached the Frenzela Ravine; a strong artillery group from 11<sup>th</sup> Army could now effectively support 4 ID's attack with fire from the side. Krauss' group themselves had available about 350 light, 100 medium and 10 heavy guns, although the ammunition supply was limited. It was also difficult to move the guns, because there wasn't a single road leading up to the heights. Deploying the artillery was thus hard work; for example, two 15 cm howitzer batteries were dragged onto Mt Prassolan in part by teams of men.

The attack was to start on 11 December regardless of the weather. As a reserve, GdI Krauss was holding 55 ID in readiness northeast of Feltre. The Edelweiss Division was resting near Fonzaso and 22 Sch Div in the area west of Belluno. For the time being neither of these divisions was in shape to return to the front. On the other hand, it was planned that the German Jaeger Division, assembled by Belluno, would relieve the 5 German ID after the fight to improve the front was a success. In addition the 33 ID was stationed south of Belluno. But this unit had no mountain equipment, so it was sent back to the plains and entered the line on 12 December to relieve German troops at the destroyed Piave bridges near Susegana. To replace 33 ID, GO Boroevic sent 60 ID to Vittorio, whence on 13 December GdI Below had them march to Belluno and placed them under GdI Krauss.

The Italians didn't remain idle during the pause in fighting in the Grappa mountains since the end of November. Every day there were improvements in the situation of the troops, their morale and their defenses. At the start of December the XXXI French Corps (47, 64 and 65 ID) took over the sector of the front that included the southern slope of Mt Tomba, Pederobba and Cornuda. Their neighbors to the southeast were the XIV English Corps (7, 23 and 41 ID), which entered the line on the Montello. This not only freed up a large number of Italian troops, but also increased their confidence in themselves and their allies.

On 10 December the four Aus-Hung. and German divisions ready to attack in the Grappa mountains were opposed between Col Caprile and Mt Asolone by the XXVII Italian Corps with 51 and 59 ID (commanding ten Alpini battalions), in the area around the Grappa summit by VI Corps with 66 ID at the front and the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpini Raggrupamento (eight battalions) and 15 ID in reserve, and in the area Col dell Orso - Mt Solarolo - Ost. Monfenera by XVIII Corps with 56 and 1 ID plus 3<sup>rd</sup> Alpini Raggrupamento (eight battalions) at the front and 24 ID in reserve. In reserve under 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ was IX Corps (17 and 18 ID) between Bassano and Asolo.

### The actions

In the morning of 11 December the mountains were covered by fog. Nevertheless the guns began their destructive work as planned. When the infantry action started, the artillery everywhere had great difficulty in shifting targets as the troops moved.

Under the 5 German ID the Prussian Leib Grenadier Regiment # 8, overcoming strong resistance, stormed Mt Spinuccia and threw the Italians back another kilometer and a half along the ridge

stretching to the southwest. They intended to continue their advance, but couldn't do so because 200 ID - after conquering several trenches at the eastern foot of Mt Solarolo - were unable to move any further forward, and therefore the Grenadiers' right flank was endangered.<sup>567</sup> The left wing of 94 ID waited in vain for 200 ID to advance toward the Col dell' Orso. The center of the 94<sup>th</sup> on Mt Pertica - to their surprise - were themselves attacked by the Italians; they repulsed the Italians, but then stayed in place.

Only 4 ID gained an unequivocal success. Along with the Division's Storm Battalion, the Bohemian IR 88 and parts of the Moravian IR 99 captured the Col della Berretta and the Casera Spiedon.<sup>568</sup> The Division thus secured the edge of the heights overlooking the basin where the Val S Lorenzo, which opens onto the plains to the south, has its source. The men of the 99<sup>th</sup> believed they could already climb Mt Asolone as well, but they encountered stiff resistance. Soon they - as well as the 88<sup>th</sup> Regiment - had to repel strong counterattacks, which continued on 12 December. The Italians had recognized that after taking the main line of resistance on the crest their opponents were threatening to penetrate deep into the Val S Lorenzo, so they called all their units together to recover the Col della Berretta. On the other side, GdI Krauss recognized that 4 ID's initial success offered an opportunity for further gains and decided to shift the main effort to the western wing of his group since the difficult terrain was an insurmountable barrier to the frontal assault on the Grappa summit. The result was some very hard and costly fighting in the Asolone sector, which lasted until Christmas.

On 12 December an intercepted radio message of the Italian 51 ID announced that the Col della Berretta had been recovered. GdI Krauss inquired about this to FML Pfeffer, who responded "Since our troops stormed the heights the only Italians here are prisoners." On the next day a battalion of the Brünn IR 8 which had been inserted in the left wing of 4 ID tried to capture Mt Asolone, but failed. Both sides, worn down by the fighting and by the cold, needed rest. Now to the right of IR 88 the Lower Austrian IR "Hess" # 49 stood ready to attack with two battalions, to be followed by a battalion of IR 8. On the 14<sup>th</sup> this gallant group stormed the Col Caprile, forcing an entire Alpini battalion to lay down their arms.<sup>569</sup> At the same time the

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567Schöning, p. 274

568Gallian, "Monte Asolone 1918" (Graz, 1933), pp. 1 ff.

569"Ehrenbuch der Hesser", Vol. III, pp. 29 ff. "Alpini", Vol.

left wing of VI Italian Corps advanced against Mt Pertica and (from Mt Asolone) against the Casera Spiedon in an attempt to relieve XXVII Corps. But their attack was defeated; among the successful defenders the 94 ID's Styrian Lst IR 26 and VI Battalion of KJR 2 were especially distinguished. In the evening FML Goiginger took control over 4 and 94 ID as a corps commander; he was also given 55 ID, whose first troops were coming up from Fonzaso toward Cison. GdI Krauss had summoned the distinguished commander of 60 ID (which now was nearing Feltre) to coordinate the operations of the right wing. Since a new shortage of ammunition was becoming a problem, the attack wouldn't be renewed until 18 December. Then Goiginger's corps were supposed to take Heights 1440 and Mt Asolone. Wedel's corps would choose their next objective in accordance with the original instructions. And they would relieve 5 ID as soon as possible because that unit had to leave the Italian theater of operations.

On 15 December IR 49 fought their way nearly up to the Casa d'Anna. IR 88, in heavy combat against newly arrived Italian reserves, also gained some ground, while IR 99 and parts of IR 8 repulsed new enemy attacks. Now it was high time to relieve 4 ID, whose ranks were greatly thinned by casualties and by their deprivations during five days of winter combat in the mountains. As ordered by FML Goiginger, 55 ID first inserted 26 Mtn Bde in the line of battle between the 4 and 94 ID (*i.e.* in front of Mt Asolone and by Mt Pertica). Parts of IR 99 and one battalion of 94 ID were pulled back. Since the way to the battlefield of Cison led through the Val Goza up a steep path on which all traffic to and from 4 ID had to pass, 10 Mtn Bde of 60 ID wouldn't be in place to relieve IR 88 and IR 49 until 18 December. Also the planned replacement of 94 ID by 2 Mtn Bde couldn't take place any sooner, so the troops had to hold on a little longer.

The Italians, who could reach the battlefield on two good roads, meanwhile brought fresh units to the scene and pinned down our troops on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> with continuous counterattacks. The Aus-Hung. artillery intervened helpfully in this fighting. But thus they consumed much of the ammunition which had been so laboriously assembled for the offensive by Goiginger's corps.

In these days there were further changes in the deployment of Below's Army. 50 ID withdrew from the front on the left bank of the Piave; then they moved north over the river and during the 17<sup>th</sup> on the Tomba ridge took the place of the Alpenkorps, which marched to Campesa and Cison di Valmarina. GM Tutschek, the

Alpenkorps' commander, replaced GM Wedel in charge of the sector held by 200 ID and the German Jaeger Division; the latter unit relieved the 5 German ID on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Finally 1 ID marched from Cison Valmarina through Belluno to the area north of Feltre, where on 20 December they were placed at the disposal of GdI Krauss.

### **b. The storm of Mt Asolone**

At dawn on 18 December there were dark clouds over the battlefield. The temperature wavered around the freezing point. It rained in the valleys of the Grappa mountains. Snow fell on the fog-shrouded heights, which now echoed from the thunder of the guns. The snow mingled with smoke from the bursting bombs and shells which heralded the assault by Goiginger's corps. Poor visibility caused by the weather aided the approach of the infantry. They came up almost unnoticed to the enemy and overwhelmed them in a wild action involving hand grenades<sup>570</sup>. The Carinthians of IR 7 were able to seize Mt Asolone, which for days had been an unattainable goal. This brilliant success was exploited by IR 88, which conquered heights 1440, while IR 49 together with a battalion of IR 8 thrust once more to the Casa d'Anna. The Italians tried in vain to restore the situation with repeated counterattacks. The victors wouldn't give up their gains. In fact, IR 7 were able to also win the heights east of the Asolone summit while BH IR 4 - their sister regiment in 26 Mtn Bde - cleared the enemy off the entire ridge which extends south from Mt Pertica into the Val Cesilla, and then stubbornly held this position. Casualties were heavy on both sides. IR 7 alone lost more than 600 dead and wounded. Furthermore the troops suffered greatly because of the cold and the difficulty of bringing up rations. In particular the regiments of 4 ID, shrunk to a few hundred men apiece, who'd been fighting and suffering with marvelous perseverance since 11 December, were now exhausted. In the evening they began to be relieved by the battalions of 10 Mtn Bde, which simultaneously had to repulse counterattacks. 2 Mtn Bde took over the sector of 94 ID, into which they first inserted two battalions.

With the successful attack by Goiginger's corps the goals of the western wing of Krauss' group had been achieved. There was some discussion as to whether the success should be exploited, but the

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570Löhner, "Monte Asolone - 18 December 1917, Aus dem Tagebuch eines jungen Khevenhüllers" (in Österr. Wehrzeitung 1926, Issues 10 and 11)



idea had to be abandoned because enemy resistance had proven stronger than expected. Furthermore the Germans of Tutschek's corps had gained nothing. Mt Solarolo remained in the hands of the enemy, who in fact thrust back many times against the pinned-down troops of 200 ID. The Jaeger Division had also been unable to advance, despite self-sacrificing efforts.<sup>571</sup> Because of these circumstances, the operation was halted, and a permanent position was to be constructed along the lines that had been reached. But the combat still wasn't over. The Italians also launched heavy counter-thrusts on 19 December, especially by Mt Pertica where at some points sharp actions with hand grenades took place in the afternoon. On the 20<sup>th</sup> they gathered together for a general offensive. This time the bitter fighting, under a rain of iron from the powerful bombardment by both sides, continued until evening at Mt Asolone, at Heights 1440 and directly north of the Casa d'Anna; the Italians couldn't gain any success. Tutschek's corps also had to fight once more to hold onto the line they'd reached. On 21 December the enemy again mounted several thrusts, accompanied by strong artillery fire. The eagerly awaited pause finally occurred on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, apparently because of the thickening fog and snowfall. Since 11 December the Italians had thrown no fewer than 19 infantry regiments and 18 Alpini battalions into the fight against Goiginger's corps, plus 14 infantry regiments and 8 Alpini battalions against Tutschek, but now they were exhausted. Besides a large number of men killed or wounded, they'd lost more than 8000 prisoners.

The operation, initially undertaken with the limited goal of gaining an improved permanent position, had developed into a major battle that lasted twelve days. Archduke Eugene, grateful for the wonderful achievement of the troops, made the following announcement in a general order: "These brave soldiers, despite the harsh weather, pushed forward with irresistible force; they overcame difficult terrain stone by stone and - supported by accurately directed artillery fire - wrested apparently impregnable positions from the enemy." At the top of the roll of honor was 4 ID, which had fought for the first time in the difficult Italian theater of operations. Another unit worthy of high praise was 55 ID, whose commander GM Schwarzenberg visited IR 7 on the Asolone summit and then reported that the enemy artillery fire there was still as heavy as it had been previously on the Karst plateau.

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571Sproesser, pp. 329 ff. Schittenhelm, pp. 95 ff. Schönfeldt, "Das Grenadier-Regiment Prinz Carl von Preussen Nr. 12 im Weltkrieg" (Berlin, 1924), p. 149. Ehrenforth, pp. 80 ff.

### 3. The end of the December fighting

On 5 December, when the attacks against the Meletta massif neared their successful conclusion, the high command was already asking Army Group HQ at Bozen where the permanent position would be established, since there were no plans for a major exploitation of the Meletta operation. The enemy seemed to be growing weaker every day, so Conrad entertained the idea of moving the front forward to the edge of the plateau at Bassano; in his opinion this goal could be easily achieved if the high command placed three fresh, full-strength divisions at his disposal. At this point the AOK were longer completely unreceptive to this concept. But, they replied, they just didn't have available the units he needed. Therefore Conrad had to limit the next operation of 11<sup>th</sup> Army to taking the line Mt di Val Bella - Col del Rosso, which would be a favorable position for spending the winter.

Because of the unfavorable conditions on the plateau, and since the very cold weather sapped the strength of the units, the troops at the front were frequently rotated. Therefore we are not recording all the changes to the order of battle during this period. Finally, as of 23 December the III Corps had 21 Sch Div (7 battalions) and 6 ID (11 bns) at the front plus 56 Mtn Bde (4 bns) in reserve<sup>572</sup>. Kletter's Group had 18 ID (13 bns) and 37 Inf Bde (4 bns) at the front plus 1 Mtn Bde (5 bns) in reserve. 11 Inf Bde (5 bns) north of Mt Baldo was in the Army's reserve. The attack on the Col del Rosso, originally scheduled for the 15<sup>th</sup> and then the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, would finally be carried out on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Meanwhile FM Conrad had again asked the high command to assign him two veteran mountain divisions, preferably the Edelweiss Division and 22 Sch Div. This time the high command agreed, and on 21 December placed all of Krauss' group (including both of the divisions in question) under Conrad's Army Group HQ. Thus a unified command was established over the entire mountain front, as the Field Marshal had been seeking on purely technical grounds for several weeks. But now the operation of Krauss' group in the Grappa sector had to be halted because of the enormously difficult terrain. The season was so far advanced that it wouldn't be possible to carry out an offensive on both sides of the Brenta as Conrad had earlier intended. The incorporation of Krauss' units into Conrad's Army Group at least guaranteed that

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<sup>572</sup>At this point 6 ID consisted of 12 Inf Bde plus Vidossich's Bde; 18 ID had 9 Mtn Bde plus a group under Lt Col. Kobe at the front, and 181 Inf Bde in reserve.

the divisions beyond the Cismon and the Brenta could utilize the supply lines through the Sugana valley.

Thus on 22 December the authority of Conrad's Army Group was extended to the eastern border of Krauss' force, but this border for the time being was still to be determined. FM Archduke Eugene intended that after the German divisions still fighting west of the Piave had been relieved by Aus-Hung. troops, and after 50 ID (stationed on the Tomba ridge) were placed under Krauss' group, the border would run from the bend in the Piave just north of Quero along the crest-line of the mountains stretching toward the Lago di S Croce. Thus ten divisions would join Conrad's Army Group. But this new order of battle would greatly burden the supply lines of the Group, especially the railroad in the Sugana valley. Therefore a thorough review of the question was necessary, and it led to lengthy discussions.

#### The capture of the Col del Rosso

Meanwhile the left wing of 11<sup>th</sup> Army moved forward to capture the line Mt di Val Bella - Col del Rosso. The operation was prepared with special thoroughness. In the artillery 440 light, 100 medium and 10 heavy guns stood ready to fire. In the night of 22-23 December they first bombarded the enemy batteries and assembly points with a large quantity of mustard gas shells. In the morning the inner wings of III Corps and of Kletter's group moved forward to attack:

- . 6<sup>th</sup> ID had 12 Inf Bde (IR 17 and 27) and Col. Vidossich's Brigade (Battalions I/51, I/102, I/27, X/59; FJB 20; High Mountain Comp 22)
- . 18<sup>th</sup> ID had 9 Mtn Bde (K-SchR III and Bn IV/87) and 181 Inf Bde (IR 22, Bn III/59 and a bicycle battalion).

The weather was favorable for the attack. 20 cm of snow lay on the battlefield. The artillery commanders in their advantageous observation points on the Meletta Heights brilliantly directed the destructive fire against targets that were clearly visible in the snow. Under these circumstances the infantry had a relatively easy chore. In a short time they conquered the entire first line, defended by the 2 Italian ID (Brigades Livorno, Verona and Toscana). Near Stoccareddo most of the Verona Brigade were trapped against the precipice that falls down into the Frenzela Ravine, and had to surrender.<sup>573</sup> The enemy responded with just some disjointed counterattacks. All objectives were reached by shortly after noon. Battalion IV/87 indeed advanced further and occupied Mt Melago. But they were later recalled,

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<sup>573</sup>"Brigata di Fanteria", Vol. IV, pp. 138 and 152

since the higher command levels didn't intend to extend the operation further, despite the magnitude of the day's success. More than 8000 Italians had been taken prisoner.

In the next few days the Italians tried to recover the lost heights. Regiments of the Pisa, Regina and Sassari Brigades entered the fighting, along with the 5<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment. The diary of 11<sup>th</sup> Army notes that the counterattacks, repeated many times, "only resulted in the number of our prisoners rising by another 2000 men." The operations of Conrad's Army Group thus ended for the year. The necessary relief of certain units was carried out in the last days of December.

The assignment of Krauss' group to FM Conrad led to a general reorganization along the Southwestern front. After a series of deliberations and conferences between the affected commanders, the result was that Krauss' group, with Divisions 1, 22, 28, 55 and 60 plus the Edelweiss Division, left Below's Army and were placed by FM Conrad under 11<sup>th</sup> Army HQ. 50 ID on the Tomba ridge stayed under Scotti's group, part of Below's Army. The border between Below and Conrad still hadn't been finally settled when Mt Tomba became the scene of renewed fighting.

#### The loss of Mt Tomba

This time it was the enemy who fanned the faltering flames of battle. On 27 and 28 December they sent strong scouting detachments against the Tomba ridge, but were repulsed. Throughout the 29<sup>th</sup> the positions of 50 ID lay under heavy and continuous artillery fire, which intensified on the next day. Around 4:00 PM French infantry - deployed in depth and supported by a squadron of airplanes - opened their assault. In fighting which raged back and forth the Chasseurs of the 47<sup>th</sup> French Division penetrated the defenders' lines on Mt Tomba and at Point 715. GdI Below didn't get any reliable report until late in the evening, so he ordered that if the enemy had merely made a local penetration there should be an immediate counterattack to restore the situation. But if a large part of our position had been lost the counter-thrust should be postponed. On 31 December it was determined that the losses of 50 ID were heavier than had been believed. Since the nearest reserves weren't sufficient to recover the original position, GdI Below ordered that the German troops who had already been brought up weren't to be deployed; the Tomba ridge was to be abandoned. The new main defensive position would run along a line from Mt Spinuccia through Uson to the southern edge of Quero; some terrain ahead of this line, as far as the Ornigo Brook, would be held as an outpost area. 50 ID

had suffered severely, losing 500 dead, 1000 wounded and 1600 missing. Therefore the relief of this Division was ordered. Meanwhile the new position could be occupied without any major problems, since the French didn't advance past the Tomba ridge.

At the time there was considerable discussion about this first French action in the Italian theater of operations. The French pointed to the operation as a model modern offensive, and asserted that the enemy they encountered here were of much poorer quality than the foes they were used to fighting on the Western front. The Italian military writer General Caracciolo argued against this assessment and emphasized that the French 47<sup>th</sup> Division owed their success mainly to their extraordinarily strong artillery support (450 guns).<sup>574</sup>

While the actions narrated here were developing on the Sieben Gemeinde plateau and in the Grappa mountains, most of the Piave front was quiet. Fighting was restricted to isolated, small-scale operations. The Italians repeatedly thrust against our troops in the Zenson bridgehead on the western bank of the Piave; although the enemy's attempts were fruitless, the defenders suffered substantial casualties and their situation became difficult. When it was learned that the Italians were preparing to make a larger effort with the support of heavy guns and trench mortars, it was decided to evacuate the bridgehead. This took place on 26 December. Observers then noted with satisfaction that for several days afterward the enemy continued to bombard the abandoned trenches of the bridgehead. Actions were somewhat livelier in the area near the mouth of the Piave. Here 41 Hon ID were stationed on the western bank of the river's principal branch, but hadn't reached the Sile, which is the second branch of the river as it enters the sea. On 9 December the Honved attacked the enemy near Capo Sile and threw them over the Sile, while taking about 200 prisoners. But on the next day the Italians again established themselves firmly on the eastern bank. This action was renewed several times. On 18 December one Honved battalions even thrust past the Sile. But since it wasn't possible to reinforce them with further units, on the 20<sup>th</sup> they had to pull back to the eastern bank. The activity of the enemy artillery increased gradually. Here the ships' guns - which had once pounded our troops on the Hermada from their stations at the mouth of the Sdokka - once more came into action. Therefore the

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<sup>574</sup>Cabiati, "La riscossa", pp. 226 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: At the Col del Rosso, the k.u.k. troops were considered well supported by their artillery because they had 560 guns to help 24 battalions. A few days later, the French deployed 450 guns to support just 9 battalions in the Mt Tomba action.

k.u.k. Army asked the Navy to find a way to intervene along the coast. But for various reasons, primarily the danger from mines and submarines, the fleet wasn't in a position to help. They received an impressive warning on 10 December when an Italian sub<sup>575</sup> penetrated our own minefield barrier off Trieste and sank the old battleship "Wien", which lay at anchor in the harbor.

## **H. Observations**

### **1. Advantages and disadvantages of the line of advance**

The main factor to keep in mind while evaluating the great offensive which the Central Powers' armies carried out from the Julian Alps through Venetia to the gates of Venice in fall 1917 is that it greatly exceeded the limits originally set. At the start the plan called for a short counter-thrust to relieve the pressure which had developed on the Isonzo front, especially in the south, since the summer. To achieve this goal it would be sufficient to secure the dominating heights north of Cividale along with Mt Sabotino; once we held this ground we would at the very least rob the Italians' southern wing of freedom to maneuver in the direction of Trieste. But already during the preliminary discussions the number of troops and equipment which would have to be used anyway practically forced the allied general staffs to expand their objectives; the Italians "should be [thrown back] over the pre-war border and if possible over the Tagliamento." And these goals also were to be exceeded. The catastrophic collapse of the enemy lent impetus to the pursuit, which didn't halt on the Tagliamento. Thus an operation that was only supposed to make a major improvement to a defensive position expanded in a little less than four weeks to a large-scale offensive, one of the greatest and most successful in the history of the World War.

The first act of this wide-ranging battle was the breakthrough at Flitsch and Tolmein. The selection as a target of a point where the enemy front bent forward at an angle had already paid off at Gorlice (1915), the Szurduk Pass (1916) and Zalosce (1917). Here also it proved overall to be a wise choice. Unlike an attack from a straight line, or from the front of a salient, a thrust

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575TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: There is an error here. The vessel which sank "Wien" was the motor torpedo-boat "MAS.9" rather than a submarine. (Greger, "Austro-Hungarian Warships of World War I" [Letchworth, 1976], p. 19.)

against a bend in the enemy's line causes the attackers' own front to shorten. The important task of protecting the flank of the attacking phalanx can at first be left to units already stationed at other points along the front line. As the advance continues fewer troops are needed because the front becomes shorter.<sup>576</sup> All these advantages became evident once more during the allied breakthrough on the upper Isonzo.

The operation was prepared with the greatest diligence. The troops stormed forward into the network of Italian trenches with incomparable elan. Rain and fog made it easier to advance in the principal valleys during the first hours of the battle. In the decisive area the attackers were already deep in the enemy position when the Italians finally realized, despite advanced warning from traitors, the extent of the disaster that was befalling them. After just 36 hours of hard fighting and marching the allies had taken the most important strong points within the Italian positions - the Stol, Mt Matajur, and the Jeza and Globocak Heights. On the fourth day of battle Below's Army reached the plains near Cividale, and the appearance of the Kaiser Jaeger on the Montemaggiore was the last straw which forced Cadorna to give up his positions on the Isonzo and to retreat, as already planned, behind the Tagliamento. Thus the hour had finally come when the defenders of the Karst were finally freed from the positional warfare in which they'd been engaged for two years. On the 28<sup>th</sup> the black-yellow standard was raised on the castle of the re-conquered city of Görz.

On the allies' side, each unit advanced toward goals which were deep in enemy territory. This method, successful in the past, once more proved advantageous, since the rapidity of the advance and frequent breakdowns in communications prevented the higher HQ from providing changed objectives in time. But due to the speed of the operation the disadvantages of such a simplified command structure also became apparent.

As 29 October came to a close, the leading troops of 14<sup>th</sup> Army had stormed past Udine and were already nearing the Tagliamento upstream of Codroipo; at this time Borojevic's Army Group had just started to cross the pre-war border south of Cormons. The Italians' battered 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were pulling back toward the Tagliamento ahead of the allied columns. Farther south their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, retreating from Görz and the Karst, were still hanging back toward the east. Thus many Italians had been outflanked south of the line Codroipo-Cormons!

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576Kiszling, "Der strategische Durchbruch", pp. 81 ff.

The opportunities for success which this situation presented were quickly recognized by the corps and divisional commanders at the front and also by Below's Army HQ, which were with their troops on the heels of the enemy. On 30 October five divisions of Scotti's and Hofacker's groups were sent to thrust toward Codroipo and Latisana; if they were successful they could cut off parts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Army and the majority of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Hofacker's Württembergers took Codroipo and laid their hands on the destroyed bridges west of this town. The many Italian units on the march to these crossing points had to shift to the southwest; here they had available, besides the bridges at Latisana, another one at Madrisio whose existence was unknown to the allies.

But on this day the simultaneous advance of Scotti's three divisions toward Latisana was greatly hampered already by the system of allowing the armies to advance by "remote control." GdI Kaiser's II Corps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Isonzo Army appeared in the area where Below wished to advance. Thus on the 30<sup>th</sup>, instead of sending Scotti's divisions straight south from Udine as Below wanted, he had to shift them more toward the southwest. This substantially reduced the pressure which had been exerted on the northern flank of the Italians who were streaming back to the lower Tagliamento. And this decision by Below was influenced by a second factor - on the 30<sup>th</sup> he was also determined to attack as quickly as possible over the Tagliamento even though this move had yet to be approved by the high commands.

In the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> it was reported from the battlefields southwest of Udine that 60,000 prisoners and a mass of booty had already been taken. Below now partly returned to his original intention; he was influenced also by a telephone call from the German OHL in which the chances of success at Latisana had been discussed. Hofacker's two divisions were to prepare to force their way over the Tagliamento, just as Stein's and Krauss' groups had been preparing farther north on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Scotti's divisions, once more directed toward Latisana, received help on the left thanks to valuable inter-allied cooperation. The commander of the k.u.k. 60 ID, FML Ludwig Goiginger, had taken control on his own authority over three divisions which were arriving at Pozzuolo and with them he joined Scotti's operation. Actually he was less interested in Latisana than in much wider-ranging objectives - he wanted to thrust over the Tagliamento toward Treviso. Scotti's exhausted group only partly fulfilled their task of striking the enemy flank. But Goiginger with his 60 ID reached the bridge at Madrisio, destroyed only at its western end, in the evening of the 31<sup>st</sup>. During the night he had



restored all but the last 30 meters of the bridge when around midnight on 1 November he received a strict order from the Army Group to shift toward Codroipo.

This surprising development was due solely to the fact that Army Group HQ, far behind the lines, were completely ignorant of the situation near Madrisio. FML Goiginger, who was one of the most successful troop commanders of the Aus-Hung. Army, would have added an especially brilliant achievement to the list of his feats of arms if at this moment he had refused to obey the order of his superiors, which was based on inadequate information, and had stayed true to his original intentions. He could have either completely blocked the crossing point at Latisana with a march to the south along the opposite (right) bank of the river or created the spearhead of a strong attacking group to block the way to the Piave for the Italian corps retreating over the Tagliamento north of S Vito. Regardless of the option he chose, he would have started our assault crossing of the Tagliamento already on 1 November. But a larger part in the failure to get over the river at Madrisio was played by the fact that the HQ of Southwestern front and of Boroevic's Army Group hadn't recognized in time the importance "of coming over the Tagliamento wherever possible."<sup>577</sup>

This observation, which is certainly appropriate in a historical work, isn't intended to denigrate the importance of the victory which was achieved at Codroipo and Latisana despite all the problems. With justification the Aus-Hung. General Staff's bulletin on 1 November concluded the review of the fighting with these words:

*"...Thus the twelfth battle of the Isonzo, which lasted for eight days, has ended with a brilliant and unprecedented success. The Austrian coastal lands are free and wide stretches of Venetian territory lie behind the allied front. In one week the enemy have lost more than 180,000 men as prisoners plus over 1500 guns..."*

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<sup>577</sup>Based on a letter from FML Konopicky to the Military Archive at Vienna, 2 May 1936

## 2. The transfer of the main effort to the northern wing

The HQ of Southwestern front didn't attach any special importance to a thrust south toward Latisana which might have led to the capture of many thousand more Italians. As narrated above, to them it was more important to reach the western bank of the Tagliamento at some point where they could win a great new success, although they had failed to issue the necessary orders in time.<sup>578</sup> Therefore they confidently rejoiced at Below's intention to continue his offensive over the Tagliamento despite his original instructions. It was mainly due to the influence of the Archduke that GdI Arz - who had at first been content with the success achieved by the end of October - now also spoke out for prolonging the attack; with the approval of the Emperor he issued the appropriate orders on 2 November. The plan was to make the southern wing of the front, which was the closest to the Piave, as strong as possible. Their mission would be to cross the Piave and then thrust to the northwest. This would make it possible to not only cut off large parts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Armies, but also the 4<sup>th</sup> Army which was still holding out in the mountains.

But meanwhile the situation was developing in a different direction because of the actions of the subordinate commanders along the Tagliamento. GO Boroevic had insisted that both of the Isonzo Armies should continue to advance in the directions they were already heading. The HQ of the Southwestern front believed that the best way to avoid unnecessary troop movement behind the lines would be to place the units of 14<sup>th</sup> Army which had strayed into the sector of GO Boroevic's Army Group under that general, and to replace them in Below's Army by the reserve divisions as they came forward.<sup>579</sup> But this plan was resisted by the commander of 14<sup>th</sup> German Army. Therefore the divisions of Hofacker and Scotti which had been heading toward Madrisio would have to move back up the river, as would Goiginger's group (which was just about to cross over). All these units were better equipped with vehicles and horses - and thus more able to move quickly - than was the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army. The result was that the stronger and

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578From a letter by FML Konopicky to the Military Archive at Vienna on 30 March 1936

579TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: As noted previously, however, this would have caused German divisions and generals to take orders from Boroevic rather than from Below, who in turn would be receiving more k.u.k. units from the reserves. This was unacceptable to the Germans at every level.

more mobile divisions were moving north on 2 November when the AOK's order arrived that the main effort was to be made on the southern wing.

Meanwhile in the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Schwarzenberg's Division had established the first foothold on the western bank of the Tagliamento near Cornino and thus initiated the assault crossing. Therefore the HQ of Southwestern front were justified in appending a note on 3 November to the AOK's order (which had arrived the evening before), stating that "for the moment this is meaningless...The situation now demands that the main effort should be made on the northern wing." The high command had to agree.<sup>580</sup> It is true that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Boroevic's Army Group were still being told to reinforce their southern wing, but neither on the Tagliamento nor on the Piave was there a notable concentration of force under the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army. The possibility that a strong southern wing could have won a major success is indicated by the fact that 44 Sch Div were able to cross the Piave at Zenson while 41 Hon ID gained considerable ground near the river's mouth. An Italian military historian has even asserted that if the southern wing of 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army had made a major effort they could have overrun the Italian coastal detachments without any delay and advanced to Venice, where military installations were already being evacuated at the start of November.<sup>581</sup>

The enemy generals gained a very useful period of time between the 1<sup>st</sup> of November (when FML Goiginger was called back from Madrisio) and the 4<sup>th</sup> (when the pressure at Cornino and Pinzano from the units of 14<sup>th</sup> Army which had reached the western bank of the Tagliamento became significant). Cadorna utilized this period to initiate the further retreat behind the Piave and onto the Grappa massif. In general the retreat took place according to plan and - except for the encirclement of 36 and 63 ID at Tramonti - without substantial casualties. The capture of 10,000 men three days later at Longarone was due to errors by the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Italian Army.

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580 Unlike the Emperor and GdI Arz, the deputy Chief of the General Staff GM Waldstätten had been convinced from the start that the right wing of Below's Army should make the main effort (per a letter from GM Waldstätten to the Military Archive on 27 March 1936). One definite advantage of striking in this area was that the numerous streams that had to be crossed were much narrower near the points where they left the mountains than was the case as they neared the sea.

581 Valori, "La guerra italo-austriaca 1915-1918" (Bologna, 1920), p. 397

As the allies continued their pursuit they were still giving priority to the effort by the northern wing of 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Some of these troops advanced along the edge of the Venetian Alps, and other past the foot of the mountains. In comparison to the 1<sup>st</sup> Isonzo Army they had to take longer and more difficult routes and, despite admirably long marches and gallant feats of arms, they arrived on the Piave after 1<sup>st</sup> Army. After the allies reached Vittorio and Longarone they entered the area in which the Piave and the Brenta come closest together and enter the plains through narrow valleys which are almost ravines and can be easily blocked. Here it was that the right wing of Archduke Eugene's armies, which were supposed to stay under his control at least until they came up to the Brenta, made contact with the left wing of Conrad's Army Group.

### **3. The cooperation of the Southwestern front with Conrad's Army group**

FM Conrad had begun very early preparations to participate in the great offensive. On the Sieben Gemeinde plateau he concentrated all units which could be spared from parts of the Dolomite front, along with two very weak divisions which came from the Isonzo front (21 Sch Div and 106 Lst ID); after completing their deployment around Asiago and opposite Valstagna, they were to thrust due east. This plan was based on the hope that it would be possible to prevent the Italians still stationed in the Dolomites from retreating through the Brenta ravine.

But the Italians withdrew more quickly than Conrad had expected. And so he adopted a second direction for the attack - southeast past Mt Bertiaga toward Bassano. Other possibilities were suggested, such as through Arsiero or (as Hindenburg advocated) along Lake Garda. For a while Conrad even considered whether to break through in the Judicarien, though only if the enemy didn't make a stand until they reached the line Verona-Venice. But in each of these three scenarios it would be necessary to punch through a firm enemy defensive front, for which Conrad still lacked the necessary combat strength. Even the intervention of the 195 German ID, approaching by train, wouldn't have substantially altered the unfavorable balance of forces. In any event the Field Marshal laid particular emphasis on having his relatively weak forces attack adjacent to the wing of Archduke Eugene's units, apparently to utilize some of the energy which still motivated these troops for the benefit of his own men.

The k.u.k. high command paid relatively little attention to Conrad's intentions. They restricted themselves to informing the HQ in Marburg and in Bozen about each other's plans. On 9 November they also let Archduke Eugene know that to support the assault which Conrad planned to start on the 12<sup>th</sup> "it is desirable that as simultaneously as possible [you should exert] strong pressure in the area between the Brenta and the Piave."

But even before 12 November the eastern wing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Italian Army fell back without having to fight very much and were able to dig in upon the Meletta massif. The attacks which Conrad directed against this bulwark in mid-November were failures, and the advance of Krauss' group also died out in the Grappa mountains before they could reach the plains. Attempts to cross the Piave on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> were equally unsuccessful.

In hindsight it can be stated that in this final phase of the campaign it would have been advisable to throw all available forces very quickly into the area between the Piave and Brenta, so that they could here strike the decisive blow desired by the high command before the enemy reinforced the defenses. Besides the units already deployed in the area, the 9 and 1 Mtn Bdes of 11<sup>th</sup> Army and 94 ID of 10<sup>th</sup> Army<sup>582</sup> could have entered the fighting relatively early. Assuming that this concentration would have broken through the barrier of the Piave and opened the way to the Brenta, then the next step could have been to assign all units not needed in Archduke Eugene's area to Conrad's Army Group so that the Brenta front would also be unhinged with a flank attack. A step-by-step offensive of this type, which the high command might have further reinforced with the three divisions of the strategic reserve which arrived at Feltre on 13 November, could well have penetrated beyond the mountains before the onset of winter and possibly reached the Adige.

After we were unable to overrun the Italian Grappa position with one swift blow we could hardly repeat the attempt because of the difficulty of concentrating a large artillery force in such terrain and because of logistical problems. These factors clearly had an impact on the major fighting in December, which was intended merely to attain a better position. For a systematic breakthrough battle the most favorable sector was that of 11<sup>th</sup> Army, which was served by the Sugana railroad and good roads. But naturally such an operation, if it were to cause the collapse of the enemy's Piave front, would require much stronger forces than FM Conrad had under his command. In this connection we should discuss the question of whether it would have been

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<sup>582</sup>The 94 ID did in fact join Krauss' group later.

possible to reinforce Conrad's group with more troops from Friauli and Venetia than actually was the case. According to an expert's opinion<sup>583</sup>, in addition to the German 195 ID it would have been possible to bring two divisions to join 11<sup>th</sup> Army by rail from the Isonzo. Additional forces could have been shifted by road from Vittorio through Belluno, Feltre and Primolano into the Sugana valley if they had been made available by various methods (troop rotation, etc.). On the other hand it should be noted that even with stronger forces an attack on the Sieben Gemeinde plateau was no easy task. This had been proven during the offensive of May 1916. The difficulties inherent in achieving a deep penetration into this mountain terrain, covered with woods and rocks, were further illustrated by the failure of the attack on the Meletta on 22 November and the great effort which was needed to finally secure this massif on 4 and 5 December. Planning for a new breakthrough battle, if it were feasible at all due to the approaching winter, would surely have required weeks of preparation.

Leaving aside the evaluation of these possibilities, we can see that the direction at the highest levels of the actual operations in these decisive days - and in particular the coordination of the individual units at the border between Archduke Eugene's and FM Conrad's troops - were deficient. Attempts by the k.u.k. AOK to control the fighting were hampered by insufficient information about developments at the focal points. Our evaluation cannot conceal the fact that while the troops and mid-level commanders performed brilliantly during the victorious advance from the Isonzo to the Piave, there were occasions when they lacked direction from the higher and highest HQ. Of the Army commands serving on the Isonzo front before the offensive started, only 14<sup>th</sup> German Army made sure that their divisions were always on the enemy's heels and hardly ever lost contact with the foremost units. This HQ, which had already proved itself in front of Riga, was the driving spirit for the Italian campaign as it developed beyond the limits envisioned by the German OHL at Kreuznach. On the other hand the HQ of the two Isonzo armies and of Boroevic's Army Group - as a result of enduring two and a half years of positional warfare which they had directed so brilliantly - found it difficult to leave their familiar work places and the methods to which they had become accustomed. The inevitable result was that communications with the onrushing troops were broken at the most important moments.<sup>584</sup> The

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583 General of Engineers Ratzenhoffer, in correspondence with the Military Archives at Vienna on 3 April 1936

584 In a report sent later to the k.u.k. AOK the Chief of the Field Telegraph Office noted that his construction detachments had

arrangements of the high command itself were deficient. The Emperor as commander-in-chief wished to be with his fighting troops due to his soldierly ideals and also a desire to escape from the poisonous atmosphere of political cares into the purer atmosphere of the Army. The indifference he displayed to physical danger was a further tribute to the often-praised courage of the young ruler. But the principle that the Chief of the General Staff should also accompany his commander on all the visits to the front was hardly advisable, since the journeys took him so far from his responsibilities at Baden near Vienna. Since by staying with the Emperor GdI Arz changed his location on an almost daily basis, and since communications between Baden and the Imperial train as it traveled through the coastal lands were usually possible only in the evening or at night, urgent decisions were delayed for half- or entire days. The orders subsequently issued were often overtaken by the rapid stream of events. Certainly the Chief of Staff had valid reasons for always staying near the Emperor. But there is no doubt that they were outweighed by the disadvantages that arose while he tried to control a rapid mobile campaign.

#### **4. The termination of the offensive and its outcome**

In the post-war literature it has often been asked whether by continuing the offensive it would have been possible to knock Italy entirely out of the war.<sup>585</sup> The principal consideration is that the quick arrival in upper Italy of French and English troops made it necessary for us to substantially reinforce our own forces if we wanted to continue the advance. At the time the HQ at Kreuznach and Baden estimated that at least twelve divisions had already arrived from the Western powers. Since at the same time all the Aus-Hung. divisions stationed in the East were either in the line or in the process of relieving German units, only Germany could have provided reinforcements. If they had done so, there is a possibility that Italy could have been vanquished completely.

But the OHL had long been determined to seek a decision in spring 1918 with a grand offensive in the West, for which they would

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lost their best personnel during the efforts to find men suitable for combat service. They had been replaced by less physically-fit Landstrum troops who weren't equal to the demanding task of quickly building the necessary wire network during the advance.

<sup>585</sup>Krauss, "Ursachen", pp. 220. Kuhl, Vol. II, p. 219

need every single available soldier.<sup>586</sup> GdI Ludendorff had already revealed his plan of attack to the AOK at Baden on 3 November and simultaneously designated the Piave as the ultimate objective in Venetia. When this river was reached, the German units showed little interest in continuing the attack; their local commander was now aware of the intentions of the OHL and, unlike earlier occasions, didn't lodge any substantial protest. Thus finally the HQ of 14<sup>th</sup> Army also advocated halting the campaign.

And so the great campaign came to a conclusion that wasn't completely satisfactory to the highest levels of command.<sup>587</sup> It had begun with rather limited objectives which were greatly exceeded after a short time. One of the results of the limitation to the initial objectives was perhaps that it hampered the development, as the fighting unfolded, of the idea that complete success could be achieved by destroying the enemy. The Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was shattered during the breakthrough at Flitsch-Tolmein. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was damaged near Latisana. A thrust northwest through Madrisio might have cut off the remnants of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army plus the bulk of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, which was tarrying deep in the mountains. These beckoning opportunities weren't exploited. There were wonderful achievements in fighting around the enemy positions on mountains and along river lines, as well as in marching through day and night; but at the decisive moments the great maneuver came up short. The Italian Army avoided the destruction with which they were threatened.

But when we compare the tremendous tension that afflicted the troops on the Isonzo in summer 1917 - which at several times could have led to catastrophe - with the situation on the Italian battlefields in November, we can justly concede that the allied high commands had good reason to be satisfied with the campaign's outcome. In the spirit of proud competition that was always evident in combined operations, the units of the allied Central Powers had stormed forward from the Isonzo to the Piave. In 17 days they'd hastened through an area 120 km deep, repeatedly driving their enemies from strong mountain positions or river lines overflowing with high waters. The extended front between Astico and the Adriatic at Monfalcone had been 384 km long; by mid-November the length had been reduced by 140 km, or almost one third. The front in Venetia now lay behind a strong, distance river line. The new mountain positions between Asiago and the bend in the Piave at Quero may have been uncomfortable, but they were easy to defend. The reduction in the front also made it

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<sup>586</sup>Ludendorff, pp. 432 ff.

<sup>587</sup>Hindenburg, p. 263



easy to withdraw the German divisions, who left with the proud knowledge that by drawing Entente units into upper Italy they had provided direct relief to their own Western front. And finally it was possible to pull other troops behind the line for rest and rehabilitation.

After the Southwestern Railroad Command restored the rail net, supplies could be brought to the entire front in the plains. Furthermore, a good road network suitable for trucks was also available after the bridges were rebuilt. On the other hand it was still difficult to supply the mountain front between the Brenta and Piave, and would always remain so. In order to use the main railroad in the upper Piave valley between Vigo and Feltre it was necessary to build a field rail line from Niederdorf into the Höhlenstein valley through Schluderbach; south of Cortina d'Ampezzo it linked up with a small Italian branch line and later with a cable line. But this route could only handle a small volume of traffic. Most trains had to be sent from Vittorio north through S. Croce to Ponte nelle Alpi, where their freight was unloaded to be moved by pack animals and bearers from the Feltre-Fonzaso basin to the front in the high mountains.

The clearest indication of the magnitude of the victory was the damage which the enemy had suffered. Between 24 October and 10 November they'd lost 10,000 men killed, 30,000 wounded and 293,000 taken prisoner. 350,000 stragglers and deserters crowded the areas behind the front and even the interior. The total of combat soldiers lost, at least temporarily, may have been about 700,000 men. According to official Italian sources the figure rose by 20 November, if the sick are included, to 800,000.<sup>588</sup>

These enormous casualties naturally led to a reduction in the number of units. The following had been dissolved by 24 November - 33 infantry brigades, 3 Bersaglieri regiments, 3 independent Bersaglieri battalions, 15 Alpini battalions, and numerous batteries and machine gun companies. At the start of October 1917 the Italian artillery had available about 7000 guns and 2400 trench mortars; they lost 3150 guns and 1732 trench mortars in the fighting.<sup>589</sup> Also lost were 300,000 rifles, 3000 machine guns and 2000 machine pistols.

As the allies advanced, a large amount of food, clothing, medical

588 "Report of the Investigating Committee", Vol. I, pp. 373 ff.

589 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Table 14. "Rivista di Artiglieria e Genio", October 1933 issue. Cadorna, "La guerra" (1934 edition), p.

equipment etc. fell into their hands. The soldiers of the Central Powers, long accustomed to scanty rations, could suddenly (though only for a short time) once more eat their fill and send some food back to hungry civilians at home. Unfortunately the preparations to process the booty were inadequate due to the campaign's original limited goals, so that a rather large portion of the food became spoiled before it could be consumed.

The allies' casualties can't be exactly determined. Borojevic's Army Group reported a loss between 24 October and 1 December of 2553 men through death and 12,343 through wounding; 5709 men were missing.<sup>590</sup> In the same period the strength of the Aus-Hung. units assigned to 14<sup>th</sup> Army (including 94 ID, which originally had belonged to 10<sup>th</sup> Army) decreased by 16,400 men. Since the German divisions had somewhat smaller strengths to start with, it is possible to estimate their total loss as 15,000 men. The casualty reports from Conrad's Army Group show that between 10 and 24 November there were 678 men killed, 6614 wounded, 6962 taken ill and 599 missing. In the five decisive weeks of the campaign the total losses of the allies thus may have been around 70,000 men.<sup>591</sup>

The allied offensive came to a halt in front of the defensive line chosen by Cadorna. A just evaluation of the Chief of the Italian General Staff must concede that after the swift collapse of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army he did everything possible to save all his other units from a similar fate, and that his decisions and authority enabled this effort to succeed. When he handed his office over to his successor the basic orders for the choice of the new defensive line had already been issued. The reduced length of the front was naturally as advantageous to the Italian Army as to ours. The Italians were able to let 2<sup>nd</sup> Army leave the front while still able to find enough strength to halt the pursuit of their opponents. And the prospect of receiving help from their allies gave them moral support.

The Italian high command furthermore strove to make up for their unusually great casualties as quickly as possible. By 24 November they had already sent to the front 170,000 replacements, 50,000 recovered wounded and 80,000 troops who'd been summoned back from leave. At the same time they were concentrating the 300,00 stragglers and deserters in camps. Thus by the end of

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<sup>590</sup>The figures do not include casualties of 43 Sch Div and of 187 Lst Inf Bde, which during the operations were sent to the Eastern front.

<sup>591</sup>There are no reports about the casualties of the parts of 10<sup>th</sup> Army which were shifted to Tyrol.

1917 the damaged units had been built up by incorporating 600,000 men.<sup>592</sup>

This physical and psychological rebuilding of the Italian Army was supported by their allies and also by their own home front. Boselli's Cabinet, which had been at the helm since June 1916, had fallen. They were replaced by a government headed by Orlando. Under his direction senators and deputies created in December 1917 the "Fascio della difesa nazionale", which called for the war to be waged with determination, and summoned the whole country to rally to this program. Thus it happened that in a few weeks an Army which had almost broken apart became once more a foe to reckon with, demonstrating that their cause was by no means lost.

The troops of the Central Powers had achieved great things during their victorious advance from the Isonzo to the Piave. Austria-Hungary's proud warriors prepared with renewed spirits for the fourth winter of the war in their new positions in the Vicentian Alps and on the Piave. The units stationed in Venetia were enormously buoyed by their victory. This increased fighting spirit of the troops also encouraged the high command, which could make the necessary decisions for the coming decisive year with confidence and steadiness.

## **XI. The Year 1917 Comes to an End**

### ***A. The East in the last quarter of 1917***

#### **1. The further decline of Russia's government and Army**

In the great Russian Empire the brief restoration of the Army's military spirit which Kerensky had awakened in high summer was soon followed by new disorders which the badly shaken government wasn't able to quell. Kornilov, the commander-in-chief chosen by Kerensky, forcefully argued that the war with the Central Powers could be continued only if order and strict discipline were restored in the Army, if necessary by the most drastic means; furthermore, order had to be restored in the state as a whole. The General's suggestions were eagerly supported by the British ambassador Buchanan, since understandably the Entente was greatly interested in keeping Russia at war.<sup>593</sup> Kerensky was also

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<sup>592</sup>Report of the Investigating Committee", Vol. I, p. 374

<sup>593</sup>Buchanan, "Meine Mission in Russland" (in German translation;

convinced of the necessity of rebuilding the armed forces with stern measures and agreed to some of Kornilov's demands<sup>594</sup>; however, he stopped short of granting powers to the military leaders which they could use against his government. Thus an ever deeper chasm opened between the revolutionary civilian leader and the commander-in-chief, two men with very different personalities; the result was a struggle for control of the Army.<sup>595</sup> The officers and the bourgeoisie looked upon the energetic General, who stated his demands with such determined language, as the savior of Russia. This strengthened Kerensky's suspicion that the high-ranking officers wanted to set up a military dictatorship.<sup>596</sup>

Subordination of the St Petersburg Military District to the Stavka was a major goal of Kerensky's program; he justified this demand as necessary to carry out military operations next to the Gulfs of Finland and Riga. At the start of August the Russian high command had already been warned by the French intelligence service that the Germans were preparing a major offensive against Riga. Allegedly as a counter-measure, at the end of the month Kornilov removed the III Cavalry Corps (1 Don and Ussuri Coss Divs) and the Caucasian Native Cav Div from the Southwestern Front and deployed them behind the Northern Front. In reality, however, the Commander-in-Chief wanted to send these apparently still reliable troops into St Petersburg to suppress the Soviet, which was gaining influence.<sup>597</sup>

When the Germans did start their offensive on the Riga front, Kornilov insisted that to protect the capital the Petersburg Military District should be placed under his authority and that the government should agree to all his other military demands. Because of the seriousness of the situation Kerensky was willing to make some concessions; he also agreed that the cavalry should be sent to St Petersburg so the government would be protected

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Berlin, 1926), pp. 216 ff.

594Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 180 ff.

595Spannocchi, pp. 168 ff.

596Martinov, "Kornilov", pp. 63 ff. Kerensky, "Erinnerungen" (Dresden, 1928), pp.382 ff.

597Martinov, pp. 56 ff. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Actually it is still by no means certain that Kornilov plotted in advance to carry out a *coup d'etat*; an alternate interpretation of this episode is that he and Kerensky finally came to blows due to mutual suspicion rather than to intentional malice on either side. See Lincoln, "Passage through Armageddon" (New York, 1986), pp. 419 ff.

against a possible Bolshevik uprising against the Army reforms. But the government retained authority over the garrison of the capital and the right to declare martial law. Because of the menace of a Bolshevik revolution, Kornilov now demanded, as the best solution, that the Minister President should give him complete military and civil authority; the cabinet should resign so that the General could select his own. In the night of 8-9 September Kerensky announced that Kornilov had been fired and asked the Chief of Staff to the Stavka, General Lukomsky, to temporarily assume the supreme command; the latter, however, declined the appointment.<sup>598</sup> In an official announcement on 9 September the Minister President denounced Kornilov's actions as a coup against the government. General Klembovsky, the leader of the Northern Front, was named commander-in-chief. Kornilov refused to leave his post, and likewise appealed to public opinion. His declaration stated that the Provisional Government were under the influence of the Bolshevik Committee and were cooperating with the Germans.<sup>599</sup> He, General Kornilov - the son of a Cossack farmer - declared that he wanted nothing for himself but only the preservation of great Russia. He swore to lead the people to victory over the enemy until the scheduled meeting of the national assembly would themselves decide the new form of government. But rather than see Russia fall into the hands of the German arch-enemy he would rather die on the battlefield. Most of the Army's commanders stood on Kornilov's side; Klembovsky refused to assume the supreme command. But Kornilov was playing a bad hand. He had the generals and staffs and the majority of the officers with him, but the mass of the soldiers, under the influence of their Front committees, stood with Kerensky. The Central Committee of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants at St Petersburg, although they had caused considerable difficulty for the Provisional Government, immediately exhorted their supporters to offer heavy resistance to Kornilov's pretensions and to defend the fruits of the revolution. The III Cavalry Corps found that the rail lines to the capital were blocked, while emissaries from Petersburg undermined the spirit of the troops.

Attempts to mediate between the highest military and civilian authorities in Russia, including efforts by General Alexeiev and by the representatives of the Entente states, were fruitless.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>598</sup>Lukomsky, "Erinnerungen des Generals A.S. Lukomsky" (Berlin, 1923), Vol. I, pp 220 ff.

<sup>599</sup>Martinov, p. 100. Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 213 ff. Spannocchi, p. 176

<sup>600</sup>Borissov, "General Michael Vasilievich Alexeiev" (in the

On 12 September the government of Minister President Kerensky took control of the military administration. General Alexeiev became Chief of the General Staff and went to Mogilev in an attempt to prevent the complete collapse of the Army and to alleviate the fate of Kornilov and his adherents.<sup>601</sup> First Kornilov and Lukomsky were arrested, and then the commander of the Southwestern Front (General Denikin) with two of his Army commanders and a number of other officers.

As an old and experienced soldier, General Alexeiev made a final attempt to check the continuing deterioration of the Russian armed forces. On 15 September he reported to St Petersburg that the Army was no longer fit for any large-scale battle; at most it could carry out small operations by individual regiments or perhaps by individual divisions. The government would have to be decisive and rely on strict laws if they still wanted an effective fighting force.<sup>602</sup> This warning cry had no effect. After about ten days of work Alexeiev left the Stavka. Kerensky named General Dukhonin as his successor. In the Northern Front Klembovsky was replaced by the revolutionary General Cheremisov. Baluiev remained the commander of the Western Front. On the Romanian Front General Shcherbachev, who had weathered all the political storms, was still with King Ferdinand. A number of Army commanders were replaced; in general the selections were based on revolutionary-political rather than military factors.

The Southwest Front was entrusted to General Volodchenko, who was acceptable to the National Committee of Ukraine (the "Rada") which was now in existence. Among the many other difficulties which beset the Provisional Government were the efforts of Russia's peripheral territories to loosen or destroy the bonds which connected them with the central government. Desire for autonomy had already awakened in Ukraine in spring 1917.<sup>603</sup> This tendency was originally expressed in a demand that Ukrainian troops should be concentrated in their own corps (VI and XXXIV) under commanders of their own nationality. Finally it was asserted that the sector of the Southwestern front was under Ukrainian rather than Russian authority. And in Bessarabia the Romanian inhabitants initiated a movement to gain a special

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Russian publication "Voyennizh Sbornik"; Belgrade, 1922; 2<sup>nd</sup> issue). Buchanan, pp. 227 ff.

<sup>601</sup>Martinov, pp. 153 ff.

<sup>602</sup>Spannocchi, pp. 178 ff.

<sup>603</sup>Korostowetz, "Lenin im Hause der Väter" (Berlin, 1928), pp. 258 ff.

status for this territory, separating it from Great Russia.<sup>604</sup> The Finnish provincial assembly strove for the complete independence of their country. Kerensky's government responded to this initiative by dissolving the assembly and reinforcing the garrison of Finland, but the local authorities continued their political battle with St Petersburg.<sup>605</sup>

The Provisional Government hadn't increased their power by suppressing the "Kornilov Rebellion."<sup>606</sup> On the contrary, power was flowing increasingly into the hands of the local Soviets, in which the radical left wing - led in Petersburg by Lenin and Trotsky - had the greatest influence. The mass of the soldiers at the front became ever more radical and mistrustful of the officers. All Russia was seething. After a great deal of trouble Kerensky created a new government, the fourth coalition cabinet, which was from the start opposed sharply by Trotsky. The government declared that they were seeking to conclude a general peace that wouldn't damage either side.<sup>607</sup> They wanted an agreement between the allied Entente powers on the basis of the principles of the Russian revolution. In the interest of peace they wished to rally all the country's forces to support the common cause of the Entente and to oppose any attempt to subject Russia to a foreign power. But the ambassadors of England, France and Italy demanded in no uncertain terms that the Minister President should restore the fighting strength of the Army and to prove by deeds that his government could impose their will at the front and in the interior.<sup>608</sup> Only thus would Russia receive full support from its allies. Kerensky had to reply that he was keeping these demands secret, since their publication would cause enormous anger in his country. He could only make a vague pledge that Russia would continue the war. But conditions in the Army and in the interior, especially the hopeless state of the railroads and the supply services, were forcing an end to the fighting.

## **2. Actions of Archduke Joseph's and Prince Leopold's Army Groups from October to mid-November**

The units of the Central Powers deployed against Russia and Rumania were still standing guard in the East. The high commands

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<sup>604</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 384 ff.

<sup>605</sup>Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 238 ff.

<sup>606</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 228 ff.

<sup>607</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 254 ff.

<sup>608</sup>Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 254 ff.

and their immediate subordinates at the front followed with interest the developments in the Russian Empire and how they affected the military situation. The intelligence services, for which the Russians' own wireless messages still provided the most useful information, were able to provide a full and accurate picture of the political strife between parties in the unruly country. After the beating which the Germans administered to the Russian northern armies in September, the allies had no need to carry out any other major offensives. But it wasn't so easy to gain a clear picture of the attitudes of the commanders and troops, particularly those in the front lines. Contacts with the Russians for purposes of disseminating propaganda made it seem that many of the infantry had been politicized; weary of the war and unwilling to fight, they were persecuting and getting rid of their officers. The foot soldiers were almost completely inactive; they did guard their trenches, but wouldn't initiate any fighting. But other branches of the service, particularly the artillery and air force, still maintained their military bearing. The same was true of the new storm troop detachments, made up of picked troops.

#### Archduke Joseph's Army Group

At the start of October the HQ of Archduke Joseph's Army Group issued guidelines for the upcoming period. Only minor enemy operations - mainly in the Ojtoz sector - were anticipated against 1<sup>st</sup> Army, although a larger assault by the Romanians was a possibility. At the moment the Russians apparently had no intention of attacking 7<sup>th</sup> Army, but they were deployed in such a fashion that they could suddenly concentrate in a number of areas. Therefore reliable defenses should be prepared. Both Army commanders were instructed to replace divisions which had been under considerable strain with units that were in better shape, to deploy their forces in depth, and to hold reserves ready for rapid deployment. There were also substantial Russian forces opposite Czernowitz, in 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's sector.

Meanwhile under 1<sup>st</sup> Army all parts of the 8 CD had reached the Soveja basin; on 3 October the defensive sectors of Marenzi's group (7 and 8 CD) and of 218 German ID were placed under 9<sup>th</sup> German Army, which belonged to Mackensen's Army Group. Then there were further reorganizations within 1<sup>st</sup> Army. In XXI Corps GO Rohr extended the sectors of the other divisions so he could relieve 3 CD, which in turn took over the right wing of 70 Hon ID (VI Corps) around the middle of the month. This sector, which was important for protecting the flank of Gerok's group, was placed under 225 German ID (Woyna's group), and Woyna was placed



directly under Gerok's command; the authority of the k.u.k. VIII Corps was extended south to include 37 Hon ID. The HQ of Liposcak's group were now designated "IX Corps", after the original IX Corps (in 2<sup>nd</sup> Army) was broken up. Enemy activity was restricted to occasional harassment fire by some batteries and to skirmishing by some patrols.

Army Group HQ had greater concerns about 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies. On 3 October the HQ of 7<sup>th</sup> Army moved from Papfalva to Kutuy. At the start of the month the 8 Bav Res ID, which originally had been supposed to move to the Isonzo front, were sent to the West as desired by the German OHL. To replace them the Bav CD transferred from XXVI Corps to the Carpathian Corps. The 1<sup>st</sup> Prussian Gd Cav Bde, which had been on their way to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, were diverted to join Mackensen's Army Group in Wallachia. Under the k.u.k. XXVI Corps, on 3 October the 4 German Ers ID - which had been inserted in the front north of 40 Hon ID in the second half of September - drove the Russians out of Obermilleschoutz and incorporated the newly-won position into the defensive line. In the next few days the enemy retaliated with considerable artillery fire between the Suczawa and Sereth Rivers. On 6 October they attacked the Carpathian Corps northwest of the city of Sereth, against the inner wings of the German 1 and Aus-Hung. 31 ID; at Waschkoutz they broke through the foremost line in a surprise assault.<sup>609</sup> The attacking unit, 31 Russian ID, also had two tanks; they were driven back after the arrival of stronger forces (several Aus-Hung. and German battalions). The German 4 Ers ID was now placed under the Carpathian Corps. The leader of this Corps, G.Lt Conta, had already been serving also as a group commander over the neighboring XXVI Corps since the departure of GdI Krauss for Italy; thus the important sector along the Moldavian border was all under one HQ.

On 10 October the Army Group HQ indicated to the Army commanders Kövess and Kritek that if possible the offensive into Moldavia should be resumed; as a preparation, air units should reconnoiter the area between the Suczawa and the Pruth. But on the 16<sup>th</sup> the German OHL stated that the operation couldn't take place in the foreseeable future. The Front's Chief of Staff, GM Seeckt, summarized his evaluation of the Russians by saying that despite the masses' yearning for peace their military and political leaders might still believe that they could carry out plans for an offensive. Whether or not such plans could be realized depended on the attitude of the troops, which was hard to judge. As was evident during the summer in Galicia, the mood kept

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<sup>609</sup>The k.u.k. 31 ID lost 12 machine guns and more than 1200 men; the majority of the casualties were suffered by IR # 44.

changing. At the moment it seemed that the commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army had his forces relatively well in hand; the rank and file, unlike their counterparts in other sectors, were very cool toward the peace propaganda. The skirmishing here in no-man's land was rather intense.

On 21 October the Aus-Hung. high command asked Archduke Joseph to hold four cavalry regiments, or an entire cavalry division, in readiness to move to Tyrol; for this purpose he chose 2 CD, which was stationed in reserve behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. On the next day GdI Arz asked the OHL if the German Eastern Command could part with 9 CD and the HQ of Hauer's Cavalry Corps, which were stationed on the northern wing of Linsingen's Army Group. The Tyrol front had been denuded of troops for the Isonzo offensive, and it was possible that the Italians might attack from the Sugana valley. The OHL noted GM Seeckt's concern that the Russians might mount attacks to help Italy; 2 CD should be left with 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to act as a mobile reserve, just like the Bav CD were doing under 7<sup>th</sup> Army. The AOK promised that if they were given 9 CD they would only withdraw 2 CD if there was a dire emergency.

Starting on 23 October the Russians suddenly increased their artillery fire against XXVI Corps (59 ID and 40 Hon ID) of 7<sup>th</sup> Army. The generals now anticipated a Russian relief offensive to help the Italians, and initiated counter-measures. The AOK sent the Polish Auxiliary Corps<sup>610</sup> by train from Przemysl to 3<sup>rd</sup> Army,

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<sup>610</sup>The former Polish Legion had been re-designated the "Polish Auxiliary Corps" at the end of September 1916. After the Central Powers proclaimed the creation of a Kingdom of Poland on 5 November of that year, the unit was supposed to be the nucleus of a Polish national Army. But this idea had to be abandoned in summer 1917 because there had been little response in the country to the recruitment effort; many of the men who did enlist refused to swear an oath of allegiance. There was a breach between Pilsudski and the German Governor General, GdI von Beseler. The national hero and future Marshal was incarcerated in the fortress of Magdeburg. The troops of the Polish Auxiliary Corps who seemed reliable (10,000 men) were moved in fall to Przemysl, where the Aus-Hung. citizens of the old Legion were transferred to the k.u.k. Army and the remaining personnel formed a mixed brigade. Two infantry regiments were ready to go to the front at the end of October. See Lipinski, "Der grosse Marschall (Einleitung zu Josef Pilsudski, Erinnerungen und Dokumente)" (Essen 1935), Vol. I, pp. 41 ff. Hausner, "Die Polenpolitik der Mittelmächte und die öst-ung. Militärverwaltung in Polen während des Weltkrieges" (Vienna, 1935), pp. 78 ff. Mitzka,

so that the Army in turn would be able to transfer 2 CD to their southern neighbors. From Gerok's group Archduke Joseph sent the 15 Bav Res Inf Bde (a regiment plus artillery) to 7<sup>th</sup> Army. At the request of the OHL, the German Eastern Command held a German mixed brigade ready to entrain under Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group. The enemy remained very active opposite Kövess' Army and pounded XXVI Corps in particular with continuous artillery fire. The Russian infantry were also more alert, but there were no particular indications that an offensive was imminent. Nevertheless the Aus-Hung. high command decided that 9 CD, which had left Linsingen's Army Group by train for Tyrol and had already reached Lundenburg, should be diverted to Bukovina; on 31 October the leading trains arrived in Czernowitz. The Division was fully assembled in the first days of November, along with the Polish and Bavarian reinforcements. But meanwhile the likelihood of a Russian onslaught had dwindled, and on 6 November the situation in 7<sup>th</sup> Army's sector relaxed.

#### Böhm-Ermolli's and Linsingen's Army Groups

The Army Groups of Böhm-Ermolli and Linsingen also found that the only actions involved cannonades, occasional dog-fights in the air, and isolated storm troop actions. At the start of October the 1<sup>st</sup> Russian Army, which had been created in August, disappeared from the order of battle of the Southwest Front; its corps were re-assigned to neighboring armies and its HQ took over a sector of the North Front. Within Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group the German high command continued their systematic rotation of units. At the end of October the South Army gave up 24 Res ID of XXVII Res Corps after receiving 10 Ers ID; the HQ of the Beskid Corps left the Army's northern wing to move to the Western theater of operations. Their part of the front (the "Jablonow Sector") was taken over the XXV Res Corps HQ, whose old "Czortkow Sector" would now be led by the commander of 15 Res ID. Under the k.u.k. XXV Corps the 55 ID was re-designated 155 ID (and later 155 Hon ID), and 54 ID became a k.k. Schützen Division; this was part of a general re-organization of the Aus-Hung. Army which will be described in the next volume. 54 Sch Div gave up IR 88 (to the Italian front) and received SchR 30, which 4 ID had left behind in the East.

Under 2<sup>nd</sup> Army the German 22 and 6 ID left the "Zloczow Sector" for the West; they were replaced (respectively) by the Bav Ers ID

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"Die k.u.k. Militärverwaltung in Russisch-Polen" in Kerchnawe's "Die Militärverwaltung in den von den öst-ung. Truppen besetzten Gebieten" (part of the Carnegie Foundation publications, Aus-Hung. series; Vienna, 1928), pp. 40 ff.

and Bav 14 ID. In the "Olejow Sector", commanded by IX k.u.k. Corps HQ, the k.u.k. 33 ID left and was replaced by the German 33 Res ID; thus IX Corps HQ were no longer needed. Their commander FML Kletter received a new assignment in south Tyrol while (as noted earlier) Liposcak's group in 1<sup>st</sup> Army became the new IX Corps. After the departure of GO Hauer and the 9 CD from the northern wing of Linsingen's Army Group a German general took over the "Tobol Sector."

The Germans had captured the Jakobstadt bridgehead to secure the right wing of the northern part of their Eastern front, which had moved forward in September. Since they were still concerned about protecting their left wing, on 12 October they started a well-prepared operation to occupy the islands of Ösel, Dagö and Moon which lie in front of the Gulf of Riga.<sup>611</sup> Although the Stavka were aware of their opponents' intentions, the Russian forces were unable to offer determined resistance by either land or sea. After a week the defenders were driven from the archipelago and the Russian Baltic Fleet withdrew. Russia's participation in the World War ended with this campaign. "From this time the Russians were no longer an opponent to be reckoned with."<sup>612</sup>

At the end of October GFM Prince Leopold of Bavaria ordered that activity was to be restricted to building up and holding the existing positions; the recently occupied lines (in Galicia and those held by 8<sup>th</sup> Army) were to consist only of a first position and a zone of resistance in depth. The smallest possible forces were to be kept in the foremost lines; the other troops were to create strong reserves which would be vigorously trained. The goal of the propaganda which was being resumed at the front was to increase the desire of the enemy armies for peace.

On 3 November the two high commands came to some agreements concerning long-range plans. Since the French theater of operations continued to consume many units, and the German OHL planned (as described earlier) to carry out a major offensive in the West in spring 1918, Archduke Joseph's Army Group would start making German units available in mid-November. Later Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group would do the same. At this time the Archduke only had 2 and 9 CD available as reserves, so the AOK at Baden started to send him the following units - FML Fernengel's 43 Sch Div from the Isonzo front, ten Trachom battalions from Tyrol along with GM von Soretic's 63 ID HQ, and Col. Lähne's k.u.

<sup>611</sup>Tschischwitz, "Armee und Marine bei der Eroberung der Baltischen Inseln im Oktober 1917" (Berlin, 1931)

<sup>612</sup>Zayonchkovsky, "1917 Campaign", pp. 107 ff.

28 Lst Mtn Bde (which had five battalions). After the last German units departed they'd be followed by the Archduke's German staff as well as the group HQ led by Conta, Gerok and Litzmann. Following instructions issued in October, 7<sup>th</sup> Army started to replace 5 Hon CD and 6 CD (Herberstein's group) with 51 Hon ID in the important Kimpolung sector. 42 ID rejoined Linsingen's Army Group from Ösel Island, and relieved 107 in the Kovel sector.

During November combat was again restricted to artillery duels and air actions. Apparently the Russian commanders, realizing their military weakness, were at least trying with vigorous air reconnaissance to secure themselves from any surprise. On the 12<sup>th</sup> storm troops of the last remaining Aus-Hung. units in the sector of the k.u.k. XII Corps (under Woyrsch's Army Group) - IR 18 and Pioneer Comp 2/2 - took part in a successful attack.

*Meanwhile events of the greatest importance were unfolding in the interior of Russia.*

### 3. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and its effect

#### The Bolsheviks in power

In Russia the decay of the Army and the executive power continued to accelerate.<sup>613</sup> Armed conflict between Kerensky and the Bolsheviks broke out in November. While Kerensky and the generals, under pressure from the Entente<sup>614</sup>, were still trying to keep the war going the radical groups of the Left were proposing a welcome and more effective peace program to the masses.<sup>615</sup> The Executive Committee of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies seized control of the capital and of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets (which had just assembled), and on 7 and 8 November overthrew the government. Kerensky fled after a brief attempt at resistance by force. The new authorities issued a program that was designed to win over the soldiers - immediate conclusion of a "democratic" peace (without annexations or reparations), distribution of noble estates to the peasantry, and assumption of all power by the Soviets. A radio broadcast announced the peace initiative to the world. Lenin had become head of the government, with Trotsky as "People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs"; the overall commander of the Army, to replace the fleeing Kerensky, was the former Chief of the General Staff, Dukhonin.

Since even the inner-political quarrels were diligently discussed in wireless messages, our side was soon aware of developments in Russia. The first white flags over the Russian trenches were already appearing opposite 40 Hon ID (7<sup>th</sup> Army) on 12 November; they soon appeared also along the Translyvania border - opposite the k.u.k. IX and XXI Corps - and at other points along the front. But Russian artillery often fired to suppress these initial peace feelers. The Central Powers' troops were now ordered to avoid any hostile action in areas where the enemy were peaceful. If individual Russian units wanted an armistice their request should be referred to higher command levels. But it

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613Kakurin, "The Disintegration of the Army in 1917" (in Russian; Central Archives - "The Year 1917 in Documents and Records"; published by Pokrovsky and Yakovlev in Moscow and Leningrad, 1925)

614Buchanan, p. 237. The Entente policy was "to keep the Russians on our side (even if we couldn't expect that they could play more than a passive role in the war) so that their vast resources wouldn't be exploited by the Germans."

615Smilg-Benario, "Von Kerenski zu Lenin", pp. 258 ff.

should be made clear to the Russian negotiators that a real armistice could be concluded only between the governments. Our side wasn't exerting pressure for an immediate peace, supporting Lenin, or taking any action which could be construed as interference in Russia's internal affairs.

Just as under Kerensky, a battle for control of the Army developed between the new executive authorities and the Stavka. The units were still controlled by the generals, at least to the extent that military discipline hadn't been undermined or destroyed by the St Petersburg Soviet or by the local soldiers' committees (whose influence was increasing). In the night of 20-21 November the commander-in-chief Dukhonin received from the Peoples' Commissars an order to immediately contact the Central Powers with the intent of terminating hostilities.<sup>616</sup> Trotsky requested that all the warring states should immediately lay down their arms on all fronts and initiate peace negotiations. This offer was broadcast to the Central Powers by radio.

But General Dukhonin refused to begin negotiations with his opponents in the name of the Council of Peoples's Commissars, which wasn't recognized abroad as a government. Immediately the new rulers dismissed the disobedient general by telephone and named as his successor the Minister of War, Reserve Ensign Krylenko. Until Krylenko arrived, Dukhonin remained at his post. The Entente's representatives in Russia now were forced to take a position regarding the peace proposal which had been broadcast to the entire world. They believed that the Stavka was the most authoritative power in Russia; therefore on 23 November, through the military plenipotentiaries which were accredited to that HQ, they sent General Dukhonin a joint note which warned sharply against any violation of the inter-allied treaty of 5 September 1914. At that time Russia had promised to neither conclude a separate peace nor break off military operations. The Entente diplomats in St Petersburg made a similar effort. Dukhonin felt strengthened in his resistance against the Red government, especially since other generals supported him and refused to subordinate themselves to Krylenko. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, announced in a circular "To Everyone!" that they weren't bound by old treaties; once again they demanded an end to the war between nations.

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<sup>616</sup>Spannocchi, pp. 182 ff. Buchanan, pp. 251 ff. Gukovsky, "The Entente and the October Revolution" (in Russian; Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), pp. 55 ff. "On the Eve of the Armistice" (in the Red Archives, Vol. XXIII), pp. 195 ff.

The reaction of the Central Powers

Russia's wishes had to be welcome to the Central Powers, since they provided an opportunity to put an end to years of warfare in the East, freeing substantial forces for decisive action elsewhere. Archduke Joseph and Prince Leopold were ordered to exploit Russia's desire for peace by avoiding any hostile action unless provoked. The goal was to conclude armistices with limited time-frames in sectors where the enemy were so inclined while trying to extend agreements in the direction of a general settlement. If the Russians requested an armistice to cover the entire Eastern front, the German Eastern Command would conduct the negotiations. The two high commands agreed on a draft peace treaty. Contacts with the enemy were to be strictly regulated and monitored to ensure that the morale of our own troops wasn't damaged and that fraternization was kept to a minimum.

Already on 23 November Archduke Joseph reported to Baden that the 32 Russian ID, opposite Czernowitz, had requested a truce. Then 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ came to an agreement with XI Russian Corps regarding the entire sector of Litzmann's group, which became effective on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Under 4<sup>th</sup> Army the first pacts were concluded with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Turkestan Rifle Divs of the Special Army; similar local negotiations were carried out between the lines in the area north of the Pripyat.

Meanwhile Krylenko had visited the Russian Northern Front where he removed the commander despite some resistance from the generals. On 26 November he contacted the Germans, and received from the OHL an assurance that the Eastern Command was authorized to conduct negotiations.<sup>617</sup> Thereupon Lenin and Trotsky on 28 November issued a high-flown appeal by radio "To the peoples of the warring countries"; they asked the governments of both the Entente and of the Central Powers and their allies whether they were willing to meet on 2 December for discussions based on the formula of "No annexations, no reparations, and guarantees for national self-determination." This would end the bloodshed and prevent a new winter campaign. As a taunt to the Entente states, the Bolsheviks called upon their populations to prevent the professional diplomats from ruining the opportunity for peace which had been provided by the Russian Revolution. This new Russian appeal, with its call for conclusion of a general peace, elicited a response from the Aus-Hung. Foreign Ministry.<sup>618</sup> Late in the evening of 29 November GdI Arz, the Chief of the General Staff, received from the Ballhausplatz a message which he was to

<sup>617</sup>Nowak, "Generalmajor Hoffmann", Vol. II, pp. 189 ff.

<sup>618</sup>Glaise-Horstenau, "Die Katastrophe", p. 135



broadcast to Tsarskoye Selo. In this response, the k.u.k. Foreign Minister Count Czernin stated that the government of Austria-Hungary considered the Russian proposals a basis for negotiating a cease-fire and a peace treaty. Czernin was ready to send an emissary at a time to be determined. On the 30<sup>th</sup> Trotsky acknowledged receipt of this information.

At the fronts the conduct of the enemy varied considerably at the end of November and start of December. As previously, the Romanians remained very hostile. The Russian units which displayed a similar temper were apparently those which still hadn't come completely under Bolshevik influence, so that leaders loyal to the Entente could prevail to a certain degree. Thus the 6<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies under the Romanian Front of General Shcherbachev weren't inclined to an armistice; therefore Kritek's Army were able to come to an agreement on 2 December only with XXXIII Corps of 8<sup>th</sup> Russian Army (adjacent to XI Corps which had already come to terms). Thus at times the old battlefields, such as the Ojtoz sector of 1<sup>st</sup> Army or the center of 7<sup>th</sup> Army, still echoed with the sound of cannon fire. In several sectors of Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group there were lively harassment bombardments while volunteer pilots were busy in the air. Linsingen's Army Group, on the other hand, concluded a truce at Kovel on 1 December with the Special Army, while Woyrsch's and Eichhorn's Army Groups succeeded in making partial agreements and continuing conversations. But even after pacts were signed it wasn't possible to completely avoid bloody episodes; the fire of war that had burned for three and a half years couldn't be extinguished with one gush of water. Finally War Minister Krylenko broadcast to all the Russian fronts that in agreement with the German Eastern Command there would be a meeting between plenipotentiaries from both sides on 2 December; fire should cease everywhere. Individuals who failed to pass on this order, or worked against it, would be punished. The Central Powers also strove to disseminate this news, both to their own troops and to the Russians.

On 2 December the negotiators of the Russian Soviet government crossed the German lines near Dvinsk and reported to the HQ of Prince Leopold of Bavaria at Brest-Litovsk.

#### **4. The armistice negotiations**

##### **a. Negotiations at Brest-Litovsk**

The representatives of the Central Powers had held their own preliminary meeting at Brest-Litovsk several days earlier. The German members of the commission were drawn from the staff of the Eastern Command plus a representative of the Foreign Office from Berlin. The Austro-Hungarian members were Col. Pokorny, Major Freih. von Mirbach and - from the Ballhausplatz - Legation Secretary Count Csaky. Turkey was represented by GdK Zeki Pasha, Bulgaria by Col. Ganchev. The plenipotentiaries of the People's Commissars, led by Joffe and Kamenev, arrived on 3 December. Besides the leaders, the voting members of the Russian delegation were a non-commissioned officer, a soldier, a sailor, a workman, a peasant and a woman. The Russians had brought Admiral Altvater and a number of officers as military experts. Prince Leopold opened the meeting in the afternoon, after which his Chief of Staff GM Hoffmann held the chair.

The Central Powers had originally hoped they could reach an agreement with Russia and Romania covering the entire Eastern front. Joffe opened the discussions with a demand that they should lead as soon as possible to a democratic peace, but had to concede that he hadn't received any authority from Russia's former allies to speak in their name. Therefore the meetings were restricted to the task nearest at hand, a separate truce with Russia. On 5 December Joffe announced that he would have to report to St Petersburg before the final preparation of the agreement. But as a preliminary result, and to "facilitate the ongoing armistice negotiations" it was agreed that there would be a ten-day truce between the Quadruple Alliance and Russia. According to the signed document<sup>619</sup>, the truce would start at 12:00 noon on 7 December and could be revoked by either side after a three-day time period. It was binding on all land and air forces between the Black and Baltic Seas, as well as in the Russo-Turkish theater of operations in Asia. The transfer of division-sized or larger units during the truce was permissible only if their orders to move had been issued prior to 5 December. The new agreement superceded any special arrangements by individual HQ.

During the pause in negotiations, which lasted a week, the Russian People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs (Trotsky) tried in vain to persuade the Entente powers to take part. On 12 December the Russians returned to Brest-Litovsk and late in the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> an agreement was signed, in German and Russian, to convert the truce into an armistice.<sup>620</sup> The armistice would be

<sup>619</sup>The document appears as an appendix at the end of this volume.

<sup>620</sup>The (translated) German version of this agreement also appears as an appendix.

effective for four weeks, from noon on 17 December until 14 January 1918; after three weeks either side could cancel it with seven days' advance warning. During the armistice it was forbidden to concentrate units for an offensive; operational troop movements which hadn't already been initiated on 15 December were forbidden. The agreement also applied to naval and air forces; it provided for regulated communication between the fronts, and took the place of all earlier arrangements. Both parties pledged to immediately initiate peace negotiations. An appendix dealt with the exchange of civilians and invalid troops between the two sides, and called for improvements in the treatment of prisoners of war as well as the resumption of cultural and economic relations. Representatives from the concerned states would form a commission at St Petersburg to regulate these questions. The Russians laid great stress on the provision that units weren't to be re-grouped or transferred; this was due in part to their relations with the Western powers and in part to their mistrust of the two allied Empires. A Ukrainian delegation which wanted to participate in the armistice negotiations arrived too late (after the terms were drawn up).

Conclusion of a peace treaty would be the responsibility of the various heads of state and governments. Foreign ministers and other high-ranking diplomats, accompanied by teams of advisers, made their way to Brest-Litovsk.

## **b. Negotiations at Focsani**

The Russian leader on the Romanian Front, General Shcherbachev, hadn't recognized the government of Lenin and Trotsky. At the side of the King of Romania, who controlled a cohesive army, the General was able to maintain an independent stand. Also the commanders of 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Russian Armies - Generals Ragosa and Zurikov - were still at their posts at the start of December, after the commanders in other Fronts had already been repeatedly changed in the tumult of the Revolution. Here, deep in the south and far from the Russian capital, Bolshevik influence still hadn't overwhelmed the soldiers' committees. But when negotiations started in Brest-Litovsk, the weak and long undermined discipline of the Russians broke down; the troops threatened to mutiny against their officers. Panic reigned in Jassy on 2 December.<sup>621</sup> The representatives of the Entente still tried to induce the Russian commander to make a determined stand

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<sup>621</sup>Queen Mary of Romania, "The Story of My Life" (London, 1935), Vol. III, pp. 385 ff.

for the common cause and promised him help. But on 3 December the General had to admit to the King and the Romanian government that he could no longer control his troops.<sup>622</sup> To avoid following the orders of the Soviet government, which Shcherbachev didn't recognize, his only choice was to initiate his own armistice with the enemy. This decision placed the Romanians, who didn't feel they were defeated, in a dilemma. Their Kingdom, whose armies were surrounded by those of an ally who no longer wanted to fight, couldn't continue the war on its own. A Crown Council at Jassy on 4 December, in which the Army leaders also participated, had to adopt the unavoidable measure of laying down their arms. They decided to seek a purely military truce that wouldn't forestall diplomatic efforts. To the temperamental Queen Maria in particular the idea of suddenly abandoning the cause of the Entente powers seemed inconceivable. But even the foreign observers now had to recognize the desperation of the situation and to declare that further resistance was impossible. King Ferdinand delegated supreme command over his Army to General Presan.

At 1:55 PM on 4 December, intermediaries of XXIV Russian Corps in the Trotusu sector delivered a letter in French from General Shcherbachev to the staff of the k.u.k. 7 ID; they asked that the contents should be sent by wire to GO Archduke Joseph and GFM Mackensen. The Russians asked to start negotiations for an armistice in the sector of the Romanian Front and offered to send their representatives to Focsani on a date to be determined.<sup>623</sup> The Archduke first responded with his acceptance in writing, and then awaited orders from Baden. GdI Arz decided that negotiations should be carried out by a commission in conjunction with Mackensen. The representatives of the Aus-Hung. Monarchy would be the commander of the 145 Inf Bde, GM Hranilovic, plus Lt Col. Ritter von Förster-Streffleur and Major Ritter von Hempel. After receiving these instructions, on 5 December Archduke Joseph wrote once more to General Shcherbachev that the meeting would begin at Focsani after arrangements were finalized with GFM Mackensen.

Now inquiries from the Romanian leaders were anticipated; responses were reserved for the Army Group HQ. And in fact on 5 December intermediaries from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Romanian Divisions brought identical letters over to the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army. The commander of these units had decided to follow the example of the Russians, with whom they were assigned to the same Front; the Romanians would cease hostilities as of 8:00 AM. It was

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<sup>622</sup>Kiritzesco, pp. 376 ff.

<sup>623</sup>Archduke Joseph, Vol. V, pp. 726 ff.

furthermore suggested that representatives from each side should meet, and that fraternization between the troops should be prevented. The Romanians along the Sereth sector made similar proposals to the Germans. 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ were instructed to refer the Romanians to the outcome of the meetings at Focsani. A local truce with the Romanian divisions could be honored because it was consistent with the overall negotiations.

GFM Mackensen named the commander of I Res Corps, G.Lt Morgen, to take charge of the meeting at Focsani; Major Nahsim attended for Turkey and Lt Col. Popov for Bulgaria.<sup>624</sup> At noon on 7 December the enemy's representatives passed through the German lines near Marasesti. The Russian delegation consisted of both officers (including two for Ukraine) and men, and was led by the commander of 9<sup>th</sup> Army, General Kelchevsky; the Romanian general HQ were represented by the Vice Chief of the General Staff, General Lupescu, and his assistants. Meanwhile the temporary truce had already been agreed to at Brest-Litovsk, and its wording covered the entire Eastern front as far as the Black Sea. But at Focsani the representatives of both enemy armies refused to recognize the agreement at Brest-Litovsk. The Romanians didn't believe that Lenin and his circle were a legitimate government with the authority to conclude treaties; the Russians - who included some socialists but hardly any followers of the Bolsheviks - had basically the same attitude. During discussions of the extent to which troops would be permitted to leave the front during the truce there were sharp conflicts between the warring parties. The Romanians were completely attuned to the desires of the Western powers; although the Russians were more accommodating, they were still trying to avoid antagonizing the Entente. Therefore the enemy negotiators weren't prepared to let more than two divisions leave the area for another theater of operations. The Central Powers, on the other hand, insisted on the formula which had been hammered out at Brest-Litovsk, namely that any troop movements already authorized as of the 5<sup>th</sup> could be carried out. The talks were temporarily broken off, and General Shcherbachev's delegates returned to Marasesti. Agreement was finally reached on 9 December, and at 10:30 PM all the plenipotentiaries signed a document that had been drawn up in French.<sup>625</sup>

The agreement established a "provisional truce" until the

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<sup>624</sup>Morgen, pp. 126 ff.

<sup>625</sup>TRANSLATOR' NOTE: The Focsani truce agreement, like the documents drafted at Brest-Litovsk, appears in an appendix to the original volume. For lack of a French translation, it has been omitted here.

scheduled meeting of the Constituent Assembly in Russia made a legally-binding decision about war and peace. It could be canceled after 72 hours' notice. The truce was effective immediately and extended to all units on land, on the rivers, and in the air between the Dniester and the mouth of the Danube. It would cease to be valid if an armistice was concluded which explicitly covered the entire front between the Baltic and Black Seas. Troop movements ordered prior to 5 December were permitted. No one could set foot on the neutral ground between both sides' barbed wire barriers; anyone who did enter this zone could be taken as a prisoner of war. The Romanians were responsible for this strict prohibition, which was supposed to prevent any contact between the opposing troops. The Russians had no interest in the measure; in fact they asserted that their commanders no longer had the power to carry out such orders. A special mixed commission would be established at Odessa to regulate the neutralization of the coast between the arms of the Danube, and ship traffic on the lower course of the river and on the Black Sea. A few days later General Shcherbachev suggested that because of the uncertain situation in Odessa the commission should open its meetings at Focsani instead.

According to the wording of the Focsani agreement, it became null and void on 15 December due to the armistice established at Brest-Litovsk, because the latter explicitly covered all the Russian Fronts. But Shcherbachev refused to go along since, as he informed GFM Mackensen on 23 December, the Brest-Litovsk truce had been concluded without the participation or agreement of the Romanian high command. The Russians stationed between the Dniester and the Black Sea, as well as the Romanians, recognized only the Focsani agreement. The Aus-Hung. and German high commands conceded that this argument was valid as it applied to the Romanians; as for the Russians, the question would have to be clarified in the continuing meetings at Brest-Litovsk.

## **5. Between war and peace (mid-November to the end of December)**

### Troop movements by the Central Powers

While the Central Powers' main goal was to put an end to the war with Russia, the troop movements ordered by both high commands continued, along with corresponding changes to the garrison of the Eastern front. Concern about the enemy could no longer hinder this activity, but quick movement was prevented by the condition of the railroads. The improvement of the lines which

ended in Transylvania and Bukovina still hadn't made the desired progress, so their capacity was limited. Many years of fighting had affected both the quality and quantity of the rolling stock. Furthermore the great offensive against Italy was in progress.

In mid-November, Archduke Joseph's Army Group first gave up the Bav CD to Mackensen's Army Group. To make it easier to relieve the units, GdI Arz sent to the Archduke the 187 Lst Inf Bde and Kosak's Group HQ from the Southwestern theater of operations, and XII Corps HQ from the Baranowicze area. But at the same time there were contingency plans to withdraw further forces from the Army Group if the Russian armies continued to disintegrate. It had long been confirmed that the enemy were breaking up the new divisions which had been created in the spring; but other combat units were wasting away due to wide scale desertion as discipline collapsed. By the end of November the German 225 ID and the HQ of GdI Gerok's XXIV Res Corps had left the k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army for the West. The Aus-Hung. VIII Corps now consisted of 37 Hon ID, 53 ID (ex 71 ID), and 39 Hon ID; VI Corps commanded 3 CD, 70 Hon ID and the k.u. 28 Lst Mtn Bde. Under 7<sup>th</sup> Army, Habermann's group (XI Corps) led Herberstein's group (5 Hon CD and 6 CD), 63 ID, 51 Hon ID and 11 Hon CD. 1 German ID left the Carpathian Corps. 4 Ers ID changed places with 74 Hon ID. The front was guarded by 9 CD, 31 ID and 43 Sch Div, which were to be joined by SchR 16 (of 46 Sch Div) which was coming by train from Volhynia. Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Litzmann's group had received 2 CD and the Poles. But the AOK emphasized that the Polish infantry weren't to be used in the front line because of the danger that they could come under the political influence of the Russians. 16 Res ID moved to the West; 83 ID, 15 Bav Res Inf Bde and two German Landsturm infantry regiments were to transfer to the German Eastern Command.

During the first meetings at Brest-Litovsk the representatives of the Central Powers had already perceived that even during an armistice in the East the enemy would try to pin down as many German and Austrian units as possible. Both high commands therefore hastened to issue orders to make the units they wanted available prior to the armistice agreement. The k.u.k. AOK ordered Archduke Joseph's Army Group to pull 30 and 59 ID plus 70 Hon ID from the front; the Eastern Command demanded three German divisions from Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group, and more were to follow. Thus there were major changes in December along the entire front south of the Pripyat, affecting the troops and staffs as well as the order of battle. Hitherto the main objective had been to replace the most battle-worthy units which others of lesser quality. Now that the Russians were obviously

striving for peace, it was possible to weaken the front by extending the sectors of the remaining units and sending more men to the rear.

On 2 December the Chief of Staff of Archduke Joseph's Army Group, GM Seeckt, was recalled to take up a similar post in the Ottoman Army. Emperor Charles named as his successor the commander of the k.u.k. 32 ID, FML Freih. von Willerding. After German 4 Ers ID left 7<sup>th</sup> Army by train, they were followed by the staff of G.Lt Conta's Carpathian Corps. Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, GdI Litzmann's XL Res Corps HQ were replaced by FML Kosak's Group HQ. In mid-December the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were instructed to gradually relieve the German units of South Army. For this purpose 30 and 59 ID began to march north from 7<sup>th</sup> Army, and FZM Braun's XII Corps HQ were assigned to the area. The only combat unit coming from the latter Corps' former sector, IR 18, were moving at the same time to Galicia; they finally joined 30 ID. The 53 and 15 Res ID, as well as the HQ of XXV Res Corps, left South Army by train. Later 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ would relieve the German divisions of the Zloczow Sector of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army with XIII Corps. 14 Bav Res ID left this area without being replaced; the German 42 and 108 ID likewise weren't replaced when they left Linsingen's Army Group. Still more of Linsingen's units, as well as some of Böhm-Ermolli's, were waiting for trains. Thus at the end of December the large-scale troop movements were still far from complete. And the new organization of the Aus-Hung. divisions would entail further transfers of regiments, battalions and artillery units.

The following was the order of battle on the Eastern front, south of the Pripyat, on 31 December 1917. Units which were in motion at this point are shown as of their current assignment; German units are shown in italics.

*Mackensen's Army Group* (HQ at Bucharest)

. 3<sup>rd</sup> BULGARIAN Army (HQ at Babadeg) - Cav Div (reinforced); 12 & 4 ID

. 9<sup>th</sup> Army (HQ at Romnicu Sarat) - VI TURKISH Corps (*Bavarian CD*, TURKISH 15 ID); *LII Corps* (the former "Danube Army"; also commanded the VI Turkish Corps; directly commanded the A-H. 145 Inf Bde, 216 ID, 212 ID and TURKISH 25 ID); *I Res Corps* (92 A-H. ID; 303 ID; 62 A-H. ID; 89, 217 & 115 ID; *Marenzi's Group* [7 & 8 A-H. CD]; 218 ID; 76 Res ID; 12 Bav ID); 6 BULGARIAN (Combined) ID

Archduke Joseph's Army Group (HQ at Klausenburg)

. 1<sup>st</sup> Army (HQ near Szekely Udvarhely) - VIII Corps (37, 53, 39 ID), VI Corps (3 CD, 70 ID, 28 Lst Mtn Bde), IX Corps (7 ID, 16



k.u. Lst Inf Bde, 10 CD), XXI Corps (72 ID, 1 CD, 15 ID)  
 . 7<sup>th</sup> Army (HQ at Kutý) - Group Habermann (XI Corps HQ - 5 Hon CD, XI Corps [63 & 51 ID], 11 Hon CD), XXVI Corps (40, 74 & 43 ID; 6 CD), XVII Corps (34 ID, 9 CD)  
 . 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (HQ at Czernowitz) - Group Kosak (5 ID, 2 CD, POLISH Auxiliary "Corps"), XIII Corps (36 ID, 187 Lst Bde); 16, 31, 42, 59 ID

(The Army Groups of Böhm-Ermolli and Linsingen were under the *Eastern Command* of Prince Leopold of Bavaria)

Böhm-Ermolli's Army Group (HQ at Zloczow)  
 . *South Army* (HQ at Buczacz) - XXV Corps (38, 54, 155 ID), *Jablonow Sector or XXVII Res Corps* (237, 96, 241 ID); XII A-H. Corps HQ; 30 A-H. ID; 83 ID, 10 Ers ID  
 . *Zloczow Sector or I Res Corps* - 223, 197, *Bav Ers*, 6 Res, 232 ID; 11 A-H. ID  
 . 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (HQ at Zloczow) - V Corps (12 LW ID, 27 ID, 4 CD), XVIII Corps (15 LW ID, 25 ID); 92 ID, 33 Res ID, 15 Res ID

*Linsingen's Army Group* (HQ at Chelm)  
 . *Falkenhayn's Group or XXII Res Corps* - 46 ID, 34 LW Bde, 32 ID, 215 ID  
 . 4<sup>th</sup> Army (HQ at Vladimir-Volynsky) - *Luga Sector or X Corps* (2 Gd Cav Bde; 1 LW ID, 224 ID, 2 A-H. ID, 86 ID); *Turya Sector or XII Res Corps* (7 LW ID, 2 CD; 12 k.k. R-Sch Div)  
 . *Kovel Sector or LV Corps* (HQ at Kovel) - 45 LW ID, 22 LW ID; XXII Corps (26 ID, 45 ID, 91 ID), *Tobol Sector* (1 LW ID, 4 Bav Cav Bde)  
 . *Gronau's Army Detachment or XLI Corps* - 9 CD, 20 LW ID, 95 ID, 5 CD

#### Conditions at the front

Throughout December the provision of food for men and horses caused great concern to the Aus-Hung. commanders. The transportation of rations and fodder from the interior was delayed or even interrupted for days on end. There was a shortage of flour. Rations had to be reduced, and many horses perished. The AOK gave trains carrying foodstuffs priority over all other traffic and exerted pressure on the civilian administration of the Monarchy, but these measures didn't produce any quick relief. There were suggestions, particularly from 1<sup>st</sup> Army HQ in Transylvania, that the government should resort to the extreme measure of requisitioning supplies in our own territory by force, but GdI Arz didn't concur. The situation on the home front and the morale of many groups were deteriorating after

three years of burdensome warfare; this became forcefully evident at the end of the year when Archduke Joseph's Army Group were ordered to provide field troops to maintain order in the industrial cities.

As fighting subsided along the Eastern fronts, men from the Austro-Hungarian and German Armies soon began to appear in front of our lines; they had escaped from Russian captivity. Special measures had to be taken to assimilate these "Heimkehrer." Some of them were infected with diseases, but their morale and psychological state posed a greater danger. If these men, who'd been subjected to so many changes of fortune, were incorporated back into the ranks of their comrades they could easily disseminate ideas which they'd picked up in Russia and thus undermine cohesion and willingness to fight within the armies of the Central Powers. It was suspected that the Russians were even promoting the return of these ex-prisoners as advocates of their new teachings. The "Heimkehrer" were segregated from the other troops, questioned about their political beliefs, informed about the military situation, and then sent to join replacement units.

#### The end of the old Russian Army

At the start of December the fate of the Stavka, the Russian high command, was settled in dramatic fashion.<sup>626</sup> The course of the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk was being broadcast by radio throughout the Empire, and announced at the front. General Dukhonin and his colleagues could do nothing to prevent the dissemination of this information, which was so welcome to the Army and to the general population. The Stavka remained silent, and so the fate of the commander-in-chief and his party was sealed. Ensign Krylenko with an escort of sailors came to Mogilev and occupied the Stavka's compound. Dukhonin was assured a safe passage to St Petersburg, but he was hauled from his train by a mob of enraged soldiers and brutally murdered.<sup>627</sup> The military plenipotentiaries of the foreign countries were sent by Krylenko's orders to safety at Kiev. General Kornilov, who'd been brought to Mogilev, was able to escape from captivity along with the officers arrested with him. The central authority which the Stavka had provided now ceased to exist. It had been difficult for a long time to feed the field armies; at the end of October, when there was still a total of around ten million men on active duty, the War Minister had suggested a reduction in strength.<sup>628</sup> The older soldiers were gradually discharged.

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<sup>626</sup>Spannocchi, pp. 195 ff.

<sup>627</sup>Lukomsky, Vol. I, p. 250

After the armistice agreement the Army entered the final phase of its dissolution.<sup>629</sup> The discharge of some troops and the announcement that general de-mobilization was pending awakened in the remaining soldiers an eager desire to go home. Regiments and larger units refused to relieve the troops at the front, where many units were withdrawing on their own authority. Staffs and military installations could no longer function because their personnel had disappeared. Under pressure from radical soldiers' committees, officers of all grades began to flee to the southern and southeastern parts of the Empire. Here, as well as in Siberia, individual generals were taking steps to organize like-minded adherents into volunteer armies which would contest the authority of the government in St Petersburg.

The Bolshevik-inspired disintegration also afflicted the Romanian Front. General Ragosa had to give up the command of 4<sup>th</sup> Army. At a Russian camp near Jassy a group of conspirators plotted the overthrow of the Romanian Kingdom and threatened to arrest and kill General Shcherbachev. Based on a decision at a council of ministers, Romanian troops suppressed this uprising on 22 December; Jassy was saved and General Shcherbachev was freed.<sup>630</sup> Meanwhile Ukraine declared itself an independent state, and refused to take orders from the Russian peoples' commissars. Shcherbachev entered negotiations with the Ukrainian government, which also placed the Southwestern Front under his [nominal] authority. They considered his entire area of operations to constitute a "Ukrainian" command. Measures were being taken to convert the units here into purely Ukrainian formations; the Great Russian soldiers were to be removed.

In Romania, as elsewhere, many Russian troops refused to stay any longer at the front after the armistice, and headed for home. Licentious, plundering bands under self-elected leaders threatened to inundate the land. The Romanian high command took measures to guard the border areas in place of the unreliable Russians. They deployed 13 divisions and some of their cavalry along an extended position, while the remaining troops protected the interior against their former "comrades in arms." Thus a large portion of the Russian and Romanian units in Moldavia were in motion.

Despite the armistice, it wasn't easy for the allied commanders to determine what the enemy were doing. On 31 December the

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628Knox, Vol. II, p. 697

629Spannocchi, pp. 195 ff. and Appendix 6. See also Kakurin.

630Kiritzesco, pp. 379 ff.

k.u.k. 1<sup>st</sup> Army reported that the positions of 4<sup>th</sup> Russian Army in front of VI and IX Corps had largely been evacuated; in the abandoned trenches north of the Csobanos valley only some isolated Romanian outposts remained. The German OHL were suspicious of Shcherbachev, and shared their concerns with the Aus-Hung. high command. The transfer of strong Great Russian units from the Ukrainian fronts to the north was contrary to the armistice agreement. The Central Powers would be caught in an impossible position if on the one hand they concluded peace with Russia, while on the other hand Shcherbachev - with help from the Entente - built up a substantial force in Ukraine by spring 1918. In this scenario, the Russian general could decide whether or not to conclude peace; regardless of his choice, substantial Austrian and German forces would be tied down. Since the situation in the wake of the Focsani agreement was still unclear at the start of 1918, measures were needed to deal with all eventualities.

It would soon be determined that these concerns were groundless. The Russian Army, which had been a major power in Europe since its creation by Peter the Great, and which no opponent could afford to ignore, had been broken in 1917. When the Central Powers observed what had once been the mighty Empire of the Tsars, all they could see was disorder, confusion and disintegration.

## ***B. The Western front in the last third of 1917***

### Land warfare

Although the mutinies in the French Army in spring 1917 had been suppressed with draconian sternness, for the rest of this year France didn't have the capacity of carrying out any major offensives. Its high command decided to play a waiting game; they'd wait for the arrival of American help and for the mass production of tanks. Meanwhile the English were suffering substantial damage from the German submarine campaign; besides taking maritime counter-measures (described later) they concentrated all their efforts on land to an attempt to capture the German U-boat bases on the Belgian coast. This led to the hundred-day battle in Flanders, whose third phase started in the latter half of September. And to also keep the Germans under pressure farther south, the French high command decided to at least carry out some very carefully-prepared local operations.

The first of these attacks was delivered near Verdun; on 20 August, after eight days of fire for destruction, the French

pushed forward on both sides of the Meuse about 4 kilometers, wresting from the Germans the last of the area the latter had conquered in spring 1916. The fighting on the Meuse didn't die down until the start of October. Here the Germans were affected less by the loss of ground (which was relatively slight) than by their casualties and their lost equipment, especially at a time when their 4<sup>th</sup> Army near Ypres was fighting a battle of attrition that was consuming their strength at an extraordinary rate. In August there were six days of major actions at Ypres, followed by four in September and six more in October.<sup>631</sup>

Soon after the action ended at Verdun the Army Group of the German Crown Prince suffered a second setback. On 23 October the French struck the point where the front bent north of Soissons, the so-called "Laffaux Corner"; the Germans were taken by surprise and driven back. As a result they had to also abandon the Chemin des Dames ridge, which hitherto they had been stubbornly defending. Once again it was mainly the loss of men and military equipment which was most painful; on the first day of the battle 8000 Germans entered French captivity. The front here finally became quiet at the start of November.

Almost immediately thereafter the Battle of Ypres spread to the south, since the English now also attacked the right wing of the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army. But the strength of the British and Belgians wasn't sufficient to attain their goal of driving the Germans out of Flanders.<sup>632</sup> Meanwhile the tension along the German front became so great that twice in October the OHL considered whether to withdraw German units from the Italian front. But the quick and overwhelming success that was achieved on the Isonzo at least made it possible to quickly bring to France many of the heavy guns and trench mortars, which weren't needed in the pursuit.

In order to hold out in Flanders, the Germans had to weaken the other sectors of their front as much as possible. This didn't remain concealed from the English. They decided to take advantage of the situation with a surprise attack in which tanks, a new weapon of war, would be used on a large scale. The Cambrai area was chosen as a target, and preparations were so carefully undertaken that the operation completely surprised the Germans.

The German 2<sup>nd</sup> Army were basically unprepared for the offensive which was opened on 20 November by the English Tank Corps (with

<sup>631</sup>Reichskriegsministerium, "Gefechtskalender des Deutschen Heeres im Weltkrieg 1914/1918" (Berlin, 1935), p. 10

<sup>632</sup>TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This sentence is misleading; no units of the Belgian Army were engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres.

378 fighting machines and 98 equipment trucks) and six infantry divisions. The front was broken and three English cavalry divisions came forward, ready to pursue. For the same purpose the neighboring French concentrated substantial forces near Péronne. But the English, surprised by their own success, didn't know how to exploit their triumph. This gave the Germans time to consolidate their front and to prepare a counterattack, which they unleashed on 30 November. By 5 December they had wrested back from the English most of the lost ground, while capturing 9000 prisoners and 150 guns.

The massive employment of tanks was the most important development on the German front. The OHL now began to produce their own tanks. But because German industry was already overburdened and lacked raw materials, they couldn't overcome their enemies' head start. By the start of 1918 Germany was using just 75 captured tanks plus 15 vehicles they'd produced themselves.<sup>633</sup>

By the end of 1917 the German Western front had been successfully defended, except for a few small penetrations. But it had been demonstrated that in a purely defensive action success was no longer guaranteed due to the enemy's enormous expenditure of matériel. The loss of ground at Verdun, Ypres, Laffaux and Cambrai had been accompanied by losses of men and guns which were far greater than what the Germans would have expected if they had been conducting a well-led attack of their own. Also discipline was undoubtedly starting to sink after three and a half years of warfare. But when German soldiers did attack, as at Zloczow and Tolmein and in the counterattack at Cambrai, they showed they were still everywhere superior to their foes. And so there was a general realization in the Army that only an attack by land could end the war with victory.<sup>634</sup>

### Naval warfare

In contrast to the success won in the strategically defensive campaign of the German Western armies in 1917, Germany's Navy didn't fulfill the hopes for unrestricted submarine warfare. It is true that from May to August, just as in the three preceding months, the monthly average of enemy shipping sunk was 800,000 to 1,000,000 tons; from September to December the average was 600,000 to 700,000 tons per month. And thus during 1917 the enemy and neutral merchant marine was reduced by 7,500,000 tons due to submarines and by another 1,500,000 tons due to mines. But the prediction by the German naval staff that the U-boat

<sup>633</sup>Kuhl, Vol. II, p. 235.

<sup>634</sup>Ludendorff, p. 434

campaign would force England to surrender after five months had been proven false.<sup>635</sup>

In the first months it had still seemed possible to defeat Great Britain. Admiral Jellicoe speaks frankly in his book about the "black days of unrestricted submarine warfare" and describes the situation at that time as very critical, "the worst period in English history." And the English Minister Churchill declares in his memoirs: "The U-boats were not only quickly undermining the life of the British Isles, but also the foundation of our alliance's strength. The danger of collapse in 1918 stood dark and threatening on the horizon."<sup>636</sup> But the English were able to master the crisis thanks to improved defensive tactics, their own still unexhausted resources, and the enormous organizational activity of the United States of America.

The English built new ships totaling about 2,000,000 tons, which made up for hardly a quarter of the total losses (9,000,000 tons). But they ruthlessly utilized all the neutral vessels in their hands. Both at sea and in the air they organized large-scale counter-measures to the danger from submarines and mines. At least 200,000 men were employed for this purpose; mine-sweeping alone involved 3200 English vessels with 25,000 men in the crews. To better guard the civilian ships they were organized in convoys, which were protected by light naval vessels which prevented the German submarines from approaching their targets. With all these methods, implemented with great energy, England avoided the near victory of the U-boats. Also it must be admitted that the English will to resist was strengthened by their knowledge of the inner political problems of the Central Powers (some of which have already been mentioned, plus others to be described below), which blunted the effect of the submarine campaign.

Far from the battlefields of Europe and western Asia there was also fighting in Africa in 1917. The still unconquered colonial troops of German East Africa, led by Prussian GM von Lettow-Vorbeck, had to evacuate their own territory under assault from all sides by enormously larger enemy forces. With a strength of 300 white and 1700 black soldiers they invaded Portuguese territory at the end of November, stormed the border defenses, re-armed themselves with weapons taken from their enemies, and prepared to return to German East Africa.

<sup>635</sup>Kuhl, Vol. II, p. 156

<sup>636</sup>Churchill, "The World Crisis 1916-1918" (the cited passage is in the German translation published in Vienna in 1928; Vol. II, p. 80)





## ***C. The Balkans and Turkey in the second half of 1917***

### **1. Events in Albania and Macedonia**

#### The situation in late summer

Until mid-August 1917 the enemy opposite the k.u.k. XIX Corps restricted their activity to unimportant local thrusts, most of which were easily repulsed by our outposts. Thus, for example, several Italian companies were defeated east of Virzeza (near the source of the Tomorica). On 3 August an Italian attempt to cross the lower Vojusa was thwarted, as was the thrust of a French detachment of all arms on the Devoli south of Kucaka. On 7 August an Italian battalion penetrated over the Vojusa as far as the village of Toci (northwest of Tepelini), but then was thrown back over the river by Bosnian Jaeger and Albanian detachments.

The increasing attention which the enemy were paying to the Albanian theater was recognized by the k.u.k. high command in the orders they issued to XIX Corps HQ in mid-June. As soon as Aus-Hung. and German reinforcements were on hand, there were plans to capture the road Biklista-Korca-Herseg. An attack on Valona was also under discussion. But after several weeks, when the general situation made it impossible to reinforce the Albanian front, the AOK at Baden were content merely to have XIX Corps offer prolonged resistance in the positions along the Vojusa. The Corps were supposed to deploy as much artillery as possible at the front and to draw the troops still stationed north of Semeni closer to the battle lines. Coastal defense should be restricted to the ports of S Giovanni di Medusa and Durazzo and to the supply lines running right along the coast north of Kavaja. Only observation points would be left in the other coastal sectors. To cover the east-west route in the Skumbi valley new positions were to be reconnoitered and outposts constructed.

Even after the departure of two English divisions from Macedonia to Palestine, the enemy still outnumbered the troops of the quadruple alliance in the Balkans; nevertheless, General Sarrail hesitated to attempt a decisive attack due to uncertainty about where the Central Powers would send the forces which they no longer needed in Russia. The war-weariness of the troops paralyzed their commander's will.<sup>637</sup> Even in August, when the

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<sup>637</sup>Herbillon, "Du general en chef au gouvernement sous les commandements des gen. Nivelle et Pétain" (Paris, 1930), p.

battles at Focsani and on the lower Sereth should have spurred on the Entente armies in Macedonia, their mission remained "to pin down the enemy with local attacks, using as little infantry and as much artillery as possible."<sup>638</sup> Only in southeast Albania did the sudden small-scale infantry, artillery and air attacks develop into a larger action, when on 19 August two French columns with guns pushed back our Albanian irregular detachments southwest of Moskopolje. Thus the French also widened the area where they could deploy an attacking group near Koca for an eventual thrust west of Lake Ochrida.

XIX Corps HQ were aware of the enemy's preparations to attack but lacked the fresh forces needed to successfully oppose the enemy thrust, which apparently would be directed against the inner wings of Trollmann's Corps and Scholtz's Army Group. Only two Landsturm battalions and three mountain batteries could be made available; they deployed at Elbasan at the disposal of FML Gerhauser's "Group I/XIX". Also a battery of long-range cannon was sent from Ochrida to Pogradec. Scholtz's Army Group promised to help out by sending a detachment (of three bicycle companies, two squadrons and two guns) over the Lake. Also they ordered the German Col. von Reuter, who now commanded the troops stationed between Lakes Ochrida and Prespa, to be ready to attack the Russians who faced him.

In fact the French Army of the Orient were planning to capture the entire area between Lakes Malik and Prespa, including the narrow land near Pogradec and the heights farther west and northwest (the Kamia Ridge and Mokra planina). Thus on the one hand they would separate XIX Corps from the German-Bulgarian front and on the other they would solidify the link between the French and Italian wings of their own forces. For this purpose a combined division, made up of French and Senegalese infantry plus Moroccan Spahis, assembled under General Jacquemot; they would pin down the troop stationed on the Cerava and farther south as far as the Gradiste Heights, while their main attacking group (deployed in the wooded area between the Devoli and Moskopolje) broke through over the Kamia and the Mokra planina.<sup>639</sup> On the opposing side the k.u.k. 20 Mtn Bde, commanded since August 1917 by Col. Edler von Lerch, had been ordered that if forced to retreat they should hold a position running from Pogradec over the Kamia Ridge, where they would await the reinforcements which hopefully the k.u.k. AOK would send to XIX Corps.

The French attacks in Albania

Before the French light and medium artillery opened their fire for destruction on 7 September, the Albanian volunteers abandoned their advanced outposts and pulled back to the main position on the Cerava. The attacking French troops assembled around Koca in night marches; in the morning of 8 September they suddenly struck with their western wing on both sides of Tersova, and on the same day reached the high ground between Strekanj and Babien. On the other hand, the French 175<sup>th</sup> IR stormed in vain against the Gradiste Heights. Finally that night the defending Aus-Hung. Grenz Jaeger Bn # 4, already enveloped on the west, pulled back toward the Kozel Heights.

By evening of the next day the Spahis had captured the southwestern part of the Kamia Heights, while the French infantry thrust farther north and northeast; they compelled the stubborn defenders of the Cerava River, three battalions of 20 Mtn Bde, to evacuate their position. Up to the last moment the Brigade made repeated counterattacks at Grabovica (south of the bend in the Cerava) while Col. Lerch, supported by the German bicycle troops, sought to check the enemy's advance farther west in a fall-back position between Prenisti and Causli. These efforts, and the self-sacrificing stand of the Aus-Hung. mountain batteries, made it easier for the Brigade to withdraw to the line chosen by XIX Corps HQ; it ran between the ruins on the heights next to Lake Ochrida and the northeastern part of the Kamia. Furthermore a small reserve, consisting of the German detachment sent by Col. Reuter plus two Aus-Hung. technical companies, were held ready north of Pogradec.

It seemed that Lerch's Brigade would be able to hold fast to the important area around Pogradec, especially since the garrison of the Kamia (one and a half battalions), supported by German bicycle troops, defeated an envelopment attack from the west by three French battalions on 10 September. However, a Bulgarian company stationed in the ruins on the heights gave up this important strong point. The reserves hastened to the scene and during the night did manage to recover the heights, but in the morning of the next day they were overwhelmed by a larger enemy force.

Covered by the German detachment, an Aus-Hung. pioneer company and two Aus-Hung. mountain batteries on the road along the Lake, and by rear guards on the Mokra planina, Lerch's Brigade retreated to the heights southeast of Radokal and deployed in a position which had been built there in spring 1917. Rear guards

held fast north of Uduniste and at Point 1704. Early on 12 September Col. Lerch brought his troops forward to the line held by these rear guards, without any hindrance from the enemy.

Contrary to expectations, the enemy didn't exploit their success with a decisive thrust through Lin toward the Struga-Elbasan road. In response to a request by the Italians, who were concerned for their hegemony in Albania, the French pulled Jacquemot's combined Division back to Florina. Thereafter only two French regiments guarded the area around Pogradec. This dissension in the enemy ranks was very useful to 20 Mtn Bde as they strengthened their position. The Italians had assisted the advance of their allies merely with a bombardment of the Pojani cloister from the Adriatic Sea, and of the adjacent Aus-Hung. position on the Vojsa from artillery on land; there were also some small infantry thrusts over the Osum near Cerevoda. Now the eastern wing of Lerch's Brigade was strengthened by a newly-arrived German battalion. On 13 September the Brigade was placed under the newly-formed Ochrida Division, led by Prussian GM Posseltdt; the second component of the Division was Col. Reuter's group east of Lake Ochrida.

Col. Lerch believed he could carry out his twofold mission - to protect the routes in the Skumbi valley leading to Elbasan, and to guard the right wing of Scholtz's Army Group against any enemy thrusts toward the Struga-Ochrida area - by making sure to retain the current position. GM Posseltdt further strengthened 20 Mtn Bde with two units (the Saxon Jaeger Bn # 12 and a bn from Bulgarian IR 19) and approved Col. Lerch's decision to bring the defenses forward to a line on both sides of Point 1704.

These preventive measures proved to be justified. When the government in Paris learned how the Italian intervention had damaged the common cause, they sent Sarrail an order to resume the offensive west of Lake Ochrida which had started so successfully before its premature termination. The French regiments came forward once more from Florina in difficult night marches, but this time they encountered a firm front. On 21 September the attackers managed to penetrate the line near Golik, but were thrown back in a counter-thrust by Battalions I/98 and IV/SchR 23; on the next day the French did take the Krcova Heights (marked on their maps as "Fort Douamont"). Farther east, as far as Point 1704, all their attacks were fruitless.

The possibility that the enemy attack might extend toward the west had compelled XIX Corps HQ to bring up three battalions of 211 Lst Inf Bde through Durazzo and to furthermore assign four

mountain batteries to 47 ID. And the AOK felt it was necessary to give XIX Corps four battalions and two mountain batteries that had been in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro, even though a partisan movement was still seething in the latter two countries.

This increase in strength enabled XIX Corps to close the gap that still existed between 20 Mtn Bde and the eastern wing of FML Gerhauser's Group I/XIX. In the last days of September the situation also improved farther south. Albanian irregulars once more pushed forward as far as the Krasta Heights and Mali Korona, where they repulsed French attacks. Our Albanians also stood their ground in fighting around the Devoli bridges at Kucaka.

The following was the organization of XIX Corps after the arrival of reinforcements (shown as of 18 October 1917):

- . 47<sup>th</sup> ID (FML Ritter von Weiss-Tihanyi)
    - . 14 Mtn Bde (Col. von Stransky) - Bn II/72; BH FJB 1, 2, 7; k.u. Lst Bn IV/4; eight Albanian comps, eight batteries
    - . Group I/47 (Col. von Spaics) - Bn II/45; Border Jaeger Bns 1, 2, 3; k.k. Lst Bn 45; k.u. Lst Bn II/32; Sturm Comp I/XIX; four Albanian comps, eight batteries
    - . 211 Lst Inf Bde (Col. von Szabo) - k.k. Lst Bns II/23, I/37, 158; k.u. Lst Bns I/9, III/29, I/30, I/31
    - . Group I/XIX (FML von Gerhauser) - Border Jaeger Bn 5 and one comp of Bn 6; I Bn/Streif Regt "S"; BH Gendarme Bn; k.k. Lst Bn 46; Albanian bands of Ghilardi and of Salih Butka; two batteries
    - . 20 Mtn Bde (Col. Edler von Lerch) - Bns I/28, IV/SchR 23; Border Jaeger Bn 4; k.k. Lst Bn I/23; k.u. Lst Bn V/19; Sturm Comp II/XIX; two batteries
    - . Directly under the Ochrida Div - Bn I/98; three comps of Border Jaeger Bn 6
    - . Albanian Coast Defense Command (FML von Bekic) - k.k. Lst Bns V/9, IV/16, V/3; k.u. Lst Bns VI & VII/8; fourteen batteries
- TOTAL strength = 34 ½ bns, 14 Albanian comps or "bands"; 34 batties; about 16,000 riflemen, 120 guns, 220 MG

Scholtz's Army Group now intended to have 20 Mtn Bde attack to recover the Pogradec area; they wanted to support this operation by leaving two batteries with the Albanians and having them make supporting thrusts from the Kucaka-Krusevo area. But, despite the recent favorable developments in the Albanian sector, XIX Corps couldn't agree to Scholtz's request because of intelligence reports that the Italians were preparing for a rather large offensive toward Berat. The possibility that the enemy might land on the Adriatic coast also had to be addressed, in cooperation with defensive measures undertaken by the naval command. Thus despite the demands of Scholtz's Army Group, the

Corps HQ wanted to pull from the front at least the parts of 20 Mtn Bde that had suffered the most damage (three battalions); they would recuperate at Berat and Ljusna in the Corps' reserve where they'd be available for new assignments. The units which had been detached from the Military Governments of Serbia and Montenegro couldn't be counted on for the long term, since after the departure of these troops the occupied lands were immediately once more the scene of rebellion and attacks by bandits.

On 20 and 21 October the French combined division tried once more to break through west of Lake Ochrida. On the first day of the assault their envelopment attempt in the Skumbi valley was shattered thanks to the resistance of the Border Jaeger and a counterattack by the Saxon Jaeger Battalion. The primary assault occurred on the second day between the shore of the Lake and the Skumbi. North of Uduniste the attackers remained pinned down under the fire of the Prussian Guard Schützen Battalion, at Point 1704 their assault collapsed under a counterattack by Bulgarian IR 19, and farther west the French recoiled from the positions held by parts of 20 Mtn Bde. Thus the enemy's ability to attack was exhausted.

In mid-November the French pulled their western wing back into the area southeast of the Gora Top heights (# 1728), which the Ochrida Division saw as an opportunity to advance to the line Point 1250 - Pogradec. Parts of Group I/XIX were to join this movement up to the area of Heights 2150 and Kucaka. But the advance soon came to a halt opposite a strong position which the enemy had prepared for the winter near the sources of the Skumbi. Group I/XIX was now also plagued with logistical problems. Snow already lay upon the mountains, while in lower areas rains were causing the rivers to overflow.

By the end of the year the 20 Mtn Bde (except for two battalions) left the Ochrida Division, which since 30 October was led by the Bulgarian G.Lt Kantardiev; the Bde, along with the irregular Albanian bands, took over the Devoli sector. Here on 28 and 29 November they repulsed enemy thrusts directed against their southern wing in the high, snow-covered mountains. Then in December the Brigade was reorganized at Kavaja.

On 18 October the XIX Corps lost their commander, GdI Freih. von Trollmann, who was taken ill. His successor, GdI Koennen-Horak, anticipated difficult times ahead. The supply route over the sea was precarious, the construction of overland communications was slow, and the local resources of the country were exhausted. The attitude of the Albanian population was becoming hostile due to

the influence of foreign emissaries. All signs indicated that the enemy were preparing for a wide-ranging offensive.

#### The situation in Macedonia

On the Macedonian front, in spring 1917 the French, Serbs and English had thrown themselves in vain for many days against the Bulgarian positions north of Monastir, in the Cerna bend and west of Lake Doiran; casualties of the Entente troops were heavy. Thereafter no major operations took place through the end of 1917. Both sides labored to improve their positions.<sup>640</sup> Only sudden cannonades (which were especially heavy in the Monastir area) and then small-scale infantry thrusts (mostly in the English part of the front) interrupted the monotony of trench warfare. The successful stand against the attack by the Entente armies had greatly lifted the spirits of the Bulgarian troops, along with their trust in German leadership and in the cooperation of Bulgarian and German soldiers, which had been displayed at its best at the hot points of the battle.<sup>641</sup> And in the second half of 1917 the Bulgarian Army still proved reliable on the defensive. They were tying down a large enemy force of 24 divisions (7 Serbian [1 of which was cavalry], 8 French, 4 English, 1 Russian, 1 Italian and 3 Venizelist Greek).

In the camp of the Entente, on the other hand, the setbacks in the spring campaign had reduced the fighting spirit of the troops. This was especially evident among the Serbs, who'd suffered the heaviest losses and who were particularly taken aback by the collapse of Russia in late fall. Among the Russian troops stationed in Macedonia there were also signs of disintegration, similar to those in Russia itself. And the hopes for military help from Greece hadn't been fulfilled. By the end of December 1917 there were just 3 Greek divisions (37,000 men) at the front, without any artillery and of doubtful combat value. For political reasons a general mobilization in "Old Greece" couldn't be undertaken until February 1918.<sup>642</sup> London privately harbored plans to recall the English troops from the Salonika front. The Italians were still urging that their 35<sup>th</sup> Division,

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<sup>640</sup>Ministère de la guerre, "Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre" (hereafter cited as French Official History) (Paris, 1923), Vol. VIII, p. 563. Nedev, "Les Operations en Macedoine. L'épopée de Doiran 1915-1918" (Sofia, 1927), p. 109

<sup>641</sup>Kirch, "Krieg und Verwaltung in Serbien und Mazedonien 1916-1918" (Stuttgart, 1928), p. 7

<sup>642</sup>French Official History, Vol. VIII, p. 551

stationed in the center of the Entente forces, should be sent instead to the extreme left wing, facing Albania. Even the French, the principal advocates of the alliance's commitment in Macedonia, couldn't spare a single man for Salonika because they had to send strong forces to Italy when that country's Army was defeated in late fall. Therefore the French high command couldn't plan another offensive by the motley Army of the Orient. General Guillaumat, who succeeded General Sarrail in command on 16 December, was therefore ordered merely to hold onto the current front between the Struma and the Albanian border, and to guard the routes into Greece, especially those east of the Pindus Mountains.<sup>643</sup>

Since the German OHL and the Bulgarian high command envisioned the mission of the Bulgarian southern front as the retention of the conquered territories, no major operations in the Macedonian theater were likely for the foreseeable future.

## 2. The Turkish fronts

Of the members of the Quadruple Alliance, Turkey seemed to be in the relatively worst shape in 1917. Its Army had suffered many misfortunes. And it shouldn't be forgotten that the Turks had been at war since 1911, that the resources of their country were exhausted, and that it was very difficult for them to supply the various distant fronts because of their transportation network was extremely defective.

As hitherto, the 1<sup>st</sup> Turkish Army were stationed near Constantinople; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> were in the Armenian highlands, the 4<sup>th</sup> in Syria, the 5<sup>th</sup> on the Dardanelles, and the 6<sup>th</sup> in Iraq. Three corps fought in the allied ranks in Europe - VI at Braila, XV in east Galicia (until summer) and XV on the Struma (until May). The Turks were primarily concerned now about defending two areas - Iraq and Palestine. On the other hand they faced little danger at the Dardanelles or, due to the collapse of the Russian Army, in Armenia.

GdI Falkenhayn had been instructed to recover Bagdad; when he arrived in Turkey in early summer to lead the "Yildirim" Operation, he encountered passive resistance everywhere and couldn't get the offensive going. At the end of August he had to abandon the plan for wresting the ancient city of the caliphs

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<sup>643</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, Appendices, p. 441



back from the English.<sup>644</sup>

Meanwhile dark clouds were gathering over Palestine. The new commander of the English Army here, General Allenby, was preparing for a systematic offensive; he could commit seven divisions plus a number of independent brigades for a total of about 200,000 men. Falkenhayn, who now was placed in charge of the units in Syria, proposed to respond to the growing menace by striking ahead of the enemy on the eastern wing of the Palestine front; for this purpose he brought up the 7<sup>th</sup> Army and the German Asia "Corps", which initially had been earmarked for Iraq.

The railroad on which the reinforcements were coming still hadn't been completed through the Taurus and Amanus Mountains, so they were delayed. Allenby attacked before their arrival. In the third battle of Gaza the Turks were thrown back to the north on 7 November.<sup>645</sup> During the pursuit the English took Jaffa ten days later and entered Jerusalem on 9 December. This was a heavy new blow to the Turks which, like the loss of Mecca in 1916 and of Bagdad in March 1917, damaged the standing of their country and of the Sultan in the Mohammedan world. But now the rainy winter season arrived, just in time to end the campaign which was already seeming quite hopeless for the Ottomans. Djemal Pasha, the commander of their 4<sup>th</sup> Army, was dismissed. The remnants of his Army were incorporated into a newly-formed 8<sup>th</sup> Army, to be led by the former Chief of the General Staff Freiherr von Kress Pasha.

Although the Turks remained true to their allies, their fighting strength was already quite diminished, since many divisions existed only on paper due to a heavy desertion rate. Nevertheless at the end of 1917 they were pinning down more than seven British divisions in Palestine and two English and several Indian divisions in Iraq; all these units were thus kept away from the principal theater of operations in France.

#### D. Review of the year 1917

Strictly from the stand-point of the military leadership, the Central Powers closed the book on the year 1917, the fourth

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<sup>644</sup>Zwehl, p. 286

<sup>645</sup>In this battle the two Aus-Hung. mountain batteries once more displayed extraordinary courage, as did the newly arrived 10.4 cm Cannon Battery # 20. See Adam, "Die österreichisch-ungarische Artillerie in der Türkei" (in Schwarte, Vol. V, p. 565).

calendar year of the great world-wide struggle, strongly on the credit side.

It is true that 1916, after weeks and months of breath-taking tension, had ended with a visible success - the defeat of the Romanians, who'd entered the field with proud hopes of delivering the death-blow to the Central Powers but instead had seen more than half of their country (including the capital) overrun by their victorious conquerors. Nevertheless, as 1917 opened the allied armies were exhausted and bled nearly to death after the enormous struggles in the West, Southwest and East. FM Conrad, still an active and indefatigable planner just a few weeks before his dismissal, proposed to his allies a spring campaign against Italy, but he encountered refusal. The German high command, now embodied in Hindenburg and Ludendorff, intended at first to stay on the defensive while husbanding their strength for future combat; later they would draw to a greater degree than ever upon the depths of their nation's resources. Meanwhile at least, on the high seas and in the waters around England the German submarines would resume the unrestricted warfare they had foregone for a long time; by overthrowing Albion they would strike the enemy front at its strongest and most stubborn point. On 9 January 1917, after it was certain that the peace initiative of 12 December of the preceding year had failed, this important decision was taken at Pless castle in Prussian Silesia. A few days later, even before Austria-Hungary had given its reluctant consent, the German U-boats were heading for their secret destinations in the depths.

Meanwhile the Entente had once more brought out of their strategic arsenal their familiar plan for a general offensive on all fronts. They had been able in summer 1916 to implement this concept for the first time since the start of the war, striking on the Somme, on the Isonzo, in Volhynia and in east Galicia. Now they wanted to try again, in spring or summer of 1917, to achieve the final defeat of their opponents.

#### The collapse of Russia and the weakness of France

But then, as a result of the first revolution in Russia a major stone was torn from the impressive facade of the multi-national alliance. As spring spread over the land the Russian Army, while furling the standards of the Tsar, also let their weapons sink; it was difficult to predict if they would take up these arms again. The Italians also postponed their offensive, due in part to widespread weariness and also to concern that they would become the target of an assault by both of the Central Powers, as

Conrad had in fact proposed. Only the French and British forces were determined to attack, but the first effort of their assaulting columns struck into thin air. Hindenburg had secretly given up the wide advanced position which stretched in an arc between Arras and Soissons, pulling his troops back to the chord of the arc and turning the intervening territory into a wasteland. The new front could be held by much smaller forces, which would be a great help during the remaining battles of 1917. And the Western powers had to reconfigure their attack. After a delay of four weeks there was heavy fighting in Artois and Champagne, which did cost the defenders heavy casualties but practically ruined the French Army. Discouragement overcame the soldiers of the Third Republic; mutinous sentiments spread through the ranks and also affected a significant part of the industrial workers. In this period a thrust by the Central Powers on the French or Italian fronts could have had enormous consequences. But this didn't happen, since the German OHL lacked accurate intelligence reports of their enemy's weakness and didn't feel they had sufficient reserves to mount an offensive. Thus what was perhaps the last moment when the Central Powers could have won a decisive victory on the battlefield slipped away unused.

The great Entente offensive in the West was already ebbing when the Italians, who'd overcome their fears of being assaulted by the Austrians and Germans, launched their tenth attack along the Isonzo in the second half of May. North of Görz the Kuk fell into the hands of the attackers. But on the Karst plateau the defenders struck back at the start of June, keeping the enemy away from the Hermada Ridge which barred the road to the "unredeemed" city of Trieste.

A few weeks later, on 1 July the Russians rallied to fight once more upon the battlefields of eastern Galicia. A year previously it had been the Tsar, supported by his clergymen, who urged the Mujiks into death-defying assaults; now the leader produced by the Revolution, Kerensky, made an effort to do the same for at least part of the Army. The successes thus won, at least south of the Dniester, were by no means negligible. But as soon as the Central Powers counterattacked they broke the Russians' brittle sword. In scenes of mindless confusion the Russians fled back behind the borders of their own land, but once they reached their native soil they were still strong enough to put an end to the pursuit. Similarly the Romanians were able to check Mackensen's attack at Marasesti; the Central Powers had to give up their hopes of shortening and relieving the front by reaching the line of the Pruth. But they won one more military victory, in the

northern segment of the 1200 km front. Riga, the leading city of the Baltic Germans, was captured by Otto von Below's divisions; German troops also occupied the islands in the Moon Sound. Behind the trembling Russian lines, where the war-weary troops lay down their rifles in the trenches, a second rebellion was brewing. Lenin, who'd been brought through Germany in a sealed train that spring, took power assisted by Trotsky. Soon the red star of the Soviets would rise over the grey Russian landscape, taking the place of the Tsars' double eagle on top of the Moscow Kremlin.

In the Balkans, General Sarrail's Army of the Orient were unable to win any great success either in spring or autumn, even though they secured their rear areas by forcing Greece to join the Entente. The British had much better luck in the Asian theaters of war. Their capture of the caliphs' old city of Bagdad in March was followed in December by the occupation of Jerusalem, which for the 37<sup>th</sup> time in its history saw conquerors enter its walls. The loss of this holy city completely destroyed the trust of the Islamic world in the leadership of the Ottoman Turks.

#### The recovery of France and determination of Great Britain

In France the sharp and ruthless measures of War Minister Painlevé, and of Generals Foch and Pétain, had pulled the Army back from the edge of the abyss where it was tottering. But the French high command didn't believe they could carry out large-scale operations with just their own forces. They would await the arrival of the Americans, whose emissary General Pershing appeared in Paris. Unrestricted submarine warfare had given Wilson an excuse for his break with Germany, which would have eventually occurred anyway due to pressure from the American capitalists. The Western powers and their allies could thank their wonderful luck that in place of the faltering Russian Empire they could welcome a new partner into their ranks; although there would be a rather long delay, they were sure of the assistance of a massive population of 100,000,000 people and their tremendous wealth.

France was determined to stay on the defensive while waiting for this great hour. But the British General Staff couldn't agree to a policy of patient waiting. The U-boat menace, which despite all their counter-measures still was a burden to their people and Army, and the great stubbornness with which the German armies protected Zeebrugge, strengthened England's determination to capture the Belgian coast. The British willingness to make sacrifices was soon demonstrated in the Flandres battle, the

first great campaign which they initiated without help from allies. But the defenders' power of resistance was also not to be despised. When the battle finally died down after four months, Zeebrugge still lay far behind the unbroken German front! The painful lessons learned by the British and their leader Lloyd George didn't lessen their commitment to hold out until the end. In mid-November the British Premier found on French soil an equally stubborn and grim comrade at his side - the new Minister President Clemenceau.

#### The Central Powers turn against Italy

After negotiations to bring strong Entente units onto Italian soil had proven fruitless, in August Cadorna once more opened an attack on the Austria-Hungary's wall along the Isonzo with his own forces. He drove a large wedge into his opponents' lines on the plateau of Bainsizza-Heiligengeist. And hot new fighting erupted at the foot of the Hermada, on the road to Trieste. The danger to the defensive structure not only of the Habsburg Monarchy, but also of the entire Quadruple Alliance, led the Aus-Hung. high command during the eleventh battle to approach their German allies with a suggestion for a joint relief thrust from the Tolmein area.

Despite the successes which the Central Powers had won together in the east Galicia fighting, the bonds between the two Empires were no longer as close as they had been in preceding years (despite the controversies between their respective Chiefs of Staff). Politics were interfering with the needs of purely military planning. This became evident during preparations for the victory on the Isonzo. For months the focus of Austria-Hungary's peace policy had been to find a settlement by building a bridge between the Danube Monarchy and France. Emperor Charles was troubled by intelligence reports stating that direct combat between French and Aus-Hung. units could damage this plan. For this reason he didn't want German divisions to come to the Isonzo, because their appearance would probably also draw French forces to upper Italy. On the other hand, Reich-German circles haven't unanimously denied the assertion that has appeared in post-war literature - that Germany, desiring to keep Austria-Hungary from leaving the alliance, desired "neither the victory nor the defeat of Italy."<sup>646</sup> At any rate, the German supreme command continued to regard the Italian front as a secondary

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<sup>646</sup>Fester, p. 186. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: What the Germans allegedly feared was that if Italy was defeated the Austrians would in fact be able to conclude a separate peace with the Western powers.

theater of operations. Undoubtedly it was due to the efforts of GdI Arz and of his deputy GM Waldstätten that these obstacles on both sides were overcome, and that German units could come to the Isonzo. The result was the victorious advance into Venetia, which right from the start exceeded the strictly limited objectives of the campaign.

#### Prospects for the new year

Thus in 1917 the Central Powers had carried out four major sorties from the mighty fortress which they were defending against enemies on all sides - one each in east Galicia, in Romania, along the Baltic Sea, and finally in upper Italy. In the latter operation the attacking troops came forward 100 to 150 km from the Isonzo and the Carinthian mountains. But the allies had been unable to rip apart the siege lines. The submarines, which were supposed to serve as relieving units against the rear of the besieging forces, had also failed to fulfill the hopes which had been placed in their effectiveness. Although they had sunk 2,976,000 tons of shipping in the second quarter of 1917, in the following quarters their totals were reduced to 2,491,000 and 1,983,000 tons respectively.<sup>647</sup> In autumn the English could regard the U-boat menace as ended. But the Central Powers could balance this disappointment against the advantages they gained when Russia withdrew from the battlefield. The final collapse of the Russian Army, which could no longer be avoided after the failure of the "Kerensky Offensive", had already freed the rear of the allied Imperial powers during the Italian campaign. This freedom in the rear remained an advantage during the upcoming spring and continued to give the Germans an edge until strong American forces could appear on the Western front.

This generally favorable military situation was offset by the political problems of the Central Powers and their allies. The "hunger blockade" which hung over their heads, and their isolation from all the sources of raw materials in the world, were having an inevitable impact. The propaganda campaign waged by the Entente powers found fertile soil. The German body politic was already afflicted by significant social fevers. In the Habsburg Monarchy the tremors of nationalistic strife were no longer entirely underground. On 12 December 1916 the governments of the Central Powers had issued the first official peace offer during the World War. The failure of this step hadn't prevented the young Emperor and his Foreign Minister Czernin from sending

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<sup>647</sup>According to British figures, these quarterly totals were 2,225,000, 1,500,000 and 1,125,000. See also Montgelas in the "Propyläen-Weltgeschichte", Vol. X, p. 432.

out further peace feelers. We have briefly discussed the possibilities of Austria-Hungary achieving a separate peace. The question of whether a general settlement was possible was answered in the negative by various Entente statements in summer and fall 1917. The Italians showed that they had no inclination to give up the aspirations which had been recognized in the London Treaty of 1915. The French remained inflexible about the issue of Alsace-Lorraine, and furthermore wanted to annex the Saar basin and create a neutralized buffer state on the western bank of the Rhine. The English backed up the French claims on German territory and demanded the complete evacuation of Belgium. They were determined moreover to carry the war to its ultimate objective - the complete destruction of German power.

*Unless there was a surprising turn in the direction of peace during the winter, the course of events in 1918 had been determined in the late fall of 1917. Both coalitions had played a waiting game in 1917 (in the case of the Entente, only after the collapse of the spring offensive in France). After the defeat of the U-boat campaign the Central Powers were again determined to seek a decision on land. The collapse of Russia had provided them with promising possibilities. But time was limited. If the Americans appeared in substantial force on the French battlefields before the allies won a decisive victory, then the scales would tip for good to the side of the Entente. Therefore the watchword of the Entente was - "Hold on at any price until the arrival of our new comrades from the other side of the Atlantic!" Both coalitions were embarked on courses which they couldn't change.*

## XII. Appendices

### Appendix # 1 -

The truce agreement at Brest-Litovsk, 5 December 1917  
(Source = AOK, Secret Order # 537 dated 8 December 1917)

To facilitate the armistice negotiations between the plenipotentiary negotiators of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey on the one hand, and of Russia on the other, a truce has been concluded with the following provisions:

1. The truce starts at noon on 7 December 1917 at noon and will last until noon on 17 December 1917. Either party can cancel the truce with three days' notice.

2. The truce applies to all land and air forces of the participating Armies between the Black and Baltic Seas, as well as in the Russo-Turkish theater of operations in Asia. The German land forces on the islands of the Moon Sound are included in the truce. Naval air units have freedom of operation, but only over the sea; they may not fly over enemy-controlled land. The bombardment of coastal points by naval forces is forbidden.

3. On the European front the demarcation lines are the foremost barriers of the opposing sides. In areas lacking an unbroken chain of positions, the demarcation lines run half-way between the most forward outposts of the two sides. The area between both lines is considered neutral. In the Asiatic theater of operations the demarcation line is to be determined by agreement of the two opposing commanders-in-chief.

4. All parties are required to ensure that explicit orders are issued that their troops are not to cross the demarcation line.

5. During the truce troop movements in division strength or larger can take place only if they had already been ordered prior to 5 December 1917.

6. All other agreements regarding truces by local command HQ are hereby canceled.

Drawn up and signed in five copies.

Brest-Litovsk, 5 December 1917 [22 November 1917 in the old Russian calendar]

[Followed by the Russian text, and then the signatures]



Appendix # 2

The armistice agreement at Brest-Litovsk, 15 December 1917 (Source = AOK, Secret Order # 677 dated 23 December 1917. Also published in Niemeyer, "Die völkerrechtlichen Urkundes des Weltrkieges", Vol. VI, pp. 699 ff. (Part of the "Jahrbuch des Völkerrechts"; Munich and Leipzig, 1922; Vol. VIII.)

To facilitate the conclusion of an honorable peace for all parties, the plenipotentiary negotiators of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey on the one hand, and of Russia on the other, have concluded the following armistice:

I. The armistice begins at noon on 17 December 1917 [2:00 PM Russian time, 4 December 1917] and will last until noon on 14 January 1918 [2:00 PM Russian time, 1 January 1918]. Beginning on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the armistice it may be canceled by either of the negotiating parties with 7 days notice. If this doesn't happen, the armistice will automatically be renewed until such time as either party gives 7 days' notice of cancellation.

II. The armistice applies to all land and air forces of the participating Armies on the front between the Black and Baltic Seas. It will simultaneously take effect in the Russo-Turkish theater of operations in Asia. The participating parties agree that during the armistice they will not increase the number, organization or size of units along the fronts named above, or on the islands of the Moon Sound; troops will not be re-grouped in preparation for an offensive. Furthermore the parties agree that until 14 January [1 January] 1918 they will not carry out any operational troop movements other than those already initiated at the moment that the armistice agreement is signed. Finally they agree not to concentrate troops in the Baltic Sea harbors east of 15 degrees longitude east of Greenwich, or in the Black Sea harbors, for the duration of the armistice.

III. On the European front the demarcation lines are the foremost barriers of the opposing sides. These lines may be crossed only under the conditions described in Article IV. In areas lacking an unbroken chain of positions, the demarcation lines run half-way between the most forward outposts of the two sides. The area between both lines is considered neutral. Where the opposing positions are separated by navigable rivers, the rivers are considered neutral and not to be crossed until such time as there is an agreement about merchant shipping. In sectors where the opposing positions are separated by a great distance the armistice commissions [see Article VII] will meet as soon as possible to determine and mark the demarcation lines. In

the Russo-Turkish theater of operations the demarcation lines and traffic through them [Article IV] will be determined by the respective commanders-in-chief.

IV. To develop and solidify friendly relations between the peoples of the contracting parties, there will be organized interchanges between the troops under the following conditions:

1. Passage [between the lines] is permitted for intermediaries, for members of the armistice commissions [Article VII], and for their representatives. All must carry identification issued by at least a Corps level HQ or soldiers' committee.

2. In the sector of each Russian division, organized traffic can take place at 2 or 3 points. For this purpose the opposing divisions shall agree to set up posts, identified by white flags, in the neutral zone between the demarcation lines. Traffic will take place during the day only (between sunrise and sunset). The traffic posts can be occupied at one time by not more than 25 representatives of each side, without weapons. The exchange of information and newspapers is permitted. Unsealed letters may be handed over to be forwarded. The selling or bartering of goods to meet daily needs is permitted at the traffic posts.

3. Fallen soldiers may be interred in the neutral zone. Arrangements can be worked out between the divisional or higher HQ on both sides.

4. The repatriation of released prisoners through the demarcation lines will be regulated as part of the peace treaty negotiations. The discussions will cover members of Polish units.

5. All persons who cross the demarcation lines of the opposing side contrary to Points # 1-4 above will be interned and won't be released until the conclusion of peace or the end of the armistice. The contracting parties agree to ensure that their troops follow the rules for interchanges by means of strict orders and by ongoing instructions about the provisions as well as the penalties for non-compliance.

V. The following terms apply to the naval situation:

1. The armistice is effective over the entire Black Sea and over the Baltic Sea east of 15 degrees longitude east of Greenwich, and covers all naval and naval air forces of the contracting parties. The German and Russian naval commands will conclude a special agreement concerning the question of an armistice in the White Sea and in the coastal waters of the Russian Arctic Sea; attacks by either side against civilian or naval vessels in these areas will cease immediately if possible. The special agreement will also address methods to prevent the

naval forces of the contracting parties from becoming engaged on other sea fronts.

2. On all other seas, naval or air attacks against the harbors and coasts of the contracting parties are forbidden. Also the naval forces of both sides are forbidden to visit the harbors or coasts held by the opposing side.

3. Flying over harbors or coasts held by the opposing side, or over the demarcation lines, is forbidden on all seas.

4. The demarcation lines run as follows:

a. On the Black Sea from the Olinka light house (at the St George mouth) to Cape Jeros by Trebizond.

b. On the Baltic Sea from Rogekül along the west coast of Worms through Bogskär to Svenska-Högarne.

A more precise delineation of the boundary between Worms and Bogskär will be established by the Baltic Sea Armistice Commission [Article VII, Point 1], and will ensure that the Russian vessels have free access to the Aaland Sea regardless of weather or ice conditions. Russian naval forces will not move south of the demarcation lines, nor will the naval forces of the Quadruple Alliance move north of the lines. The Russian government assumes the responsibility of ensuring that any naval forces of the Entente stationed north of the demarcation lines at the start of the armistice, or which later come there, observe the same restrictions as does the Russian Navy.

5. Trade and merchant shipping is permitted in the maritime areas mentioned in the first sentence of Point 1. The establishment of trade regulations and the designation of certain areas as dangerous for merchant ships are tasks assigned to the Armistice Commissions of the Black and Baltic Seas [Article VII, Points 1 and 7].

6. The contracting parties promise not to prepare for any offensive operations against each other on the Black or Baltic Seas during the armistice.

VI. To avoid confusion or accidental clashes at the front, infantry exercises cannot be carried out within 5 km of the front and artillery exercises cannot be carried out within 15 km of the front. Planting of land mines will stop completely. Air units and fixed balloons must stay in back of an air zone extending 10 km behind their own side's demarcation line. Work on positions behind the foremost barbed wire barriers is permitted, but not for the purpose of preparing for an attack.

VII. When the armistice starts, permanent "Armistice Commissions" (consisting of representatives of the contracting states) will meet to settle all military questions arising from implementation of the armistice provisions. Commissions will be

established in various areas as follows:

1. At Riga for the Black Sea;
2. At Dvinsk for the front between the Baltic Sea and the Disna;
3. At Brest-Litovsk for the front between the Disna and the Pripyat;
4. At Berdichev for the front between the Pripyat and the Dniester
5. At Koloszvar and
6. at Focsani for the front between the Dniester and the Black Sea (the border between the areas of commissions # 5 and 6 will be established by mutual agreements); and
7. At Odessa for the Black Sea.

Direct and unlimited teletype communications will be placed at the disposal of the members of these commissions within their homelands. Teletype connections with their homelands will be set up in the areas between the demarcation lines by the responsible high commands. A similar commission will be created for the Russo-Turkish theater of operations in Asia upon agreement between the commanders-in-chief of both sides.

VIII. The truce agreement of 5 December [22 November] 1917 and all local truces or armistices concluded prior to that date for individual parts of the front are superceded by this armistice agreement.

IX. Immediately after the ratification of this armistice agreement the contracting parties will initiate peace negotiations.

X. Out of concern for the principles of the freedom, independence and territorial integrity of the neutral Persian Empire, the Turkish and Russian high commands are ready to withdraw all their troops from Persia. As soon as possible they will contact the Persian government to arrange the details of the evacuation and any measures necessary to guarantee these principles.

XI. Each of the contracting parties is receiving a copy of this agreement in the German and Russian languages, signed by the plenipotentiary representatives.

Brest-Litovsk, 15 December 1917 [2 December 1917, Russian calendar]

[Followed by the Russian text and the signatures]

POSTSCRIPT TO THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENT

To complete and build upon the agreement concerning the armistice, the contracting parties will also come together for direct talks about the exchange of civilians and disabled soldiers held as prisoners. The first issue will be the repatriation of women and children (under 14 years of age).

The contracting parties will immediately take all possible measures to improve the lot of prisoners of war held by both sides. This should be a top priority of the governments involved.

To facilitate peace negotiations, and to heal as quickly as possible the wounds inflicted on civilization by the war, measures will be taken to restore cultural and economic relations between the contracting parties. For this purpose will be employed, *inter alia*, the restoration of postal service and trade, and exchanges of books and newspapers and other material subject to the limitations imposed by the armistice.

To regulate details, a mixed commission of representatives of all the parties will meet next at St Petersburg.

Brest-Litovsk, 15 December 1917

[Followed by the signatures of the representatives of the Quadruple Alliance, and by the Russian text with the signatures of the Russian representatives]

Appendix # 3

Major troop movements by rail during 1917 (see Beilagen 11 and 21 of original text).

Months shown are those when the movements were initiated. German units are shown in *italics*.

## JANUARY 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front: *10 Bav ID* - From Maroshevitz to Zablolce (67 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . *31 ID* - From Ozydow & Zloczow to Maroshevitz (74 trains)
  - . Parts of *70 Hon ID* - From Kovel to Földvar (55 trains)
  - . HQ of Archduke Joseph's Army Group - From Segesvar to Maros Vasarhely (4 trains)
- . Leaving Romania for another (non-Austrian) front
  - . *2 Cav Div* - From Botfalu to Oderberg (38 trains; actually started on 30 Dec 1916)
  - . *11 Bav ID* - From Bucharest to Salzburg (85 trains)
  - . *49 Res ID* - From Szekely Udvarhely to Oderberg (37 trains)
  - . *7 Cav Div* - From Botfalu to Bodenbach (28 trains)
  - . *Bicycle Bde (with attached supply columns)* - From Bucharest to Salzburg (21 trains)
  - . *41 ID (with attached supply columns)* - From Craiova to Salzburg (97 trains)

## FEBRUARY 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . Half of *20 Hon ID* - From St Daniel to Stojanow (43 trains)
  - . *Parts of 86 and 91 ID* - From Kovel to Kamien Kaszmyrsky (45 trains)
- . Leaving Romania for another (non-Austrian) front
  - . *187 ID* - From Botfalu to Oderberg (47 trains)
  - . *Württemberg Mountain Bn (with attached supply columns)* - From Bucharest to Salzburg
  - . *6 Cav Div* - From Botfalu to Bodenbach (37 trains)
  - . *Batteries of heavy artillery* - From Bucharest to Salzburg (62 trains)
- . Movement to the Italian front
  - . *7 ID* - From Stojanow to Sesana (65 trains)
  - . Heavy artillery to join 5<sup>th</sup> Army - From Kovel & Zloczow to Prosecco (14 trains)

## MARCH 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . *92 ID* - From Poginki to Rogozno (26 trains)
  - . *38 Hon ID* - From Hinowice to Martinow (48 trains)
  - . *15 LW ID* - From Oswiecim to Zablolce (38 trains)

- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . VIII Corps HQ and attachments - From Krechowice to Kezdi Vasarhely (6 trains)
  - . 212 ID - From Salzburg to Romnicu Sarat (34 trains)
  - . *Alpenkorps* - From Romnicu Sarat to Szelistye (88 trains)
- . Movement to the Italian front: 106 Lst ID - From Zablolce to Prosecco (63 trains)

## APRIL 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 48 Res ID - From Kalusz to Zloczow (26 trains)
  - . 24 Res ID - From Oswiecim to Pukow (31 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 195 ID - From Zloczow to Oswiecim (30 trains)
  - . 15 ID - From Vladimir Volynsky to Brest-Litovsk (31 trains)
- . Movement to the Italian front
  - . 26 Sch Bde - From Radom to Bozen (12 trains)
  - . IV and XXIV Corps plus attachments - From Zloczow to Greifenberg (4 trains) and from Rogozno to Dutovlje (5 trains)

## MAY 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 7 LW ID - From Brest-Litovsk to Rogozno (33 trains)
  - . 12 LW ID - From Salzburg to Zloczow (25 trains)
  - . 223 ID - From Oswiecim to Zloczow (29 trains)
  - . 4 Ers ID - From Oswiecim to Powysokie (27 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 119 ID - From Hinowice & Pukow to Oswiecim (27 trains)
  - . 16 ID - From Rogozno & Poginki to Brest-Litovsk (29 trains)
  - . 48 Res ID - From Zloczow to Oswiecim (26 trains)
  - . 10 Bav ID - From Zloczow to Oswiecim (29 trains)
  - . 36 Res ID - From Podwysokie & Rohatyn to Oderberg (27 trains)
- . Leaving Romania for another [non-Austrian] front: *Alpenkorps* - From Gyulafehervar & Szaszsebes to Salzburg (79 trains)
- . Movement to the Italian front: 24 ID - From Madefalva & Csikszentsimon to Podmelec (66 trains)

## JUNE 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 16 ID - From Trieste to Kalusz (49 trains)
  - . 47 LW ID - From Oswiecim to Kalusz (25 trains)
  - . 15 Res ID - From Lublin to Rohatyn (26 trains)
  - . 241 ID - From Brest-Litovsk to Powysokie (27 trains)

- . 83 *ID* - From Brest-Litovsk to Kalusz (26 trains)
- . XVII Corps HQ and attachments - From Grapa to Raho (5 trains)
- . XXV Res Corps HQ - From Raho to Rohatyn (4 trains)
- . 237 *ID* - From Brest-Litovsk to Zloczow (30 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . XV TURKISH Corps - From Podwysokie to Belgrade (35 trains)
  - . 47 *LW ID* - From Bednarow to Lublin (26 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . 7 *ID* - From Sesana to Des (25 trains)
  - . 62 *ID* - From Podmelec to Bucharest (25 trains)
  - . 7 Cav Div - From Romnicu Sarat to Kezdi Vasarhely (17 trains)
- . Movement to the Italian front
  - . 73 *ID* - 10 Mtn Bde from Kronstadt to Prosecco, and 2 Mtn Bde from Piatra to Levico (68 train total)
  - . 35 *ID* - From Brest-Litovsk to St Daniel (64 trains)
  - . 21 Sch Div - From Majdan & Bednarow to Podmelec (66 trains)
  - . 12 *ID* - From O Radna & Borsa to Dutovlje (26 trains)

## JULY 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 41 and 46 *Fuss Arty Bns* - From Oswiecim to Ozydow (12 trains)
  - . 12 Reit. Sch. Div - From Lemberg to Zloczow (14 trains), and from Sokal to Ozydow (19 trains)
  - . XXXIII Res Corps HQ and 6 *ID* - Oswiecim to Zloczow (32 trains)
  - . 5 *ID* - From Oswiecim to Dunajow (37 trains)
  - . 2 *Guard ID* - From Brest-Litovsk to Ozydow (33 trains)
  - . 1 *Guard ID* - From Brest-Litovsk to Ozydow (39 trains)
  - . Artillery of 7<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies - From Tiszaborkut, F. Borgo and Kronstadt to Csap, Stryj and Broszniow (45 trains)
  - . 8 *Bav Res ID* - From Gyimesbükk to Broszniow (46 trains)
  - . 16 *Res ID* - From Oswiecim to Martinow (28 trains)
  - . 8 Cav Div - From Borsa to Raho and from Felsöborgo to Raho (17 trains)
  - . 20 *ID* - From Oderberg to Dolina (49 trains)
  - . *Infantry of 19 ID* - From Biale to Zablolce (11 trains)
  - . *Two field artillery regts* - From Chelm to Zloczow (15 trains)
  - . *Supply columns* - From Kovel (etc.) to Zloczow (etc.) (41 trains)
  - . *XL Res Corps HQ* - From Csikszereda to Dolina (5 trains)
  - . *Reinforced Bav Cav Div* - From Kovel to Krechowice (51 trains)



- . 42 ID - From Granica to Zloczow (26 trains)
- . *Beskid Corps HQ and 92 ID* - From Chelm & Kovel to Zloczow & Martinow (41 trains)
- . *Infantry of 32 ID* - From Biale to Ozydow (9 trains)
- . 20 ID - From Martinow to Zloczow (43 trains)
- . 75 Res ID - From Martinow to Kovel (29 trains)
- . XXVI Corps HQ and attachments - From Stryj to O Radna (3 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . 7 ID - From Des to Gyimesbükk (28 trains)
  - . 15 ID - From Stryj to Marosheviz (29 trains)
  - . 37 Hon ID - From Marosheviz to Kovaszna & Bereczk
  - . 8 Cav Div - From Felsöbörgö (etc.) to Bereczk
- . Movement behind the Italian front: Nine bns [IR 64 and 57; FJB 23; Bns III/57 & II/SchR 36] - From the Isonzo to Trent (19 trains)

## AUGUST 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 11 ID - From Iwaniczny to Zborow (74 trains)
  - . 232 ID - From Chelm to Zloczow (31 trains)
  - . 31 ID - From Marosheviz to Zablolow (53 trains)
  - . 32 ID - From Ozydow to Stojanow (53 trains)
  - . The POLISH AUXILIARY "CORPS" - From Tomaszow & Debli to Przemysl (48 trains)
  - . Transfer of artillery from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> Army - From Marosheviz to Zuczka (21 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 2 Gd ID - From Zloczow to Brest-Litovsk (47 trains)
  - . *One regiment and 21 heavy batteries* - From Zloczow to Brest-Litovsk (45 trains)
  - . XXIII Res Corps HQ and 1 Gd ID - From Jezierna to Brest-Litovsk (50 trains)
  - . *Leib Hussar Bde* - From Podwysokie to Lublin (17 trains)
  - . 42 ID - From Zborow to Brest-Litovsk (45 trains)
  - . 20 ID - From Podwysokie to Brest-Litovsk (45 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . *Alpenkorps* - From Salzburg to Focsani (77 trains)
  - . *Württemberg Mountain Bn* - From Oderberg to Bereczk (5 trains)
  - . XVIII Res Corps HQ - From Salzburg to Odobesti (4 trains)
  - . 92 FA Bde - From Tarvis to Sihlele & Gugesti (7 trains)
  - . Hon IR # 15 - From Gyimesbükk to Bereczk (6 trains)
  - . 1 Cav Div - From Zabolafüresztelep to Ditro (51 trains)
  - . Hon IR # 17 and III Bn/IR 76 - From Gyimesbükk to Bereczk (10 trains)
- . Movement to the Balkan front: 20 TURKISH ID - From Dublany

(etc.) to Belgrade (48 trains)

- . Movement to or behind the Italian front
  - . Parts of 73 ID - From Laibach to Dutovlje (14 trains)
  - . 10 ID - From Dutovlje to Laibach (24 trains) and, after a pause, from Laibach to Vrhovlje
  - . Eighteen bns for the Isonzo Armies [IR 64 and Bn I/63; then IR 50, SchR 13, SchR 25; finally IR 14] - From Trent & Matarello to Grahova & St Daniel (35 trains)
  - . 19 ID - From Zablolce to Grahova (59 trains)
  - . 53 ID - From Grywiatki to Opcina (23 trains)
  - . 25 Sch Bde plus FAR # 13 - From Focsani to Grahova (49 trains)
  - . 20 Hon ID - From Stojanow to Prelanke (75 trains)

#### SEPTEMBER 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 12 Reit Sch Div - From Kamien to Poginki (19 trains)
  - . 6 Res ID - From Oswiecim to Jezierna (32 trains)
  - . 2 Cav Div - From Brest-Litovsk to Iwaniczy (37 trains)
  - . 33 Res ID - From Oswiecim to Zborow (30 trains)
  - . 22 LW ID - From Brest-Litovsk to Grywiatki & Lubitow (41 trains)
  - . 14 Bav ID - From Kovel to Jezierna (30 trains)
  - . Bav Ers ID - From Oswiecim to Jezierna (29 trains)
- . Movement behind the Romanian front: HQ of Archduke Joseph's Army Group - From Maros Vasarhely to Klausenburg (9 trains)
- . Leaving Romania for another [non-Austrian] front: *Seven heavy batteries* - From Piatra to Salzburg (15 trains)
- . Movement to the Balkan front: *Württemberg Mountain Bn* - From Kovaszna to Belgrade (4 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Italian front
  - . 19 ID - From Sesana to Trent (30 trains)
  - . *Alpenkorps* - From Focsani to Kronau [but some infantry and mountain artillery went to south Tyrol as a deception measure] (79 trains)
  - . I Corps HQ plus attachments - From N Sadagora to Kronau (3 trains)
  - . II Corps HQ plus attachments - From Lubitow to Bresowitz (4 trains)
  - . Edelweiss Div - From Trent to Nötsch (23 trains)
  - . *Guard Jaeger and Guard Schützen Battalions* - From Bolechow to St Rupprecht (5 trains)
  - . 5 ID - From Jezierna to Zwischenwässern (54 trains)
  - . 200 ID - From Kolomea to Salloch (64 trains)
  - . 29 ID - From Rogozno to Preslanek (58 trains)
  - . 12 ID - From Salzburg to Velden (82 trains)
  - . 26 [*Württemberg*] ID - From Salzburg to Maria Saal &

Klagenfurt (62 trains)

- . 22 Sch Div - From Trent to Thör/Maglern (34 trains)
- . 43 FA Bde - From Krainerend to Kronau (10 trains)
- . *Three Storm battalions* - From Arlberg to Trent (9 trains)
- . Various smaller Aus-Hung. and *German* units plus equipment from their respective homelands to the Villach-Laibach area (about 1200 trains)

#### OCTOBER 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . 22 ID - From Trembowla to Lemberg (30 trains)
  - . IX Corps HQ - From Zborow to Felsöborge (4 trains)
  - . 10 *Ers ID* - From Oswiecim to Borszczow (30 trains)
  - . Two inf regts of the POLISH AUXILIARY "CORPS" - From Przemysl to Kotzmann (9 trains)
  - . 9 Cav Div (minus a detachment, see under Nov) - From Kamien to N. Sadagora & Nagybocksko (24 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 6 ID - From Jezierna to Oswiecim (30 trains)
  - . 8 *Bav Res ID* - From Zablatow to Oswiecim (37 trains)
  - . 24 *Res ID* - From Borszczow to Oswiecim (29 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . 1 Cav Bde - From N. Sadagora to Piatra & Focsani (8 trains)
  - . 3 Cav Div - From Marosheviz to Bereczk (29 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Italian front
  - . Parts of the *Alpenkorps* (see October entry) - From Trent to Kronau (46 trains)
  - . *Three storm battalions* - From Levico to Arnoldstein (9 trains)
  - . 117 ID - From Kovaszna to Salloch (58 trains)
  - . 33 ID - From Zloczow to Bresowitz (88 trains)
  - . 4 ID - From Kovel to Zwischenwässern (60 trains)
  - . 21 Sch Div - From Sesana to Trent (47 trains)

#### NOVEMBER 1917

- . Movement to or behind the Russian front
  - . Remaining detachment of 9 Cav Div - See under October for itinerary (5 trains)
  - . 42 ID - From Bret-Litovsk to Lubitow (20 trains)
  - . 43 Sch Div - From Opcina & Sesana to N. Sadagora (46 trains)
  - . Ten "Trachom" bns - From Neumarkt near Marburg to Felsöborge (14 trains)
  - . 187 Lst Bde - From Krainerend to N. Sadagora (11 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 107 ID - From Poginki to Brest-Litovsk (29 trains)

- . 16 Res ID - From N. Sadagora to Oswiecim (36 trains)
- . 1 ID - From N. Sadagora to Oswiecim (39 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Romanian front
  - . Bav Cav Div - From N. Sadagora to Braila (30 trains)
  - . 28 Lst Mtn Bde - From Welsberg to Csikszentsimon (12 trains)
- . Leaving Romania for another [non-Austrian] front: 225 ID - From Kezdivasarhely to Passau (45 trains)
- . Movement to or behind the Italian front
  - . 106 Lst ID - From Divaca to Trent (37 trains)
  - . Parts of 52 ID - From St Lorenzen to Caldonazzo
  - . 195 ID - From Kufstein to Calliano
  - . 10<sup>th</sup> Army HQ - From "Stazione per la Carnia" to Trent (2 trains)

## DECEMBER 1917

- . Movement behind the Russian front
  - . 53 Res ID - From Zborow to Kovel (30 trains)
  - . 15 ID - From Tarnopol to Kovel (30 trains)
- . Leaving Russia for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 4 Ers ID<sup>648</sup> - From N. Sadagora to Oswiecim (37 trains)
  - . 108 ID - From Iwaniczy to Brest-Litovsk (28 trains)
  - . 14 Bav ID - From Tarnopol to Brest-Litovsk (33 trains)
  - . 42 ID - From Guszyn to Brest-Litovsk (26 trains)
- . Movement to the Italian front: UR # 6 - From Salzburg to Tolmein (4 trains)
- . Leaving Italy for another [non-Austrian] front
  - . 195 ID - From Matarello to Kufstein (50 trains)
  - . 12 ID - From Podnart (etc.) to Salzburg (73 trains)
  - . 5 ID - From Lavis to Kufstein (59 trains)

## NOTES:

Movements of small units...

- . Jan-July 1917
  - . To or behind Russian front - 111 trains for *German* units, 16 for k.u.k. units
  - . To or behind Romanian front - 78 trains for *German* units, 46 for k.u.k. units
  - . To or behind Italian front - 51 trains for k.u.k. units
  - . From Russia or Romania to other [non-Austrian] fronts - 68 trains for *German* units, 3 for k.u.k. units
- . Aug-Dec 1917

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648TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In the original text, this unit is listed as "4<sup>th</sup> Reserve ID" but there was no such unit. Review of the situation maps and of German unit histories indicates with almost 100% reliability that the unit in question was 4<sup>th</sup> Ersatz ID.

- . To or behind Russian front - 38 trains for *German* units, 29 for k.u.k. units
- . To or behind Romanian front - 18 trains for *German* units, 4 for k.u.k. units
- . From unspecified areas to other [non-Austrian] fronts - 71 trains for *German* units, 46 for BULGARIAN units

## SUMMARIES:

- . Jan-July 1917
  - . By front - 1392 trains for Russia, 577 for Romania, 523 for Italy, 872 to move units away from Russia or Romania
  - . Grand total - 3364 trains were involved in troop movement on the Aus-Hung. rail network, an average of 16 trains per day
- . Aug-Dec 1917
  - . By front - 818 trains for Russia, 270 for Romania, 52 for the Balkans, 2445 for Italy, 932 to move to non-Austrian fronts
  - . Grand total - 4517 trains were involved in troop movement on the Aus-Hung. rail network, an average of 30 trains per day

## SPECIAL MOVEMENTS:

The largest troop concentrations in this period were:

- . The build-up for the offensive in east Galicia; at that time 359 trains brought troops to Zablolce, Ozydow and Zloczow; 224 more trains brought troops to Martinow and Krechowice
- . The build-up for the join offensive in Italy; it involved 848 trains for the major units, 972 trains for the smaller units directly under Army HQ and for various equipment; the total was thus 1820 trains

Appendix # 4

Chronological summary of the campaigns and most important battles of 1917. (Beilage 36 in the original)

- . 1 January ff. - Trench warfare on the entire front between the Pripyat and the Carpathian crest (Army Groups of *Linsingen* and of *Böhm-Ermolli*)
- . 5-9 January - 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of the Aa River (*8<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 14 Jan-17 Feb - Actions on the southeast front of Transylvania (*Group Gerok*)
- . 23 Jan-3 Feb - 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of the Aa River (*8<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 27 Jan-30 March - Actions in the Mestecanesci sector, at Jacobeny and at Kirlibaba (*7<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 1 February - Unrestricted submarine warfare begins
- . 11 March - Loss of Bagdad to the English (*4<sup>th</sup> Turkish Army*)
- . 11-26 March - 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Monastir (*Below's Army Group*)
- . 16 March - Start of actions in front of the Siegfried Line (by *1<sup>st</sup> Army* until 12 April, by *2<sup>nd</sup> Army* until 20 June)
- . 26-27 March - First Battle of Gaza (*4<sup>th</sup> Turkish Army*)
- . 2 April-20 May - Spring Battle of Arras (*6<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 4 April - America declares war on Germany
- . 4 April - Storm of the Tobol bridgehead (*Hauer's Cav Corps*)
- . 6 April-27 May - Double Battle of the Aisne and in Champagne (*7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies* joined on 16 April by *1<sup>st</sup> Army*)
- . 19-20 April - Second Battle of Gaza (*4<sup>th</sup> Turkish Army*)
- . 4-18 May - "May Battle" in Macedonia (*Scholtz's Army Group*)
- . 12 May-5 June - Tenth Battle of the Isonzo (*5<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 15 May - Naval thrust into the Strait of Otranto
- . 27 May-21 July - Actions around the Wytschaete bend (*4<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 9-29 June - Battle of Ortigara (*11<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 29 June-3 July - Double Battle of Koniuchy-Zborow and of Brzezany (*2<sup>nd</sup> Army* and *South Army*)
- . 6-17 July - Battle of Stanislaw-Kalusz (*3<sup>rd</sup> Army*)
- . 18-25 July - Defensive Battle of Dvinsk (*Army Det. D*)
- . 19-27 July - Defensive Battle of Smorgony-Krevo (*10<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 19-22 July - Breakthrough Battle of Zborow (*Zloczow Sector* of *2<sup>nd</sup> Army*)
- . 22-25 July - Pursuit actions in eastern Galicia (*2<sup>nd</sup>, South* and *3<sup>rd</sup> Armies*)
- . 22-29 July - Renewed actions in southeast Transylvania (*Group Gerok* of *1<sup>st</sup> Army*)
- . 22 July-17 Sept - Summer Battle in Flanders (*4<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 24-30 July - Thrust from the Carpathians (*7<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 29 July to mid-August - Actions on the Zbrucz (*South Army*)
- . 31 July-5 Aug - Re-capture of Czernowitz (*7<sup>th</sup> Army*)
- . 1 August - Siam declares war on the Central Powers
- . 1-31 Aug - Liberation of Bukovina and attempts to thrust to the

Moldau (7<sup>th</sup> Army)

- . 2 Aug-9 Oct - Defensive Battle at Verdun (5<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 6-13 August - Battle of Focsani (9<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 8-13 August - Battle in the Ojtoz Sector (1<sup>st</sup> Army)
- . 14 August - China declares war on the Central Powers
- . 14 Aug-3 Sept - Actions around the approaches to western Moldavia (Group Gerok of 1<sup>st</sup> Army, and 9<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 18 Aug-13 Sept - Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo (5<sup>th</sup> Army, which on 23 Aug became Boroevic's Army Group)
- . 27 August - Capture of the Dolzok Heights (3<sup>rd</sup> Army)
- . 1-5 September - Battle of Riga (8<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 7-12 and 23 September - Actions west of Lake Ochrida (parts of XIX Corps and of Scholtz's Army Group)
- . 9-18 September - Final actions on the southeast Transylvania front (Group Gerok of 1<sup>st</sup> Army)
- . 18 Sept-3 Dec - Autumn Battle in Flanders (4<sup>th</sup> Army and from 5 Nov the 6<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 21-22 September - Storm of the Jakobstadt bridgehead (8<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 11-20 October - Conquest of the Baltic Islands (8<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 24 Oct-2 Nov - Rear guard actions at and south of the Ailette (7<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 24-27 October - Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo (14<sup>th</sup> Army, Boroevic's Army Group)
- . 28 Oct-1 Nov - Battle of Codroipo-Latisana (14<sup>th</sup> Army, Boroevic's Army Group)
- . 2-4 November - Assault crossing of the Tagliamento (10<sup>th</sup> Army, 14<sup>th</sup> Army, Boroevic's Army Group)
- . 2-7 November - Third Battle of Gaza and Battle of Jaffa (Turkish Yildirim Army Group)
- . 4-10 November - Pursuit in the Dolomites, Conrad's Army Group, 10<sup>th</sup> Army
- . 5-10 November - Pursuit to the Piave (14<sup>th</sup> Army, Boroevic's Army Group)
- . 11-30 November - Attacks toward the area west of the Piave (11<sup>th</sup> Army, 14<sup>th</sup> Army, Boroevic's Army Group)
- . 20 Nov-3 Dec - Battle of Cambrai (2<sup>nd</sup> Army)
- . 22 November - 10<sup>th</sup> Army is dissolved, but reformed on the western and southern fronts of Tyrol
- . 4 December - Capture of Mt Meletta (11<sup>th</sup> Army)
- . 7 December - America declares war on Austria-Hungary
- . 9 December - Loss of Jerusalem to the English (7<sup>th</sup> Turkish Army)
- . 18 December - Start of the armistice on the Eastern front