

# THE GREAT WAR IN THE EAST

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

by Richard Spence

The immediate cause for the outbreak of the First World War was the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia (annexed by Austria in 1908) on June 28, 1914. The general bad blood between Austria and Serbia, which led to the murder, was a result of the latter's egocentric vision of uniting all South ("Yugo") Slavs living under Habsburg rule into a "Greater Serbia" or Yugoslavia. Tiny Serbia would not seem to present much of a threat to the great Austrian Empire, but backed by Russia, who saw herself as the patron and protector of her "little Slav brothers" (and Austria's chief rival for influence in the Balkans), the Serbs were viewed as a dangerous enemy. The assassination itself had been carried out by a secret nationalist society, the so-called "Black Hand" which was active throughout Bosnia and had adherents in the highest levels of the Serbian government. While subsequent evidence does not suggest that the Serb government as a whole can be held responsible, the Austrians used this argument to justify their settling the "Serbian problem" once and for all.

Austria had declared war on Serbia on July 28 and, as Russia's position was as yet unclear (as was virtually everything else at this point), Variant B with three armies deployed against the Serbs was put into effect. After August 1st, however, Austria found herself at war with Russia. Mobilization was not something, however, that could be reversed without interfering in the progress of the "B" plan. The Austrian armies facing Serbia were ready to move on August 12. Conrad, however, fearing for his position in Galicia and under pressure from the Germans to draw off as many Russians as possible, decided to switch the 2nd Army to the north. Meanwhile, he ordered the three armies already in Galicia to commence offensive operation as soon as possible. These decisions were to have momentous effect on Austrian military fortunes. Conrad was disobeying his own edict against simultaneous offensives. In addition, the 2nd Army was being moved from the Balkan Front before it could be of any real use, and it would not arrive in Galicia in time to prevent the Austrian defeat there.

The transfer of the 2nd Army to the east ruined the chances for a quick victory over the Serbs. The number of equivalent divisions facing the Serbs was reduced from 19 to 13, and the remaining two armies, the 5th and 6th, were massed in Bosnia. This deployment made any invasion a matter of mountain warfare in desolate regions supported by two small rail heads at Sarajevo and Tuzla. The ideal avenue for an Austrian invasion was from then north, across the Sava and Danube rivers. This route offered not only more level ground and better communications, but also an immediate objective in the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

### The Russian Plan

Prior to 1914, the Russians had developed two potential war plans, entitled "A" and "G".

The latter plan could be implemented either offensively or defensively. Under its provisions, three armies — the 1st, 2nd, and 4th — were to be concentrated against East Prussia either to defend against a German attack or to overrun its defenders. This left three other armies — the 5th, 3rd, and 8th — to fend off the Austrians. As the basic concepts of the Schlieffen plan became known to the Russians, they developed plan A. This left only the 1st and 2nd Armies to defeat the northern flank while the other four were to face the Austrians. In retrospect, this deployment was probably fortuitous, as the 4th Army would not have mitigated the disasters of Tannenberg and may have been caught up in them, while in the south, its presence was felt by the Austrians.

Russia in 1914 was capable of mobilizing 70 infantry divisions, 18 rifle brigades, and the equivalent of 36 cavalry divisions. The Russian army had to be drawn together from a vast empire with a limited transportation network. While the German army could completely mobilize in nine days and the Austrian in 15, it was reckoned that only a third of the Russian army would be in position by the 15th day (August 17). The more distant corps in European Russia and the Reserve divisions would not arrive until about the 30th day, while the corps from Siberia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus would not complete arrival until the 60th day.

As a matter of fact, the Russian mobilization proceeded much faster than either the Russians or the Central Powers expected. By August 23rd, there were 51 infantry divisions, six rifle brigades, and some 20 cavalry divisions were in the process of arrival, and 13 were *en route*. This did not give the Russians any appreciable numerical superiority at the outset of operations. As the more distant forces arrived, they would be used to form the 9th and 10th Armies. There also existed 6th and 7th Army headquarters at Petrograd and Odessa, respectively, which controlled reserve divisions in coast protection duties.

The Russian Commander-in-Chief was the Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaievich Romanov, uncle of the Tsar. He was physically imposing (over six and a half feet) and an excellent soldier. His popularity among the Russian nobility and bourgeoisie, however, made him the target of suspicion and jealousy inspired by Rasputin and the Tsarina Alexandra.

Like the Russians, the Austrians had devised two war plans. Variant B envisioned a punitive war against Serbia with Russia remaining neutral, at least temporarily. Three Austrian armies — the 5th, 6th, and 2nd — would march on Belgrade while the remaining three — the 1st, 4th, and 3rd — would watch the Russians from Galicia. Should the Russians ultimately intervene, the Galician armies would assume a defensive role until the other armies could conclude operations in the Balkans and be sent to their aid. Variant R anticipated immediate war against both Russia and Serbia. In this case only the weakest of the Austrian armies,

the 5th and 6th, would be left against Serbia. They were to invade Serbia without stretching themselves too thin. Their chief role was to protect Austrian territory, especially the province of Bosnia. The four remaining armies would be massed in Galicia and would commence offensive operations against the Russian forces in Poland, ideally in conjunction with a German drive from East Prussia.

The Austrian Chief-of-Staff, Count Conrad von Hotzendorff, is often counted among the best strategists of the war. In a theoretical sense, this assessment is justified; Conrad did originate a number of brilliant strategic plans. He was, however, unable to put them effectively into practice. Conrad is rumored to have once sighed that he "deserved a better army than the Austrian." Yet more often than not it was he who let down his troops. The opening operations are a case in point. Before the war, Conrad had declared that the Austrian army was strong enough to either crush Serbia and defend against the Russians or go all-out against the latter — but not both. An attack on the Russians, he further advised, could be successful only if carried out in cooperation with the Germans; otherwise the Austrian armies would eventually be overwhelmed by the Russians' superior numbers. Simultaneous offensives on both the Balkan and Galician fronts would be exactly what the Austrians would attempt in 1914, with disastrous results.

### The Austrian Disasters

The Austrian commander in Bosnia was its military governor, Oscar Potiorek, who was hardly a man to inspire confidence. It was he who had been in charge of security for Franz Ferdinand's visit. Potiorek felt his chief duty to be the protection of Bosnia, and he was alarmed by a small Serbian-Montenegrin incursion on August 7th. He therefore deployed his 6th Army in a defensive stance along the lower Drina River, leaving only the 5th Army to undertake the main invasion of Serb territory. The 2nd Army, keep in mind, was still north of the Sava-Danube, but was forbidden to move prior to its embarkation for Galicia on August 18th. The Austrians began their advance across the Drina on August 12th. By August 16th they had reached as far as the small Jadar River, but were then struck by a general Serbian counter-attack and thrown back across the Drina. Potiorek, still worried about the Montenegrins, had not properly supervised or supported the advance, and the Serbs had been able to throw almost their entire army against the disorganized invaders. Had the 2nd Army been allowed to move, the story might have been different. Instead, all it accomplished was a feint occupation of Sabac.

The Serbs owed their victory to the almost fanatical bravery of their soldiers who distinguished themselves in ferocious frontal charges against the enemy. They owed as much to their leader, the Voivode Putnik, who although paralyzed, conducted a brilliant campaign from maps.



Potiorek launched two more invasions, on September 8th and November 5th. The first halted a Serb foray north of the Sava and succeeded in holding on to two small pieces of Serbian territory. The last invasion — the largest — got off to a good start and captured Valjevo on November 15th and Belgrade on the 29th. On December 3rd, however, the Serbs were able to launch a surprise counter-attack which completely smashed the tired Austrians, and by December 15th had once again driven them across the rivers. The Austrians lost over a quarter of a million men in the campaign and an incalculable amount of prestige.

Action in Galicia got underway on August 23rd when Conrad sent his 1st and 4th Armies into southeastern Poland. Again Conrad was ignoring his own advice by undertaking an offensive without either the necessary strength or German assistance. Neither Conrad nor his Russian opposite number, General Ivanov, had a clear idea of enemy dispositions or intentions, but both, in fact, were about equal in overall strength. In a series of confused battles around Krasnik and Komarow between August 23rd and September 1st, the Austrians got the better of the fighting, but achieved no decisive results. Between August 25th and 30th, however, the isolated Austrian 3rd Army was overwhelmed by the Russian 3rd and 8th Armies in the Battle of the Gnla Lipa. The Galician capital of Lemberg fell to the Russians on September 3rd, and Conrad was forced to turn and face this new threat from the east. His attempt to hold a front west of Lemberg was foiled when his left flank was turned on September 11th in the Battle of Rava Ruska. The 2nd Army, which was arriving piecemeal throughout this period, was unable to turn the tide of battle, and the Austrian armies were forced to retreat, abandoning almost all of Galicia by the end of September. The Austrians lost over 350,000 men out of less than a million engaged.

Austria-Hungary suffered defeats in 1914 which permanently dampened her military reputation and her armies' fighting spirit. These failures can be blamed squarely on Conrad who undertook to do what he knew was impossible. Conducting operations with insufficient forces seemed to be a habit of his throughout the war. Had the 2nd Army been left in the south, victory over the Serbs would have been a virtual certainty. In any event, the defeat in Galicia, which could hardly have been worse, would probably have been mitigated by a defensive stance. The Serbian and Galician campaigns of 1914 must thus stand as a supreme example of the pitfalls of indecision and the inefficient use of military resources.

### **The "Bulldozer vs. the Steamroller"— The German Counteroffensives in Poland**

The Austrians' defeat not only threatened the security of Bohemia and Hungary, but opened the gateway to a Russian invasion of the rich German industrial province of Silesia. Conrad, doubting the ability of his battered armies to stop a further Russian push, called on his German allies for help.

The German armies on the Western front were now engaged in the "race to the sea," and no troops could be spared for the East. The Germans had also just received a new Chief-of-Staff, General Erich von Falkenhayn. He considered events on the Eastern front a nuisance and was convinced that decisive results could be obtained only in the West. If Conrad was to receive any help it would have to be provided by the German forces already in the East. Hindenburg and Ludendorff decided that the relatively quiet situation in the East Prussian sector would allow the transfer of sizeable forces to the south. The Germans were

especially worried over the threat to Silesia. Four corps (Guard Reserve, XI, XVII, XX) were concentrated between Czenstokhow and Krakow. The new army, designated the 9th, was placed under the command of Mackensen. It was augmented by the German 8th Cavalry Division and three Landwehr divisions.

The German plan was simple, but entailed considerable risks. The bulk of the Russian armies was still concentrated in Galicia, and between them and the 2nd Army recuperating around Warsaw there was a broad gap in southern Poland. Hindenburg and Ludendorff planned to thrust their forces through this gap as fast possible and seize all the crossings on the Vistula between its confluence with the San and Warsaw, and then go after Warsaw itself. Conrad was to do his part in the south by driving the Russians back to the San. The danger of the plan was that if the Russians got across the Vistula in force before the Germans could seal off the crossing, the 9th Army could be overwhelmed or enveloped.

The German advance began on September 28th and made rapid progress. In preparation for a possibly equally speedy retreat, all bridges were set for demolition. As fate would have it, the Grand Duke had decided on September 22nd to redeploy his armies in preparation for an invasion of Germany. The 3rd and 8th Armies would be left to hold the Austrians in Galicia, while the 4th, 5th, and 9th would be shifted to the north and across the Vistula. Russians and Germans were thus on a collision course. It would be a race for the Vistula crossings.

By October 12th the German 9th Army had closed in on the Middle Vistula and was only 12 miles from Warsaw. To the south, the Austrian 1st Army had blocked the Russian 9th at Yuzefov, and the other Austrian armies had shown surprising energy by throwing the Russians over the San. The Germans were not threatened by the descent of the Russian 2nd and 5th Armies from the Warsaw area. The Grand Duke envisioned a broad, encircling move through Lodz. The German line held but was forced back to the Pilica. On October 17th, Hindenburg and Ludendorff saw that their position was untenable, especially in light of the Austrians' weakening on the San. German preparations paid off as the withdrawal was carried out swiftly and smoothly, while the Russian pursuit was slowed and eventually stopped by the thorough destruction of bridges and rail lines.

### **The Battle of Lodz**

By November 1 the German 9th Army was regrouping at Czenstokhow and the Austrians once more held the Gorlice-Tarnow position. The Germans had suffered 40,000 casualties, the Austrians an equal number. Data on Russian losses are again inexact, but they must have exceeded 100,000. The Russian drive on Silesia had been delayed, but not stopped, however. As soon as railroads were advanced from Warsaw and Lvangorod the steamroller would resume its advance. Hindenburg and Ludendorff therefore advanced to strike again as rapidly as possible. Intelligence had revealed a weak spot in the Kutno area where the Russian 1st Army linked up with the 2nd around Lodz. The German plan was once again a rapid penetration and then a rapid turn to the south with the aim of encircling the Russian 2nd Army.

Between November 4 and 9, the 9th Army was transferred to the Posen-Thorn area and began its offensive on the 10th. The Guard Reserve and Woysch Corps were left to bolster the Austrians, but the 9th Army was strengthened by the arrival of the I Reserve and new XXV Reserve Corps from East Prussia and the "Posen" and "Thorn" Landwehr Corps. The move had been so swift that the Russians still believed the army to be in south-

ern Poland. The Germans crashed through the 1st Army on November 15, and on the 16th their left wing wheeled south.

The following Battle of Lodz was a classic maneuver. On the extreme left was the XXV Reserve Corps under General Scheffer. His task was to penetrate the rear of the Russian 2nd Army and complete its encirclement while the other German forces pressed on from the north and west. On November 17, however, the Grand Duke had ordered the Russian 5th Army north to assist the stricken 2nd. At the same time the 1st Army dispatched a three-division force from Lovitch which advanced southwest. By November 21, it was the XXV Reserve Corps that was surrounded. The Grand Duke was in fact certain enough of its capture to order trains from Warsaw to carry away the prisoners. Scheffer, however, kept his corps together and headed in the direction the Russians least expected — northeast. This brought him into collision with the Lovitch force, one of whose divisions he overran on November 23. Scheffer then turned west and regained contact with the rest of the 9th Army. He had inflicted 12,000 enemy casualties and captured 16,000 prisoners.

The attempt to surround the Russian 2nd Army had nevertheless failed. On December 6, however, the Russians, fearing overextension, abandoned Lodz and drew back 30 miles towards Warsaw. The Russian invasion threat had been definitely stopped. In addition, the Russian army was beginning to experience a shortage of rifles and munitions. The Battle of Lodz had cost the Germans another 35,000 casualties. Russian losses were some 200,000, including 40,000 prisoners. The Eastern front now settled down into relative inactivity. Germans, Austrians and Russians faced off along an 800 mile front from the Baltic to the Bukowina.

### **Enter Turkey**

On 2 August 1914, the Turkish government, under the leadership of the Young Turk regime, had signed a secret treaty providing for Turkey's entrance into the war on the side of the Central Powers. This was not surprising considering the preponderant influence of Germany in the Ottoman Empire since the 1890's. Following Turkey's defeat in the First Balkan War of 1912, over 500 German officers were brought in to rebuild its shattered forces. This mission was headed by General Liman von Sanders who became Turkish Chief-of-Staff. In the course of the war, the German presence increased to over 800, performing tasks ranging from training and supply to the command of armies, corps, and divisions.

The adherence of Turkey to the Central Powers was no sure thing, however. The leader of the Young Turks, Enver Pasha, was a crass opportunist, and as late as September 1914 explored the possibility of an alliance with Russia. The turning point in the Turkish decision was the arrival of the German battle cruiser *Goeben* and the light cruiser *Breslau* in Constantinople on 10 August. The ships were ostensibly seeking safety from pursuing Allied ships. On October 24, however, the vessels were finally "sold" to Turkey, though they retained their German crews and their commander, Admiral Souchon. On 1 November, they led the Turkish fleet on a bombardment of the Russian Black Sea ports of Novorosiisk, Fedosia, Sevastopol, and Odessa. The Russians immediately declared war; the British and French followed suit on 5 November. The greatest impact of Turkey's belligerency was the isolation of Russia.

The Germans had made good progress in rebuilding the Ottoman Army. By the end of September 1914, the Turks had mobilized 36 divi-



sions. The supply and deployment of the divisions was limited, however, according to their distance from Constantinople. The lifeline of the Turkish forces in Asia was the Baghdad railway. The line had substantial gaps, however, and the tunnels had not yet pierced the Taurus and Amanos Mountains. Eastern Anatolia was serviced by one railhead at Ankara. The result was that it took over two months to move a division by land from the Bosphorus to Erzurum or Jerusalem. Troops in Mesopotamia were even more isolated since the line extended only half-way between Aleppo and Mosul, the terminus being Ras-al-Ain.

Over half of the Turkish Army was initially deployed in the 1st Army (five corps) around Constantinople and the 2nd Army (two corps) on the Aegean coast. The Turks, for obvious reasons, were concerned about the security of the Straits. The 4th Army (five divisions) garrisoned Syria and two corps (XII and XIII) held Mesopotamia. Five divisions were deployed in Arabia, two at Medina, and three in Yemen. The latter were completely isolated, and their sole occupation during the war was a desultory and pointless siege of a small British force at Aden.

One of Enver's pet schemes was the unification of all Turkic (Turanian) peoples under Ottoman rule. To this end, he sought to use his 3rd Army at Erzurum to invade Russian Transcaucasia, where he counted on the support of such Turkic groups as the Azerbaijanis. The 3rd Army had 11 divisions with 95,000 men, although total Turkish strength in the theatre reached 150,000 including large numbers of Kurdish irregulars with slight military value. The commander of the 3rd Army was Hassan Izzet Pasha, a devoted and competent officer. His troops were also Turkey's best and were far better trained than their Russian opponents.

Hassan had an impossible task in implementing the Enver's plan. The latter fancied himself a Napoleon, but he had never conducted a campaign and had no conception of the handicaps of the mountainous terrain. He could deduce from maps, however, that everything depended on the control of the few roads. His plan was an encirclement of the main Russian forces around Kars. The XI Corps of the 3rd Army would pin the Russians frontally while three others (I, IX, X) would march through the mountains and descend on the Russian rear. Once the Russian forces had been annihilated, the Turkish forces would capture the Georgian capital of Tiflis. Basically the plan was sound and might have succeeded in summer, but Enver ordered the advance to begin on 1 December. The troops, without winter clothing or supply, would have to march 30 to 40 miles over mountains 1500 to 8000 feet high through heavy snow with daytime temperatures of  $-20^{\circ}$ .

The main Russian forces in the Caucasus consisted of the II Caucasus Corps and the 66th R Division. Additional forces were raised from the local Armenian and Georgian populations which were almost as good as the regulars. In all, the Russians had over 100,000 men, of which 60,000 were concentrated around Kars. The Russians were especially strong in cavalry, an arm in which the Turks lacked effectiveness. The Russian commander in Transcaucasia was its military governor, Myshlayevski. A sort of Russian Prittwitz, he feared Turkish strength and was prepared to abandon everything south of the Caucasus mountains. However, the commander of the troops around Kars, General Voronzov, and his adjacent General Yudenich had more aggressive plans. They, in fact, decided to attack the Turks beginning on 10 December.

The Turkish march through the mountains was, predictably, a disaster. One division started

its march 8000 strong, but was reduced to 4000 after four days in the mountains. The Turkish pincers were too weak to close, and in a desperate battle fought in bitter cold, the Turks were defeated around Sarikamish between December 29th and January 2nd. By January, 1915 the remnants of the Turkish 3rd Army were regrouped at Erzurum. Hassan had remaining only 18,000 of his original 95,000 troops.

One other incident of importance occurred in Asiatic Turkey in 1914. On 22 November, a small British (Indian Army) force occupied the port of Basra in Mesopotamia. Its avowed goal was to protect British-owned oil fields in nearby Persia. From this humble beginning great things would grow.

### Operations in 1915: East or West?

With the deadlock on the Western front, minds on both sides began to consider the strategic opportunities in the East. The German desire was to successfully resolve the struggle on the Eastern front so as to be able to concentrate their forces in the West. For the Allies, the idea was to find a "back door" which would offer decisive strategic rewards.

The paramount "Easterners" in the German camp were Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Their nemesis, however, was Falkenhayn, the chief-of-staff. In September 1914 Hindenburg had been named "Commander-in-Chief-East" by the Kaiser which made the East the virtual private domain of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Falkenhayn continually refused their requests for reinforcements, since he believed that the war could be won only in the West. Both sides plead their cases to the Kaiser, who could not bring himself to definitely back one or the other. Falkenhayn justified his stand by pointing out that relatively small German forces had so far kept the Russians at bay, and to definitely settle with the Russians would require more troops than could be spared from the West and would entail a long and risky (remembering Napoleon) campaign in Russian fastnesses. On the other hand, Hindenburg and Ludendorff pointed out there would never be enough troops to bring about a decision in the West until Germany was free in the East.

In the West the British — because of their interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially Egypt and the Suez Canal — were most receptive to an Eastern policy. One of the most vocal "Easterners" was First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. The deciding factors in favor of a British Eastern policy were an abortive Turkish attack on the Suez Canal in February 1915, and the acute arms shortage of Russia along with rumors (which were true) that the latter was considering a separate peace. British attention was therefore drawn to the Dardanelles, the seizure of which would open a supply route to Russia and probably knock the Turks out of the war.

### The Winter Battle

Both Hindenburg/Ludendorff and Conrad believed that the best way to defeat the Russians was by simultaneous offensives from East Prussia and the Carpathians which, if properly executed, could trap the bulk of the Russian armies in Poland. In February 1915 the German forces in East Prussia had been strengthened by the arrival of three new Reserve corps which were used to form a new army, the 10th. During November 1914, the Russian 10th Army had invaded the eastern margins of East Prussia and now held a line facing the Masurian Lakes. The Germans planned to use their new army to strike the Russian right flank while the 8th Army hit the left. The result, if all went well, would be another Tannenberg. Conrad agreed to launch an offensive of his

own on the Carpathians with the aim of relieving his troops in Przemyśl.

As a diversionary effort, the Germans launched a small attack at Bolimow in front of Warsaw on 31 January. The important feature of the attack was the use of 18,000 poison gas shells. This was the first use of gas in the war. It was not particularly successful. The extreme cold kept the gas close to the ground, and in one case a sudden wind blew it back on the German infantry. Oddly enough, the Russians did not bother to inform their allies of the incident.

The German 10th and 8th Armies began their attack on 7 February, and it was immediately successful. Snow up to 10 feet deep slowed the German advance, however, and most of the Russian army escaped towards Grodno. The Russian XX Corps was surrounded in the Augustow forest and destroyed by 21 February. The Russians lost over 200,000 men in the battle, while German losses were about 18,000, a quarter of them from frostbite. It was a great tactical victory, but it achieved nothing of permanent strategic significance.

Conrad's offensive in the Carpathians miscarried from the very start. Beginning on 9 February, it managed to coincide with both a blizzard and a Russian offensive. The Austrians were repulsed and lost several important positions. Losses on both sides were about 100,000.

### Gorlice-Tarnow

The surrender of the Austrian garrison of Przemyśl on 18 March freed another Russian army (the 11th) for use in the Carpathians. The Russians now held most of the crests and were planning an offensive into the Hungarian plain. Conrad decided to appeal directly to Falkenhayn for help. He drew up a plan for an attack on the Gorlice-Tarnow sector which, if successful, would outflank the Russians in the Carpathians and compel them to withdraw behind the San and perhaps beyond. He asked Falkenhayn for the loan of four German divisions. Falkenhayn was impressed enough by Conrad's predicament and plan to send eight divisions. These were combined with two Austrian divisions into the German 11th Army and placed under the command of the redoubtable Mackensen. Falkenhayn himself, however, moved his HQ to the East, much to the chagrin of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. The latter asked for additional troops to try for the double envelopment, but Falkenhayn, intent on a brief, limited operation, turned a deaf ear.

The opposing forces on the Eastern front were numerically about equal. The Germans had 59 divisions and the Austrians 49, against 107 Russian. The Russian units were all understrength and experiencing crippling shortages of rifles and shells. In April 1915, the Stavka estimated a shortage of 350,000 rifles. Whole battalions were sent to the front armed with axes or nothing at all and were expected to pick up weapons from the fallen. The supply of shells had reached such low levels that batteries were restricted to three rounds per gun, per day — if they were lucky. The morale of the troops was low, and there was increasing war weariness on the home front. Only Brusilov's 8th Army in the central Carpathians seemed to show any fighting spirit.

In late April, the 11th Army was secretly assembled behind the Austrian 4th. It was lavishly supplied with artillery — 652 field guns and 247 heavy guns — the greatest concentration of artillery to date. Its target was the X Corps of Radko-Dmitriev's 3rd Army. The barrage began on 1 May, and the infantry assault on the 2nd. The 3 Russian divisions of the X Corps between Gorlice and Tarnow dissolved. By 4 May, the Germans



had penetrated the third Russian position and were in the open.

Radko-Dmitriev wanted to effect an immediate withdrawal, but the Grand Duke, still hoping to thrust into Hungary, ordered the 3rd Army to hold its position. This proved impossible. By 10 May, Radko-Dmitriev's army was all but destroyed, and Brusilov's 8th was forced to withdraw from the hard-won crests of the Carpathians as its northern flank was bared. On 16 May, the Germans reached the San at Jaroslau, and after a desperate battle, a crossing was forced on the 20th. Here the Germans were forced to pause until their supply could catch up. The Russians launched some ineffectual counter-attacks which did nothing but further exhaust their strength. Since 1 May, they had suffered 460,000 casualties, including 250,000 prisoners. The San had been Falkenhayn's original objective. The sheer success of the attack, however, convinced him to continue the offensive.

On 25 May, Italy declared war on Austria. This had little effect until early June, when Austrian divisions were first sent south. Their place was taken by German divisions, some of which were newly formed, while others were transferred from France. By September, there were 65 German divisions in the East.

On June 12, the Austro-Germans resumed their offensive. The Russians attempted to stand in front of Lemberg but abandoned the Galician capital on 22 June. Brusilov's 8th Army distinguished itself by constant counter-attacks. The Central Powers juggernaut rolled on through July defeating another Russian stand at Krasnostaw. In the meantime, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had not been idle. As early as 2 April they had launched a force of three infantry and three cavalry divisions out of the north of East Prussia towards Riga. This move drew off large Russian forces from the battles in the south. On 12 July, general attacks were launched by the German 12th and 8th Armies against the Narew line and by the 10th against Kovno — they were attempting the double envelopment.

On 1 August, the Grand Duke realized that his position in Poland was hopeless and ordered a withdrawal to the Bug River. Warsaw fell on 5 August. The fortress of Novogeorgievsk held out until 19 August, finally surrendering with 20,000 men. The Bug provided no refuge, however. On 25 August, the Germans took Brest-Litovsk. The Grand Duke skillfully withdrew his battered armies during the remainder of August and September, narrowly avoiding mass encirclement at Grodno and Vilna. The only note of success was the failure of Conrad's attack on Rovno on 15-20 September and the repulse of the German attack on Dvinsk on the 14th. By September the Austro-German armies had ground to a halt from exhaustion, over-extension, and torrential rains. The new front ran along the Dvina River with Russian bridgeheads at Riga and Jakobstadt. From Dvinsk it ran south through Pinsk to Czernowitz and the Romanian border.

The Russian armies had retreated 300 miles, abandoning Poland, Lithuania, and all but a corner of Galicia. Casualties were staggering: at least 1,000,000 killed and wounded and 1,100,000 taken prisoner. Many divisions had only 1000 rifles; the whole army had only 600,000. The Russian Army had taken a terrible beating, but it was still intact thanks to the Grand Duke Nicholas. The Tsar was not in a mood to be grateful, however. On 5 September, he relieved his uncle as Commander-in-Chief and assumed the role for himself — one for which he was hopelessly unqualified. The Grand Duke was shuffled off to the Caucasus where he would again perform admirably.

The Germans and Austrians had won one of the greatest victories of the war. A Russian army would not again menace German territory until 1944, but the victory had not been without cost. Austrian losses were 400,000; the Germans lost over 200,000. Falkenhayn, believing that he had permanently crippled Russian offensive power, turned his attention back to the West and a new project at Verdun. Hindenburg and Ludendorff could only complain that, had they been given sufficient forces, Russia would have been out of the war for good.

### The Fall of Serbia

Following the defeat of the last Austrian invasion in December 1914, the Serbian front had remained quiet. The Serbians lacked the munitions and the manpower for a major offensive and so sat behind their river barriers and waited for help from their allies. That help never came, but by the end of August it was apparent that the Austrians and Germans would be coming — and in force. In addition, the Bulgarians were showing signs of increasing favor toward the Central Powers, and on 21 September they mobilized their army (the Bulgarians had agreed to join the Central Powers on 6 September) on the Serbian front. Serbia asked the Allies for the permission and munitions to launch a preemptive strike against the Bulgarians. The Allies instead asked the Serbians to surrender territory to Bulgaria to keep her neutral. The Serbians indignantly refused and prepared for a defense of both the eastern and northern frontiers. The Serbians divided their 270,000 men into five armies, the 1st and 3rd facing the Sava and Danube, the 2nd, the Timok, and Macedonian against Bulgaria.

For the Central Powers, the elimination of Serbia was a must. Not only did she offer a possible base for Allied operations in the Balkans, but she sat directly across the supply routes to Turkey. During September, the Austrian 3rd (Kovess) and the German 11th (Carlwitz) armies were concentrated, respectively, west and east of Belgrade. Along with the Bulgarian 1st Army, they constituted an army group under (now) Feldmarshall von Mackensen. The 2nd Bulgarian Army operated under the direction of the Bulgarian General Staff. These forces comprised ten German, eight Austrian, and six Bulgarian divisions — in all some 480,000 men.

The 3rd and 11th Armies' assault across the Sava and Danube began on 6 October, after a crushing bombardment. Belgrade was captured on 9 October. On the 10th, Putnik counter-attacked in a desperate bid to throw the invaders back across the rivers. The Serbians went forward with their typical ferocity, but the attacking waves were shot to fragments by the Central Powers' artillery. In the east, the Bulgarians began their attack on 11 October. By the 18th, Mackensen had all of his forces across the rivers and began an inexorable push southward. The Serbians withdrew methodically, devastating the countryside, followed by hordes of civilian refugees. In the south, the Bulgarian 2nd Army brushed aside the weak Macedonian Army and cut the Salonika railway by capturing Veles on October 23. A Franco-British force of two divisions advancing from Salonika was subsequently pushed back into Greece.

By mid-November, the Serbians were boxed into the Kossovo plain, the same spot where another Serbian army had met disaster nearly 600 years before at the hands of the Turks. Serbian opinion was divided on whether to go down in a blaze of glory or attempt a winter retreat through the Albanian mountains to the Adriatic. The latter course was finally accepted; 250,000 troops and civilians, including 25,000 Austrian POW's, started the march. Cold, hunger, and hostile Alba-

nians took their toll, and only 125,000 reached the Adriatic in mid-December. The survivors were rescued by Italian vessels and transported to Corfu where a small Serbian army was reformed and would fight again on the Salonika front. Over 100,000 Serbs fell in the campaign and another 160,000 were taken prisoner. Tiny Montenegro was overwhelmed as well, and formally surrendered to the Austrians on January 25, 1916.

The Central Powers stopped their advance at the Greek border for political rather than military reasons (Greece was technically still neutral) thus serving the Allied force at Salonika.

### Enter Italy

Italy's entrance into the war on 23 May 1915 came as no great surprise to the Central Powers, though Italy, through her membership in the Triple Alliance, was technically an ally of Germany and Austria. Italy's membership had been stimulated by colonial rivalries with France which were eventually forgotten. What Italian nationalists could not forget, however, was Austrian possession of "unredeemed" Italian lands, principally Trieste and the Trentino. The Allies could, and did, promise these areas to Italy (plus much more) in the secret Treaty of London of 26 April 1915. The Austrians refused German requests to cede the territories in order to preserve Italian neutrality. The Italian Army was not considered much of a threat, however. Its performance in the recent Tripolitania War had not been impressive. Nor did the present war generate any mass enthusiasm among Italians. To a peasant in Umbria or Sicily, the slogan "Trent and Trieste" had little appeal.

The Italians began their mobilization in late April. By 23 May they had 23 divisions more or less ready, and it was decided to assume the offensive immediately. The Italian Commando Supremo had hoped to coordinate their action with a Russian attack on Hungary and a Serbian push across the Danube. By mid-May, however, the Russians were being driven from Galicia, and the Serbians proved deeply suspicious of Italian aspirations in the Balkans. The dream of a quick advance on Vienna thus dispelled, the Italians were left on their own to face a geographic-strategic situation of immense difficulty.

Nowhere did terrain exert a more important influence than on the Italian Front, and it was virtually all adverse to the Italians. The frontier was some 500 miles in length and was basically divided into three sectors. The most obvious was the Trentino, a mountainous wedge of Austrian territory thrust like a dagger into the northern Italian plain. The only avenue for a major advance into the Trentino was the Adige valley, a narrow trench which had been heavily fortified by the Austrians. The Trentino provided the Austrians with an offensive base for cutting off the Italian armies on the Isonzo. The Italians were blessed in one aspect — an excellent rail net which allowed for the rapid shifting of troops — while the Austrians in the Trentino were dependent on one inadequate and circuitous line.

The central sector was the zone of the forbidding Carnic Alps. The passes in the area were over 6500 feet and suitable only for mountain troops of which the Italians never had enough. The Isonzo sector was the only sector which offered any strategic results and was less difficult, if only by comparison, than the other two. Trieste was only 30 miles from the frontier, and a breakthrough here would open up the interior of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to invasion. The Austrians, however, occupied a naturally strong position east of the Isonzo river which the works of man had made virtually invincible. The river was backed by two rugged limestone plateaus, the Carso and the Biansizza. Each had important peaks (Monte San



Michele and Monte Hermada on the Carso and Monte San Gabriele on the Biansizza) which completely dominated the western approaches to the river. In the Carso natural caverns had been connected into a series of underground galleries that could shelter entire divisions. Opposite Tolmino and Gorizia, the Austrians had heavily fortified bridgeheads. The Italian position was best summed up as follows: "The river could not be crossed until the mountains were taken, and the mountains could not be taken until the river was crossed."

On 24 May, General Luigi Cadorna, Italian Commander-in-Chief, launched his available forces into a general advance against the east face of the Trentino and the Isonzo. He hoped to seize as much territory as possible before the Austrians could transfer substantial forces from Galicia. The Austrians, in fact, had assembled 14 divisions, five of them formed from local Landsturm, plus about 50,000 Standschützen (local militia), in the Trentino. These forces were deployed in natural defensive positions behind the frontier. The Italian advance stopped as soon as it encountered these positions, and the initial attack was halted on 16 June.

Cadorna, resigned to a war of attrition, sought to wear down the Austrians on the Isonzo (now the 5th Army under Borojevic) with four offensives between 23 June and 2 December. Those first four "battles of the Isonzo" achieved minuscule gains at an immense cost — 260,000 killed and wounded and 22,500 taken prisoner. The Italian infantry had shown a reckless bravery which had impressed the Austrians. The latter's losses were some 160,000.

By the end of 1915, the Italian Army was decimated and exhausted and would probably have succumbed to a major enemy offensive. The Austrians still had the majority of their divisions on the Eastern front, though their forces against Italy had increased to 22 divisions plus the *Alpenkorps*, a crack German division.

### Gallipoli — The great Fiasco

The Allied scheme to aid Russia and knock Turkey out of the war by seizing the Straits first took the form of a naval assault. Between February and March 1915, an Anglo-French fleet under Rear Admiral Sir John de Roebuck pumelled the Turkish forts guarding the mouth of the Dardanelles. The fortifications of the Narrows, however, were expected to be more formidable. In addition to 16 permanent forts, the Germans and Turks had deployed a number of mobile howitzer batteries, and the waters had been sown with numerous mine fields.

On 18 March, de Roebuck led his 12 British (including the new *Queen Elizabeth*) and four French battleships into the Narrows. In a day-long gun duel, the Allied fleet appeared to be getting the better of the forts, but two British and one French vessel were suddenly sunk by hidden mines. Two other ships had to be beached and another French battleship was put out of action by Turkish fire. De Roebuck withdrew, and it was decided to seize the Straits by the amphibious assault of ground forces. De Roebuck never knew how close he came to victory. The Turks were all but out of ammunition and were, in fact, preparing to abandon the forts.

The Mediterranean Expeditionary Forces (Sir Ian Hamilton) consisted of the British 29th Division, the Royal Naval Division, the Anzac Corps (2 divisions) and a composite French division. Its goal was to seize the Gallipoli peninsula and thus clear the way for the fleet into the Sea of Marmara.

The Gallipoli peninsula is a rugged, scrub-covered mass of hills and ravines with most of its coastline formed by steep cliffs. The narrow point

at Bulair would seem to be the logical invasion site but was judged unsuitable because of the constricted, marshy ground, heavy Turkish fortifications, and the shallow offshore waters. The final plan envisioned a double landing on the southern part of the peninsula at Cape Helles and Gaba Tepe. The French were to make a first landing at Kum Kale on the Adriatic side and the Navy was to demonstrate off Bulair in order to deceive the Turks, which they did.

The peninsula was guarded by the Turkish 5th Army under the direct command of Liman von Sanders. He had six divisions — two at the southern end, two at Bulair, and two more near Kum Kale. The naval attack had put Sanders on the alert, but the naval demonstration off Bulair on 25 April convinced him that it was the main enemy assault.

The British landings were an epic of confusion and mismanagement. The Anzacs landed at night a mile away from their target area and spent precious hours trying to find each other in the dark. One group actually did manage to get going towards their objective of the Chunuk Bair heights, but they were thrown back by the Turkish 19th division, commanded by Mustapha Kemal Pasha (the future Kemal Ataturk). His initiative probably saved the whole Turkish position on the peninsula.

At Cape Helles, the British landed at five separate beaches. In one, the collier *River Clyde* was grounded to act as a landing ship and its troops were slaughtered by the Turkish guns as they tried to struggle ashore. Elsewhere the troops were pinned down by small Turkish forces or milled around aimlessly on the beach. In fact, less than two Turkish battalions were available to oppose the landing. By the time the British were able to collect themselves for a concentrated effort towards their objective of Achi Baba, the Turks had formed a solid defensive line in front of the village of Krithia. Despite repeated and costly assaults in the following months, the Allies were never able to budge the Turks out of the line nor were the Turks able to drive the Allies back into the sea. The MEF was gradually increased to 13 divisions, the 5th Army to 16.

In August, one more try was made to salvage the expedition by landing two divisions at Suvla Bay, north of the Anzac cove, which would march east and cut off the Turks on the lower part of the peninsula. The landing was made on 6 August, against slight opposition, but once again the troops dawdled while their commander tried to figure out what to do next, and the Turks were able to seal off the beachhead. Despite some more bloody and useless attacks by both sides, the expedition was washed up and evacuation was begun on 22 November and completed by 20 December. Amazingly, in a belated show of competence, the Allies pulled off the evacuation without the loss of a single man. The cost for the whole affair was an Allied casualty list of 214,000 against a Turkish loss of 213,000.

### Other Theatres

One minor success of the Gallipoli expedition was to contain the best elements of the Turkish Army and prevent their transfer to the Caucasus. The Russians had followed up on their victory at Sarikhan by pushing into the area around Lake Van. A Russian force of about 25,000 was surprised and defeated by larger Turkish forces at Malazgirt. The Turks in turn were surprised and routed by a largely cavalry force under General N. N. Baratov at Kara-Killise.

In Mesopotamia, the British force had continued to grow to a force of two infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade. This force pushed slowly up the Tigris and Euphrates against a Turkish force

of about 25,000. By 28 September, a British force under Major General C.V.F. Townshend with about 14,000 Indian troops had reached Kut-il-Amara. Despite the declining strength of his force, Townshend pushed on to Al-Azziya on 5 October and was determined to take Baghdad before year's end. He failed to break the Turkish position, however, and his exhausted Indian troops gave way on 22 November. Over-extended and faced with growing Turkish forces, Townshend drew his forces back to Kut. Here he was besieged by the Turks on 3 December. With a two-months supply of food and plenty of ammunition, he waited for relief — which would never come.

Asiatic Turkey in 1915 was the scene of one of the grimmest incidents of modern history. The eastern *vilayets* (provinces) of Anatolia were largely peopled by Christian Armenians. Isolated cases of collaboration between local Armenians and Russian forces had convinced the Young Turk government of the wholesale disloyalty of the Armenian population. The Turks therefore decided to implement a plan of forced "resettlement". The result was a calculated campaign of genocide that led to the slaughter of an estimated 1,500,000 Armenians.

### OPERATIONS IN 1916 Russia Resurgent

Despite their limited means, the Russians had done a remarkable job of rebuilding and rearming their shattered armies in the winter of 1915-1916. A million new recruits were put into the line, most with three months training. The arms plants were now producing 100,000 rifles per month and 1,125,000 had been received from foreign sources, including the Japanese. The number of infantry divisions rose to 130 and cavalry to 39 and the number of machine guns for the average infantry regiment rose from 10 to 12. The losses in field artillery had not been completely made up, but there were enough field guns to give each division 24 to 36, while the number of "heavy" pieces was increased to over 500. The relative inactivity of the winter also allowed the stockpiling of over 8,000,000 76.2mm shells and over 1,000,000 of larger caliber shells.

This situation was not quite as rosy as it sounds, however. There was a dire shortage of experienced officers, the majority of the pre-war crop having fallen, and their replacements lacked both quantity and quality. The army was also lacking in confidence. On the Northern and Western Fronts especially there was a belief that the Germans "could do anything."

The Stavka had deduced that the Army's condition would permit a resumption of the offensive in June. The Tsar, no strategical genius, had decided on a main effort by the Western Front to recapture Vilna. It would be supported by subsidiary attacks by the Northern Front from Riga and Brusilov's Southwest Front in Galicia. In February, however, the German attack on Verdun began — Falkenhayn's plan to wear down the French.

The French asked the Russians to create a diversion, and the Russians once again went into premature action to save their ally. The 20 divisions of the Russian 2nd Army were concentrated on a 40-mile front around Lake Narotch; 271 guns of medium and heavy caliber and 1000 field guns were gathered for support. Targeted for 1 March, the attack did not get underway until March 18. It struck the front of the German 10th Army under Scholtz, defended by eight divisions, two of them cavalry. The Russians achieved some initial success capturing most of the first and second German positions and penetrating the third in spots. The beginning of the attack, unfortunately for the



Russians, coincided with the spring thaw. By day the ground became a quagmire, only to refreeze at night. The Germans pounded the Russian infantry mercilessly and counter-attacked to win back important positions.

The attack ended on March 30 with a gain of one mile and a casualty list of 110,000 men. German losses were under 20,000. The attack of the 5th Army from the Jakobstadt bridgehead fared no better and cost another 28,000 men. These failures further eroded the confidence and morale of the Northern and Western Fronts. The Tsar decided to wait for better weather and try again.

### The Brusilov Offensive

In May the Austrians launched an offensive in Italy, and now it was the Italians' turn to ask for help. The Russian commander north of the Pripyat marshes felt incapable of attacking again so soon, but Brusilov offered to attack in the south. Alone among the higher ranks of the Russian Army, General Brusilov had made a thorough study of German tactics. He decided that numerical superiority was not necessary along the whole front; in fact, this would only serve to give away the impending attack. Instead, he believed in achieving local superiority on narrow fronts. Great emphasis was placed on secrecy and the careful briefing of officers and training of troops. Although both Brusilov and the Stavka expected only a local success, the attack was to achieve Russia's greatest victory of the war.

On 4 June 1916, Brusilov launched his carefully prepared offensive. The attack met with astonishing initial success and for a time it seemed that the whole Austrian Front would collapse. Nineteen German divisions had to be rushed from other areas of the Eastern Front, 15 more from the hard-pressed Western Front, and the Austrian offensive in Italy had to be halted. Also, Romania was emboldened to enter the war against the Central Powers. By the time the front was stabilized in late September, Austrian losses exceeded 800,000 men, over half of whom were prisoners. German losses were another 235,000 while the Russian losses totalled well over 1,000,000.

The Brusilov offensive had a number of important results. Russia's huge losses started her down the last leg of the road to revolution. Austria's defeat destroyed most of what remained of her military credibility and led to the imposition of direct or indirect German control all along the Eastern Front. Falkenhayn's underestimation of Russia's recuperation powers, coupled with the failure of his Verdun venture, led to his dismissal as Chief-of-Staff on 29 August. His replacement was none other than Hindenburg, with Ludendorff as First Quarter-Master General. Last but not least, the preliminary Russian success emboldened the Romanians to enter the war on the side of the Entente.

### Romania's Fatal Decision

Romania's situation was similar to that of Italy's. In 1914, the Romanians were technically allied with Austria and Germany, if only because their aged King Carol I was Hohenzollern. His death in September 1914 left the reins of government in the hands of his pro-Allied nephew Ferdinand and his opportunistic Premier, Ion Bratianu. Romania's adherence to the Entente became only a question of time. As a reward, Romania could hope to gain the predominantly Romanian inhabited province of Transylvania and Bukovina from Austria-Hungary. The Central Powers did their best to try to interest the Romanians in the Russian province of Bessarabia, but simply could not offer as much. Romania's resources of grain and petroleum, however, were badly needed by the Central Powers.

In mid-1916, the time looked right for Romanian action: Germany had failed at Verdun, the Allies were pounding on the Somme, Austria was bogged down in Italy, Brusilov's offensive was at high tide in Galicia, and the Allied armies at Salonika promised to launch a supporting attack against Bulgaria. The Allies, in fact, wished the Romanians to direct their main assault against Bulgaria as well, so as to knock that country out of the war completely. The Romanians, however, were determined to liberate their kinsmen in Transylvania. The Romanians also proved hard bargainers in securing guarantees from the Allies, and by the time they actually entered the war on 27 August 1916, the position of the Central Powers was much improved and they were already planning offensive action against their new enemy.

The Romanians mobilized 560,000 men in 23 divisions and divided them into four armies. The 1st, 2nd, and 4th armies were to march into Transylvania, while the 3rd Army was to watch the long Bulgarian frontier along the Danube in the Dobrudja. The Romanian Army was poorly trained and led and suffered from a general shortage of material. The Romanians also lacked an indigenous arms industry and had only a six-week supply of munitions. The Russians, who were none too enthusiastic about Romanian intervention, were supposed to supply them with 300 tons of munitions per day, but no more than 30 tons materialized.

The Romanian advance into Transylvania began on 28 August. Forced to advance through widely separated passes, the Romanian columns could not support each other. Initially the only resistance came from the local detachments of Austrian Landsturm which nevertheless slowed the Romanian advance. Kronstadt and Hermannstadt were captured, but after a maximum advance of about 40 miles, the Romanian drive ground to a halt because of logistical difficulties.

On 17 August, the Turkish 2nd Army at last got under way, and one corps under Mustapha Kemal managed to temporarily wrest the towns of Mush and Bitlis from the Russians. Yudenich was able to counterattack and retake the towns on 24 August, inflicting heavy losses on the Turks. The Turks had suffered their worst defeat of the war. Losses from combat as well as disease and desertion were so great that only 12 divisions were organized out of the original 26.

Elsewhere, the British forces in Mesopotamia made three attempts to relieve Kut in January, March, and April 1916. The Turks had constructed a series of strong defensive positions along the Tigris against which the British and Indian troops beat themselves in vain. The efforts cost 14,000 casualties and Kut was at last starved into surrender on 29 April. The capitulation was a blow to British morale but had little effect in Arab lands.

### 1917-1918

#### The Collapse of the Eastern Front

Throughout the winter of 1916-1917, the morale of the Russian Army and home front rapidly deteriorated. Ammunition was again running low at the front and there were countless shortages in the cities. The Tsar alienated what little support he still had among the aristocracy and the liberal middle class by refusing to allow basic governmental reform. Food riots broke out in Petrograd on 12 March 1917 and soon turned into full-scale revolution. On 15 March, the Tsar was forced to abdicate. A provisional government dominated by the socialist Alexander Kerenski came into being, but it had a rival for power in the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies which came to be dominated by the

Bolsheviks. An order was issued which abolished capital punishment in the army and thereby opened the gates to more desertion. In the countryside the peasantry was taking issues into its own hands and, seizing the land it had so long desired, and soldiers wanted to get home to get their fair share.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff had left the Eastern Front in the capable hands of Hoffman. The latter did not fully understand the reason for the Russian disintegration, but felt that it would be exacerbated by inaction. He nevertheless decided to encourage fraternization and local raids. As an additional step the Germans arranged the transportation of Vladimir Lenin from Switzerland to Russia in the hopes that he would stimulate Bolshevik propaganda and speed the Russian collapse.

Kerenski and the provisional government undid themselves by attempting to uphold Russia's commitment to the war. Kerenski decided to try for a victory to stimulate enthusiasm for the war and delegated the Southwest Front under Kornilov (Brusilov was now Commander-in-Chief) to make another attack in Galicia, supported by subsidiary efforts in Romania. The principal attacking forces consisted of the 7th and 11th armies with a total of 33½ divisions including a high proportion of Finnish, Siberian, and Polish troops, now the most reliable elements in the army.

In August 1916, Sarraill was ordered to pin down the Bulgarians with an attack in order to help the Romanians. The attack was launched on 10 September and coincided with a Bulgarian attack. The Serbians managed to drive back the Bulgarians and captured Monastir, inside Serbia. The Bulgarians, on the other hand, drove back Sarraill's right wing and established themselves behind the Struma River. Suspecting that the King had sanctioned Bulgarian occupation of Greek territory, northern Greece erupted into revolution. The whole affair was stagemanaged by the Allies, who set up a government under Venizelos in Crete, occupied Athens and Piraeus, took over the Greek fleet, and forced Constantine into exile in Germany.

### The Trentino Offensive

Conrad had always believed that the best way to defeat the Italians was an offensive out of the Trentino. The apparently quiet situation on the Eastern Front prompted him to transfer divisions to Italy in the spring of 1916. By May he had assembled a force of 15 divisions, including some of Austria's best mountain regiments, in the Trentino. This was no overwhelming force and Conrad hoped to make up for his shortage of troops by utilizing over 350 pieces of medium and heavy artillery. His plan was to drive into the north Italian plain and capture the vital rail junction of Padua, thus isolating the bulk of the Italian Army. The attack was launched on 25 May by the Austrian 3rd and 11th Armies and struck the Italian 1st Army. The Austrians made good initial gains and captured Arsiero and Asiago, gateways to the plain. The Italians were able to bring in large reinforcements and the pressure of the Brusilov offensive forced the Austrians to halt the attack on 17 June and pull back to a more defensible line. Austrian losses were 80,000; Italian losses amounted to 120,000.

Cadorna soon resumed his offensive on the Isonzo. Between August and November, 1916, the sixth thru ninth Battles of the Isonzo were fought. Only the sixth achieved any real success by capturing Gorizia and Monte San Michele, but casualties, as usual, were immense, over 160,000 against 100,000 Austrians.

### Turkish Fronts

Once the grip of the Gallipoli campaign had eased, Enver decided to resume his march of con-



quest in the Caucasus. The Turkish 3rd Army had been rebuilt and Enver planned to transfer the 2nd Army to the area south of Lake Van. Once completed, this move would give the Turks 26 divisions against 15 Russian. The movement of the 2nd Army could not be completed until August, however, and Enver, impatient as always, ordered the 3rd Army to attack at the end of May. The advance, after some gains, quickly bogged down. An assault against Russian-held Trebizond in June was no more successful.

The Russian forces in the Caucasus had not been idle, however. In February 1916, Yudenich had produced a considerable feat in storming the Turkish fortress of Erzurum without siege artillery. He used the cover of a snow storm to infiltrate his infantry between the forts. On April 17 the Russians had seized Trebizond on the Black Sea coast. Following the Turkish offensive, Yudenich decided to strike back. Massing a largely cavalry force, he smashed the Turkish front at Bayburt on 2 July and the Turkish 3rd Army fell back in great disorder. Erzincan was captured on 25 July, and the 3rd Army was virtually annihilated. The Turks suffered 20,000 killed and lost 17,000 prisoners.

Crisis now loomed on the Southern Front. Here the troubleshooter Mackensen had assembled an army out of available Bulgarian, Turkish, and German troops and by 1 September was threatening the Romanians' only port of Constanta. A Russian corps, including a Serbian volunteer division, temporarily halted him, but on 23 October Mackensen captured the port and pushed the Russo-Romanians to the north. Leaving part of his forces to hold the Dobrudja, he moved the rest of his "Danube Army" to Svishtov where he crossed the Danube as part of a concerted drive on the Romanian capital of Bucharest.

In the meantime, the Austrian 1st and the German 9th Armies were assembled in Transylvania under the command of Falkenhayn. He systematically fell on the Romanian columns and drove them back through the mountain passes. With winter closing in, Falkenhayn probed for a weak spot and, after some initial rebuffs, forced the Vulcan pass on 10 November. Rolling into the Wallachian plain, the Central Powers drove the Romanians eastward. The Romanians attempted two desperate counter-attacks to prevent the juncture of Falkenhayn with Mackensen, but were eventually forced to abandon Bucharest on 5 December. The arrival of additional Russian forces could not stem the Romanian rout. By early January 1917, the Romanians found a refuge behind the Siret River in Moldavia where they were saved only by torrential rains which prevented the Central Powers from pursuing effectively. The Romanians lost over 400,000 men and the Romanian Army was eliminated as an effective fighting force. The Central Powers suffered about 75,000 casualties but now possessed the vital granaries and oilfields.

### Salonika

The failure of the Gallipoli expedition had cast a pall over Allied Eastern policy, but it was decided that an Allied presence should be maintained in the Aegean region and the Greek port of Salonika was selected as a suitable base, if only because an Allied force was already in possession of it. Greece, however, was technically still a neutral country, and the attitude of the Royal Greek Army was uncertain. The Greek king was married to the Kaiser's sister and was staunchly pro-German. He had a clever political enemy, however, in his ex-Premier Venizelos. The latter had originally arranged for the Allies to occupy Salonika, a move which led to his dismissal by the King.

Salonika was hardly an ideal base. By the end of 1916, the Allies had six British, four French, and

one Italian division (actually a corps) plus a Russian brigade and the reconstituted Serbian Army of six divisions. The overall commander was French General Maurice Sarrail, although each nation continued to send independent instructions to its contingent. The port facilities of Salonika were completely inadequate to supply such a force and most of the "Orient" Army's supplies had to come via Piraeus where they were systematically recorded by members of the German consulate. Serrail spent much of the summer of 1916 fortifying the port, but did nothing to drain the surrounding swamps which spread malaria among the troops and soon laid-out entire divisions.

For the first time the Russians had clear material superiority. They had 693 field guns and 421 medium and heavy pieces on the front of attack against 284 and 244 for the enemy. There were even 120 airplanes, many flown by French and British airmen, which gave them control of the air. The defending front was held by only two German, four Austrian, and two Turkish divisions. The attack began on 1 July after a three-day bombardment. The attack captured some ground in the first few days, but soon wore down from casualties and the refusal of reserves to move up. On 8 July, the 8th Army (12 divisions) was thrown into the fray and managed a 30-mile penetration of the Austrian line near Halicz and took 40,000 prisoners. By 21 July, however, the Russian assaults were definitely stopped, and Hoffman launched a carefully prepared, counter-offensive on 24 July which broke the Russian Front wide open. By 5 August, the Germans had retaken Czernowitz and driven the Russians out of Galicia. The Russians lost at least 100,000 combat casualties and an equal number of prisoners. The supporting attack by the Russian 6th Army and the refurbished Romanian Army in Moldavia fared no better, the Romanians alone scoring some local successes.

Hoffman, Hindenburg and Ludendorff agreed that one more blow would topple the intransigent Kerenski and pave the way for peace. On 1 September, 6 divisions of the German 8th Army forced a crossing on the Dvina near Uxkull and swung west to capture Riga. The city fell on 3 September without much of a struggle. So precipitate was the Russian withdrawal that only 9000 prisoners were taken. An interesting aspect of the battle was the first use of the new "Hutier" (commander of the 8th Army) or infiltration tactics which utilized highly trained shock troops to thrust deep into the enemy rear while pockets of resistance were mopped up by support waves.

The Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd on 6-7 November (25-26 October, old style) and negotiations between the Soviets and the Central Powers were opened on 22 December (an armistice was declared on 2 December). The Bolsheviks balked at agreeing to the Germans' harsh peace terms, however, and the negotiations dragged on with the Russians hoping for the outbreak of revolution in Germany and the rest of Europe. On 10 February 1918, Leon Trotsky, head of the Soviet delegation, declared "peace" unilaterally and walked out of the negotiations. The German reaction was a resumption of hostilities on 18 February. The Russian Army had largely disintegrated, however, and the Germans and Austrians encountered only sporadic resistance and they poured into the Baltic states and the Ukraine. The latter they recognized as an independent state and signed a separate peace with. The Bolsheviks at last agreed to the German demands on 5 March and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Under its terms, Russia surrendered a third of her population, a third of her agriculture land, and more than half of her industry.

The war on the Eastern Front thus ended with Russia defeated and racked by civil strife. Russian fortunes in the war were more often defeat than victory, but it should not obscure the fact that Russia had borne a great burden and, for the most part, bravely. Russia had repeatedly sacrificed herself for her allies and tied down a large part of the German Army and a majority of the Austrian and Turkish. The Central Powers had won, but their conquests required the maintenance of large garrisons in the East. The Germans had 59 divisions in Russia when they opened their attacks in the West in March 1918, and 26 were still there in November.

### The Balkan Front

In May 1917, Sarrail attempted another offensive against the Bulgarians, but the effort failed largely because the Serbians, who were at odds with Sarrail, failed to give adequate support. Venizelos, in the meantime, had been installed as the head of a new Greek government which officially joined the Allies on 2 July 1917. In December 1917, the bumbling Sarrail was relieved and subsequently replaced with General Louis Franchet d'Esperey, an aggressive soldier.

In September 1918, Franchet d'Esperey had some 330,000 men against about an equal number of Bulgarians in the Bulgarian 1st, 2nd, and 4th Armies and the German 11th Army. The latter contained only a few German battalions. The Bulgarians, many of whom had been under arms since 1912, were war-weary and had lost confidence in the Germans in the light of the latter's setbacks on the Western Front. On 14 September 1918, the Serbians went over to the attack and broke the Bulgarians' line east of Monastir. On 15 and 16 September, a general Allied offensive began and the Bulgarian Front crumbled. The Bulgarians were basically intent on going home and agreed to an armistice on 29 September. Thus Allied forces pushed on to the Danube. The Serbians re-entered Belgrade on 1 November and the Romanians, who had been forced to sign a separate peace in March, re-entered the war.

The Salonika expedition has often been criticized as an expensive way to defeat Bulgaria which, at any rate, would have fallen with the defeat of her larger allies. Nevertheless, by turning the German flank in Europe, the final victory in the Balkans made a continuation of the war impossible.

### Italy

Cadorna kept up the pressure on the Austrians with the 10th (12 May - 8 June, 1917) and the 11th (19 August - 12 September) Battles of the Isonzo. The last achieved a five mile penetration of the main Austrian defense line on the Biansizza and brought the Austrians on the Isonzo to the point of collapse. The Italian offensive had also drained the Italian Army's manpower and morale and the troops were increasingly susceptible to defeatist propaganda. Cadorna, nevertheless, began to lay plans for a 12th offensive.

The commander of the Austrian 5th Army on the Isonzo, General Borojevic, asked for enough troops to assume the offensive and restore his armies' position and morale. Despite the initial objections of the Austrian Emperor, Karl I, who wanted to maintain Austrian integrity on the Italian Front and of Ludendorff who wanted to launch a *coup de grace* in Moldavia, seven German divisions were ultimately provided to form, with eight picked Austrian divisions, the 14th Army and placed under the command of German General von Below.

The army was secretly concentrated during October in the mountainous area north of Tolmino. Here the troops were taught infiltra-



tion tactics. These elite forces, trained to lead the assault, were called *Stosstruppen*, literally "shock troops". After an intense bombardment, the attack commenced on 24 October. This blow struck a thinly manned portion of General Capello's 2nd Army. The Central Powers rapidly captured the village of Caporetto which was to lend the battle its name. The infiltration tactics destroyed the Italian Front and forced Cadorna to order his forces behind the Tagliamento on 27 October. An audacious Austrian corps commander forced a crossing of the Tagliamento at Corino, and Cadorna ordered another withdrawal behind the Piave on 4 November. The Austro-Germans had not anticipated such a victory and were unprepared to exploit it. The Italians found a refuge behind the Piave, their northern flank protected by a strong position on the Monte Grappa. The Austro-Germans attempted to capture the Grappa in December, but the Italians line held thanks to the arrival of five French and six British divisions from the Western Front.

Caporetto was a needed tonic for the Austrians and a disaster for the Italians. Italian losses totalled 30,000 killed and wounded and 240,000 prisoners. The defeat did serve, however, to galvanize the Italian nation in support of the war.

During the winter of 1917-1918, both the Austrians and Italians sought to prepare their armies for a showdown in the spring. On 15 June, the Austrians launched a general assault on the Italian position in the Alps and behind the Piave. Despite initial gains, dispersion of effort and resolute Italian resistance stopped the attack on 24 June. The new Italian Commander-in-Chief, General Armando Diaz, bid his time until 24 October 1918 when he launched an offensive with 51 Italian, three British, two French, and one Czech divisions against 58 Austrian. The Habsburg Empire was already collapsing internally, and the army could offer no cohesive resistance. By 30 October, the Austrian line on the Piave had been breached and the Italians had captured Vittorio Veneto. The Austrian Army rapidly crumbled, and an armistice was concluded on 4 November. The Italians took over 500,000 prisoners in the final operations.

### Turkish Fronts

The Russian troops in the Caucasus began to melt away in March 1917 and by the end of the year had virtually abandoned the front. Had the revolution not taken place, the Russians would probably have occupied Ankara and Mosul. As it was, the Turks were saved and followed up the Russian withdrawal with their newly formed 9th Army of 12 divisions. The Turkish advance was resisted by Armenian and Georgian forces and the Turkish re-entrance into Armenian territories saw a replay of the massacres of 1915.

The Turks recaptured Erzurum on 12 March 1918 and occupied Kars on 27 April. By September, the Turks were laying siege to Baku which was held by a small British force. The city was taken by the Turks on 14 September. Turkish dominance in Transcaucasia was short-lived, however, ending with Turkey's surrender on 31 October 1918.

British forces in Egypt had carried out a methodical advance through the Sinai during 1916, constructing a railroad and aqueduct as they went. In March 1917, they confronted a strong Turkish position at Gaza. Two unsuccessful attacks were launched against it in March and April, which cost the British 10,000 casualties against 4,000 Turkish. The British forces were then taken over by resolute General Allenby who succeeded in taking Gaza on 7 November and pursued the defeated Turks to Jerusalem which he entered on

11 December. The Turks, commanded by Falkenhayn, made an unsuccessful attempt to recapture the Holy City on 26 December. The Turks were also plagued by Arab irregular forces under the command of T.E. Lawrence who kept up consistent raids on the Hejaz railways.

Allenby launched his final offensive on 14 September 1918 with seven infantry and four cavalry divisions against 12 weak Turkish divisions and a 6000-man German force. The British had 75,000 combatants against no more than 30,000, even if the Germans are included. The situation has been aptly described as a "lion versus a sick tomcat." The tomcat was promptly gobbled up, and the British captured Damascus on 1 October and Homs on 16 October.

In Mesopotamia, the British had 166,000 troops against about 35,000 Turks. Baghdad fell on 11 March 1917 and, despite determined Turkish resistance, the remnants of their forces surrendered to the British at Mosul on 3 November 1918. The Mesopotamian campaign had cost the British Empire 92,500 men, most of them from disease. It was a high cost to safeguard a few oil wells.

The Turkish soldier, like the Russian, deserves more credit than he is generally accorded. Poorly provided for and often badly led, the Turk generally fought against larger and better equipped enemy forces. The Turk was in his element when defending a prepared position and could only be driven from it by a powerful effort.



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### WAR AIMS

One of the interesting facts of the First World War is that none of the initial belligerents save Austria (who wanted to crush Serbia) entered the war with any clearly defined aims except to defend themselves and their allies. The French certainly wanted to get back Alsace-Lorraine, and there were Pan-Germans who cast covetous eyes on the Russian Baltic provinces, but none of these issues were grounds for the nations themselves to go to war.

In the course of the war, both sides developed schemes for dividing up enemy territory, if only to justify the tremendous sacrifices. In the east, various annexationist groups in Germany like the Fatherland Party advocated massive acquisitions. These groups did not gain any particular importance until 1916 when Ludendorff lent them his support. In their final form, German aspirations sought to control Poland and the Baltic provinces outright and have economic overlordship of a vast *Mittel-europe* which would include Austria-Hungary, the Balkans, and Turkey. The Ukraine and the Caucasus would likewise be made economic vassals. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918 in fact secured most of these aims.

The Austrians were more moderate in their aims, wishing only to destroy Serbia and secure a dominant position in the Balkans. The occupation of Poland in 1915 led to a conflict with the Germans, however, over the future of that territory. The Austrians favored annexing Poland themselves, but the Germans wanted an "independent" Poland, and in September 1916 a Kingdom of Poland was proclaimed (without a king). Hopes of raising a large Polish army to fight beside the Central Powers were unfulfilled, and the Poles, finding their freedom a sham, ceased to cooperate. In November 1918, they successfully revolted against German and Austrian occupation.

The Russians were less specific in their war aims, although there was a general consensus that East Prussia would have to be annexed along with Galicia and portions of Posen and Silesia to create an autonomous Poland. In the Near East, the Russians expected to get the Straits, sizeable portions of Anatolia, and perhaps even parts of Syria. The British, of course, objected strongly to the latter.

The various states which entered the war later generally did so for some calculated territorial aim. The Italians were promised the Trentino and Trieste as well as part of the Dalmatian coast, a dominant position in Albania, and a share of the Ottoman domains. The Serbs expected to gain all of the Habsburg South Slav territories, and the Romanians were promised Transylvania, Bukovina, and portions of the Hungarian plain. The Bulgarians wanted Macedonia and were offered Serbia up to the Morava.

The Turkish strongman, Enver Pasha, envisioned carving out a vast empire from the Turkish regions of the Caucasus and Russian Central Asia, plus reasserting Turkish authority in Egypt and Libya.



## BRISK LITTLE WAR

### The Invasions of Serbia

Serbia's ambitions toward the South Slav territories of the Austrian Empire, and the latter's stubborn desire to retain them was the immediate cause of World War I. The assassination of the Austrian heir-apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, sparked the conflagration. The Austrians believed, with some justification, that Serbia's government was behind the murder, and decided to take on their small but dangerous neighbor.

In 1914, Serbia, situated in the middle of the Balkan peninsula, controlled the main routes from central Europe to the Aegean and Constantinople. Her population, dwarfed by Austria's 51,000,000, was a mere 4.8 million, 86% of whom were peasants. The only appreciable lowlands in the mass of mountains which made up Serbia were those along the banks of the Sava, Danube, and Morava rivers. The rail line leading to the Greek port of Salonika was Serbia's only source of contact with her allies.

Austria declared war on 28 July. By 12 August the Serbs had assembled their small army which was composed of 11 1/2 infantry, one cavalry, and numerous small detachments. Nearly all the troops were veterans of the recent Balkan Wars. They formed three armies,

each not much stronger than an Austrian corps. Their commander the Voivode Radomir Putnik, a semi-invalid, drew them up in a central position around the town of Valjevo. Putnik's plan was to wait until the Austrians had committed themselves and, once their main thrust became apparent, to strike it with everything he had. Trouble was, he also had to keep an eye on the Bulgars, who were seething for revenge. As well, the attitude of the Greeks was unclear. His one ally, tiny Montenegro, with its irregular army of some 50,000 could not be of much help.

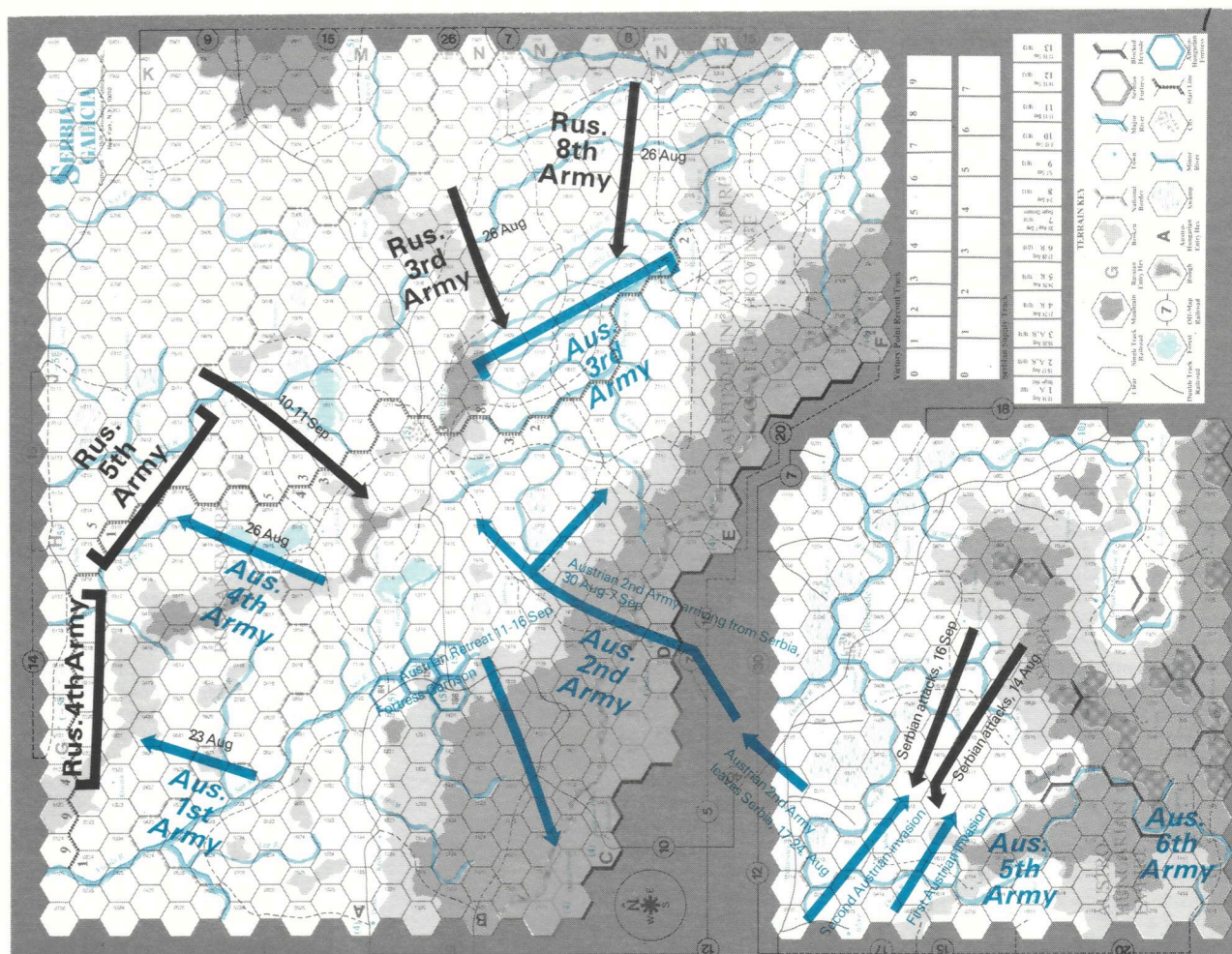
The Austrian commander was the military governor of Bosnia, Oskar Potiorek. On 12 August he had the 5th and 6th Armies deployed in Bosnia, and the 2nd north of the Sava and Danube. With seven infantry and one cavalry divisions, the 2nd was the stronger. It also possessed the best communications. However, since it was earmarked for transport to Galicia, it could not be committed to the offensive. Of Potiorek's two armies in Bosnia, which had a combined strength of 10 1/2 infantry divisions and seven Gebirgs brigades, one division was assigned to garrison the naval base at Cattaro and the rest of the 6th Army was deployed against an imagined Montenegrin threat. Thus, the brunt of the invasion, which began on 12 August, was borne almost completely by the 5th Army — mostly by the 2 1/2 divisions of its XIII corps. On 15

August, the Austrians had pushed across the Drina river to Jadar. That was as far as they got, however, as the counterattack by Putnik's armies threw them back across the border.

Potiorek's second offensive, launched on 8 September, forced the Serbs to abort their small offensive in the Srem area (between the Danube and Sava). He used his forces to better advantage this time, once again pushing across the Drina. The furious charges of the second Serb counterattack halted the Austrians on 16 September. This time, however, Potiorek's troops were not completely expelled from Serbian territory, and retained two small bridgeheads on the Drina and Sava.

Potiorek prepared his armies for a final offensive. Plagued by heavy casualties and low on ammunition, Putnik drew back his forces into the hills around Valjevo. On 5 November, the Austrians attacked out of their bridgeheads; by 15 November the Serbs were forced to abandon their positions before Valjevo. By 29 November the Serbs had abandoned Belgrade.

The Austrians appeared to have won a decisive victory, with the Serbs on the verge of complete collapse. However, in reality, the Austrians weren't much better off than the Serbs. Their front line units were decimated, and the survivors exhausted. To make things worse, rain had bogged their supply down on the miserable roads.





On 1 December the Serbs received the first shipment of munitions from the Allies via Salonika. King Peter arrived at the front, and the old man's appearance restored the sagging Serbian morale. On 3 December Putnik's armies were thrown into a general attack on the Austrian lines. The weary, overextended Austrians gave way and their retreat soon turned into a rout. By 15 December, the last Austrian soldiers were driven across the Sava and Drina.

Fed by blind hatred on both sides, the campaign was one of the most bitterly fought of the war. Although many of the Austrian troops were ethnic Serbs and Croats, they proved perfectly capable of killing their fellow South Slavs. The Austrians suffered a humiliating defeat and lost over 240,000 men, including 55,000 prisoners. Although there are no exact figures on Serbian losses, they certainly exceeded 150,000. This was amplified by a Typhus epidemic, triggered by the Austrian invasions, which killed more than 70,000 troops.

**Conrad's Gamble — The Galician Campaign** By 20 August, the Austro-Hungarian armies in Galicia were grouped as follows: the 1st Army under General von Dankl was massed along the San from Sandomierz to Przemyśl with 9½ infantry divisions, (including the Polish Legion under Pilsudski), two cavalry divisions and 2 Landsturm brigades. Around Krakow there was also the Kummer Group with 2½ Landsturm and one cavalry divisions. The 4th Army, under General von Auffenberg, was based north of Przemyśl with nine infantry and one cavalry division and one Landsturm brigade. The 3rd Army (Bruderman) was based on Lemberg and comprised 5½ infantry and three cavalry divisions. Scattered around the rest of eastern Galicia was the Kovess Group of eight infantry and three cavalry divisions and five Landsturm brigades. The 2nd Army (Bohm-Ermoli) was on its way from Serbia with another six infantry and one cavalry divisions. For his initial operations, therefore, Conrad had a total of 33½ infantry divisions, 10 cavalry divisions, and 10 Landsturm brigades.

Facing the Austrians was a comparable force of Russians, the Southwest Front under General Ivanov. This consisted of the 4th Army (Salza) at Lublin with eight infantry and two cavalry divisions, 5th Army (Plehue) with 8½ infantry and 2 cavalry at Kholm, 3rd Army (Ruski) with nine infantry and 3 cavalry at Dubno, and the 8th Army (Brusilov) with 9½ infantry and 2 cavalry at Proskurov — in all a total of 35 infantry and 9 cavalry divisions. Ivanov could soon expect the arrival of several Reserve divisions and 9th Army forming around Warsaw.

Both sides had amazingly little idea of each others intentions or dispositions. Conrad believed that the Russians would concentrate their main forces in the Lublin-Kholm area and so did the same. Ivanov, on the other hand, felt that the Austrians would strike eastwards from Lemberg and placed his strongest armies to offset this. Both commanders were committed to a headlong offensive. Like a couple of blindfolded prizefighters they went in flailing away, hoping to score a knockout punch. Luck at first favored Conrad. On 23rd August Dankl's 1st Army, moving north, collided with the Russian 4th near Krasnik. For three days the armies fought a confused battle in the summer heat. By 25 August the Russians concluded

that they had been beaten and retreated toward Lublin. Conrad was understandably, if prematurely, elated, and ordered his armies into high gear. On 26 August, the 4th Austrian Army met the Russian around Komarow. The result was similar to the earlier encounter. The Austrians, by merit of their superior artillery, gained the upper hand. By 1 September, the Russians were surrounded on three sides. Conrad, however, uncertain of the strength or whereabouts of the other Russian forces was concerned about the flanks of the enveloping force. He hesitated, and Plehve's 5th Army managed to escape to Kholm, but at the cost of some 16,000 prisoners and 100 guns. Conrad believed that he had met and defeated the Russians main strength. He was wrong and luck would now change sides.

**The Battle of Gnila Lipa** The Russian 3rd and 8th Armies had in the meantime been driving down into eastern Galicia brushing aside the scattered resistance of the Kovess Group. On 26 August, they met the Austrian 3rd Army which had hastily assumed a position behind the Gnila Lipa River, some 25 miles southeast of Lemberg. The Austrians were able to commit 6½ divisions to the battle, the Russians 16. By 30 August, the Austrians had been routed and were streaming back toward Lemberg. Ivanov believed that he too had met and defeated the main enemy forces and was prepared to stop and let his forces rest. The Grand Duke, however, insisted that the 3rd and 8th armies press on.

Conrad now ordered Auffenberg's 4th Army southeast in order to hit Ruski's flank. The forces of the Austrian 2nd Army were assembling south of Lemberg but were tired and disorganized from this long journey. By 8 September, the 4th, 3rd, and 2nd Austrian armies were facing the Russian 3rd and 8th armies 20 miles west of Lemberg. The Austrian 4th Army, however, had opened up a 40-mile gap between itself and the 1st, through which a revitalized Russian 5th Army now poured. In the resulting battle of Rava Ruska (10-11 September), the Austrian left flank was turned. Indeed, Auffenberg's 4th Army avoided encirclement only because another Russian wireless message was intercepted which revealed the danger.

Conrad, in the meantime, had launched a series of piecemeal and unsuccessful attacks against the Russian 3rd and 8th armies. On 11 September, Conrad ordered a general retreat behind the San River. This was completed on 16 September. The Austrian left flank was now menaced by the arrival of a new Russian army, the 9th, and Conrad was forced to order a further retreat to the Gorlice Tarnow, over 135 miles west of Lemberg. Conrad left behind a large garrison in the fortress of Przemyśl, hoping to obstruct the Russian advance and provide support for an eventual Austrian counter-offensive. Over 100,000 men, including the 23rd Honved division and five Landsturm brigades were left in the fortress. Here they would stay until hunger forced them to surrender in March 1915.

The Austrians had engaged nearly a million men in Galicia and lost over 350,000 of them, including 100,000 prisoners. The remainder were exhausted and demoralized, and only the Russian's supply difficulties prevented them from taking Krakow. Russian losses, largely a matter of conjecture, must have exceeded 200,000.

## BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE

In the spring and summer of 1915, the Germans and Austrians had maintained a continuous offensive in the East, driving the Russian Armies from the borders of East Prussia and the crests of the Carpathians, back 300 miles to the line running roughly from Dvinsk to the Romanian border. The Russians had suffered immense losses, and the Austro-Germans had confidently concluded that Russian offensive capabilities would remain limited throughout most of 1916. The Russian recovery was surprisingly rapid, however, and by February 1916, the Russian General Staff (Stavka) was contemplating a series of massive offensives as soon as weather permitted. In March, however, French entreaties to relieve pressure on Verdun prompted the Russians to launch a premature assault around Lake Naroch, which quickly bogged down in the spring thaw and was beaten back with heavy loss and contemptuous ease by the Germans.

Despite their setback, the Russians decided to make their main effort in the same area in June. It was felt, however, that some subsidiary effort should be made on the Galician Front, if only to tie down the predominantly Austrian forces there. The Commander of the Russian South-Western (Galician) Front was General Alexei Brusilov. Alone among the high-ranking Russian officers, he had studiously observed German tactics. Since the Stavka was unwilling to provide him with any reinforcements (units were, in fact, withdrawn from his front), he decided to concentrate men and material on limited fronts and in complete secrecy. Thus, by surprise and careful planning, he hoped to achieve at least local success without numerical superiority. The opposing forces were, in fact, just about equal.

From north to south, Brusilov's army groups comprised the 8th (Kaledin), 11th (Sakharov), 7th (Shcherbathev), and 9th (Letshitski) Armies with 40½ infantry and 16 cavalry divisions (approximately 660,000 combatants). They confronted 35 Austrian and two German infantry divisions and 11 Austrian cavalry divisions with a total of around 650,000 combatants. From south to north, the Austrian-German forces were arrayed as follows: Austrian 7th Army (General von Pflanzer-Baltin), German Sud Army (General Graf von Bothmer, one German and five Austrian divisions), Army Group Bohm-Ermoli (1st and 2nd Austrian Armies), and German Army Group Linsingen (4th Austrian Army and German Group Granau, one division).

The main Russian attack on June 4 struck the Austrian 4th, the German Sud, and the Austrian 7th Armies. The attack against the Sud Army, whose commander and staff were German but whose troops were mostly Austrian, was unable to break through. The attack on the Austrian 4th Army, however, met with sudden and spectacular success, as did the assault on the 7th. In three days, the Russians had advanced a maximum of 30 miles and taken 125,000 prisoners. By 23 June, the haul had reached 204,000.

The Austrians contributed substantially to their own defeat. Army and corps commanders were off hunting or otherwise absent from their units. The artillery regularly failed to support the infantry with the result that some divisions lost all their infantry and not a single



gun. In order to shore up the front, the Germans were forced to call 15 divisions from the Western Front and 19 from other areas in the East. The Austrians brought eight divisions from Italy. These reinforcements repulsed a Russian drive on the vital rail junction of Kovel in July. Attack and counterattack continued throughout August and early September with few gains. On 20 September, Brusilov halted his attack. His armies had driven to within 50 miles of Lemberg and overran the province of Bukovina. The Austrians had suffered over 750,000 casualties, 450,000 of them prisoners. The Germans had lost 235,000. Russian losses, however, were equally huge, at least 1,000,000 and probably as many as 1,500,000.

There are two standard interpretations of the Austrian disaster. The first places the blame on Austrian overconfidence and general unpreparedness. The second emphasizes disaffection in the Austrian ranks, particularly among the Slavic nationalities, such as the Czechs and Ukrainians. There is some truth in the first explanation. Austrian intelligence work, especially patrolling and reconnaissance, had been poor. The initial Russian blow had come as a complete surprise. Under such circumstances, it is understandable that the Russians should have achieved local success and breached the Austrian forward positions. What turned the Russian attacks into a strategic success, however, was that the afflicted Austrian units not only abandoned their forward positions, but made no effort to hold two well-fortified reserve positions.

The second proposition is a more delicate one. There is no denying that disaffection existed in the Austrian Army. In early 1916, however, it was still largely confined to Czech units. Among the Ukrainians, Slovaks, Rumanians, and South Slavs, the situation was more one of *indifference* to the war against the Russians. When such troops found themselves in a difficult or untenable position, surrender was simply a more natural reaction than prolonged resistance. Another contributing factor was the Austrian infantry's lack of confidence in their artillery. On 9 June, for instance, the 40th (Ukrainian) Regiment surrendered in body to the Russians. When questioned, the soldiers revealed that their abandonment by their divisional artillery was the final factor in the decision to give up.

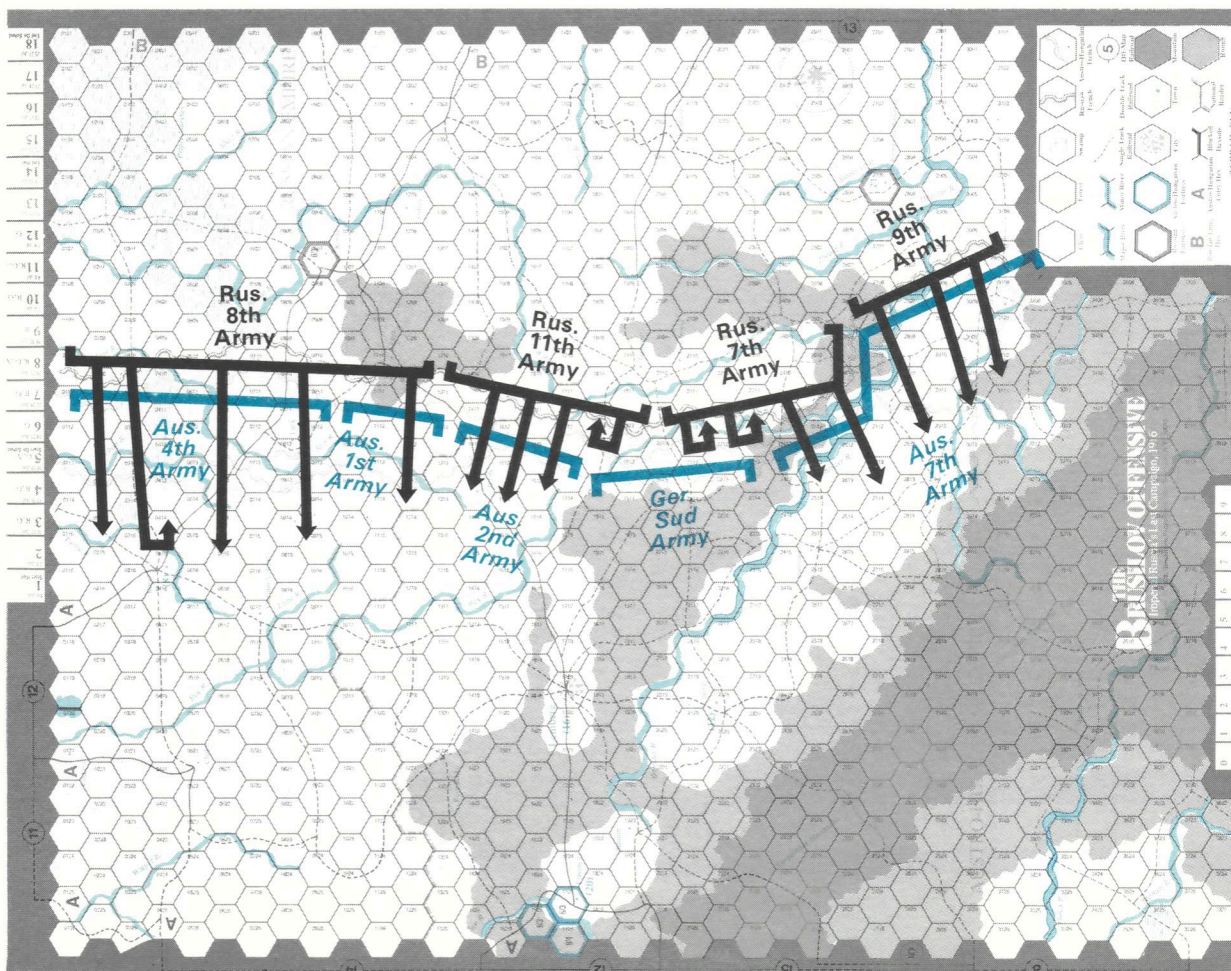
The failure of the Austrian troops to rally and hold well-fortified positions and the artillery's penchant for leaving the unfortunate infantry in the lurch are both symptoms of the real Austrian failure — complete command breakdown. The Austro-Hungarian Army was unlike the German in many ways, but none was more obvious (and to the Germans, more odious) than its often casual attitude toward discipline, not only in the rank and file, but among the officers as well.

Perhaps the greatest failing of the Habsburg officer corps was the tendency of many commanders to take leave of their units. The Commander of the Austrian 4th Army, for instance, the Archduke Joseph Ferdinand, was ensconced in a hunting lodge in Northern

Poland when the Russian attack struck his army. He did not learn of the attack for four days. In addition, seven of his 14 divisional commanders were absent. The attack also found several divisional, brigade, and regimental commanders absent from Pflanzer-Baltin's 7th Army. Staff work, on the whole, had been allowed to deteriorate. As a result, the fighting coordination within units (i.e., the cooperation of infantry and artillery) was found to be affected.

In addition to its far-reaching strategic results, the Brusilov Offensive also had important effects on the Austro-German partnership. Austrian military prestige, which had suffered a series of humiliating blows from the beginning of the war, was reduced to zero. The German attitude toward their chief ally shifted from mere deprecation and condescension to open contempt. The independence of the Austrian Army was greatly curtailed, and hereafter its forces in the East were placed largely under German control.

Nevertheless, as poorly as the Austrians had performed, the success enjoyed by the Russians was ephemeral. The offensive had raised great hopes which now collapsed. Russian morale dropped and desertion, always a problem, increased to epidemic proportions. On 30 July, the Russian Western Front attempted another attack, this time against the German-held rail-junction of Baranoyitchi. It was easily repulsed, rolling up another 70,000 Russian casualties. The steamroller had run out of steam.





## CAPORETTO

In 1917, both the Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces on the Isonzo Front were near physical and moral exhaustion. On 19 August, the Italian Army had launched its greatest assault to date against the Austrian position on the Biansizza and Carso plateaus. Fifty-one divisions and 5200 guns (of a total Italian strength of 63 divisions and 7000 guns) supported this "11th Battle of the Isonzo." Like its 10 predecessors, the battle quickly became a bloody battle of attrition. When it was finally called off on 12 September, Italian losses totalled 147,000 and Austrian 75,000. Despite these losses and the complete failure of the Carso attack, the 11th Battle of the Isonzo had netted the Italians a clear cut gain on the Biansizza — a five-mile penetration of the Austrian line which had driven the latter back to their last prepared positions in this sector.

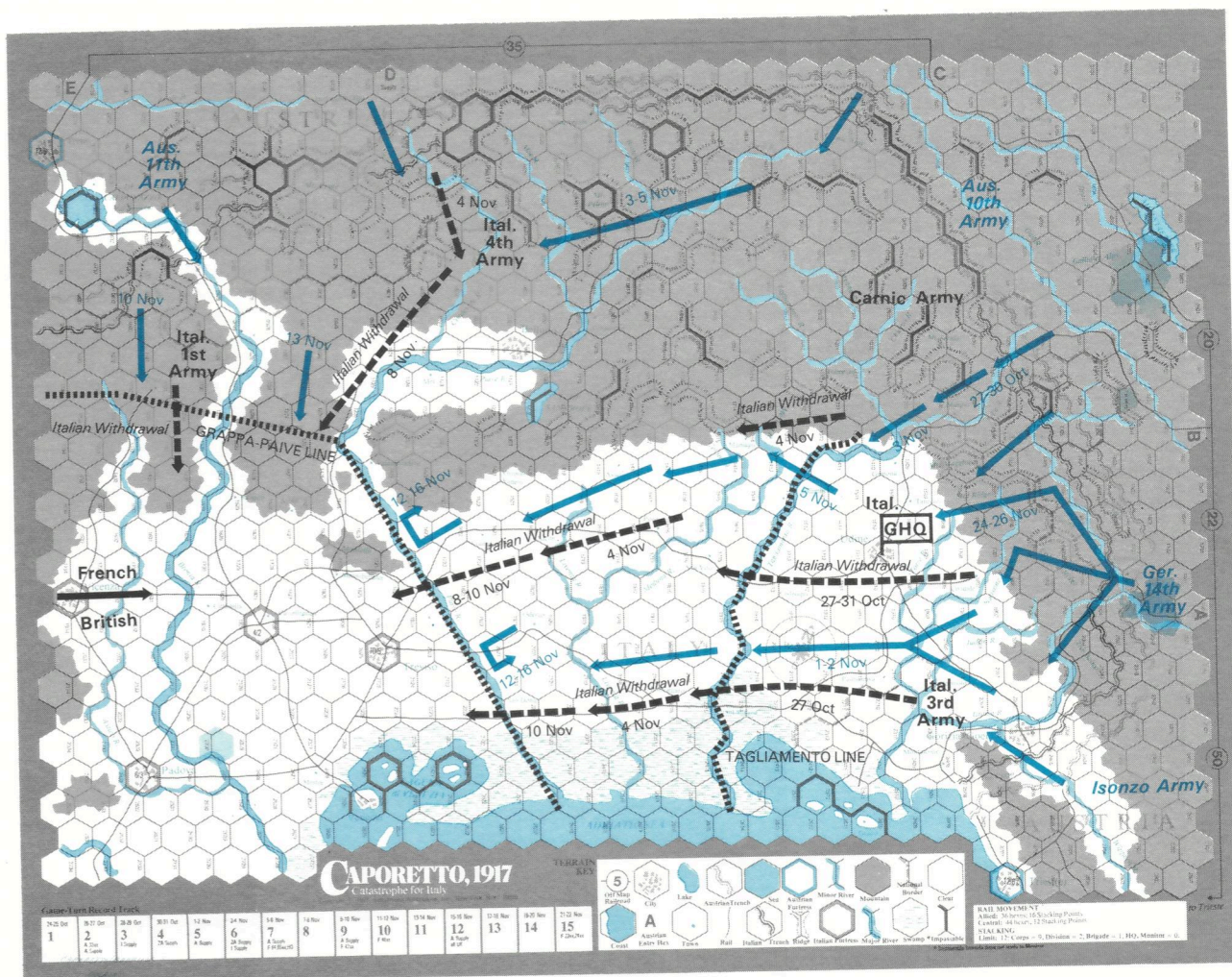
This tangible success, coupled with the large numbers of Austrian prisoners taken in the battles — over 22,000 — convinced the Italian Commander-in-Chief, General Luigi

Cadorna, that the enemy was nearing the end of his powers of resistance. One more attack, he reasoned, would crack the Austrian line, opening the way to Trieste and the Austrian heartland. Cadorna, a grim attritionist, took little consideration of the condition of his troops, however. The Italian Army had suffered over 1,500,000 casualties since its entrance into the war in April 1915. These losses and the slim gains they achieved made the Italian troops increasingly vulnerable to neutralist and defeatist propaganda.

Cadorna, however, was not mistaken about conditions in the Austrian camp. The commander of the Austrian 5th (Isonzo) Army, Feldmarschall Svetozar Borojevic von Bojna, was alarmed both by the growing size and efficiency of the Italian attacks and his troops' dwindling capability. While Austrian losses had been half the Italian, coupled with huge losses suffered on the Eastern Front, these losses had placed a tremendous strain on the Habsburg Empire's manpower resources. Equally important was the growing disaffection among many of the army's component na-

tionalities. Czechs and Romanians could no longer be depended upon and even among such steadfast groups as the Yugoslavs (Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes) there were increasing incidents of desertion and insubordination. Borojevic, therefore, informed the Austrian Emperor, Karl I, that the forces on the Isonzo could not withstand another full scale attack. To restore the armies position and morale, he urged an immediate offensive to drive the Italians back across the Isonzo and perhaps beyond. As such an attack was beyond the power of the Austrian forces already on the front, additional forces would have to be brought from the Eastern Front or obtained from the German ally.

The Emperor, an anti-German at heart, and resentful of German domination of the Eastern Front, wished to avoid the use of German troops on the Italian Front. He therefore asked the Germans to relieve Austrian units in Russia and Romania so that sufficient Austrian strength would be available to throw against the Italians. The head of the German General Staff, Erich Ludendorff, despised Austrian





methods and felt that an assault would only compel the Austrians to abandon their present excellent defensive positions and redeploy less favorably. Moreover, he could not assume Austrian sectors in the East and still have sufficient forces to carry out his proposed attacks against Riga and in Moldavia. Ludendorff changed his mind only when a report from German General Krafft von Delmisingen, who had inspected the Isonzo Front, came to the same conclusion as Boroevic. Ludendorff thereupon decided to support a limited offensive in Italy, but with German troops and under German leadership. The Austrians had no choice but to accept. The Germans had recently tried out their new infiltration (Hutier) tactics in the capture of Riga (1-5 September), and it was felt that a few divisions using these tactics could be effective against the Italians.

The strike force for the offensive was put together at the end of September and designated the German 14th Army. It was formed of seven German (12, 117, 200, 5, 26, Alpenkorps, and Jaeger) and eight Austrian (22, 65, 50, 1, 4, 33, 13, and Edelweiss) divisions. The German units had been picked for their experience in mountain warfare (mostly in the Carpathians), although only the Alpenkorps was officially a mountain unit. This unit contained the crack Wurttemberg Mountain battalion commanded by a young Erwin Rommel. The Austrian units were of good quality, although three (4, 33, 13) were recent arrivals from the Eastern Front. Two divisions, the 1st and 5th, were composed entirely of mountain battalions. Both German and Austrian units were given a three-week course in infiltration tactics and lavishly supplied with artillery (each battalion was given a battery of light guns), trench mortars, and pack transport.

The leadership of the 14th Army was likewise of high quality. The commander was German General Otto von Below with Krafft, the German's best expert in mountain warfare as his Chief-of-Staff. Two of the four corps commanders, Stein and Beirer (the victor of Riga) were German, and two, Scotti and Kraus (an expert mountain tactician) were Austrian.

Despite the overall quality of the army, it was obvious that it would waste its effort in a headlong assault against the Italians on the Carso or Biansizza. The Italians had 23 divisions in the line between Plezzo and the sea with another 18 in reserve. These forces were divided into the 3rd Army (13 divisions under the Duke of Austria) and the 2nd Army (28 divisions under General Capello). The Italians held the front lines in great strength (231 out of 353 battalions) and most of their artillery remained in an offensive position near the front line.

Between Plezzo and the Austrian bridgehead at Tolmino, the left wing of the Italian 2nd Army was lightly held by four divisions (19, 46, 43, and 50) with three others (34, 16, 45) in nearby reserve. The 19th Division, which held the front opposite Tolmino, was known to have especially bad morale due to its large complement of workers from Turin and Milan who had been conscripted as punishment for strikes and anti-war activities. The three divisions in reserve were all the worse for

wear from their recent fighting in the 11th Isonzo battle.

The sector from Plezzo to Tolmino was therefore chosen as the 14th Army's point of attack. While the Austro-Germans had only 37 divisions (including the 14th Army) on the Isonzo against 41 Italian divisions, they would have a better than 2 to 1 advantage over the Italians on the sector of attack, not to mention a pronounced qualitative advantage. However, if numbers favored the 14th Army, the terrain did not. The center of the Italian position was firmly anchored on the Monte Nero ridge. To the rear, the Italians held the steep Stop and Colovrat ridges and the dominating heights of Monte Maggiore, Kuk, and Matagur. The Austro-German plan envisioned simultaneous thrusts from the Tolmino and Plezzo to converge at Caporetto, thus stranding the Italian 43rd and 46th Divisions on Monte Nero. The troops would then have to seize the Stol and Colovrat ridges. Using these as avenues of advance, the 14th Army would push south and west, turning the flank of the Italian 2nd Army. If all went well, the Italians might be forced back to the Tagliamento, which Ludendorff declared the maximum limit of the offensive.

Despite attempts at secrecy, the Italians soon learned of the impending attack through deserters. The exact force of the enemy attack eluded them, however. While deserters' statements explicitly mentioned the Plezzo-Tolmino sector, Cadorna believed the area too rugged for a major attack and felt the Biansizza a more likely target. Capello was ordered to thin out his front lines and prepare for defense in depth, but he was ill throughout October, and these measures were never carried out. On 21 October, Cadorna decided to reinforce his left flank — but it was too late.

At 2 a.m. on 24 October, an intense and effective bombardment hit the Italian lines at Plezzo and Tolmino. It consisted mostly of high explosives and gas shells, the latter causing great havoc because of the poor quality of Italian gas masks. The 14th Army went over the top at 8 a.m., blanketed by a heavy mist which blinded the already disrupted Italian artillery. The troops advanced according to the dictates of the new infiltration tactics, pushing forward as fast and as far as possible and bypassing centers of resistance. The latter were few. The Italian front line was virtually deserted save for the dead. Striking from Plezzo, Kraus' corps (Edelweiss, 22, 55 and German Jaeger Divisions) had established themselves on the Stol ridge by evening. In the Tolmino sector, the Alpenkorps brushed aside the remnants of the shattered Italian 19th Division and reached the Colovrat. The 12th Division pushed on to Caporetto, encountering a single Italian platoon on the way. Berrer and Scotti's corps (200, 117, 5, and 26 German and 1 Austrian Divisions) were ordered to push south along the Isonzo in order to threaten the Italian position on the Biansizza.

At his headquarters near Udine, Cadorna was receiving only sketchy information from his threatened flank, but he had heard enough to guess that the enemy had achieved a major breakthrough. Unaware of enemy penetration

on the Stol and Colovrat, he still believed that these ridges could be used to contain the attack. Five divisions were moved north from the general reserve, and a brigade of Alpini was ordered to occupy Monte Maggiore. As a precaution, however, he ordered the Tagliamento organized for defense.

The morning of 25 October revealed the full extent of the disaster. Italian reinforcements found roads blocked by panic-stricken comrades. The enemy was rarely seen until he suddenly descended on flank or rear. The Italians failed to realize that the Austro-Germans were advancing along the heights rather than down the valleys. The Alpenkorps and elements of the 26th Divisions were consolidating their hold on the Colovrat ridge. Rommel's Wurttemberg Mountain Battalion distinguished itself by capturing Monte Kuk and bluffing into surrender the entire 4th Bersaglieri Brigade; the Wurttemberg took over 3600 prisoners this day. Kraus' 22nd Division had meanwhile won control of the Stol.

On 26 October, Rommel told Monte Matagur, the last Italian foothold on the Colovrat. The 117th and 200th divisions meanwhile advanced to within a few miles of Cividale. Further south, the Austrian forces on the Biansizza and Carso joined the attack, breaking through the Italian positions. Cadorna still hesitated in ordering a general retreat, however. By 5 November, the advance of Kraus' corps had turned the Italian position behind the Tagliamento and forced a further withdrawal to the Piave river, which was completed on 7 November. The Austro-Germans, having outrun their supply, were unable to force a crossing.

The Italians lost over 320,000 men, 290,000 of them prisoners. Of the 65 Italian divisions extant before Caporetto, only 33 still were functional on 8 November, while 4 or 5 others were still partly serviceable. Eleven Franco-British divisions had to be dispatched from the Western Front to bolster the Italians. Despite these losses, the defeat did have a positive effect on the Italian war effort. The invasion of Italian territory stimulated a tremendous popular will to prosecute and win the war. The army's command structure was drastically reorganized, culminating in the replacement of Cadorna with General Armando Diaz.





## THE ARMIES

**The German Army** Of all the armies on the Eastern Front, the German was by far the best led, trained, and equipped. At the beginning of the war, the basic tactical unit was the corps. The Germans had two types: Active and Reserve. There was no significant difference in human material between Active and Reserve units, but there were variations in organization and equipment. Both corps consisted of two infantry divisions, each division being composed of two brigades, each brigade of two regiments, and each regiment of three battalions. Most Reserve divisions had Jaeger (light infantry) battalions attached, the so-called "square division" common to most armies. An active division had an artillery brigade of two regiments. The first regiment had two battalions (three batteries apiece, each of six guns) of 77mm field guns; the second had one battalion of 77's and one of 105mm medium howitzers. Each Active Corps also possessed a battalion (four batteries, each of four guns) of 150mm howitzers which was normally divided up between the divisions. The Reserve division, however, had only one artillery regiment with two battalions of 77's, although it was not unusual to find one or two 150mm batteries attached. The rifle strength of both types of divisions was about 12,000 (13,000 with the Jaeger battalion), and each regiment had a machine gun company of six guns. The ration strength of an Active Corps was 47,500, that of the Reserve Corps was 38,000 to 40,000.

In addition to the Active and Reserve forces, the Germans mobilized a second line of reservists — the Landwehr — and even a third line — the Landsturm. The Landwehr was initially organized into infantry brigades of six

battalions with a couple of field batteries, as an independent regiment or battalion. These troops were intended mostly as fortress garrisons, border security, and rear support for the main forces. Landwehr units were almost immediately formed into divisions, however, and constituted a large part of the active forces in the East. In early 1916, for example, 13 out of 46 German divisions in the East were Landwehr. Though of limited offensive value, Landwehr units proved themselves steadfast defensive fighters on both the Eastern and Western fronts. The Landsturm, organized into battalions, assumed the garrison and line-of-communication duties, although a few regiments were formed for combat.

From 1915 through the end of 1916, the German Army was reorganized. The corps disappeared as a rigid tactical formation, and the division was reduced from four to three regiments (nine battalions) in order to create more units and increase tactical flexibility. Divisional artillery was reduced to one field artillery regiment with two battalions of 77's and one of 105's, and batteries were reduced from six to four guns. The division's firepower was maintained, however, by the addition of a battalion of heavy guns, normally 150mm, and an increase of machine guns from 24 to 54 (six per battalion) and eventually to 108. The rifle strength of the reorganized division was about 8000. On the whole, a German division had the combat value of 1 1/2 or even 2 Russian or Austrian divisions.

German cavalry divisions consisted of three brigades of two regiments each. A battalion of 77mm field guns was attached along with a machine gun company (six guns). A Jaeger battalion (sometimes two) was also attached with its own machine-gun company. In

the course of the war, the Jaeger battalion was dropped and the artillery battalion was expanded into a regiment. After 1915, cavalry divisions were used largely as infantry, a cavalry regiment roughly being equivalent to an infantry battalion. Combat strength was about 4500 (5000 with the Jaeger battalion).

The German Army's greatest strength was in its artillery, especially the heavy guns. In addition to the artillery battalion attached to each division, each corps and army normally controlled a number of heavy batteries (130 to 305mm). All heavy artillery (150mm and above) was under the operative control of the OKH and was moved about as needed. German artillery pioneered the use of poison gas shells.

**The Russian Army** The Russian Army at the beginning of the First World War was something of an enigma. Despite its poor showing against the Japanese in 1904-1905, friend and foe alike still thought in terms of a "Russian steamroller" which, if allowed to gather its enormous bulk and put it into motion, would crush all before it by sheer weight of numbers. This image was founded on the belief that Russia's huge population (about 160,000,000 in 1914) could provide a virtually inexhaustible supply of manpower. Facts were to prove otherwise, however. The Russian conscription program was riddled with corruption and gross inefficiency. In some districts, there were no written lists of men available for service, and in others the lists had not been updated for years. Exemptions were widely, if inconsistently given, especially to the urban classes. The result was an army composed largely of illiterate peasants.

The Reserves system, instituted after 1905, was similarly mishandled. Men leaving active service (if they weren't lost track of) first

## A Day in the Life of Ivan Ivanovich

In the Second World War, German soldiers looked forward to being sent to the Eastern Front as much as they would to being drawn and quartered — maybe less, and for good reason. The Russian Front was the scene of the most savage and difficult fighting, and

conditions of life were generally far worse than in the West. In the First World War, however, essentially the converse was true.

Life on the Western Front, save a few such "quiet" sectors as Alsace, was the nightmare of trench life fraught with the constant danger of bombardment, sniping, and raids. Offensives, for both attacker and defender, meant a drawn-out slugging match with gigantic losses. The highlight of one's ex-

istence was a monthly de-lousing and rest in the rear before returning to the hell at the front.

Life on the Eastern Front was better only by comparison. The trenches and the lice were there as well, but the level of danger was, as a rule, considerably less. The opposing lines in the East were often separated by as much as 20 miles, although three to five was more common. Between battles, things were generally pretty quiet, with only an occasional artillery

## Economics and Logistics of the War in the East

The fighting in the East absorbed the industrial output of three of the major belligerents — Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Italy — and a significant part of Germany's. The question here is not which of these nations could economically best afford the war (nobody could), but whose industries were most efficient in supplying the needs of the armed forces. Germany, expectedly, was the hands down winner in this category.

As the largest industrial nation in the world (she had surpassed Britain around 1900 and the U.S. was still well behind), Germany outproduced all the other Eastern belligerents combined. However, the gigantic siege on the Western Front absorbed the majority of Ger-

many's war production, the Eastern Front receiving a preponderance only during the offensives of 1915. The Eastern Front received only 10%-15% of the total munitions supply in 1914 and 25% during the height of the Brusilov offensive in 1916. In addition to supplying its own needs, however, Germany was the chief purveyor of weapons and ammunition to her Bulgarian and Turkish Allies. To the latter, between 1913 and 1918, the Germans supplied some 1500 guns of all calibers, 250,000 rifles, 3,000,000 shells and 18,000,000 small arms rounds.

The Austrians and Italians had modest economic capacities, and both produced the majority of their own armaments. The Austrians, however, possessed what was probably the finest artillery production firm, the Skoda Works, which supplied such weapons as the

giant 305 and 420mm mortars not only to the Austrian Army, but to the Germans as well.

The nation least able to support a modern war was Russia. Russia's industrial output in 1914 was less than that of Austria's and only 10% that of Germany's. The major armament works was the Putilov arsenal at Petrograd, which produced most of the Russian artillery. Like everyone else, the Russians started the war with insufficient stockpiles of munitions, but they were subsequently unable to support the needs of their army. The number of guns supporting a Russian infantry division dropped from an average of 48 in 1914 to 30 in 1916 to 18 in 1917. (For further comment on the Russian arms situation see the **Armies** Module.)

To keep fighting, an army must be supplied with munitions and food. To keep up a consistent flow of this material 365 days of the



entered the Reserve, then the *Opolchenie* (militia). The first received sporadic training, the latter none at all. There was no Reserve officer system, so the reserve units had to be staffed either by officers siphoned off the already understaffed active units, or by completely untrained commanders. In the German Army, for instance, there was an officer or NCO for every 12 men, while in the Russian Army, units were lucky to have one for every 1000. In 1914, the Russian Army had a mobilizational strength of 4,900,000 against 4,500,000 for Germany which had about 40% the population (66,000,000). The Russians, in addition, had to maintain a huge logistical tail. While the ratio of combatants to non-combatant troops in western armies was about 2 to 1, the ratio was reversed with the Russians.

Despite all this, the Russian Army still looked formidable on paper. The Russian Army Corps had two infantry division of the standard "square" arrangement (two brigades, four regiments), except that the regiments had four battalions. Each regiment had eight machine guns. Divisional artillery consisted of a brigade of two "battalions," each battalion having three batteries of eight 76.2mm field guns. On paper, the corps supplied each division with a battery (six guns) of 120mm howitzers (in practice these guns were often missing). The organization of reserve divisions was identical with the exception of the howitzer battery.

Thus, it would appear that a Russian division of 16 battalions and 54 guns would be pretty much equal to a German division with 12 battalions and 78 (active) or 36 (reserve) guns. Again, however, appearances are deceiving. First of all, the Russian infantry was markedly inferior, especially in aimed rifle fire and in the

general caliber of its leadership. Secondly, the Russian infantry battalion had an official strength of 800 vs. 1000 for its German counterpart, thus making the Russian division about par in rifle strength, i.e., 12,800 to 12,000-13,000. Wastage from battle casualties and desertion always ran far ahead of replacements in the Russian Army, so that throughout most of the war the actual rifle strength of an infantry division was more like 10,000. In 1917 the division was reduced to 12 battalions and batteries to six guns, ostensibly to create new divisions. The 60-odd new divisions formed in this manner lacked artillery and supporting services and were of questionable combat value. Division rifle strength was reduced to 6000-7000.

At the beginning of the war, the Russians fielded another type of infantry unit, the rifle brigade. Actually a mini-division, its four regiments fielded only two battalions apiece, and its artillery consisted of three eight-gun field batteries. As the war progressed, most rifle brigades were converted into divisions. These rifle divisions had 12 battalions and three or four field gun batteries. Rifle units generally bore "regional" titles such as "1st Finland Rifle brigade," etc., although the troops were not necessarily from these areas. The equipment of rifle units did not differ materially from that of "line" units, and they were not, as is sometimes suggested, elite formations.

The one truly impressive aspect of the Russian war machine was its huge masses of cavalry. In 1914, Russia could field some 36 cavalry divisions, a number greater than all the other other belligerents combined. Better than half of this force consisted of Cossacks, some 200,000 of whom were available for military service. Despite their fierce reputations, however, the Cossacks — and cavalry in general —

were to prove relatively useless in the context of modern warfare. Thus, despite some value as a reconnaissance and screening force, Russia's cavalry superiority was an empty advantage. Organizationally, a Russian cavalry division consisted of two brigades, each of two regiments. Attached were a MG company and 12 field guns. Combat strength was around 2500.

The deficiency of the Russian army was nowhere more apparent than in its artillery. Russian guns, especially the 76.2mm field piece, were fair designs, and the crews were probably the best-trained of the Russian services. Russian organization was clumsy, and the quantity and quality of shells was always inadequate. While a German battery carried 2500-3000 rounds into action, a Russian one at best would have 600-800. Most seriously, the Russians lacked sufficient quantities of medium and heavy guns. In 1914, they had only 538 of the former, and but 173 of the latter, most of these obsolescent. The effect of all this was that the artillery of the average German division could deliver a punch four to five times as great as that of a Russian division.

Russia thus began the war with severe armament limitations which the equally limited Russian industry proved incapable of remedying. In 1914, for example, the minimum monthly shell expenditure was estimated at 45,000, while monthly production was only 13,000. There were also insufficient stockpiles of rifles and small arms ammunition. Even Tsar Nicholas was astute enough to conclude that "the one big and serious difficulty for our army is that we haven't enough munitions. Because of this...all the fighting falls on the infantry. Thanks to this, losses soon become colossal." That was Russia's plight in a nutshell.

duel or raid to break the monotony. German relations with were the Jews, who were numerous in the towns of Poland and Lithuania, if only because German and Yiddish were mutually intelligible. in the towns of Poland and Lithuania, if only because German and Yiddish were mutually intelligible.

The Russian soldier, of course had no choice between fronts, unless he was part of

the small contingents which fought in France or the Balkans. He was most often an illiterate peasant who was used to a hard existence, however, and was capable of bearing privation with a kind of bland stoicism. His own deficiencies in armament, coupled with German superiority in firepower, soon made the Russian come to fear this adversary. Against the Austrians, on the other hand, he felt a general contempt.

The Austrian soldier's preference would mostly depend on his nationality. A Croat or Tyrolean would prefer to fight the Italians which meanced their homelands, while Poles felt more enmity toward the Russians. The Czechs, of course, did not much feel like fighting anyone — unless it was the Habsburgs.

year to millions of men was a situation unprecedented in warfare. The basic logistical lifeline was the railroad; beyond its reach, shells and bully-beef were carted by time-honored horse drawn transport. The Germans and, to a lesser extent, the Austrians and Italians possessed highly developed rail systems. The Russians, however, were once again the worst served, their situation immeasurably complicated by the sheer vastness of their country. The Germans, for instance, possessed 10.6 miles of track to the Russians' one for every 100 square miles of territory. Nor was the Russian rail system as efficient as those of its enemies. A Russian train could average only 200 miles per day, whereas a German or Austrian one could travel 400. Russian rail lines were also a wider gauge than other European lines, which necessitated complete

retracking by either side when it advanced into enemy territory. The deficiency of the Russian rail net also afflicted the Germans and Austrians when they seized large areas of Russian territory in 1915. The importance of rail lines on the Eastern Front is evident in the number of battles which were fought for the control of such vital junctions as Lemberg, Warsaw, or Kovel.

The mobilization of rolling stock for military use had a severe effect on the nations' internal distribution, especially of foodstuffs. While German and Austria suffered greatly from the effects of the Allied blockade, they were both capable of providing self-sustaining quantities of foodstuffs. With the military paying fixed prices for foodstuffs, landowners were not encouraged to grow more and, with so many men at the front, they were short-

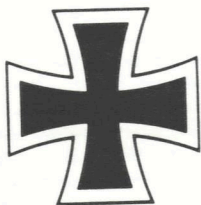
handed as well. The hardest hit were the city-dwellers who were forced to pay exorbitant prices for what few edibles found their way in from the countryside. The Central Powers' occupation of the Ukraine with its grain probably saved Austria-Hungary from internal collapse in the winter of 1917-1918. Even so, the amount of relief was only a drop in the bucket to what might have been received if sufficient transport had been available.

The Armies gradually felt the pinch of hunger as well. By 1918, German and Austrian troops were surviving largely on a diet of potatoes and ersatz coffee. As early as 1915, the Russians, along with a dearth of arms, had experienced a food shortage which reduced many troops to eating their boots and, in a few cases, it was rumored, the corpses of their fallen comrades.



### General Erich von Falkenhayn 1861-1922

Chief of the German General Staff from September 1914 to August 1916. He was convinced that the war could only be won in France and hence generally ignored the East, which led to a bitter personal feud and power struggle with Hindenburg and Ludendorff. He did intervene to save the Austrians in 1915 and initiated Germany's greatest victory on the Eastern Front. In 1916 he tried to wear down the French manpower and morale by a battle of attrition around Verdun. Its failure and the resurgence of Russia, which was blamed on his short-sightedness in 1915, brought about his fall and replacement by Hindenburg. He was subsequently shuffled off to commands in Romania, Turkey, and Lithuania where he performed well.



**General (later Field Marshal) Paul von Beckendorff und von Hindenburg, 1847-1934** A veteran of the Austro-Prussian (1866) and Franco-Prussian (1870) wars, Hindenburg had retired from the Army in 1911, but he was recalled in 1914 to take command of the 8th Army in East Prussia. The victory at Tannenberg and subsequent successes made him a national hero which his brooding, fatherly image helped to enhance. He was made Chief-of-Staff in August 1916. Despite defeat, the old man preserved his popularity and was elected President of the German Republic in 1925. In one of his last acts, and against his better judgment, Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor in 1933.

### General Max von Hoffman, 1864-1927

Attached to the staff of the German 8th Army at the beginning of the war, Hoffman was the real architect of the Tannenberg victory. He closely associated himself with Hindenburg and Ludendorff and became *de facto* commander of the Eastern Front after August 1916, though still but a colonel. He advocated a passive policy toward the Russian collapse in 1917 and was the chief German negotiator at Brest-Litovsk. After the war he became a spokesman for Franco-German cooperation against Communism.

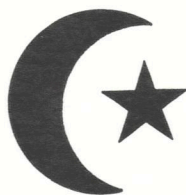
**General Erich Ludendorff, 1865-1937** This brilliant but rather eccentric German commander became the virtual military dictator of the country in the last two years of the war. In 1914 he won laurels by supervising the capture of the Belgian fortress of Liege. He was subsequently appointed Chief of Staff to Hindenburg in East Prussia. Ludendorff's tremendous ego made him the dominant member of the team and led to bitter quarrels with Falkenhayn. In August 1916, Ludendorff was elevated to First Quarter-Master General and then *de facto* head of the Army. By 1918, however, he was near to mental exhaustion. He supported annexationist parties and, when the war was

ending, refused to take part in any armistice discussions. A firm believer that the German Army had been "stabbed in the back," he became a fanatical nationalist in the post-war years and was eventually a Nazi member in the Reichstag.

### General (later Field Marshall) August von Mackensen 1849-1945

One of the most outstanding of Germany's Eastern commanders. Resourceful and offensive-minded, he commanded the 9th Army in Poland in 1914, led the breakthrough of the 11th Army at Gorlice — Tarnow in 1915 (which earned him the rank of Field Marshall), and went in to lead the attack on Serbia in October 1915 and a mixed Turkish-Bulgarian-German Army against Romania in 1916. Abetted by his able Chief-of-Staff Hans von Seeckt, he commanded most of the Romanian Front during 1917 and the occupation forces in the country in 1918. Following the armistice of November 1918, he was held by the French until December 1919 and retired from the Army in 1920.

**General Luigi Cadorna 1850-1928** Italian Chief-of-Staff until after the disastrous Italian defeat of Caporetto in October-November 1917. He did a commendable job of preparing the Italian Army for its entrance into the war. In the fighting itself he proved a dedicated attritionist and launched 11 attacks upon the Austrian Isonzo defenses which achieved only minor gains at the cost of hundreds of thousands of casualties and the armies' morale. He was subsequently replaced by General Armando Diaz, but remained in the Army and was promoted to Field Marshall in 1924.



**Enver Pasha 1881-1922(?)** A hero of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution which ostensibly brought reform to the Ottoman Empire, Enver ruled as the military component of a triumvirate with Talaat and Djemal Pashas. Enver had had limited military experience against rebels in Macedonia and the Italians in Libya but fancied himself another Napoleon. He planned and executed an impossible winter offensive in the Caucasus in 1914, which practically destroyed the 3rd Turkish Army, in order to fulfill his dream of a "Pan-Turanian" Empire stretching from the Bosphorus to Central Asia. His conduct of the rest of the war was not much better and included a wild scheme to recapture Baghdad in 1917 which his German advisors refused to implement. He was also personally responsible for instigating the Armenian massacres in 1915. After the war he fled to Germany and from there to Russia where he made a miraculous conversion to Bolshevism. Sent to Central Asia, he subsequently revolted against the Russians and supposedly died fighting them in 1922. Other reports suggest that he may have escaped and died in 1931 in the service of a Chinese war lord.

### Feldmarschall Franz Conrad von Hotzendorff,

**1852-1925** Austrian Chief-of-Staff from 1906 to 1916. Considered a brilliant strategist, Conrad failed to consider the limitations of the Austrian Army and the result was generally defeat. A sabre-rattling proponent of preventive war against both Serbia and Italy, he was one of the strongest forces influencing the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia in July 1914. The failures of his Italian offensives and Galician debacle in 1916 led to his dismissal by the new Emperor, Karl I, with whom he had personal differences. He was relegated to an Army Group command in Italy which he held until the end of the war.



### General Alexei Alexeyevich Brusilov,

**1853-1926** Russia's most successful commander in the war. In 1914 he led the 8th Army to victory in Galicia and captured important positions in the Carpathian Mountains. He distinguished himself in the retreat of 1915 and was made commander of the Southwest (Galicia) Front. In June 1916 he smashed the Austrian Front with a carefully prepared attack that brought Russia her greatest victory of the war, but incurred huge losses as well. He was made Supreme Commander in May 1917 and tried to arrest the decline in the Army. After November 1917, he eventually made his peace with the Bolsheviks and served as an advisor in the Polish War of 1920 and as inspector of cavalry until 1924.

### Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaiyevich Romanov,

**1856-1929** A brilliant soldier, the tall Grand Duke was to many Russians what a real Tsar should look — and act — like. As Supreme Commander of the Russian armies from August 1914 to August 1915, he successfully fended off the German counteroffensive of 1914 and saved his armies from mass encirclement in 1915. Motivated largely by jealousy, the Tsar relieved him and exiled him to a remote command in the Caucasus, where he nevertheless continued to produce a string of successes against the Turks until the collapse of the Army in 1917.

### Voivode Radomir Putnik, 1847-1917

Commander of the Serbian Army in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and throughout most of the war. Confined by illness, Putnik conducted his campaigns by a careful study of maps and the influences of the terrain. He led the Serbian Army to victory over the Turks at Kumanovo and Monastir in 1912 and against the Bulgars at Bregalnica in 1913. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, he was undergoing medical treatment in Austria and was chivalrously allowed to return to Belgrade. Realizing the Serbian Army's lack of heavy weapons, he specialized in sudden, fierce frontal attacks which proved successful in defeating the three Austrian invasions of 1914. He was relieved of his command in 1917 and died in France.