

A HOPELESS STRUGGLE:
THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ARMY AND TOTAL WAR, 1914-1918

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is an institutional study of the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War. It analyzes the operations of five infantry divisions, fighting on several different fronts, to reach conclusions about the wartime performance of the multinational Habsburg Army. The dissertation focusses on both tactical and socioethnic aspects of battlefield effectiveness. It is therefore a novel approach, combining operational and social history.

The first chapter is an overview of the Austro-Hungarian Army in 1914, on the eve of the war. It deals with overall army organization, the nationalities issue, war plans and strategy, weaponry, and tactical doctrine to reach conclusions about the preparedness of the Habsburg Army for total war.

The second chapter deals with the battlefield performance of the Bohemian 21st *Landwehr* Infantry Division in 1914. This largely Czech formation fought in failed campaign against Serbia from August to December. It suffered the first Austro-Hungarian defeat of the war, participating in three major offensives in five months.

The third chapter focusses on the 1915 campaigns of the Magyar-Romanian 17th Infantry Division, recruited in South-Central Hungary. The division fought against the Russians on the Hungarian frontier in the Carpathians during the winter and spring. It defended the Carpathian passes and participated in the Gorlice-Tarnów breakthrough. In May 1915 the division moved to the opening Italian front, where it successfully resisted the first Italian offensives in Carinthia and on the Isonzo.

The fourth chapter details the 1916 fighting record of the West Galician 12th Infantry Division. This largely Polish formation, like so many Austro-Hungarian divisions, enjoyed a tranquil first half of 1916, but was defeated by the Russians during the June Brusilov offensive and the battles which continued all summer in East Galicia and Volhynia.

The fifth chapter analyzes the performance of the 55th Infantry Division during the 1917 Caporetto offensive. The 55th, a Bosnian-German mountain division, defeated several Italian formations in October and November, and played a decisive role in Austria-Hungary's victory in the offensive, the most successful Habsburg effort of the war.

The sixth and final chapter deals with the North Bohemian 29th Infantry Division on the Italian front during 1918. This German-Czech formation

participated in the failed June offensive on the Piave, the last Austro-Hungarian offensive of the war. It resisted the Italian "victory offensive" in late October, and managed to escape Italian captivity, retreating home in good order.

This dissertation contradicts the prevailing historical perception that the wartime Austro-Hungarian Army was crippled by the nationalities issue. Instead, this revisionist work suggests that purely military shortcomings--principally poor high level leadership and a lack of industrial capacity--were the main causes of Habsburg defeat, and that the army actually performed respectably throughout the First World War despite its inherent weaknesses.

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Introduction

In 1848, the year of Europe's revolutions, the Austrian Army saved the Habsburg realm from complete dissolution. Hungary had declared its independence, several crownlands were in revolt, and Italian forces were besieging Habsburg garrisons in Lombardy. The imperial family had fled Vienna in fear; even the ancient *Kaiserstadt* belonged to the rebels. The Habsburg collapse appeared total. In the chaos of national and social revolutions across the empire, only elements of the army stayed loyal. Three senior generals--Radetzky in Northern Italy, Windischgrätz in Bohemia, and Jellačić in Croatia--remained *kaisertreu*, disregarding--and in some cases disobeying--defeatist orders from the fleeing Habsburgs. The generals kept significant forces recruited from all regions of the monarchy under their command and outfought the many rebel groups on several fronts. By 1849, Habsburg authority had been restored to the entire monarchy. The multinational Austrian Army had won the greatest victory in its long history, bringing the empire back from extinction.¹

The central myth of the late Habsburg Army was thus born. The exploits of *Feldmarschall* Joseph Radetzky in particular inspired succeeding generations of Habsburg officers to see themselves as the only truly loyal and dependable element in the ethnically diverse, and potentially unstable, empire. The eighty-two year old Radetzky personally led his multinational army in Northern Italy to a series of unlikely triumphs over rebel forces.² His leadership provided the counterrevolution with desperately needed victories. Radetzky, his deeds, and his army were immortalized in music by Johann Strauss the elder's waltzlike *Radetzkymarsch*, and in poetry by Franz Grillparzer's dramatic "*In deinem Lager ist Österreich*" ("Austria is in your Camp"); both works became powerful and popular symbols of the army's loyalty to the throne. In the decades after the counterrevolution, no army review was complete without Strauss's march, and no officer was unfamiliar with Grillparzer's stirring verses. In the more than half century following Radetzky's triumph, as the Habsburg Monarchy grew increasingly divided by nationalism and ethnic hostility, Radetzky and the legacy

¹One of the best explanations of the events of 1848-9: A. Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918* (London, 1989).

²For particular detail on the reasons for Radetzky's triumphs, refer to Sked's *The Survival of the Habsburg Empire: Radetzky, the Imperial Army and the Class War, 1848* (London, 1979).

of 1848 provided the Habsburg Army with a sense of continuing purpose and mission.

In late 1918, seven decades after Radetzky's victories, the Habsburg realm was yet again in dissolution. As in 1848, Hungary was seceding, crownlands were declaring themselves independent, and an Italian army was on the attack against Habsburg forces in Northern Italy. The fate of Austria was again in the hands of its army, as in the year of revolutions, but there would be no Radetzky to deliver salvation. This time, no hero comparable to the old Field Marshal would emerge to rally the fragmenting multinational army and save the dynasty and realm from the jaws of defeat. The army had already been fighting for more than four years. The First World War was a conflict for which Austria-Hungary and its army were woefully unprepared. The cost of waging total war on three major fronts and several minor ones proved enormous for the army--almost five million soldiers lost to death, wounds, illness, or capture. Three of every five Habsburg soldiers mobilized for the war became a casualty. Saving the monarchy was perhaps too much to expect of an army which had endured so many battles in Galicia, in the Balkans, and on the Isonzo. Faced with a total collapse on the home front, the ancient Habsburg Army marched into history in November 1918 without benefit of a formal demobilization. It was Austria-Hungary's last war.

History has not been kind to the Habsburg Army, particularly in its final struggle. Its allies and adversaries during the First World War lived on to fight again, albeit under different flags.³ But the Austro-Hungarian Army never stood a chance of a rebirth, any more than the empire it served so well. The Habsburgs may be with us still, albeit uncrowned, but their once mighty army has disappeared irrevocably. Instead, the memory of the Habsburg Army has been largely suppressed by the successor states.⁴ In twentieth century Europe, the era of the

³In the 1990's, the long submerged Imperial Russian Army appears to be enjoying a renaissance; the Yeltsin government has announced a return to Tsarist-period army dress uniforms by 1995, along with the restoration of some old regimental titles and lineages.

⁴Horthyist Hungary being a possible exception, but it chose to recreate the army's uniforms, not its tolerance of minorities. Even official republican Austria, except during the brief Dollfuß and Schuschnigg era, has been essentially unsympathetic to the memory of the Habsburg Army.

triumph of the nation-state concept, the memory of a multinational army imbued with a dynastic, anational ethos was an anomaly, if not an embarrassment.⁵

Since 1918, Central European historians of all nationalities have frequently obscured the achievements of the Habsburg Army in its last struggle. Too many works about the army, and similarly about the late stages of the monarchy itself, have suffered from what one scholar has correctly termed "misplaced determinism."⁶ In truth, the tendency to overemphasize the failings, and particularly the ethnic problems, of the wartime army, began during the failed invasion of Serbia in 1914, when the cold, hard light of battlefield performance was shed on optimistic Habsburg prewar planning. Austro-Hungarian generals, usually already suspicious of certain nationalities, especially Czechs and Serbs, proved only too willing to blame operational reverses on ethnic disloyalty, rather than on incompetence, poor judgment, or simply bad luck. Thus defeats in the field were frequently attributed to supposedly traitorous minorities, thereby protecting the honour and career of many a failed commander. In the post-1918 period, the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, which had directed the war effort, now reincarnated as the War Archive, carried many of these tendencies over into scholarly publications, including the otherwise admirable seven-volume Official History of the monarchy's war effort, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg*.⁷ The first four directors and vice-directors of the Austrian *Kriegsarchiv*, all veterans of the Habsburg General Staff, who ruled the archive until 1945, were careful to protect revered reputations, especially that of the former Chief of the General Staff, *Feldmarschall* Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf.

⁵Refer to: L. Jedlicka, "Die Tradition der Wehrmacht Österreich-Ungarns und die Nachfolgestaaten," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, 1968. In contrast, the Imperial Russian Army (as the Soviet as well) was multinational too, but its ethos remained unquestionably Great Russian. See: I. Deák,

"Comparing Apples and Pears: Centralization, Decentralization and Ethnic Policy in the Habsburg and Soviet Armies," in: R. Rudolph and D. Good, eds., *Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union* (New York, 1992).

⁶Sked, *Decline and Fall*, 187.

⁷K. Peball, "Österreichische Militärgeschichtliche Forschung zum Ersten Weltkrieg zwischen 1918 und 1960," *Geschichte und Militärgeschichte: Wege der Forschung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1974), 89-90. B.H.

Liddell Hart considered the Austrian work, "Probably the best and unbiased of the General Staff histories."

Unfortunately for historical accuracy, the generals' postwar desire to shift blame on to certain supposedly unreliable nationalities echoed similar wartime claims by radical nationalists demanding the reorganization, or even destruction, of the monarchy. For such partisans, claims of battlefield disaffection and treason only served to "prove" the irredeemable nature of Austria-Hungary as the "prison of the nations." This was notably true of the efforts of Czech nationalist leaders such as Edvard Beneš and Tomáš Masaryk, the "two geniuses of propaganda," who used questionable evidence of Czech hatred of the Habsburgs to such effect on the Allies, particularly in the treaties of St. Germain and Trianon.⁸

The widely read Czech writer and Bolshevik agitator (and wartime Habsburg officer cadet) Jaroslav Hašek did the army's image further damage with his fictional, but unforgettable, soldier Švejk.⁹ That the novel was at least as much antiwar as anti-Habsburg, and as much a comment on the Czech national character as a condemnation of the monarchy, was lost on many readers. Worse, Hašek's portrayal of endless tragicomedy in army life was at points not significantly different from the characterization of the Austro-Hungarian Army presented by its wartime German ally. From almost the war's beginning, the German General Staff, and especially Erich Ludendorff, *de facto* commander from 1916, grew increasingly contemptuous of the Habsburg Army and its unique inefficiencies. The Germans had little understanding of, or sympathy for, their ally's need for delicate ethnic balancing. The considerable German military effort expended in support of Austria-Hungary, particularly on the Eastern front, worsened Berlin's poor impression of Habsburg military performance. Hence the portrait of the Habsburg Army outlined in most German accounts of the war dwelt on *Schlamperei* and little else.¹⁰

⁸F. Fejtö, *Requiem pour un Empire défunt: Histoire de la destruction de l'Autriche-Hongrie* (Paris, 1988), Ch.31.

⁹J. Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk and his Fortunes in the World War* (trans. C. Parrott, New York, 1974).

¹⁰A. Cramon, *Unser österreich-ungarischer Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg: Erinnerungen aus meiner vierjährigen Tätigkeit als bevollmächtigter deutscher General beim k.u.k. Armeekommando* (Berlin, 1922). Cramon, senior German liaison officer to the Habsburg High Command during the war, is sharply critical but more informed than other German accounts; for a general survey of German-Habsburg misunderstandings: G. Shanafelt, *The Secret Enemy: Austria-Hungary and the German Alliance, 1914-1918* (New York, 1985).

Historians in other Central European countries were usually even less sympathetic to the memory of the multinational army. Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, the main successor regimes to the multinational monarchy, used historical examples of ethnic disloyalty in the wartime army to legitimize their similarly diverse but generally much less tolerant states. Much was made especially of the small number of Habsburg soldiers captured by the Russians who took up arms against the monarchy, particularly among historians in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. That Austria-Hungary had been the enemy of the postwar leaders in Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest did not help the matter either.¹¹

Admiral Horthy's revanchist Hungary, although theoretically sympathetic to the Habsburg dynasty and its military, was uninterested in objective historical studies of the war effort. Instead, interwar Hungary, with different intentions but a similar grasp of historical accuracy, used stories of Slav and Romanian treason in the trenches to advance its already vociferous claims for the disproportionate frontline sacrifices of the "heroic Magyar race."¹² Similarly, *deutschnational* Austrians, increasingly in the ascendent in Vienna after 1934, were willing believers in Slav disloyalty, partly due to poor relations with their former subjects, and partly out a sense of Teutonic superiority. Although relatively few former Habsburg senior officers became National Socialists, those who did adhered to and espoused the belief that German-Austrians had been betrayed at the front by their rebellious non-Aryan comrades in arms, a peculiarly Austrian *Dolchstoßlegende*.¹³

¹¹E. Beneš, *My War Memoirs* (London, 1928). A good example of Czech myth making. It should be noted, however, that one interwar successor state, renascent Poland, was generally more sympathetic to the memory of Austria-Hungary and its army. Józef Piłsudski, father of the state, had led the wartime Polish Legions under Austrian sponsorship, and filled many key post-1918 military appointments with ex-Habsburg officers.

¹²M. Farkas, "Doberdo: The Habsburg Army on the Italian Front, 1915-16." in: B. Király, N. Dreisziger, A. Nofi, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX: East Central European Society in World War I*. (New York, 1985), 315-17. A concise account of interwar trends in Hungarian historiography on the war.

¹³W. Czermak, *In deinem Lager war Österreich: Die österreichisch-ungarische Armee, wie man sie nicht kennt* (Breslau, 1938). A. Krauß, *Die Ursachen unserer Niederlage* (Munich, 1920). C. Bardolff, *Soldat im alten Österreich: Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben* (Jena, 1938). Three interwar accounts (two of them senior generals' memoirs) heading in the National Socialist direction.

Historiographically speaking, little improved after the Second World War. The former Habsburg lands, nearly all subjugated by Moscow or Belgrade, rewrote their histories of the First World War in line with the latest political and ideological norms. Hence yesterday's nationalist hero fighting against German or Magyar rule became a proletarian hero combatting the bourgeoisie, with much emphasis being placed on the workers' supposed role at the front and in the factory in bringing the imperialist war to an end. The essential hostility to the Habsburg Army, and willingness to disregard inconvenient facts, remained unchanged.¹⁴

That said, the army's legacy has not been completely without defenders. Some Central European liberals and social democrats who had criticized the army while it still existed changed their minds after 1918, recognizing the army's unique nature. As the great Hungarian sociologist Oskar Jászi noted favourably, "The army was the most individual creation of the monarchy."¹⁵ The traumas and tragedies of post-Habsburg Central Europe gave rise to a yearning for the greater tolerance and acceptance of ethnic diversity of an earlier epoch. It has been the task of more unbiased historians working since the 1960's, many of them American or Central Europeans settled in the United States, to restore a sense of balance to the history of the late Habsburg Army.¹⁶ The work of Gunther Rothenberg stands above all others' for its comprehensiveness, moderation, and scholarly value, all enhanced by freedom from the ethnic prejudices of the Danubian region, so frequently the bane of European historians; his *Army of Francis Joseph* justifiably remains the preeminent one volume work on the topic in any language.¹⁷

Still, much work remains to be done. In most histories of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Army appears as a minor German ally or satellite, if at

¹⁴Two of the more historically accurate works of the Marxist-Leninist genre: K. Picháček, *Vzpouřij navrátilců z ruského zajetí na jaře 1918* (Prague, 1968). M. Farkas, *Katonai összeomlás és forradalom 1918-ban* (Budapest, 1969). Accounts emanating from Ceausescu's Romania were generally the most biased.

¹⁵O. Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, 1929); see also: L. Jedlicka, "Politische Parteien, Heer und Staat in Österreich 1918-1939." *Unser Heer: 300 Jahre österreichisches Soldatentum in Krieg und Frieden* (Vienna, 1965), 315.

¹⁶For example, the Hungarian émigré historian István Deák, despite his excellent scholarship, has occasionally overcompensated by creating a virtual black-yellow (*schwarz-gelb*, from the Habsburg colours) counter-myth.

¹⁷G. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, 1976).

all.¹⁸ The fronts where the army fought--the Eastern, Italian, and Balkan--are generally treated as sideshows of the war without great significance; the assumption has been that nothing about tactics or operations could be learned from their study. This myopia has been particularly prevalent among English language historians, whose interest in the First World War apparently remains confined to the Western Front.¹⁹ One otherwise commendable survey of military effectiveness during the First World War manages to leave Austria-Hungary out completely, although it includes Italy, and even Japan!²⁰ To most military historians, the multinational Habsburg Army appears too diverse and complex--perhaps not sufficiently successful--to justify serious study.

This dissertation seeks to remedy the pervasive lack of attention and misunderstanding concerning the Austro-Hungarian Army in the historiography of the First World War. The Habsburg Army survived until the end, remaining a competent fighting force on several fronts until the end of October 1918. It outlasted the Russian Army by more than a year, and kept fighting as long as its much vaunted German ally. For these reasons alone the army deserves serious scholarly attention which it has heretofore rarely received. In addition, the wartime Austro-Hungarian Army functioned effectively as a multinational force of millions of soldiers divided among ten major ethnic groups. Its study therefore has much to offer social and ethnic historians, as well as students of warfare.

Several questions present themselves at the outset. First, how prepared was the Habsburg Army in terms of morale, training, doctrine and technology for the First World War? Why did it fail in its opening campaigns? How did it adjust to the terrible losses and stresses of total war? To what degree did the army update its tactical doctrine as the war progressed? How effectively did it integrate new technology with innovative tactics? Did the nationality question significantly

¹⁸R. Paschall, *The Defeat of Imperial Germany 1917-18* (Chapel Hill, 1989). This recent work even manages to attribute the Caporetto breakthrough of 1917--the greatest triumph in the history of Habsburg arms--exclusively to German brilliance; the author, director of the U.S. Army Military History Institute, should really know better.

¹⁹Sideshows involving English-speaking troops (Gallipoli, Salonika, Mesopotamia) apparently are considered significant. See, M. Gilbert, *The First World War* (London, 1994). This recent general history of the war hardly makes mention of Austria-Hungary and its war effort.

²⁰See: A. Millett and W. Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness* (3 Vols., Boston, 1988), *Vol. I: The First World War*.

hamper the army's battlefield effectiveness? Were certain ethnic groups consistently more--or less--reliable than others? Did the army perform with more success on some fronts than on others? Why did the army collapse in October 1918, failing to restore the dynasty as it had in 1848? To sum up, why did the Austro-Hungarian Army fight as well as it did for as long as it did?

This thesis proposes to address such questions in an innovative way. First, it will focus on the army at the divisional level. The division, comprising 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers, was the smallest self-contained formation of all arms and services--infantry, artillery, cavalry, engineers, and various support and logistical units. There are no comparative studies of Austro-Hungarian wartime divisions, in any language.²¹ Too many historians, like the oft-criticized generals of the Great War, have been content to remain at a safe distance from the front line. Rarely has historical research extended much below High Command level, so a detailed picture of the war the army actually fought, a tactical and politico-ethnic version of "history from below," has yet to emerge.

Secondly, five infantry divisions have been selected, one for each year of the war. These divisions saw service on various fronts in different strategic circumstances; all three major Austro-Hungarian fronts--Russian, Balkan, and Italian--are represented. The histories of these five divisions will be examined against the overall strategic background of the varied campaigns in which they fought. The chosen infantry divisions, although only a fraction of the Habsburg Army's combat formations, have been selected to represent the diverse experiences of the wartime army.²² In addition, the surviving war records of the five divisions--unit diaries, battle reports, orders, command reports, personnel files, and other relevant archival evidence--are sufficiently comprehensive to permit detailed analysis.

²¹Historians of the Second World War have used analysis of combat divisions to draw both operational and political lessons about wartime performance; refer to: J. Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy* (New York, 1982); and O. Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1992). The only divisional analysis for the First World War is a recent sociopolitical history: L. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton, 1994).

²²The army from 1914 to 1918 included two types of divisions: more than seventy infantry and a dozen cavalry; however, the cavalry divisions were fighting dismounted as *de facto* weak infantry divisions by 1916.

Thirdly, the five divisions represent different ethnic regions of the Dual Monarchy.²³ This thesis therefore innovatively combines conventional (but in this case, unwritten) military history with an institutional and sociological approach. It unites two diverse and frequently divergent streams of military history, the so-called "war and society" school and the more traditional operational version of events. The "war and society" concept of analysis of military institutions through the prism of social science did much to rejuvenate military history in the 1970's by drawing attention to vital social, political and ethnic factors previously undervalued or even ignored by historians. But as these investigations proved far easier to pursue in a relatively static environment, sociologically-inspired works on military forces have tended to discuss peace far more than war, thus putting aside the very *raison d'être* of all military organizations;²⁴ as Michael Howard has commented, "the trouble with this sort of book is that it loses sight of what armies are for."²⁵ Whatever the shortcomings of the regimental style of military history, ignoring what armies are for cannot be counted among them. However, a purely conventional study of the Austro-Hungarian Army's combat record in the First World War would hardly be innovative. The Habsburg Army was truly unique because of its ethnic diversity and the mechanisms it developed to function under the stress of total war in a multinational framework. Hence this study seeks to provide insights not only into the composition of the army and how its leaders adapted to this difficult circumstance, but why soldiers did--or did not--continue to fight in such terrible conditions, and also into how the army performed operationally through over four years of total war. Thus this dissertation will use an innovative methodology, drawing from the best of conventional military analysis and more current models to determine how the Habsburg Army actually performed in battle, in both operational and politico-ethnic terms.

It remains to be seen what generalizations about the army's performance are justified by this approach. Organizational changes, tactical doctrine and improvements in weaponry were usually applied by the High Command on an

²³The chosen units include a largely Czech reserve division, a Magyar-Romanian division, a Polish division, an élite Bosnian-German mountain division, and a mostly German division from North Bohemia.

²⁴I. Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918* (New York, 1990). Unquestionably the best work of this genre on the subject.

²⁵M. Howard, quoted in: J. Keegan, *Face of Battle* (New York, 1976), 29.

army-wide basis; such details are relatively easily found and evaluated. Yet ethnic and socio-political considerations depend upon more elusive and variegated sources. However, national questions were also to some extent governed by High Command policy, and all ten major ethnic groups are represented, at least to some degree, in the five chosen divisions. In any case, no study of the Habsburg Army is meaningful unless the politico-ethnic issue is included.

In my research I have consulted a wide variety of sources. The majority of my primary research comes from the *Kriegsarchiv* of the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv*, located in Vienna. I consulted the Habsburg Army's First World War field records, focussing primarily on those of the five divisions chosen for study; however, I also examined many relevant corps- and army-level documents, in addition to special collections, personnel files, and numerous battle reports. Archival research has been supplemented by the use of the seven volumes and exhaustive supplements of the Austro-Hungarian Official History, as well as many other official sources. I have also consulted numerous memoirs and unit histories. Lastly, I have examined many relevant secondary sources, particularly in German, but many works in ten other languages as well.

Chapter I: The Habsburg Army on the Eve

In 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Army was the last of Europe's multinational dynastic armies, the ultimate defender of the ancient Habsburg realm. It remained a source of unity and strength in a monarchy increasingly divided along national and ethnic lines. The army, for centuries one of the most powerful in Europe, by the early twentieth century had declined in size and fighting power compared to its potential enemies. Austria-Hungary had neglected its defences for decades while its strategic situation deteriorated and its many neighbours armed with unprecedented zeal. As the First World War approached, the Habsburg Army was no longer capable of successfully defending Austria-Hungary against all comers.

The Habsburg Army conformed to the administrative structure and organization accepted in the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867. Just as that agreement between Emperor-King Franz Joseph I and the Hungarian ruling class divided the monarchy into Austrian¹ and Hungarian² halves, it divided the army as well. In fact, until its collapse, there was not one army, but three. The main, or "common," army of 1914, by far the largest and most important, was the Imperial-and-Royal Army³ (*kaiserlich- und königliche*--henceforth *k.u.k.-- Armee*), controlled by the monarch and a joint war ministry (*k.u.k. Kriegsministerium*)⁴ in Vienna. However, in the spirit of the Dual Monarchy, Austria and Hungary had their own armies, controlled by separate war ministries in Vienna and Budapest. These were the Imperial-Royal Home Guard (*kaiserlich-königliche Landwehr*)⁵ and the Royal Hungarian Home Guard (*königlich ungarische Honvédség*), respectively; the latter title, usually shortened to *Honvéd*, was a noteworthy concession to Hungarian national pride, for it was the name of the Hungarian revolutionary army of 1848-49.

¹Technically before 1915 the term "Austria" was not used officially to describe the non-Hungarian half of the monarchy; the accepted name was "the lands represented in the *Reichsrat*" (*Die im Reichsrat vertretenen Königreiche und Länder*).

²As Hungary was a Kingdom, it is not correct to refer to a unified Empire, but only a Monarchy.

³Its characterization as Imperial-*and*-Royal was a significant issue for Hungary, for the use of the conjunction was a sign of Hungary's independence.

⁴Before 1911 it was the *Reichskriegsministerium*, but this was changed under Hungarian pressure, for the earlier title implied that there existed a single *Reich*, which Budapest steadfastly denied was the case.

⁵Imperial-Royal because, as if this were not already sufficiently complicated, although "Austria" was an Empire, some of its elements (Bohemia, Galicia and Bukovina) were Kingdoms.

Even more daunting than the bureaucratic apparatus of the Habsburg military was its multinational character. Like the monarchy it served, the army had always drawn on many different peoples. However, it became even more ethnically diverse with the introduction of peacetime conscription in 1868, in deliberate emulation of the Prussian military which had recently defeated the Habsburg Army in Bohemia; thereafter, the annual levy brought thousands of men from all nationalities and classes into the peacetime standing army, in rough proportion to their numbers in society. Thus of every hundred soldiers in the *k.u.k. Armee*, there were twenty-five Germans, twenty-three Magyars, thirteen Czechs, nine Serbs or Croats, eight Poles, eight Ruthenes (i.e., West Ukrainians), seven Romanians, four Slovaks, two Slovenes, and one Italian.⁶ These were the ten "national languages" recognized by the army.

The corps, divisions, and regiments of the Habsburg Army⁷ were organized on a regional basis, with each unit having a specific recruiting and mobilization district. This practice served to represent ethnic groups in a single regiment or independent battalion in approximate proportion to their numbers in a region, so that units had distinct local and ethnic characters. To function in a multilingual environment, all units of the *k.u.k. Armee* and *k.k. Landwehr*, regardless of national composition, had German as their language of command (*Kommandosprache*). This encompassed about eighty basic parade ground commands (i.e., "halt," "march," "forward," etc.). The language of service (*Dienstsprache*) was also German. This was a list of about a thousand technical terms necessary for soldiers, especially in the specialist branches. Thus a Czech sergeant could take command of a mixed Romanian-Magyar gun crew if the need arose, for all knew the German words for breech, shell, high-explosive, and the like. Yet the most important language in the army was the regimental language (*Regimentssprache*), which was the unit's vernacular. If twenty percent of a unit's troops spoke a certain language, it was accorded official status as regimental language; of course there could be several regimental languages in a given unit, and there often were. Nonetheless, the unit's officers and sergeants were expected to be able to conduct nearly all affairs in the soldiers' own languages. The *k.u. Honvéd* was different, however: conceived as a Hungarian national army, all its units had Magyar as the language of command, service, and regimental purposes. This was in accordance with Budapest's policy of

⁶W. Winkler, *Der Anteil der nichtdeutschen Volksstämme der öst.-ung. Wehrmacht* (Vienna, 1919), 1-2.

⁷"Army" is used here generally to describe all three forces--*k.u.k.*, *k.k.*, and *k.u.*

Magyarization through government organs, of which the national army was only one element.⁸

In the *k.u.k. Armee* and *k.k. Landwehr* the majority of units had more than one regimental language. Of the 102 *k.u.k.* line infantry regiments, only fifteen were considered "race pure" (*reinrassiger*), that is, having ninety percent of their soldiers belong to a single ethnic group. In the *k.k. Landwehr*, only nineteen regiments had a single *Regimentssprache*, while forty-four had two, and one regiment had three. Considering all branches of the army, only 142 units had one *Regimentssprache*. Some 163 units had two, twenty-four had three, and a few had four or even five.⁹

The army went to great lengths to accommodate its linguistic diversity equitably. As early as 1862, service textbooks were translated into the recognized languages of service. Posters announcing the 1914 mobilization had to be printed in fifteen different tongues. There was a comical side to the army's multilingual *mélange* as well. For example, the regimental doctor of the 5th Dragoons, a half Slovene unit, performed his routine medical examination in seven languages.¹⁰ For these reasons, the army tended to function with more efficiency and less national antagonism than most Austro-Hungarian institutions, its "delicate and tactful handling" of ethnic balancing being praised even by liberals and socialists as a model for other state organs.¹¹ The use of German for many official purposes, which for civilian government agencies caused such protest in some regions of the monarchy, rarely posed a problem in the army, for it was generally realized that it had been maintained to propagate historical unity, "a matter of convenience rather than prejudice."¹²

Ethnic pride and national identity were encouraged by the army in many cases, the most significant example being the *Honvéd*, with its Hungarian national flags and colours on the uniform. In addition, *k.u.k.* infantry regiments raised in Hungary wore traditional

⁸M. EhnI, "Die öst-ung Landmacht nach Aufbau, Gliederung, Friedengarnison, Einteilung und nationaler Zusammensetzung im Sommer 1914," *Ergänzungsheft 9 zum Werke Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (Vienna, 1934), 14.

⁹J.-C. Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht in Staat und Gesellschaft," in: A. Wandruszka and P. Urbanitsch, eds., *Die Habsburger Monarchie 1848-1918* (6 Bände, Vienna, 1973-89), *Band I: Die bewaffnete Macht* (1987), 97-98. EhnI, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht," 14.

¹⁰Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 98.

¹¹O. Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, 1929), 143.

¹²N. Stone, "Army and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1900-1918," *Past and Present*, No.33, April 1966, 100.

Hungarian dress distinctions such as tight fitting trousers and a special lace decoration on the tunic cuffs, known as the "bear's paw." The uniform of *k.u.k.* and *k.u.* Hussars similarly recalled Hungarian national tradition, with its headgear, the fur busby, and embroidered tunic, the *attila*. The *k.u.k.* and *k.k.* Lancers' tunic and distinctive helmet, the *czapka*, reflected historic Polish martial costume. Bosnian-Herzegovinian regiments, raised after the occupation of the two provinces in 1878, wore a red fez and special trousers, recalling Turkish costume. Local tradition was also honoured in the Alpine garb of the Imperial Tyrolean Rifles (*Tiroler Kaiserjäger*), the army's *corps d'élite*, as well as the Tyrolean Home Guard (*Landeschützen*) and mountain rifle (*Gebirgsschützen*) regiments of the *k.k. Landwehr*.

A major concession to national heritage and pride was the unique status of Croatian units of the *Honvéd*, the Croatian Home Guard (*Hrvatsko Domobranstvo*). Under the terms of an agreement between Hungary and its region of Croatia-Slavonia, often known as the "second *Ausgleich*," Croatian regiments of the *Honvéd* were granted the right to use Serbo-Croat in place of Magyar as the language of command and service, to carry Croatian national colours, and to wear Croatian national insignia on the uniform.¹³ The Croatian Home Guard units were concentrated in the 42nd *Honvéd* Infantry Division, which was given the honorary title of the "Devil's Division" (*Vrazija Divizija*) by the Archduke Franz Ferdinand for its excellent performance in prewar exercises.

There was a certain ethnic division of labour in the army, based upon convenience, tradition and martial reputation. Infantrymen, regardless of nationality, were predominantly peasants, many of them Romanian, Ruthene, Slovak, and South Slav. The *Tiroler Kaiserjäger*, the Habsburg Army's closest equivalent to Guards regiments, (unlike Europe's other monarchical armies, Austria-Hungary's had no Guards regiments, only ceremonial bodyguard units) were approximately two-thirds German and one-third Italian.¹⁴ Rifle (*Feldjäger*) battalions, another élite, were disproportionately German, although recruited from all regions of the Dual Monarchy. Croatian infantry regiments of the *k.u.k. Armee*, composed of Croats and some Serbs, were also highly respected for their martial prowess, as they were descended from the *Grenzer* who had defended the

¹³T. Papp. "Die königliche ungarische Landwehr (Honvéd)," *Die Habsburger Monarchie 1848-1918: Band V*, 658-9.

¹⁴These percentages were carefully maintained by recruiting throughout Tirol and Vorarlberg, so none of the four regiments would become too Italian. P. Broucek (Ed.), *Ein General im Zwielficht: Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaises von Horstenau* (2 Bände, Vienna, 1980), *Band I*, 143.

monarchy's Balkan frontier for centuries.¹⁵ Bosnian-Herzegovinian regiments, the famed *Bosniaken*, quickly established a reputation for ferocity and toughness; like their home provinces, they were an amalgam of Serbs, Moslems and Croats.

Ethnically the cavalry was similarly divided. The Hussars, Hungary's traditional cavalry, were overwhelmingly Magyar. Lancer regiments, Poland's historic mounted troops, were comprised mostly of Poles, with some Ruthenes and Germans. The Dragoons, raised in the western areas of the Austrian half of the monarchy, were largely German and Czech. The artillery, a more technical arm, favoured urban soldiers, often Germans and Czechs. The support and administrative services, needing educated and skilled soldiers, were disproportionately German, Magyar and Czech. The medical and transportation branches of the army contained many Jews; indeed, the Jewish regimental doctor (the young *Leutnant* Dr. Sigmund Freud, for example) was a cliché of the late Habsburg Army.¹⁶

Not surprisingly there was a degree of ethnic antagonism among various national groups, usually corresponding to the sentiments and hatreds of the wider society. Hungary's minorities, and particularly Romanians, disliked their Magyar fellow soldiers, especially in the less than tolerant *Honvéd*.¹⁷ There were resentments and bad feelings in some mixed German-Czech units recruited in Bohemia. Poles and Ruthenes in Galician regiments often did not get along well. Relations between Croats and Serbs were frequently less than ideal, notably in Bosnian-Herzegovinian units. Mixed South Slav-Italian units from Dalmatia and the Littoral suffered from nationalist back biting as well.¹⁸

The divisions in the army were not only characterized by ethnicity. Levels of political, economic and social development in the Dual Monarchy varied widely by region. Much of German and Czech Austria, and some of Magyar Hungary, was as advanced as any parts of Europe in 1914. Vienna, Prague, Budapest and their environs were thoroughly modern and cosmopolitan. However, the inhabitants of vast segments of the Habsburg realm, especially rural Hungary, Galicia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, were

¹⁵For a scholarly study of this fascinating institution: G. Rothenberg, *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740-1881: A Study of an Imperial Institution* (Chicago, 1966).

¹⁶I. Deak, "Pacesetters of Integration: Jewish Officers in the Habsburg Monarchy," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol.3, No.1, Winter 1989, 31. Jews were not recognized as a distinct ethnic group by the army.

¹⁷R. Kizsling, "Das Nationalitätenproblem in Habsburgs Wehrmacht 1848-1918," *Der Donauraum*, 4. Jahrgang, 2. Heft, 1959, 86.

¹⁸KA, Nachlass Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr. I/I. "Die Klammer des Reichs: Das Verhalten der elf Nationalitäten der k.u.k. Wehrmacht 1914-1918," 3-4.

living in near-medieval poverty and backwardness. For the army, this meant that many of its recruits arrived for training lacking the most basic of skills, "utterly alien to the world of discipline, timetable, and hygiene."¹⁹ On the eve of the First World War, three percent of the population of Lower Austria (the area including and surrounding Vienna) was illiterate; among Galician Ruthenes the rate was sixty-one percent, among South Slavs in Dalmatia, sixty-four percent. Thus a popular army joke stated that Galician peasants made the world's best troops, but first needed three years of training to become human, and another five to become soldiers.²⁰ Such disparities in levels of cultural and social development made the task of forming cohesive multinational units that much more difficult.

The army attempted to overcome its inherent weaknesses by emphasizing *esprit de corps*. Pride in unit has proven a significant motivator in all armies throughout history, but for the Habsburg Army it was especially important, for it gave soldiers of widely different languages, cultures and classes a common home and heritage. Every *k.u.k.* infantry, cavalry and artillery regiment had a distinctive name, that of its honorary colonel, most often a leading general, but also sometimes of a monarch, or a senior member of the royal family;²¹ its own regimental day, normally the anniversary of a famous battle; its own colours; its own marches and regimental songs, often sung in regimental languages; and its own specific uniform distinctions, a combination of facing colours and buttons. A soldier was enlisted into a specific regiment, was trained by the regiment, fought with the regiment, and if killed in action was buried with his regiment's number on his gravestone. "Regimental ideology," although customarily associated with a professional force rather than a mass conscript army, was vitally necessary to forge and maintain unit cohesion. Little had changed in the spirit of the Habsburg Army since the days of the Archduke Charles and Field Marshal Radetzky. The concept of *esprit de corps* inculcated in the 1807 Service Regulations--"The confidence of a regiment in its capabilities, pride in its tradition, and the determination to safeguard its reputation"--was equally true a century later.²²

¹⁹I. Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848 to 1918* (New York, 1990), 105.

²⁰Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 93-94.

²¹This could get rather long: hence, Budapest's 32nd Infantry was rendered officially as, "Imperial-and-Royal Infantry Regiment Empress-Queen Maria Theresia, No.32."

²²G. Rothenberg, *Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army, 1792-1814* (London, 1982), 118.

Still, the vital element which made the army function was loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty. The army was first and last a dynastic instrument, bound together by a semi-feudal devotion to the monarch; it was very aware of its role as "the most powerful pillar of the Habsburg fortification,"²³ and proud of its past service as the ultimate guarantor of the dynasty's rule. Made up of ten different nationalities, the army obviously could not generate a modern patriotism based on the nation-state, as other European armies did. Indeed, such a secular faith was a complete contradiction of the unique Imperial-and-Royal way. As put succinctly by the Chief of the General Staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorff, in a letter to Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1911, "Lacking all cohesive basis for a state, the army can only rely on the dynastic principle."²⁴ The only method the army had at its disposal to win and maintain the loyalty of its soldiers was to generate a loyalty to the Emperor-King.

Thus the conscript's training was filled with dynastic indoctrination, emphasizing the army's "cultural-historical mission."²⁵ The army's task was made easier because the monarch, Franz Joseph I, was a generally popular, in many cases beloved, figure. His presence dominated the realm, and his popularity was no doubt due to his extreme longevity as much as his perceived benevolence. The army was fortunate that Franz Joseph understood well its unique and vital mission; he considered himself to be the first soldier of the monarchy, a role he relished and pursued very seriously, rarely wearing civilian clothing, and taking an active daily interest in "his" military.²⁶

Religion served as an invaluable supplement to the dynastic principle. Although the Dual Monarchy contained Orthodox Christians (principally in Bosnia, Croatia and Transylvania), Jews, and Muslims (in Bosnia-Herzegovina), the vast majority of Franz Joseph's subjects were adherents of the Church of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church was an active supporter of the monarchy, for Austria-Hungary was the preeminent Catholic country in Europe, and the last remnant of the Holy Roman Empire. The army's chaplains did much to reinforce dynastic loyalty among the troops. Unit chaplains, frequently of the same nationality as their uniformed flock, stressed the moral and ethical aspects of the soldiers' duty, filling their sermons with themes of "Emperor, King ,

²³Jászi, *Dissolution*, 141.

²⁴G. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, 1976), 162.

²⁵Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 95.

²⁶J.C. Allmayer-Beck, "Das Heerwesen," in: F. Engel-Janosi and H. Rumpler, eds., *Probleme der franzisko-josephinischen Zeit 1848-1916* (Munich, 1967), 75.

Fatherland."²⁷ The support of the Roman Catholic Church gave the Dual Monarchy and its army legitimacy in the eyes of its soldiers, a factor which no doubt helped morale and troop loyalty, especially among the devout peasants who made up so much of the fighting forces.

Austria-Hungary's multinational character, combined with the increasing nationalist agitation which plagued the monarchy's last decades, produced a general pessimism among many political and military leaders. As early as 1895, Austrian Prime Minister Casimir Badeni told the German Ambassador Lichnowski, "Any war is an impossibility for Austria. If we are attacked, we must accept the situation with God's help...a multinational state cannot fight a war without damage."²⁸ In 1897, Czech nationalists initiated a campaign to encourage soldiers to answer *zde* rather than *hier* on the parade ground, which was among the first signs of nationalist agitation in the multinational army.²⁹

Several disturbing incidents in the final years of peace only served to encourage the generals' worst forebodings. The 1908-09 mobilization during the Bosnia-Herzegovina annexation crisis saw open manifestations of troop disloyalty in several units. In the worst cases, Czech reservists, sympathetic to Serbia, appeared for duty carrying black flags and shouting Serbian slogans.³⁰ The 1912-13 Balkan War preventative mobilization produced even worse incidents. Numerous regiments experienced disturbances, the most serious again being in Czech units. Reservists of the 8th Dragoons refused to entrain for Galicia, and did so only when forced, while similar occurrences were reported in the 18th and 36th Infantry Regiments, also Czech formations.³¹

Thus the generals' increasing fears about troop disloyalty were hardly surprising. Concerns centered on Slav troops, including Ruthenes and Serbs as well as Czechs, in the event of a war with Russia or Serbia. In 1910 the commander of the East Galician XI Corps stated, "as matters stand, the entire Ruthene population must be considered unreliable." The senior officers' pessimism about what was termed the "internal enemy"

²⁷W. Wagner, "Die k.(u.)k. Armee--Gliederung und Aufgabestellung," *Die Habsburger Monarchie 1848-1918: Band V*, 534.

²⁸K. Peball, "Um das Erbe: Zur Nationalitätenpolitik des k.u.k. Armeeeoberkommandos während der Jahre 1914 bis 1917," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, 1967, Sonderheft, 38.

²⁹Kiszling, "Das Nationalitätenproblem," 87.

³⁰KA Nachlass Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr. 1/I, 192-193.

³¹Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 116-117.

was not confined to Slav troops, however: during the annexation crisis, the commander of the Trieste military district reported that Italian regions of the monarchy would rise in armed revolt if Austria entered a war with Serbia.³²

Such lack of optimism on the part of many senior officers, amounting to a genuine *déformation professionnelle*, was disturbing, due to the officer corps' special role. The Habsburg officer corps was the ultimate guarantor of the dynasty and the monarchy. While all armies' officers ideally identify with the regime which employs them, the mission of the Habsburg Army's officers was unique in its concept of service and supranationalism. As Emperor Franz had once appealed to them, they were to be not patriots for a nation or an ethnic group, or even a state, but instead "patriots for me."³³ In an era of increasing nationalism, the professional officer corps held itself instinctively and rigidly, perhaps even atavistically, above most of the ethnic and regional prejudices which were fraying the Dual Monarchy. Franz Joseph's regular officers were the last true "Austrians," in the old sense, dedicated not to peoples or nations, but solely to the House of Habsburg.

Dedication to dynasty and supranationalism was inculcated at all levels of officer education. The route to a commission was similar to those offered by other European armies of the day. There were two *k.u.k.* military academies. The *Theresianische* Military Academy at Wiener Neustadt produced career subalterns for the infantry and cavalry, while the Technical Military Academy at Vienna trained junior officers for the artillery, engineers, and other specialist branches. Austria and Hungary each had a small military academy as well; the latter, Budapest's Ludovika Academy, was a particular point of Hungarian national pride.³⁴ Admission to the academies was open to graduates of the numerous special military preparatory high schools, and also to students from civilian high schools, even before completion of the graduation certificate (*Matura*). The academies offered a three-year curriculum leading to a regular commission as a lieutenant.

However, the *k.u.k.* academies produced only about 250 new officers annually. Far more significant, at least numerically, were the nineteen army cadet schools, scattered throughout the Dual Monarchy, which graduated some 1,000 new regular subalterns every year.³⁵ There were sixteen *Kadettenschulen* for the infantry, and one each for the

³²Stone, "Army and Society," 101.

³³Jászi, *Dissolution*, 83.

³⁴Papp, "Die königliche ungarische Landwehr," 672-3.

³⁵Deak, *Beyond Nationalism*, 86.

artillery, cavalry and engineers, including three for the *Landwehr/Honvéd*. Cadets were commissioned as ensigns (*Fähnriche*), a probationary rank, after completion of a four year course. Ensigns were usually promoted to lieutenant after two years' active service.³⁶

A commission in the reserve was theoretically available to all fit young men with a *Matura* (secondary school graduation certificate) and sufficient private income. Reserve officer candidates entered the army as one year volunteers (*einjährig Freiwilliger*), paying for their uniform and living expenses. The year of service was relatively easy, especially compared to the life of a conscript, thanks to many privileges. After completing the year of active service, successful candidates were made non-commissioned officers in the reserve, most of whom became reserve ensigns within three years. A reserve lieutenancy was offered to most reserve ensigns after a probationary period.

The reserve officer corps was a particular bastion of the middle class. Commissioned reservists were drawn largely from the professional and commercial classes, and were frequently university educated. While the regular officer corps included many sons of soldiers and men of relatively modest backgrounds, the reserve officer corps brought the bourgeoisie into the army.³⁷

The Habsburg regular officer corps was a socially diverse group, hardly the preserve of the hereditary nobility, as in many other European armies. While nobles had once dominated the active officer corps, their overall number had been declining in the years before the war. By 1896, of the 15,580 regular officers, only 3,534 were nobles of any type, and 1,374 of them were *vons*, the lowest variety. A noble monicker did not constitute a special career advantage either; rather, advancement seems to have been based solely on merit at all levels. From 1866 to 1918, none of the ten Chiefs of the General Staff was a hereditary noble.³⁸ Instead, the lower middle and middle classes

³⁶Wagner, "Die k.(u.)k. Armee," 494-524.

³⁷For example, Fritz Kreisler, a reknowned violinist and *Leutnant der Reserve* in a Styrian *Landsturm* regiment, observed that the prewar officer corps of his battalion included, in addition to himself, "a famous sculptor, a well-known philologist, two university professors (one of mathematics, the other of natural science), a prince, and a civil engineer at the head of one of the largest Austrian steel corporations." *Four Weeks in the Trenches* (Boston, 1917), 10.

³⁸R. Kann, "The Social Prestige of the Officer Corps in the Habsburg Empire from the 18th Century to 1918," in: B. Király and G. Rothenberg, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe, Vol.I: Special Topics and Generalizations on the 18th and 19th Centuries* (New York, 1979), 121. Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, 159-164.

dominated the regular officer corps. Indeed, seventy-five percent of general officers in 1918 were from the lower middle and middle classes, as were eighty-nine percent of the General Staff officers from 1867 to 1918.³⁹ The dominance of the bourgeoisie, and particularly the petty bourgeoisie, was possible because the military academies and schools almost always waived their fees, and because only a few exclusive cavalry regiments expected junior officers to have a private income. Although officers' salaries were hardly lavish, and particularly modest before 1908, a newly commissioned lieutenant could normally survive on his pay, which was not the case in many of Europe's armies.

Nonetheless, many of the Habsburg Army's leaders were inevitably the sons of soldiers, both commissioned and non-commissioned: they were *Tornisterkinder*, "knapsack children." A tradition of service to the dynasty ran strong in military families, in many cases over centuries. However, one significant change in the commissioning process came with the introduction of a more formalized modern system after 1868. Previously commissioning from the ranks for acts of battlefield heroism had been a fairly common method of promotion (as portrayed memorably in Joseph Roth's famous novel *The Radetzky March*); after the *Ausgleich* this practice essentially ceased. It was no longer possible for a rank-and-file soldier or non-commissioned officer to rise *von der Pike auf* and win an officer's golden sash and swordbelt for his bravery. Commissions were available instead to those with a certain degree of educational achievement. Thus officer status became formally tied to class and rank in civilian society.

The ethnic composition of the officer corps was no less diverse than its social makeup. Like many other arms of the Imperial-and-Royal bureaucracy, the professional corps was disproportionately German. In 1910, German speakers⁴⁰ comprised fully seventy-nine percent of the regular officer corps, although Germans represented only twenty-four percent of the overall population of the Dual Monarchy. The next largest groups were the Magyars, with nine percent, and the Czechs, with five percent.⁴¹ Other ethnic groups were vastly underrepresented in the active officer corps, well below their percentages of population in the empire. However, the percentage of non-Germans, especially Magyars, was rising considerably in the years immediately before the war.

³⁹Stone, "Army and Society," 98.

⁴⁰German speakers, not necessarily German by ethnicity. Many officers whose ethnic background was non-German (and particularly sons from army families) spoke German as their first language, and were therefore considered "Germans," inasmuch as they had any nationality.

⁴¹Stone, "Army and Society," 99.

The preponderance of ethnic Germans in the regular officer corps was largely a matter of tradition and self-selection. There existed little ethnic prejudice among regular officers. Yet being a member of a distinctly underrepresented nationality certainly did not cause career difficulties; as an institution, the regular officer corps was more open-minded than the wider civilian world around it, proving, "remarkably free of that national intolerance which flourished everywhere in the monarchy."⁴² Indeed, many of the army's senior officers were non-Germans (and non-Magyars). Of the nine active Field Marshals serving during the First World War, three--Eugen, Joseph and Friedrich--were Habsburg Archdukes; Conrad and Rohr were German-Austrians; Böhm-Ermolli and Kövess were German or part-German, although from outside Austria; Krobotin was a Moravian Czech and Borojevic a Croat.⁴³

The reserve officer corps was also disproportionately German, although less so than the regular officer corps. In 1906, fifty-nine percent of reserve officers were Germans, twenty-six percent were Magyars, and almost ten percent were Czechs. Other nationalities were represented roughly as they were in the active officer corps.⁴⁴ The relatively high numbers of Magyars and Czechs, as well as the low numbers of other ethnic groups, were attributable to the level of education and private income necessary to qualify for a reserve commission. Thus the more rural and economically less advanced nationalities were rarely found among reserve officers. However, the numbers of Romanians, Poles, Ruthenes, Croats and Serbs in the reserve officer corps began to increase sharply after 1907, more so after 1912, when a new law granted elementary school teachers the right to be commissioned in the reserve.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, the religious composition of the army's officer corps reflected its ethnic makeup. Roman Catholics dominated the regular officer corps, Protestant and Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Jews being hardly represented. However, there was considerable religious diversity among reserve officers. Corresponding to their conspicuous presence in commerce and the professions, Protestants and Jews were well

⁴²Ibid., 98.

⁴³I. Deák, "The Ethnic Question in the Multinational Habsburg Army, 1848-1918," *Ethnic Armies: Polyethnic Armed Forces from the Time of the Habsburgs to the Age of the Superpowers*, (Waterloo, ON, 1990), 41.

⁴⁴Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 127.

⁴⁵T. Hajdu, "Army and Society in Hungary in the Era of World War I," in: B. Király, N. Dreisziger, A. Nofi, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe, Vol. XLX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985), 121. Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 99.

represented in the commissioned ranks of the reserve forces. Indeed, the percentage of Jews was astounding, without precedent in European history. Although Jews comprised less than five percent of the monarchy's population in 1911, they represented seventeen percent of army reserve officers and almost twenty-three percent of reserve military officials (e.g., administrators with officer rank). There were six Jewish officers for every Jewish rank-and-file soldier.⁴⁶ Due to Hungary's exceptional tolerance of its Jewish population, particularly those who had assimilated and become linguistically and culturally Magyars, Jewish reserve officers were especially prominent in the *Honvéd*.⁴⁷ The reserve officer's social prestige and association with the dynasty, while not as strong as in neighbouring Prussia, was a strong incentive nonetheless to the monarchy's minorities, notably Jews desiring assimilation or at least respectability. Jews aspiring to a reserve commission were aided in this, as the Habsburg Army was certainly the most advanced and open-minded of all Europe's armies in its dealings with its Jews. As a result, Jewish officers thrived in the Austro-Hungarian Army while they were excluded from, or persecuted in, many European armies of the day. From 1885 to 1914, the Prussian Army trained some 30,000 Jewish reserve officer candidates, but deemed not one worthy of a commission.⁴⁸

It bears repeating that the unifying factor in the Habsburg officer corps, whether regular or reserve, regardless of social, ethnic or religious background, was loyalty to the throne and the dynasty. The ethos of the officer corps was thoroughly Imperial-and-Royal. Upon commissioning, officers swore an oath to the monarch and the House of Habsburg, not to political leaders or governments in Vienna or Budapest. The sense of loyalty to the Emperor-King was especially strong, not least because of Franz Joseph's long reign: as early as 1900, all serving officers had been commissioned in his name. Franz Joseph reciprocated with an affection and special appreciation for his army and its officers. After all, the monarchy's survival depended on the army, as he had learned in 1848. The octogenarian Emperor-King, in his own mind always a soldier before anything else, continued to start his full days before dawn, clad in a cut-down army greatcoat, working at a simple army field table.

⁴⁶Deák, "Pacesetters of Integration," 24, 31.

⁴⁷E. Schmidl, *Juden in der k.(u.)k. Armee 1788-1918* (Eisenstadt, 1989), 133. As the army did not consider Jews a distinct ethnic group, exact percentages are sometimes difficult to ascertain, but the prewar *Honvéd* officer corps was likely one-quarter Jewish.

⁴⁸Deák, "Pacesetters of Integration," 23. The Bavarian and Württemberg forces did commission some Jews in the reserve, however.

As inculcated in the academies and the cadet schools, and reinforced in regimental life, the officer corps bound itself directly and uniquely to the monarch and his interests, the only unquestionably and thoroughly loyal element in the empire, "the last bond of cohesion in a dividing monarchy."⁴⁹ They were the ultimate defenders of the dynasty, the last remnant of feudal loyalty to the Supreme War Lord, a code which had not changed for centuries. Franz Joseph's regular officers rejected the nationalistic and commercial values of the wider society, thriving instead on their special duty and mission, perceiving themselves to be "a noble elite separate and far above the self-seeking landed aristocracy and the money-grubbing middle classes."⁵⁰

Thus the regular officer corps constituted the only truly non-national group in the Dual Monarchy. Military education and life essentially denationalized officers, so much so that one scholar properly noted their status as an "anational caste" within the Dual Monarchy.⁵¹ Regular officers, regardless of nationality, lived largely apart from the civilian population, secure in their distinct ideals, even speaking their own German dialect, the rootless *ärarisch deutsch* of the Habsburg bureaucracy. Most had no real home except the army, and no sense of permanent identity outside the Habsburg Monarchy. Any display of ethnic or nationalist sentiment among regular officers, at least in the *k.u.k. Armee*, was viewed as bad form at best, traitorous at worst. It is significant that the official service file (*Qualifikationslist*) maintained for every Habsburg officer, although exceptionally detailed concerning the officer's background, education, and service in uniform, makes no mention whatsoever of an officer's nationality. Naturally this highly developed institutional identity and dynastic loyalty could easily lead to presumptions of disloyalty among other groups in the monarchy, as in the case of the regular officers' widespread fear of ethnically-based treason both before and during the war.

The situation among reserve officers was somewhat different. Reserve officers frequently shared the dynastic sentiments of the professionals, but usually with markedly less intensity. Their much briefer military training and experience, their civilian lives within their communities, and their greater ethnic diversity meant that reserve officers typically remained active members of their various ethnic groups. Commissioned reservists brought with them many nationalist and democratic, even socialist, ideas which

⁴⁹Peball, "Um das Erbe," 29.

⁵⁰G. Rothenberg, "Patriots for Me: Observations on the Habsburg Professional Officer Corps, 1868-1918," in: D. Denton, ed., *Limits of Loyalty*, (Waterloo, ON, 1979), 67-68.

⁵¹Jászi, *Dissolution*, 144.

were unpalatable to regular officers. The influx of political nonconformists and nontraditional ethnic groups into the officer corps worried many active officers, who feared that the vital element of unswerving loyalty to the dynasty was being sacrificed. Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Chief of Staff Conrad became concerned about such issues; in 1907 the latter suggested that the reserve officer corps be purged of undesirables, but such a proposal could never have been implemented in the Dual Monarchy and its officer corps, which assumed all commissioned soldiers to be honourable and loyal.⁵²

An omnipresent emphasis on honour and other quasi-feudal values proved a unifying force in the officer corps, giving both active and reserve officers a common code and identity. The use of the informal you (*du*) among all officers, regardless of rank or position, was unique among the armies of Europe. An aristocratic custom, *duzen* had fallen out of use elsewhere, but it continued in the Habsburg forces. It proved an important social leveller, contributing to a sense of cohesion in the officer corps, helping to unite officers of different nationalities and classes.⁵³

Beyond that, a highly rigid sense of honour was universal. A near-medieval fascination with chivalry and honour lived on the Habsburg officer corps, as did so many other feudal notions. The code of honour, rooted in ancient custom, extended to all areas of an officer's life, whether regular or reserve. Indeed, the hopes of liberal reformers that the *einjährig Freiwilliger* system would bring more modern, bourgeois values into the army were proved mistaken. Instead, most reserve officer candidates absorbed the values of the professionals, following the general tendency of the bourgeois to mimick the style of the gentry. The greatest expression of the code of honour was the officer corps' atavistic predilection for duelling. The pistol or sword duel, though technically illegal in Austria-Hungary, flourished in the army. Duels were conducted for many personal and political reasons, a frequent one being defence of the honour of the army and the dynasty. Many duels resulted from political disputes and insults from *deutschnational* university students, as the highly ideological *Burschenschaften* were as enamoured of duelling as the officer corps.⁵⁴

A more serious condition affecting the entire officer corps was the singular linguistic burden borne by troop leaders. Upon joining his regiment, a new officer almost

⁵²Hajdu, "Army and Society," 116.

⁵³KA, Nachlaß Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr. 1/1, 13.

⁵⁴Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, 128-135. See also the same author's "Chivalry, Gentlemanly Honor, and Virtuous Ladies in Austria-Hungary," *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol. XXV, 1994.

invariably had to start learning a new language or languages. Many officers were fortunate in knowing several languages before entering the army. This was especially true of the sons of soldiers, who often had grown up in several regions of the monarchy. Conrad, for example, knew seven languages.⁵⁵ Every professional learned German as well as two of the army's other officially recognized languages in the cadet school or the academy, Czech and Magyar being the most common.

New officers had three years to achieve proficiency in their regimental language or languages. As the army provided little educational assistance, instruction was an individual burden. Officers had to be able to demonstrate proficiency before a board to advance their careers; although a two-year grace period was available in the event of failure, those who failed a second time were set back on the promotion list, in which case there was little choice but to leave the army.⁵⁶

Even those officers who knew their regimental languages well could easily be troubled by obscure dialects, particularly of peasant soldiers. To function in such circumstances, the army had its own pidgin, known as *Kauderwelsch*, permitting basic communication between officers and men. The most notorious example of such a pidgin was "Army Slavic" (*Armee-Slawisch*), a mix of several languages, Czech predominating, which was supposed to function well enough for all Slav troops, whether Czech, Slovak, Slovene, Serb, Croat, Polish or Ruthene.⁵⁷ Mercifully, the army generally functioned better than this example would seem to indicate, at least in peacetime. However, a few officers proved deficient in their learning of the languages of their men, particularly reserve officers, who frequently lacked the time to gain proficiency in foreign tongues.

The army's non-commissioned officer cadres were usually very helpful when junior officers suffered from communication problems. Although the Austro-Hungarian non-commissioned corps lacked the authority and prestige of its famed Prussian counterpart, it could be of great assistance with linguistic matters. A regiment's sergeants, while by tradition not too involved in troop training or leadership, leaving those duties instead to lieutenants, were normally of the same nationality as the other ranks, and were thus able to act as translators, if necessary. The Habsburg Army's non-commissioned cadres were small, however, with companies averaging only three professional non-commissioned officers (versus twelve in the German Army, six in the

⁵⁵Stone, "Army and Society," 100.

⁵⁶Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, 99.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 102.

French, three in the Italian, and only two in the Russian).⁵⁸ The complications and weaknesses of the army's language problem only became serious during the First World War.

The Habsburg Army's officers led lives and careers quite apart from civilian society. Most of Franz Joseph's regular officers pursued careers characterized by modest finances and glacially slow promotion. The officer corps was by no means top heavy (in 1911, only 1.4% of regular officers wore generals' stars, and fully eighty-six percent were subalterns or captains)⁵⁹; line careers rarely advanced beyond the regiment, and never rapidly. The only exception was the select minority taken onto the General Staff via the *Kriegsschule*, and thus frequently to general officer rank. This tiny élite effectively ran the army, enjoying great prestige and rapid career advancement. But the overwhelming majority of the active officers, the long-serving career captains and majors commanding companies and battalions, served loyally, secure in their faith in the dynasty, and well aware of the army's many limitations, political and military.

But by the eve of the First World War, the purely military problems of the multinational army had grown noticeably serious; when war came they would prove more damaging than any political or ethnic difficulties. The army's fundamental problems, as with other Austro-Hungarian institutions, originated with the *Ausgleich*. Like all compromises, the *Ausgleich* did not satisfy all the desires of any of the involved groups and angered all the uninvolved groups. However, its military provisions from the outset were fraught with considerable difficulties for the Habsburg military establishment.

Franz Joseph was persuaded to accommodate many of the demands of the Hungarian political leadership after the army's defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1866. The subsequent political instability demanded an end to Hungary's constitutional status, which had been in place since the suppression of the revolution of 1848-49 and was now perceived to be unsatisfactory. Military matters were at the very centre of the political controversy, because Hungarian nationalists--who included virtually the entire Hungarian "political nation," that is, ruling class--had never abandoned the hope of a separate Hungarian national army modeled on the revolutionary *Honvédség*.

In November 1867, Franz Joseph convened a generals' council to break the constitutional deadlock, with the aim of creating a military reform plan which would be acceptable to Budapest, the army, and the crown. After a few months of direct

⁵⁸D. Jones, "Imperial Russia's Forces at War," in: A. Millett and W. Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness* (3 Vols., Boston, 1988), Vol. I: *The First World War*, 281.

⁵⁹Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, 170.

negotiations with the Hungarian government, an arrangement was agreed upon and put into law in 1868.⁶⁰ In this, Budapest consented to the continued use of German as the language of command in the *k.u.k. Armee*, as well the display of Habsburg colours and imperial symbols. In exchange, a new national second-line force, the *k.u. Honvédség*, was to be created, and permitted the use of Magyar for all purposes and the display of Hungarian colours on the flag and uniform. The *Honvéd's* intended companion force, the *k.k. Landwehr*, was simultaneously established, not because the Austrian half of the monarchy needed or wanted its own army, but rather to achieve the vital appearance of symmetry with Hungary. Its language policies were identical to those of the *k.u.k.* forces, but its colours and insignia reflected the heritage of the traditional Austrian lands.

The Military Law (*Wehrgesetz*) of 1868 brought additional significant changes to the army. Following the victorious Prussian model, Austria-Hungary introduced a comprehensive military service programme, based for the first time on peacetime conscription. The new system was intended to provide the standing army with sufficient soldiers, and, more importantly, with a large body of trained reservists able to be recalled to the colours in an emergency, thereby bringing first- and second-line units up to war strength. Under the 1868 law, all fit male subjects of the Dual Monarchy were liable for twelve years' military service. Candidates for conscription drew lots, usually at age twenty. Those with the lowest numbers spent three years on active service with the *k.u.k. Armee*, then seven years in the reserve, and finally two years in the reserve of the *Landwehr/Honvéd*.⁶¹ A small number of conscripts with middle lots spent two years on active service with the second-line armies, and then ten years in the reserve of those formations. Those with the highest numbers, and the many who received deferments, were placed in the supplementary reserve (*Ersatzreserve*) and did not have to serve on active duty, receiving only six weeks' basic training.

Ultimately the most obstructive element of the military reforms of 1868 was the provision for modifications to the law, including budget and manpower issues. After 1868, questions of army finance and structure, like all constitutional issues, were to be brought up for review every ten years. However, any legal revisions had to be approved by both the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments. Thus any increases in military appropriations or conscript levies had to meet with the approval of both major political

⁶⁰G. Rothenberg, "Toward a National Army: The Military Compromise of 1868 and its Consequences," *Slavic Review*, Vol.31, No.4, December 1972, 805-809.

⁶¹Stone, "Army and Society," 98.

groups in the Dual Monarchy, owing to the fragmented nature of parliamentary rule in Austria-Hungary. Thus the army became the "Achilles' heel of Dualism."⁶²

In practice, any attempts to increase army funding or manpower met with strong opposition in many quarters, but particularly from the nationalists in Budapest. This reflected the essential problem surrounding the military aspects of the *Ausgleich*. To Hungary's many nationalists, the *k.u.k. Armee* was the foreign army which had violently suppressed the 1848 revolution, a German force to be financed and supported only as much as necessary under existing law. However, the *Honvéd* was a true Hungarian army, the inheritor of the heroic traditions of 1848. To nationalists, the *Honvéd's* limitations of small size, second-line status and poor equipment (when founded, the *Honvéd* included only infantry and cavalry, lacking artillery and most supporting arms and services) would eventually be overcome. In contrast, politicians in the Austrian half of the monarchy viewed the *k.u.k. Armee* as the real army, seeing the *Landwehr* and *Honvéd* as second-line formations only, with the latter intended as a mere political concession to Hungary.⁶³ So Vienna and Budapest held very different and fundamentally incompatible views on the status of the army and its future development. The Hungarian parliament proved willing to fund the *Honvéd* at relatively high levels (considerably higher than Austrian support for the *Landwehr*), but entirely unwilling to increase appropriations for the *k.u.k. Armee*.

By the turn of the century, the Austro-Hungarian Army clearly was falling behind its allies and potential adversaries in terms of military effort and expenditure. Conscription continued to be enforced on the basis of the 1889 law, which assigned 103,100 recruits to the *k.u.k. Armee*, 19,970 to the *Landwehr* and 12,500 to the *Honvéd* annually.⁶⁴ However, because of financial shortfalls, many conscripts were released from active duty after only two years' service, instead of the required three. Worse, reserve training was minimal, usually only two weeks per annum: units of the secondary reserve, the *Landsturm*, received essentially no regular refresher training. The large numbers of men not required to perform active service were assigned to the *Ersatzreserve*, receiving no refresher training whatsoever.⁶⁵ Mostly for financial reasons, Austria-Hungary was making inadequate use of its available manpower, and the army was using poorly the soldiers it had.

⁶²A. Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (London, 1989), 193.

⁶³E. Somogyi, "The Hungarian *Honvéd* Army and the Unity of the Habsburg Empire: The *Honvéd* Reform of 1904," *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX*, 277.

⁶⁴Papp, "Die königlich ungarische Landwehr," 653.

⁶⁵J. Lucas, *Fighting Troops of the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1868-1914* (New York, 1987), 22.

To avoid falling further behind in comparative military strength, increases in the recruit contingent and the military budget were evidently required, but attempts to achieve them proved a political disaster. In 1898 the joint War Ministry (*Reichskriegsministerium*) requested a minor increase in the conscript levy to bring active units closer to establishment. In response, the Hungarian parliament used obstructive tactics to block passage, as it did on so many issues, preventing any progress on the issue for eight years. Only in 1907 did the army receive a small increase of 23,000 conscripts annually.⁶⁶

More serious was the political confrontation which began in 1903 when the *Reichskriegsministerium* asked the Hungarian parliament to consent to an increase in both credits and conscripts above 1889 levels. Once again, Budapest parliamentarians used technical obstructions to prevent action on the proposal. Indeed, there was agreement across party lines in Hungary, including both the Liberal and Independent parties, on the need for revision of the existing laws. However, the Hungarian government wanted more concessions to Magyar national sympathies in the *k.u.k.* forces before any increases could be discussed. The demands included greater use of Magyar and the wearing of Hungarian insignia in Hungarian *k.u.k.* units. Nationalists also wanted artillery for the *Honvéd*, to transform it into a first-line army equal in all respects to the *k.u.k. Armee*.⁶⁷

The reform bill was presented to Budapest in January 1903, and political turmoil followed. The situation deteriorated throughout the year, with the resignation of Hungarian Prime Minister Kálmán Széll's government in June. Franz Joseph, while essentially tolerant of many of the excesses of the Hungarian "political nation," refused to surrender to any threats to the unity and cohesion of the army, the bedrock of his rule. Understanding that Magyar demands implied eventual complete division of the army into Austrian and Hungarian halves, he issued his famous Chlopy order in September, remembered for its brief but concise statement that "My Army shall remain as it is, common and united."⁶⁸ As the constitutional crisis continued, the General Staff in Vienna went the length of drawing up plans in the summer of 1905 to invade Hungary

⁶⁶Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 814.

⁶⁷N. Stone, "Constitutional Crises in Hungary, 1903-1906," *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. XLV, No. 104, January 1967, 167-169.

⁶⁸"Gemeinsam und einheitlich wie es ist, soll Mein Heer bleiben." K. Peball and G. Rothenberg, "Der Fall 'U': Die geplante Besetzung Ungarns durch die k.u.k. Armee im Herbst 1905," *Schriften des Heeresgeschichtlichen Museums in Wien*, 1969, 92.

with reliable *k.u.k.* troops, a total of eight army corps, to force political concessions from Budapest.⁶⁹

In the end, however, the crisis was resolved peacefully, thanks to a desire for some compromise on the part of the government of István Tisza in Budapest and Franz Joseph's threat to introduce universal suffrage in Hungary, the ultimate fear of Hungarian magnates. The monarch, supported strongly by the generals, refused to accept further division in the common army. In an attempt to appease Magyar nationalism, the *Honvéd* was permitted to form artillery units from 1907, making it a *de facto* first-line army.⁷⁰ As for the Habsburg Army, it did not receive sizable increases in recruits or funding; serious revisions of the 1889 law were not attempted again until 1911.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, as the international situation was growing increasingly precarious, especially in the Balkans, all major powers in Europe except Austria-Hungary were investing heavily in armaments and military preparedness. The Dual Monarchy's relative strategic position was eroding rapidly. Military manpower had not been significantly increased since 1889. In the period 1907-1910, France conscripted .63 % of its total population annually, Germany took .46 %, and the monarchy's adversaries, Russia and Italy, drafted .40 % and .41%⁷¹, respectively; Austria-Hungary put only .29 % of its population in uniform every year. Considering that as many as 30% of those conscripted were sent to the *Ersatzreserve*, only one man in eight in the Dual Monarchy underwent real military training. Thus, while the population of Austria-Hungary increased from forty million in 1890 to fifty-two million in 1910, the conscript levy essentially was not increased. The result was an army of too few active units, most of which were quite under strength; the reserve was likewise starved for men, and those it had were very inadequately trained.⁷²

The predicament of the army's finances, also kept at 1889 levels, was similarly grim. Military spending had fallen far behind that of the other major powers. In 1911 the defense budget was 420 million *kronen*; in Germany it was the equivalent of 1790 million, in Russia 1650 million, even in Italy 528 million.⁷³ Thus in 1903 the citizens of the Dual Monarchy were spending three times as much on wine, beer and tobacco as on

⁶⁹Ibid., 98-112.

⁷⁰I. Berkó, *A magyar királyi honvédség története 1868-1918* (Budapest, 1928), 97-100.

⁷¹F. Franek, "Probleme der Organization im ersten Kriegsjahre." *Erganzungsheft 1 zum Werke OUIK* (Vienna, 1930), 18.

⁷²Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 148.

⁷³Ibid., 160.

national defense, a ratio which had not changed much by 1913.⁷⁴ Although there were minor increases in the defense budget from 1908 to 1912, these were largely shipbuilding costs: in that period naval outlays more than doubled while army spending increased hardly at all.⁷⁵ Sadly lacking in funds, the army was unable to procure badly needed weaponry, and remained short of money for adequate troop training. When asked about Austria-Hungary's participation in the Hague disarmament conference of 1907, Chief of the General Staff Conrad von Hötzendorff replied, echoing a common sentiment in the officer corps, "the present condition of our army has already an appearance of permanent limitation of armament."⁷⁶

The Bosnia-Herzegovina annexation crisis of 1908-09 and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 increased awareness of the poor state of the monarchy's defences. Under the pressure of international events, the political machinery of the Dual Monarchy slowly corrected many of the mistakes of previous decades. In June 1912, a new army law passed the Hungarian parliament, and was quickly approved in Vienna. The recruit intake was immediately increased by 42,000 annually, for a total of 181,000: 136,000 for the *k.u.k. Armee*, 20,715 for the *Landwehr* and 17,500 for the *Honvéd*. A three stage series of increases was planned, the goal being an overall conscript levy of 236,000 by 1918, with an organized reserve force of 450,000 by 1924.⁷⁷

Military appropriations were similarly increased, especially armament outlays. Including the emergency allocation of 250 million kronen in late 1912 for the cost of the Balkan Wars preventative mobilization, military spending increased by 123 % in 1912-13. Part of the 1912 law was the War Services Act, which legalized the placement of all labour, goods and service at the disposal of the state in time of war.⁷⁸ The only concessions made by the *k.u.k. Kriegsministerium* to achieve the enactment of the 1912 legislation were a reduction in conscript service time in the *k.u.k.* forces from three years to two (which was simply an admission of a long-standing reality) and recognition of the *Landwehr* and *Honvéd* as coequals in the Dual Monarchy's first line of defence.

⁷⁴G. Rothenberg, "The Austro-Hungarian Campaign against Serbia in 1914," *Journal of Military History*, 53, April 1989, 128.

⁷⁵Wagner, "Die k.(u.)k. Armee.", 591. Ch. 12 of this article, "Das Budget," is the best explanation of prewar military spending trends.

⁷⁶Stone, "Army and Society," 107.

⁷⁷Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 138.

⁷⁸Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 165, 167, 172

Certainly the 1912 law represented a vast improvement in army manpower and funding appropriations over the levels of previous decades. Units were closer to full peacetime strength than ever before; all the army's branches were beginning to receive badly needed new equipment, as well as the training required to test new weapons and doctrine. Despite these changes, however, one scholar's description of the prewar army as "badly equipped, under-financed, technologically backward but splendidly uniformed," remained essentially true.⁷⁹ Vital reforms simply came too late to have a substantial impact on combat readiness at the outbreak of the First World War.

Although the army conscripted a record 227,000 men in the last year of peace (representing 166,760 for the *k.u.k. Armee*, 24,717 for the *Landwehr* and 25,000 for the *Honvéd*), creating a standing army of 450,000 officers and men, this actually had little impact on the overall shortage of trained soldiers.⁸⁰ Years of small recruit levies meant that the monarchy's ready manpower reserves compared poorly with those of other major powers. In 1914 the army mobilized all classes of reservists--*k.u.k.*, *k.k.*, *k.u.*, *Landsturm* and *Ersatz*--to produce a total force of 2,265,000 soldiers of widely varying levels of training and readiness; but France, with ten million fewer citizens, mobilized an army of four million in August 1914.⁸¹ Recent increases in expenditures similarly had only a limited effect on the army's problems of obsolete equipment and inadequate training. Austria-Hungary continued to lag behind other powers in its military funding. In 1914 the Dual Monarchy, although ranking behind only Russia and Germany in population, was still spending less than any major European power on defence: one-fourth the expenditures of Russia or Germany, one-third those of Britain, and even less than Italy.⁸²

Thus the Habsburg Army of 1914 was to go to war with too few units, too few men and too little modern equipment. The political difficulties which had plagued the Dual Monarchy since its birth in 1868 had all but prevented anything else. By preferring intrigue and nationalist agitation to achievement of badly needed military reforms, the politicians in Austria and Hungary, and especially the latter, had predestined many of the reverses and defeats of the war's first year. The historian who noted, "The weakness of the Habsburg Army in 1914 stemmed not from the disaffection of its soldiers but from the intransigence of politicians in Hungary," was surely far more right than wrong⁸³. The

⁷⁹Sked, *The Decline and Fall*, 258.

⁸⁰Ehnl, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht," 5.

⁸¹Stone, "Army and Society," 107.

⁸²Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 172.

⁸³Stone, "Army and Society," 103.

army was unready for war because of endless prewar political controversies and constitutional wranglings, which were the congenital defects of the *Ausgleich*.

The Habsburg Army's unpreparedness in 1914 proved serious because of the monarchy's precarious strategic situation, a comparatively recent development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Austria-Hungary's strategic position was hardly unfavorable. The Dual Monarchy's membership in the Triple Alliance served it well, for it strengthened the ties with Germany, and kept potentially strained relations with Italy, Austria's traditional enemy, relatively tranquil. Romania was also an ally by treaty, thus securing Hungary's long, exposed southeastern frontier. Russia was still essentially friendly, and Serbia, virtually a Habsburg client state, was too small and weak to pose a legitimate threat to the monarchy's security.

Yet the balance of power in Europe, particularly in the increasingly volatile Balkans, began to change very rapidly to Austria-Hungary's disadvantage. In little more than a decade, Austria-Hungary's strategic predicament had grown dangerous, threatening to outstrip the Habsburg Army's limited military capabilities. Although elements in the officer corps and other realms of the joint bureaucracy were well aware of unfavorable alterations in the strategic balance, there was as yet insufficient awareness in the Dual Monarchy as a whole of the size and power of the forces gathering against it.

Militarily the greatest threat to emerge was the Russian, with which Austria-Hungary could not cope without German assistance. Politically, however, the Serbian threat was perceived as even more dangerous for the monarchy. After the 1903 coup d'etat, the hostility and irredentism of the Karadjordjević dynasty in Belgrade, increasingly supported by St. Petersburg, threatened to undermine the Dual Monarchy's fragile ethnic equilibrium. Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina in 1908 failed entirely to intimidate Serbia, and angered and alienated the Russians as well. Furthermore, the Serbs' military prowess and resulting victories against the Ottomans and their neighbours in the Balkan Wars proved to be a severe blow to the Dual Monarchy's security and prestige. The previously secure southwestern and southeastern borders of the monarchy were similarly threatened by diplomatic alterations, namely the *de facto* separations of Italy and Romania from their alliances with Vienna. In the last years of peace, only Imperial Germany could be considered a dependable ally.

The development of the Habsburg Army's strategic planning to address potential wars was the domain of the Chief of the General Staff (*Chef des Generalstabes für die gesamte bewaffnete Macht*), who from late 1906 was *General der Infanterie*⁸⁴ Franz

⁸⁴Equivalent to an Anglo-American Lieutenant General.

Freiherr (Baron) Conrad von Hotzendorff. Known at the time as an intelligent, forward-looking officer with considerable staff experience, Conrad enjoyed an excellent reputation and a considerable following in the officer corps. Conrad was acutely aware of the monarchy's severe, and worsening, political vulnerabilities and military deficiencies. Indeed, Conrad, like many senior officers, was perhaps too sensitive to the forces arrayed in opposition to the Habsburg throne, both foreign and domestic. Embracing a social Darwinist creed, and imbued with a sense of impending disaster for the Dual Monarchy and an acceptance of the inevitability of conflict, Conrad believed passionately that Austria-Hungary could survive only if it proved willing to wage aggressive wars for ostensibly defensive political purposes. From his appointment to the outbreak of the First World War almost eight years later, the Chief of the General Staff repeatedly urged Franz Joseph to wage preventative wars against neighbouring states, notably Italy and Serbia.⁸⁵ Conrad considered the crushing of Italy or Serbia (especially the former, but ideally both) to be the only way to save the dying monarchy from internal collapse. He desperately wanted to invade Serbia during the annexation crisis of 1908-09. Conrad similarly recommended an invasion of Italy during the 1911-12 Italo-Turkish War, writing to Franz Joseph, "Austria's opportunity has come, and it would be suicidal not to use it."⁸⁶ The old monarch, cautious in such matters after several serious military defeats during his reign, dismissed Conrad as Chief of Staff, only to bring him back at the end of 1912.

Although the alliance with Imperial Germany was vital to Austria-Hungary's security, strategic coordination with Berlin remained surprisingly poor. The two General Staffs established informal ties in 1882, but actual negotiations between them on war planning issues commenced only in 1909, at the height of the Bosnian crisis.⁸⁷ This proved really too late to permit effective strategic cooperation when war came. Even more ominously, the strategic goals of Germany and the Dual Monarchy were essentially incompatible. According to the Schlieffen plan, Germany intended to seek a battle of decision in the West against France while holding a defensive line in East Prussia against a Russian attack. Conrad agreed with Moltke as far back as 1909 that a two-front war

⁸⁵Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 143.152.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 155.163. T. Kletečka, "Äussenpolitische Vorstellungen von Parteien und Gruppen in Cisleithanien," in: A. Wandruszka and P. Urbanitsch, eds., *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (6 Bände, Vienna, 1973-89), *Band VI/1: Die Habsburgermonarchie im System der internationalen Beziehungen* (1989), 451.

⁸⁷H. Herwig, "Disjointed Allies: Coalition Warfare in Berlin and Vienna, 1914," *Journal of Military History*, 54, July 1990, 268.

required German concentration in the West.⁸⁸ However, Austria-Hungary was concerned with defending its long border with Russia, while possibly contending with Serbia. Although there existed no "systematically developed war plan"⁸⁹ between Berlin and Vienna, the plans which did exist were potentially very dangerous for the Dual Monarchy. In essence, Conrad committed Austria-Hungary to an offensive against Russian forces in Galicia, regardless of events in the Balkans, in exchange for a supporting German offensive across the Narev from East Prussia. The intended grand strategic operation would take the form of a pincer action, with German forces from the north and Austro-Hungarian forces from the south meeting in the centre of Russian-occupied Poland. Included in the allies' understanding was a promise of German units arriving on the Russian front following victory over France, six weeks after the onset of hostilities. This committed the Habsburg Army to a series of strategic offensives in which it would be outnumbered while the monarchy's southern frontier would be vulnerable; worse, it tied the fate of the army, and indeed the Dual Monarchy, to the chance of a quick German defeat of France. As Alfred von Schlieffen stated correctly, "The fate of Austria will be decided not on the Bug but on the Seine."⁹⁰

The strategic plans of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff were intended to deal with several contingencies. There were three major plans, Cases "I", "R", and "B", representing war with Italy, Russia, and Serbia and Montenegro, respectively. The order of battle of the main force, *A-Staffel*, included nine army corps, a total of twenty-eight infantry divisions, ten cavalry divisions and twenty-one provisional brigades (the last to be raised on mobilization from *Landsturm* and *Ersatz* units); it was intended to be employed against either Italy or Russia. The second force, *Minimalgruppe Balkan*, was to protect the monarchy's southern border and included three corps comprising eight infantry divisions and a number of provisional brigades. The remaining contingent was *B-Staffel*, a grouping of twelve infantry divisions and one cavalry division organized in four corps, whose wartime task was the reinforcement of *A-Staffel* against either Italy or Russia, or support of *Minimalgruppe Balkan* in the event of war with Serbia.⁹¹

⁸⁸*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38). *Band I: Das Kriegsjahr 1914* (1930), 30

⁸⁹Herwig, "Disjointed Allies," 267.

⁹⁰N. Stone, "Moltke and Conrad: Relations between the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs, 1909-1914," in: P. Kennedy, ed., *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914* (Boston, 1979), 223-4, 229.

⁹¹Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 159.

While these plans had serious flaws, the basic difficulty with all Austro-Hungarian prewar strategic planning was the unavoidable reality of the Dual Monarchy's numerical weakness, in terms of units, men, and materiel, and lack of speed in mobilization. Given the strength of the forces potentially arrayed against Austria-Hungary, the undertaking of a two-front war was suicidal, and no staff planning could alter this fact. In 1914, the Habsburg military could mobilize only forty-eight infantry divisions of all types, *k.u.k.*, *k.k.*, and *k.u.*, whereas Russia had ninety-three, Italy had forty-six, and even Serbia had eleven.⁹² The 1912 increases in manpower and appropriations came too late to be of much assistance to the field army when the long awaited war finally came. One of the most serious deficiencies was the army's total lack of second-line divisions after 1912, when *Landwehr/Honvéd* divisions were recognized as first-line units; to remedy this defect, in late 1913 Conrad advocated the establishment of a German-style second-line reserve of seven divisions, but the request was refused.⁹³ The army's only logical strategy if it wanted to avoid a catastrophe was a defensive one, but this was impossible as long as Vienna wanted to maintain its alliance with Germany, its only dependable ally.

Not only was much of the army's leadership aware of the army's deficiencies, it was well informed about the strengths of potential enemies. To a degree, the growing pessimism of so many prewar officers, from Conrad down the chain of command, was attributable to their knowledge of the army's growing relative weakness. The desire for preventative war emerged more from fear than from pseudo-Darwinian delusion. The army's prewar intelligence assessments were substantially accurate in their analyses of foreign army strengths and capacities. The Army Intelligence Service (*Evidenzbüro*) of the General Staff was relatively efficient, especially in its decoding department, and largely correct in its estimates of the dispositions and orders of battle of potential adversaries; its annual reports on the Russian and Serbian armies were generally accurate. Even the difficult task of estimating and judging Russia's wartime deployments was performed well by army intelligence.⁹⁴ The only significant intelligence failure which befell the *Evidenzbüro* before the war was the infamous treason of Colonel Alfred Redl, a widely respected General Staff officer and former head of the department of military espionage and counterespionage who, before his suicide in 1913, sold a substantial

⁹²Rothenberg, "The Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 129.

⁹³Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 174.

⁹⁴N. Stone, "Austria-Hungary," in: E. May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, 1984), 42-44.

amount of secret information to St. Petersburg.⁹⁵ Most damaging to the army was Redl's betrayal of Austro-Hungarian mobilization plans against Serbia and Russia.⁹⁶

In general, army intelligence performed its assigned tasks loyally and effectively. The disasters which befell the army in 1914 can hardly be blamed on poor intelligence collection or interpretation. While the Habsburg military's prewar strategic planning can be faulted on many counts, it was not responsible for the essential and unavoidable problem of weakness and unpreparedness from years of financial neglect. Well before 1914, Austria-Hungary had fallen out of the ranks of Europe's major military powers. As a German officer and experienced observer of the Habsburg Army noted, "The Danube monarchy's strength and armed forces were adequate for a campaign against Serbia, but inadequate for war against major European powers."⁹⁷ The test of war made horribly evident the Dual Monarchy's prewar military inadequacies, some of which had been obscured by peacetime inactivity.

The prewar Habsburg Army's tactical doctrine and organization were not significantly different from those of other European armies, but the Habsburg forces' lack of modern equipment and weaponry was a serious defect at the tactical level. The basic fighting unit in the Austro-Hungarian Army of 1914, as in all major European armies, was the division. It was the smallest fully self-contained unit of all arms, capable of accomplishing an independent task on the battlefield. There were two types of Habsburg division, infantry and cavalry. Each was usually commanded by a *Feldmarschalleutnant*⁹⁸ and had two brigades of infantry or cavalry, typically commanded by a *Generalmajor*⁹⁹; each brigade in turn comprised two regiments of infantry or cavalry, or their equivalent. The division also contained combat support and service support elements, including an artillery brigade, and engineering, signals, transport, medical, and supply units. Divisional size varied, with infantry divisions ranging from 12 to 18,000 men, and cavalry divisions averaging 5,000 fewer soldiers. The army had forty-eight

⁹⁵The best overall English-language account of this well known case remains: R. Asprey, *The Panther's Feast* (London, 1959). The well-known 1983 film by István Szabó, *Oberst Redl*, though magnificently acted and directed, bears little resemblance to the actual case.

⁹⁶For an insider's account of the prewar *Evidenzbüro*, including the Redl affair: M. Ronge, *Kriegs- und Industrie Spionage* (Vienna, 1930), 70-92

⁹⁷A. von Cramon, *Unser österreichisch-ungarischer Bundesgenosse in: Weltkriege* (Berlin, 1920), 200.

⁹⁸The magnificently archaic title for the equivalent of an Anglo-American Major General.

⁹⁹Despite the title, comparable to a Brigadier General in English-speaking armies.

infantry divisions (including seven *Landwehr* and eight *Honvéd*) and eleven cavalry divisions (of which two were *Honved*) at the war's outbreak.¹⁰⁰

The army's largest branch by far was the infantry: well over half its soldiers in 1914 were infantrymen.¹⁰¹ The largest purely infantry formation was the regiment, and at the beginning of the war the army had 182 infantry regiments, of which forty were *Landwehr* and thirty-two were *Honvéd*. Of the 110 *k.u.k* regiments, 102 were regiments of the line. Additionally, four regiments of *Tiroler Kaiserjäger* and four of Bosnian-Herzegovinan troops were carried on the prewar order of battle. The infantry also included thirty rifle (*Feldjäger*) battalions, one of which was raised in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁰² The rifle units carried on the traditions of early nineteenth century light infantry units; however, by 1914, there were no longer tactical distinctions between line and rifle battalions.

At full strength, infantry battalions had 1,100 men, organized in four companies of 250 men, each divided into four platoons. First-line infantrymen were armed with the standard service rifle, the M.95 Steyr-Mannlicher, a bolt-action weapon firing brass-jacketed high-velocity 8 mm bullets from a five round internal magazine, comparable to other modern military rifles of the day; unfortunately, only one-third of the army's total of 2,500,000 rifles in 1914 consisted of the modern Mannlichers, the remainder being obsolete models.¹⁰³ Infantry regiments contained four battalions, (although *k.k.* and *k.u.* regiments only had three) a regimental headquarters detachment, and an *Ersatz* cadre for the training of recruits and replacements.¹⁰⁴ In practice, many regiments deployed with only three battalions, the fourth frequently being detached in peacetime to another formation, often a remote garrison in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The majority of regiments also had a machine gun unit, with three or four detachments, each with two weapons. The army's standard machine gun was the Schwarzlose M.7 (or M.7/12, an improved version), an 8mm belt-fed weapon, fired from a tripod mount, with a cyclic rate of fire of 400 rounds per minute. The Schwarzlose, first issued in 1907, was the infantry's main direct support piece and its deadliest weapon. It was essentially identical in performance

¹⁰⁰ÖUk: *Registerband* (Vienna, 1938), 173-261. In practice, Habsburg divisional organization varied considerably in 1914, and rarely were two divisions structured identically.

¹⁰¹Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 126.

¹⁰²Ehnl, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht," 5-6.

¹⁰³J. Mötz, "Mannlichers Waffenreihe M. 1895," *Blätter für Heereskunde*, 1987, 15-26.

¹⁰⁴*Generalstabshandbuch* (Vienna, 1912), 2.

(if not internal mechanism) to the machine guns of all the European armies of the period.¹⁰⁵ The Schwarzlose's only defect in 1914 was that there were not enough of it.

The only infantry units with a different combat organization and doctrine were battalions attached to mountain (*Gebirgs-*) brigades, of which there were fourteen at the war's beginning. Mountain warfare had been a traditional area of expertise in the Habsburg Army, which had maintained specially trained and equipped brigades since the mid-nineteenth century. The mountain brigades, garrisoned in peacetime in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Tyrol, and other Alpine regions on the Italian frontier, were organized to fight as independent units due to the unique and dispersed nature of alpine fighting; thus they had their own machine gun, cavalry, light artillery, engineering, signals, and service support subunits, in addition to four or more mountain-trained infantry battalions.¹⁰⁶

The *k.u.k.* cavalry had forty-two regiments in 1914: fifteen of Dragoons (*Dragoner*), sixteen of Hussars (*Husaren*) and eleven of Lancers (*Ulanen*). The *Landwehr* and *Honvéd* added seventeen cavalry regiments to the order of battle.¹⁰⁷ As with the infantry, these nineteenth-century titles no longer indicated any special mission, and all types of cavalry were organized and equipped identically. A cavalry regiment had two divisions (a battalion-sized unit, and not to be confused with the larger combined-arms formation of the same name) of about 700 men, divided into three squadrons of 180 men, armed with the shorter cavalry model of the M.95 Steyr-Mannlicher, as well as sabres. Regiments also included a headquarters, an *Ersatz* cadre, and a detachment of four Schwarzlose machine guns.¹⁰⁸

The artillery, the remaining combat arm, was divided into several branches in 1914: field gun, field howitzer, horse, fortress, and mountain artillery. The *k.u.k. Armee* maintained forty-two field gun (*Feldkanone*) regiments and fourteen field howitzer (*Feldhaubitze*) regiments, one per corps. The order of battle also included ten mountain

¹⁰⁵E. Schmidl, "From Paardeberg to Przemyśl: Austria-Hungary and the Lessons of the Anglo-Boer War," in: J. Stone and E. Schmidl, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XXVIII: The Boer War and Military Reforms* (Lanham, MD, 1988), 260. The *Honvéd* had experimented with French mitrailleuses as early as the mid-1870's.

¹⁰⁶G. Hebert, *Das Alpenkorps: Aufbau, Organization und Einsatz einer Gebirgstruppe im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Boppard am Rhein, 1988), 117-19.

¹⁰⁷Lucas, *Fighting Troops*, 95-120. These were six regiments of *k.k.* Lancers, two half-regiments of mounted rifles (*k.k. reitende Schützen*, from Dalmatia and Tyrol), and ten regiments of *k.u.* Hussars.

¹⁰⁸J.H. Blumenthal, "Vom Wiener Kongress zum Ersten Weltkrieg," *Unser Heer: 300 Jahre österreichisches Soldatentum in Krieg und Frieden* (Vienna, 1965), 264.

artillery regiments and one mountain artillery division (as in the cavalry, a battalion-sized formation), and nine horse artillery (*reitende*) divisions. Other types of artillery units were the fourteen divisions of heavy howitzers (*schwere Haubitze*), and the six regiments and six battalions of fortress (*Festungs-*) artillery. The *Landwehr* contributed six field gun divisions, and the *Honvéd* added a further eight field gun regiments and a division of horse artillery to the army order of battle.¹⁰⁹

Ominously, the artillery was the combat arm least well-equipped at the beginning of the war. The effects of paltry funding was found everywhere in the artillery. As in so many European armies, the artillery park was heavily weighted in favour of light field guns, weapons which proved less than adequate in positional warfare due to their low shell weight and flat trajectory. In August 1914, the Habsburg field artillery had 2,154 light guns, 112 medium guns, 296 light mountain guns, 206 medium howitzers, and only seventy-two mobile heavy fortress guns.¹¹⁰

The M.5 (and M.5/8, a later model) field gun was the mainstay of the artillery. A relatively modern piece by Habsburg Army standards, the 80 mm gun could fire a shell 6,000 meters. First introduced into field and mountain artillery batteries in 1908, it had the modern design features of a recoil mechanism and a protective shield for the gunners. However, its rate of fire and range were obsolescent by 1914: it was outranged by the comparable Russian 76 mm field gun by 1,000 metres. Like all Habsburg pieces, the M.5 and M.5/8 had obsolete and heavy steel-bronze barrels, which were less expensive to produce than steel ones. They were also metallurgically inferior.¹¹¹

The main weapon of the field howitzer regiments was even less satisfactory. The M.99 howitzer was a nineteenth century 104 mm weapon, which was entirely obsolete by the time it fired its first shot in anger in 1914. It could fire out to 6,000 meters, at most; worse, it lacked a recoil mechanism and a shield for the crew. The heaviest field artillery piece, the 149 mm M.99/4 howitzer, was equally outmoded. It, too, lacked features such as recoil buffers and shields which were standard on twentieth century field pieces; its range of little more than six kilometers was disappointing. Even the mountain artillery, a specialist arm in which Habsburg gunners had long excelled, was similarly ill-equipped. Only four of the army's fifty-two mountain batteries had the relatively modern M.8/9 70

¹⁰⁹Lucas, *Fighting Troops*, 121-40. Field gun and mountain regiments each had four batteries of eight guns, field howitzer regiments each had four six-gun batteries, and horse artillery divisions included four four-gun batteries.

¹¹⁰*ÖUIK: I*: 31.

¹¹¹Wagner, "Die k.(u.)k. Armee," 452. *Generalstabshandbuch*, 246.

mm mountain guns or M.8/10 100 mm mountain howitzers: the remainder were equipped with the outdated 70 mm M.99 mountain gun.¹¹²

There was one outstanding weapon in the Habsburg artillery arsenal of 1914, however. The enormous M.11 305 mm mortar, produced by Bohemia's famed Škoda works, could fire a 380 kg shell almost 10,000 meters. It was an ingenious design, incorporating innovative features; broken into three loads for transport, it was moved by motor carriage, a rarity in 1914. Given the army's poor prewar funding, the new mortar was ordered secretly in 1911, purchased without legislative approval out of the army's equivalent of a "black budget." Lack of official funding meant that only twenty-four examples of the M.11--twelve batteries--were in service at the war's outbreak. Two batteries loaned to the German forces in the West in 1914 performed splendidly, their armour-piercing shells with delayed-action fuses helping to reduce strong Belgian fortifications at Namur and Liège. However, the Habsburg heavy artillery was largely equipped with the obsolete M.98 240 mm mortar, which represented two-thirds of the army's heavy field artillery park.¹¹³

The state of the artillery was the Habsburg Army's greatest tactical and organizational weakness in 1914. Not only were many field pieces badly outdated, there were also not enough of them. In terms of divisional firepower, the Austro-Hungarian Army of 1914 compared poorly to allies and adversaries alike. The infantry division's artillery brigade, customarily composed of a field gun regiment and a field howitzer division, totalled no more than fifty-four field pieces, and few divisions had anything like that many. In particular, *Landwehr/Honvéd* divisions usually had significantly less artillery than *k.u.k.* units, although all were expected to perform equal tasks on the battlefield. In 1914, the Habsburg infantry division boasted less firepower, on average, than any European division, save the Italian. Thus a German infantry division had as many as seventy-two pieces, the Russian sixty. Austro-Hungarian corps-level artillery brigades were equally inferior in firepower when compared to other European armies of the day. This lack of artillery proved deadly when war came, a very grave deficiency in a war dominated by firepower, particularly artillery. Although more modern field pieces for the army had been designed, and some were just reaching production in 1914,

¹¹²Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 174. *Generalstabshandbuch*, 247. Wagner, "Die k.(u.)k. Armee," 452. Lucas, *Fighting Troops*, 132, 199.

¹¹³*OUIK: I*:79. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 149-50, 174. G. Hartcup, *The War of Invention: Scientific Developments, 1914-1918* (London, 1988), 64.

consistently low prewar funding meant that the army entered its greatest struggle very weak in artillery.¹¹⁴

The army's most important combat support branch was engineering. Direct support on the battlefield was provided by the sapper and pioneer (*Sappeur und Pionier*) service, which was responsible for demolition, field construction, bridging, and other tasks. Each army corps had a battalion each of sappers and pioneers. The battalions, comprised of several companies of 250 to 300 men, were divided in the field among the corps' divisions. The military construction (*Genie und Bauwesen*) branch of the engineers performed mostly rear echelon tasks such as fortress construction and maintenance of the lines of communication.¹¹⁵

The army service branches were organized in the field into functional detachments. Thus a 1914 infantry division included a signals detachment of eighty men, a munition column of a hundred, a medical unit of 270, as well as detachments from the corps service battalion (*Traindivision*) of varying strengths. Naturally, there were considerably larger service units at corps and army echelons.¹¹⁶

The Habsburg Army's tactical doctrine in 1914 was overwhelmingly offensive in orientation, as was the case in all Europe's major armies. This was due to the basic tactical question which confronted the infantry by the early twentieth century: how to overcome the effects of the massive, rapid firepower generated by modern machine weapons. The battle's first blow had to be delivered urgently to be decisive. The then current belief in progressive military circles was that the offensive, the battle-winning tactical component, could only be maintained against overwhelming defensive firepower through shock tactics and the development of high morale among the troops.¹¹⁷

The 1911 Field Regulations for the Infantry were the army's guide to the employment of tactical units at the war's outbreak. They were influenced by current tactical thinking in Europe, and by the Russo-Japanese War, which seemed to indicate that well motivated, aggressive infantry could achieve success in the attack, even if at high cost. The Field Regulations placed strong emphasis on the dominance of the

¹¹⁴J. Decsy. "The Habsburg Army on the Threshold of Total War." *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX*, 285.

¹¹⁵Wagner. "Die k.(u.)k. Armee." 465-67.

¹¹⁶*Generalstabshandbuch*, 3.

¹¹⁷For a brief, concise examination of these general trends: M. Howard, "Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914." in: P. Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Macchiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, 1986).

infantry in the tactical offensive, moving forward in close echelon against enemy units; attacking infantry was to use rifles to win the firefight, and then close with bayonets.¹¹⁸ The bayonet assault figured prominently, for it matched the belief in the superiority of morale, and the value of cold steel to break the enemy. The issue of morale was central, with much emphasis being placed on "united spirit" and "positive objectives." As an artillery manual in use before the war expressed it, "The attack rises from a sense of superiority in numbers or competence."¹¹⁹ The unstated assumption was "attack at any price," so strong was the faith in the tactical offensive.¹²⁰

The 1911 Field Regulations was very much the product of Conrad's tactical vision. An infantry officer by training, he was known in the army as a brilliant tactician, especially in mountain warfare; however, in retrospect, Conrad's ideas on the tactical offensive contained serious flaws. Notably absent was an appreciation of the need for coordination of offensive firepower to support the attack: combined arms fire preparation was virtually unknown in the prewar army. Even the Official History concluded that, "Doubtless too little attention was paid to the cooperation of infantry and artillery."¹²¹ The infantry was to make charges essentially unsupported by artillery fires. In addition, the obsession with the attack meant that defensive tactics, soon to prove so important for the army's survival, were given scant attention, either in doctrine or on maneuvers. In prewar maneuvers, "trenches had only been marked with strings; to actually *dig* them was seen as a waste of time."¹²²

The other combat arms were as unprepared as the infantry for the tactical realities of the coming war. Artillery doctrine was concerned almost entirely with direct-fire missions, over open sights, and rarely in support of the infantry battle. Gunnery officers had minimal interest in, and equipment for, indirect fire methods, those which would prove vital in most wartime situations. Financial stringency also kept the artillery from perfecting what doctrine it did have. Before the war each field battery received only 250 training rounds annually, compared with 650 in Germany, 730 in France, and 500 to 600

¹¹⁸P. Broucek, "Taktische Erkenntnisse aus dem russisch-japanischen Krieg und deren Beachtung in Österreich-Ungarn," *Mitteilungen des osterreichischen Staatsarchivs*, 1977, 203-4.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 194-5.

¹²⁰*ÖUİK: I*: 34.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 34.

¹²²Schmidl, "From Paardeberg to Przemsyl," 257.

in Russia. Lack of funds also meant that each battery went to war with a thoroughly inadequate ammunition reserve of 500 rounds per field gun and 330 per field howitzer.¹²³

The cavalry was even less doctrinally prepared for modern warfare. As in other European armies of the epoch, the cavalry lobby was strong, (it produced twelve army commanders during the war) and typically conservative in its tactical views¹²⁴. It maintained its faith in the traditional battlefield role of the *arme blanche*, the massed cavalry charge *à outrance*. Although armed with carbines, the cavalry steadfastly refused to transform itself into mounted infantry, using horses for mobility but fighting as dismounted riflemen, preferring to rely upon the supposed shock value of the horse and sabre in the face of twentieth century machine weapons.¹²⁵

In all fairness, it must be stated that the flaws in Austro-Hungarian prewar tactical doctrine were hardly exceptional. No army of the day had managed to develop a full appreciation of the effect of machine weapons on the battlefield, especially not of their tremendous lethality in the defence. The tactical notions of all the continental armies were generally no more farsighted than those of the *k.u.k. Armee*: "all armies entered the war with a stunted appreciation for firepower, with inadequate ammunition reserves, and on the whole ill-prepared for a war of attrition in the trenches."¹²⁶ If the Habsburg Army went to war in 1914 not having absorbed many of the tactical lessons of the Anglo-Boer and Russo-Japanese Wars, and even of the far closer and more recent Balkan Wars, the same can be said in varying degrees of all Europe's armies.

In fact, the army experienced a tactical renaissance of sorts during Conrad's peacetime tenure as Chief of the General Staff. Conrad had achieved early recognition in the army for his tactical theories, especially in Alpine warfare. Soon after rising to the army's senior post in late 1906, he ordered training methods to be overhauled, starting with the annual maneuvers. Historically, the *Kaisermanöver* had been something of a vast military pageant to impress the visiting Imperial-and-Royal entourage. Conrad ruined the show by stipulating that unit commanders have free play without limitations and adding simulated night combat. These changes, though very unpopular with Franz

¹²³Decsy, "Habsburg Army," 285. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 174. Most of the shells were shrapnel, rather than the more useful and lethal high-explosive rounds.

¹²⁴A. Bernhard, "Die öst.-ung. Kavallerie," *Militärwissenschaftlichen Mitteilungen*, I, 1931. 3.

¹²⁵Decsy, "Habsburg Army," 284-6.

¹²⁶J. Luvaas, "A Unique Army: The Common Experience," B. Király, R. Kann, P. Fichtner, eds., *The Habsburg Empire in World War I* (New York, 1977), 91.

Joseph and other royals, brought a new level of realism to army training.¹²⁷ Conrad, no military Luddite, encouraged a degree of tactical innovation, including the raising of *Feldjäger* bicycle companies in 1912 to enhance mobility; he also covertly purchased new heavy mortars and mobile artillery for the army, ordered troop trials of a prototype automatic rifle, and took an interest in the army's nascent air arm.¹²⁸

The army adopted a new field uniform under Conrad, in an early attempt at camouflage. The old dark blue uniform was replaced by a drab uniform in pike grey (*hechtgrau*) on the eve of the war in all branches except the cavalry. The staunchly traditionalist mounted arm resisted this concession to the modern battlefield, and went to war wearing what was in effect a dress uniform, including a medium blue tunic, red trousers, and colourful headdress; however, in an odd half-concession to the twentieth century, the cavalry dressed its machine gun detachments in drab uniforms, although the gunners continued to carry sabres as well. Infantry officers similarly made themselves unnecessarily conspicuous by wearing yellow sashes and bright metal scabbards with their grey field uniforms.¹²⁹ In defence of the cavalry, it was a relatively progressive mounted arm when compared to other cavalries in Europe. The Habsburg cavalry abandoned body armour in the 1860's, and the lancers lost their lances in 1884, rearming with carbines and sabres. Cavalry regiments also established pioneer detachments in 1873, telegraph detachments in 1890, and machine gun detachments in 1909.¹³⁰

The tactical problems of the Habsburg Army in 1914 stemmed far more from firepower deficiencies than doctrinal weaknesses. Low prewar military expenditure produced an army of units with too few weapons systems, particularly artillery, and inadequate training and ammunition reserves. While the Habsburg Army suffered from tactical difficulties, principally a lack of infantry-artillery cooperation and mutual fire support, it was really no more tactically reactionary than other European armies. The emphasis on the attack, which would cost all belligerent armies so many men in the great maneuver battles of 1914, was not a rash predilection, but a well reasoned response to the

¹²⁷Schmidl, "Paardeberg to Przemysl," 258.

¹²⁸Wagner, "Die k.(u.)k. Armee," 435. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 175. The army's air arm was small and ill-equipped in 1914, boasting nine air companies with thirty-nine first-line aircraft and eighty-five pilots, versus 232 aircraft in Germany, 190 in Russia, and 162 in France. O. Kostrba-Skalicky, "Die Luftstreitkräfte Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Heereskunde - Kriegsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen siebenzig Jahre danach* (Vienna, 1988), 134-5.

¹²⁹Schmidl, "From Paardeberg to Przemysl," 261-2. Allmayer-Beck, "Die bewaffnete Macht," 137.

¹³⁰Schmidl, "From Paardeberg to Przemysl," 281-2.

conditions of the modern battlefield. The generals and tacticians of prewar Europe were hardly unaware of the lethality of modern arms; in their defence, as one historian has noted, "At no point during the nineteenth century *did* anything very much seem to change."¹³¹ Alterations in the tactical situation caused by machine weapons were perceived as evolutionary, not revolutionary; tacticians presumed that new doctrines could be created to overcome the new technology. The attack *à outrance* by highly motivated soldiers offered the infantry of 1914 the best chance of success in the tactical advance, to press home the attack despite high casualties. The resulting infantry losses in the war's opening battles illustrated horribly the cost of such tactics, and eventually more advanced tactics emerged. Until then, morale was the vital factor in all combatant armies in the First World War. The frontline soldier proved capable of surviving in the worst conceivable conditions. In that limited sense, the prewar advocates of "united spirit" were proved correct in their evaluation of the importance of morale.¹³²

The Habsburg Army in 1914 was a uniquely multinational force. It had defended Europe's oldest dynasty for centuries, developing over time its own methods of dealing with its ethnic composition. However, like the Dual Monarchy itself, the army's viability and future were doubted even by many senior generals. The nationalist tensions which had plagued Austria-Hungary for decades, combined with serious military deficiencies, had given rise to fears of collapse in the minds of many officers. The incessant political and constitutional struggles with Hungary had weakened not only the fabric of the monarchy, but its military capacity as well. By the war's outbreak, the Austro-Hungarian Army had fallen well behind other major powers in terms of deployable units, reserves, and equipment. In his "Summation of the Situation at the Beginning of the Year 1914," Conrad concluded that the time for preventative war had passed.¹³³ Nonetheless, in the summer of 1914 the Habsburg dynasty irrevocably entrusted its future to its army, beginning a total war for which the *k.u.k. Armee* was entirely unprepared, a struggle which neither the Habsburg dynasty nor its army would survive.

¹³¹P. Griffith, *Forward into Battle: Fighting Tactics from Waterloo to the Near Future* (Novato, CA, 1991), 73.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 75.

¹³³Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 172.

Chapter II: From Bohemia to the Balkans: The 21st *Landwehr* Infantry Division, 1914

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne, and his wife Sophie, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, began the well-known sequence of events which led to the outbreak of the First World War.¹ On July 25, after weeks of diplomatic maneuvering, Chief of the General Staff Conrad issued the mobilization order for the Austro-Hungarian units required under Case "B," that is, *B-Staffel* as well as *Minimalgruppe Balkan*. The seven corps thus assigned to the Serbian front, IV (Budapest), VII (Temesvár), VIII (Prague), IX (Leitmeritz) of *B-Staffel*, as well as XIII (Zagreb), XV (Sarajevo), and XVI (Ragusa), did not actually receive their mobilization orders until July 26, and the first official day of mobilization was delayed two days.² War with Serbia was officially declared on July 28, when Habsburg batteries at Semlin on the Save began hostilities by opening fire on neighbouring Belgrade.

Unfortunately the army's mobilization and initial deployment were such as to create unnecessary difficulties once battle was joined. The fundamental difficulty, namely that the army of 1914 was numerically incapable of fighting a two front war, was fudged by self-deception at the highest level. Conrad was well aware of the perils of a two-front war, noting at the outset, "It will be a hopeless struggle, but nevertheless it must be because such an ancient monarchy and such an ancient army cannot perish ingloriously."³ Disregarding reports of Russian troop movements as early as July 20, Conrad initially ordered the mobilization of about half the army, as he wanted to settle accounts with Serbia, although he was privately convinced that war with Russia was inevitable.⁴ Conrad dispatched a force of some nineteen infantry divisions or their equivalent against Serbia's eleven first-line divisions, an appropriate force ratio for an invasion; however, this left only about thirty infantry divisions to conduct offensive operations in Galicia against fifty Russian infantry divisions. As evidence of Russian troop movements mounted, leading to a Habsburg general mobilization on July 31 and a declaration of war against Russia on August 5, the formations of *B-Staffel* continued for

¹For a recent version: S. Williamson, *Austria-Hungary and the Origins of the First World War* (New York, 1991), 190-216.

²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, k.k. Landwehr Kmdo. in Prag, Pras.Nr. 1064, 28.7.14.

³G. Conrad von Hötzendorff, *Mein Leben mit Conrad von Hötzendorff* (Vienna, 1935), 114.

⁴G. Rothenberg, "The Austro-Hungarian Campaign against Serbia in 1914," *Journal of Military History*, Vol.53, No.2, April 1989, 132-3.

the Serbian front.⁵ Rather than respond to the far greater Russian threat on the monarchy's northeastern frontier, Conrad chose to prosecute his war momentarily as if that threat did not actually exist. Thus the Army High Command (*Armeeoberkommando*-AOK), that is Conrad, although titularly Archduke Friedrich, planned very optimistically to take advantage of Russia's probable slow mobilization by sending the Second Army of *B-Staffel* against Serbia, and then quickly rerouting it, after Serbia's rapid defeat, to fight the Russians in Galicia. When this did not work at all as planned, blame was placed on the trains, diplomats, German allies, even simple *Schlamperei* or muddle, rather than on Conrad himself.⁶

The actual mobilization of reserve elements went according to well laid plans, so that the army's full, if inadequate, order of battle was quickly ready for action: forty-eight infantry, two *Landsturm*, and eleven cavalry divisions, supported by twenty-one provisional *Landsturm* brigades and numerous replacement (*Marsch*-) brigades, a total of 1,421,250 soldiers in combat arms and combat support units.⁷ These were supplemented soon after the war's outbreak by a further 257 *Landsturm* battalions, some thirty-two brigades, for rear area duties.⁸

While bringing units to war strength proceeded efficiently, the actual movement of formations was lamentably slow. The General Staff's railway officers in most instances had calculated accurately the rolling stock required to move the enormous numbers of troops to staging areas. However, the prewar planners stipulated numerous pauses in rail movements, to allow for feeding and resting. Thus the Habsburg Army's trains moved men and their equipment to war in the summer of 1914 at the leisurely pace of eighteen kilometers per hour (compared to thirty in Germany), less than the speed of a bicycle.⁹ Unnecessary delays were the inevitable result, an important defect considering how much planning depended on a rapid dispatch of Serbia's army and the immediate redeployment of the 2nd Army to the plains of Galicia.

⁵N. Stone, "Die Mobilmachung der öst.-ung. Armee 1914," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 16, Bd.2/1974, 69-71.

⁶Ibid., 67-8, 81-2.

⁷*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-8), *Band I: Das Kriegsjahr 1914* (1930), 62-80.

⁸F. Franek, "Probleme der Organization im ersten Kriegsjahre," *Ergänzungsheft 1 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1930), 29.

⁹Stone, "Mobilmachung," 83.

In spite of these delays, mobilization proved totally and unexpectedly successful in one area at least. The anticipated and feared mutinies of recalled reservists did not materialize. The response of soldiers and civilians to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the worsening crises that followed was almost unfailingly patriotic. Indeed, there were anti-Serbian demonstrations in Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ragusa. The problems of the 1908-09 and 1912-13 mobilizations were not repeated; the army experienced no mutinies or disturbances in 1914, even among Slav troops: the Official History characterized the mobilization as "completely without friction."¹⁰ War was frequently greeted with enthusiasm, even in unlikely quarters. For example, Count Apponyi, head of the Independents in the Hungarian parliament and a longtime opponent of increased funding for the *k.u.k. Armee*, upon hearing of the declaration of war against Serbia, exclaimed, "We, too, can only have a single word in answer to the beginning of this action, the word which is on the tip of everyone's tongue: At Last!"¹¹

The response of Czech soldiers and civilians to war and mobilization was also unexpectedly enthusiastic. Despite years of nationalist struggles in Bohemia, the departing troops of the *deutschböhmisches* 29th Infantry Division were sent on their way as enthusiastically by Czech citizens as by German ones. As the mixed Czech-German 4th Infantry Division left its native Moravia for Galicia, its soldiers were met in every town on the rail line with cries of "Our soldiers!" ("*Naše vojáci!*") without reference to nationality.¹² The generals' prewar nightmares of an army of Slav soldiers unwilling to fight fellow Slavs were proved unfounded in the summer of 1914 as the Habsburg Army marched off to a major war for the first time in forty-eight years.

The actual conduct of operations against Serbia, the war's first campaign, was placed in the hands of *Feldzeugmeister*¹³ Oskar Potiorek, Governor-General of Bosnia-Herzegovina. By early August, after some train delays, Potiorek had at his disposal the 5th and 6th Armies, known as the *Balkanstreitkräfte*, and the 2nd Army as well, although only until August 18. Then the 2nd Army would be required to depart for Galicia, leaving behind one of its corps to reinforce Potiorek. Unfortunately, the 2nd Army was also the strongest army on the Serbian front, comprising three corps with almost seven infantry and one cavalry divisions. The 5th and 6th Armies were considerably smaller.

¹⁰ÖUHK: I:46.

¹¹J. Galantai, *Hungary in the First World War* (Budapest, 1989), 58.

¹²KA, Nachlass Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr. 1/1, "Die Klammer des Reichs: Das Verhalten der elf Nationalitäten Österreich-Ungarns in der k.u.k. Wehrmacht 1914-1918," 252-3.

¹³A Lieutenant-General of the artillery and engineering branches.

The former included the equivalent of five infantry divisions in two corps; the latter also totalled five infantry divisions (four of them actually mountain units, as the XV and XVI Corps were garrisoned in Bosnia-Hercegovina and Dalmatia) in two corps.

Potiorek's war plan was enough on paper. He intended to send the 5th Army across the Upper Drina, advancing southeast towards Valjevo; the 2nd Army on the Danube would conduct limited supporting attacks. The 6th Army, in addition to defending Eastern Bosnia-Hercegovina against Serb and Montenegrin attacks, would invade Serbia five days after the 5th Army crossed the Drina, through the Užice gap, advancing into the enemy's rear. Once primary objectives were reached, the 5th and 6th Armies were to conduct mutually supporting offensives toward Kragujevac in Central Serbia, where the main body of Serbia's field forces would be annihilated. The plan was to be executed quickly, not merely to provide units for the Russian front, but also to persuade Romania to stay neutral, and to destroy Serbia before Bosnian Serbs had any chance to stage an anti-Habsburg revolt.

Unfortunately for him, Potiorek's plan neglected several difficulties. The terrain chosen for the advances was rough, even mountainous, and lacked decent roads, making logistic support difficult and giving additional geographic advantages to the defender. Besides, the 5th and 6th Armies, separated by over a hundred kilometers at the outset, were too far apart to support each other; the necessarily limited role given to the powerful 2nd Army only worsened the odds. Lastly, the *Balkanstreitkräfte* were given the task of confronting an enemy of approximately equal strength and considerable recent combat experience, well placed and motivated to defend their own soil.¹⁴ Thus Potiorek's war plan contained the seeds of its failure, perhaps unavoidably given the forces at his disposal.

By any standards, the Serbian Army was an impressive, if comparatively small, force. On total mobilization it included three armies (each actually the size of a large army corps) and more than 270,000 field soldiers, supported by replacements and many irregulars. The main element of the army was made up of ten first line infantry divisions, five of them recruited in the districts won in the Balkan Wars. Serbian first line divisions were somewhat larger than Habsburg infantry divisions, including four four-battalion infantry regiments, and approximately equal in artillery. Serbia also had five second line infantry divisions, raised as "shadow" formations of first line units from Old Serbia; they had less than half the artillery, but three-quarters the infantry, of first line divisions. Despite the firepower differential, recent combat experience meant that first- and second-

¹⁴Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 135-6.

line divisions were qualitatively essentially equivalent.¹⁵ The army's third line included fifteen non-divisional infantry regiments, each of four battalions. There were also a small cavalry division and three separate artillery regiments to support the three field armies.¹⁶ Considerable numbers of irregulars supported the Serbian Army in the field as well. Known as *komitadji*, these bands of anything from five to 200 guerrillas were frequently well armed with modern rifles, grenades and other explosives. As many of the irregulars had combat experience dating from the struggle against the Turks early in the 1900's, the *komitadji* presented a formidable obstacle to any invading army, particularly in vulnerable rear areas.¹⁷

Despite the Serbian Army's peasant origins, it was a surprisingly well equipped force, as the small kingdom had invested heavily in armaments from all over Europe. Small arms were modern, especially for first- and second-line divisions, including Mauser M.99 and M.10 rifles, as well as Russian M.91 rifles; the army also had considerable numbers of modern Maxim and Hotchkiss machine guns. The artillery park was also quite up-to-date, including M.07 7.5 cm field and M.09 7 cm mountain guns and M.11 12 cm and M.10 15 cm howitzers. Although third-line units were equipped with obsolete 8 cm M.85 field guns, there was at least an excellent ammunition supply.¹⁸ Thus the Serbian Army was at least as well equipped as its Habsburg adversary, and in many cases better supplied with modern weaponry, especially artillery.

The experience of years of irregular warfare against the Ottomans, not to mention several major campaigns in the Balkan Wars, gave the Serbian Army of 1914 a notable advantage over the Habsburg military, unblooded for two generations. The test of war had produced a Serbian force which was tactically proficient, well organized, equipped and administered, led by battle-tried officers, and fiercely determined to defend its homeland. Its only significant deficiency was a logistical inability to fight a prolonged war. The Serbian High Command was led by *Vojvoda* Radomir Putnik, "the undisputed

¹⁵J. Schön, *Šabac! Der Kampf der deutschböhmisches 29.ID, des Prager VIII Korps und des Budapest IV Korps im August 1914 in Nordwest-Serbien* (Reichenberg, 1928), 13. B. Ratković, "The Mobilization of the Serbian Army for the 1st Balkan War, October 1912," in: B. Király, D. Djordjević, eds., *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars* (New York, 1987), 147.

¹⁶KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, "Kriegsordre de bataille der serbischen Armee Juli 1914."

¹⁷KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, "Über Wesen, Ausrüstung und Kampfesart der Komitadschis."

¹⁸K. Peball, "Der Feldzug gegen Serbien und Montenegro im Jahre 1914," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, 1965/Sonderheft, 21. Schön, *Sabac*, 12.

patriarch of Serbian soldiery," army commander since 1912.¹⁹ Putnik, an experienced and able tactician and strategist, had been the architect of Serbia's victories in the 1912 and 1913 conflicts. Ironically, Austria-Hungary might easily have been spared great difficulties, for Putnik was visiting Bohemia when the war broke out, taking the cure at Gleichenberg. The old general was briefly interned at Budapest, but released as a soldierly gesture by Franz Joseph, to return home to defeat the Habsburg Army.²⁰

While the Austro-Hungarian Army had followed recent Balkan military developments quite closely, and was quite well informed about Serbian order of battle, equipage, and general war planning, it nonetheless underestimated Serbian military prowess.²¹ The army tended to attribute Serbian military successes in the Balkan Wars to Turkish numerical inferiority and poor readiness, rather than to Serbian tenacity and skill.²² This led to unfortunate overconfidence among Habsburg officers from Potiorek down. Many Austro-Hungarian officers believed, like legions of jingoistic politicians and journalists, that the defeat of Serbia would prove little more than *einen kleinen Herbstspaziergang*--"a brief autumn stroll."

Serbia mobilized its forces on July 24-25; the mobilization was rapid and efficient, as it had been executed several times in recent years, so that the army was fully ready to fight by August 10. All three field armies deployed in the north, considerably behind the borders by way of providing strategic depth; the 1st and 2nd faced the Danube and the 3rd was placed near the meeting of the Drina and Save. The independent divisional-sized Uzice group defended the western frontier. The southwestern border was reinforced by 35,000 men of Montenegro's militia army, poorly equipped but tenacious soldiers. The Serbian war plan was not merely defensive because the invader's initial advances were to be thrown back by counterattacks. By the time Potiorek was ready to begin his offensive, the Serbian 2nd Army's four infantry divisions and the 3rd Army's two infantry divisions were positioned first to absorb and then push back Habsburg penetrations across the Save and Upper Drina, respectively.²³

¹⁹D. Djordjević, "Vojvoda Putnik, the Serbian High Command, and Strategy in 1914," in: B. Király, N. Dreisziger, A. Nofi, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985), 570-1.

²⁰Ibid., 572.

²¹Refer to: KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, "Kriegsordre," for an excellent prewar order of battle report.

²²Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 131.

²³Ibid., 135-7.

The Habsburg army chosen for the most vital task in Potiorek's operation was *General der Infanterie* Liborius Ritter von Frank's 5th. The army's two corps were the heavily Czech VIII (Prague) and the overwhelmingly Croatian XIII (Zagreb). Army command held a mountain brigade and a *k.u. Landsturm* brigade in reserve. The Croatian corps, with two infantry divisions and a separate infantry brigade, was the stronger of the two. The choice of *General der Kavallerie* Arthur Freiherr Giesl von Gieslingen's VIII Corps²⁴ for such an important role was perhaps an odd one, given the army's suspicions about its Czech troops. The corps originally had been part of *B-Staffel* (2nd Army), but was assigned to reinforce 5th Army, where it would remain throughout the Serbian campaign. Unfortunately VIII Corps was understrength, as one of its three divisions, the *k.u.k.* 19th (Pilsen), had been deployed with the 4th Army in Galicia, leaving only the *k.u.k.* 9th and *k.k.* 21st *Landwehr* Infantry Divisions, both headquartered in peacetime in Prague.

Czech units from Bohemia had been the source of headaches for the army during the 1908-09 and 1912-13 mobilizations. Elements of the Bohemian *k.u.k.* 18th and 36th Infantry Regiments and the *k.k.* 10th *Landwehr* Infantry Regiment, inspired by pan-Slav propaganda, refused to entrain during the Bosnian annexation recall of reservists. In some cases they had to be forced on board at bayonet point. Four years later, the Bohemian *k.u.k.* 8th Dragoons and 11th Lancers reported similar incidents, with refusal to board trains for Galicia and the singing of pan-Slav and pacifistic songs; the Czech 2nd and 10th Dragoons of VIII Corps likewise experienced difficulties during the Balkan War precautionary mobilization. After these events, condemned as mutinous by many officers, VIII Corps command in Prague went to great lengths to prevent the spread of what it considered nationalist, socialist and pacifist ideas among the troops.²⁵

Czech nationalist discontent had little to do with the army, and the army was essentially powerless to ameliorate the situation. The Dual Monarchy's six-and-a-half million Czechs, a quarter of Cisleithania's population, had been badly alienated by the *Ausgleich*, for the Czechs and Magyars had long disliked one another. To Czech nationalists and Slavophiles, the *Ausgleich* condemned Slavs, and especially Slovaks, to Budapest's misrule and Magyarization. The unalterable nature of the compromise and its dualist inequities only angered the Czechs further. Nationalist campaigns had grown

²⁴Baron von Giesl's career had not been helped by the previous year's revelation that his widely respected chief of staff, Colonel Alfred Redl, was a major Russian spy and homosexual; no less embarrassing was the fact that von Giesl, as head of the *Evidenzbüro* in 1900, had rapidly promoted the promising young Captain Redl.

²⁵KA, Nachlaß Robert Nowak, Nr. 1/I, 189, 192-3, 204-5, 213.

increasingly shrill by the early twentieth century, notably in Bohemia, where Czechs comprised almost two-thirds of the population. Bohemian Czechs were politically and economically the most advanced of all the Slavs, boasting a heavily industrialized economy and a strong, nationally conscious bourgeoisie; they shared many socioeconomic values with their *deutschböhmisch* neighbours, so much so that they were sometimes ironically called "Slavic Germans" (*slawische Deutsche*).²⁶ However, Czech-German national rivalry and antagonism in Bohemia was a serious problem by the early 1900's, causing the virtual collapse of parliamentary rule in Vienna.

It was inevitable that these seething prejudices would appear in the army among Czech nationalist conscripts. From 1897, Czech nationalism became an increasing worry for the High Command. Nonetheless, the Czechs had served loyally for centuries in the Habsburg Army; their prowess in the technical arms and service branches, especially the artillery, was widely acknowledged. Indeed, the army's greatest hero, *Vater Radetzky*, was a Bohemian Czech. Yet Czech nationalism presented a potentially serious problem for the army by 1914. The use of German as the language of command and service doubtless annoyed many nationalist Czechs who resented the generally German character of the monarchy.²⁷ Still, as a leading scholar has noted of the Czech predicament, "On the eve of World War I the Czechs, though deeply frustrated in the Habsburg Empire, could not conceive of living outside of it."²⁸ This was equally true of the Habsburg Army's Czech soldiers. While some resented the military, and many had no desire to fight fellow Slavs, the overwhelming majority were prepared to do their duty when war came, as indicated by the enthusiastic and patriotic response of almost all Czech fighting men in the summer of 1914.

The 21st *Landwehr* Division of VIII Corps was not especially remarkable, apart from the fact that in 1914 it was the only *k.k. Landwehr* formation to serve on the Serbian front. Recruited from mixed Czech-German Western Bohemia, many of its soldiers were workers from Prague, Pilsen, Budweis, and other industrial towns. It included two brigades, the 41st and 42nd *Landwehr*, headquartered in Pilsen and Prague, respectively.

²⁶J. Kořalka, R. Crampton, "Die Tschechen," in: *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (6 Bände, Vienna, 1973-89), *Band III: Die Völker des Reiches I* (1980), 493-7. P. Vysný, *Neo-Slavism and the Czechs 1898-1914* (Cambridge, 1977), 8-12.

²⁷O. Gallian, *Der österreichische Soldat im Weltkrieg: Die Legende vom "Bruder Schnürschuh"* (Graz, 1933), 48.

²⁸V. Mamatey, quoted in: A. Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (London, 1989), 224.

Upon mobilization, the division totalled twelve infantry battalions in four regiments, eight artillery batteries and two cavalry squadrons, as well as support and service troops.

The 21st Division's four *Landwehr* Infantry Regiments were the West Bohemian 6th from Eger, the Southwest Bohemian 7th from Pilsen, and the Central Bohemian 8th from Prague, all formed in 1889 from independent *Landwehr* battalions; and the South Bohemian 28th from Pisek, raised a decade later from battalions of the 7th and 8th Regiments.²⁹ The 6th Regiment was ninety-seven percent German, while the 8th was equally Czech. The 7th Regiment was sixty percent Czech and almost forty percent German, while the 28th was four-fifths Czech, the remainder being German.³⁰

The divisional artillery, the 21st Field Artillery Brigade, included the *k.u.k.* 23rd Field Gun Regiment of four batteries, and the *k.k.* 21st Field Gun and 21st Field Howitzer Divisions, each of two batteries. The artillery units were all roughly three-quarters Czech and one quarter German in composition.³¹ The divisional cavalry consisted of the 1st and 3rd Squadrons of the 14th Dragoons, an élite, old regiment which was majority Czech. Service units, many of them concentrated in VIII Corps' 8th *Traindivision*, included signals, medical, field hospital, bakery, and transport units, all company-sized. The service units, too, were predominantly Czech.³²

The commander of the 21st *Landwehr* Infantry Division as it went off to war was *Feldmarschalleutnant* Arthur Przyborski, an officer in many ways typical of the Habsburg Army's senior leadership. Although of Polish ancestry, he had been born in 1860 in Vienna, and effectively denationalized by his army training and service. Przyborski entered the army at the age of eighteen, serving as an *einjährig Freiwilliger* with the *k.u.k.* 2nd Lancers. He converted his reserve commission to a regular one, and transferred to the infantry. He had enjoyed a successful career, although naturally without combat experience, graduating from the *Kriegsschule* and serving four years on the General Staff and three years on the staff of the *k.k. Landwehr* in Vienna. Przyborski also served with field units, including line and *Jäger* battalions. He rose to command a *Landwehr* brigade in 1908, and from 1911 a division, the 21st. Although Przyborski

²⁹A. Wrede, *Geschichte der k.u.k. Wehrmacht: Die Regimenter, Corps, Branchen und Anstalten von 1618 bis Ende des XIX Jahrhunderts* (5 Bände, Vienna, 1903), V. Band, 385-9.

³⁰M. Ehnle, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht nach Aufbau, Gliederung, Friedensgarnison, Einteilung und nationaler Zusammensetzung im Sommer 1914," *Ergänzungsheft 9 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1934), 75, 79.

³¹*Ibid.*, 53, 81, 83.

³²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, 21.LITD Kmdo., "Trainorganization."

previously had no experience commanding Czech units, he spoke passable Czech, as well as Polish and Slovak.³³

Przyborski and his staff received mobilization orders for the division shortly after noon on July 26, but actual mobilization was delayed two days.³⁴ The reservists were thus given plenty of time to put their personal affairs in order, though the delay dampened eager reservists' enthusiasm as well.³⁵ The 21st Division's mobilization proceeded very smoothly and without disruption, despite some confusion about the unit's destination. As a result of Conrad's ill-advised corps deployments, Przyborski and his staff were still unsure as late as July 31 if the division was headed for Galicia or the Balkans. This confusion, combined with the natural friction of large undertakings, meant that while units were ready to deploy by August 1, in some cases trains were not yet available to move them.³⁶

Nonetheless the divisional staff moved to Brčko in northeastern Bosnia (also the headquarters of 5th Army) on August 2, and the remainder of the division soon followed, sent on their way from Prague by Prince Thun, governor of Bohemia. There were transportation difficulties, both with trains and road movement, mostly due to Bosnia's inadequate rail system, but all divisional units were settled into the Brčko area near the Serbian frontier, on the northern flank of VIII Corps and the 5th Army, by August 9.³⁷

Habsburg formations were warned to be prepared for patrols and attacks by Serbian irregulars in border regions. While actual *komitadji* probes were rare, there were numerous shooting incidents. Illustrating one of the perils of a polyglot army, on several occasions 21st Division night sentries mistook units of the neighbouring 42nd *Honvéd* Division and *k.u.* 104th *Landsturm* Brigade for the enemy and opened fire, understandably enough as these XIII Corps formations used Serbo-Croat as their language of command and service. Repeatedly troops of the 21st Division fired upon Serbo-Croat speaking detachments of the *Schützkorps*, an Austro-Hungarian paramilitary force, even in the daytime, as the auxiliaries were clad in civilian garb, except for black-yellow

³³KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart.2629, Arthur Przyborski

³⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1188, k.k. Landwehr Kmdo in Prag, Pras.Nr.1064.

³⁵Stone, "Mobilmachung," 78.

³⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1188, k.k. Landwehr Kmdo in Prag, Pras.Nr.80, 31.7.14.; k.k. LIR, Prag Nr.8, Res.Nr.215 Mob., 1.8.14.

³⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1188, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo, Nächtigung vom 9. auf den 10. August.

armbands. The 5th Army headquarters rapidly moved to remedy this situation by ordering all sentries to yell, "Halt," "Who's there?" and "Forward," in German.³⁸

Settled on the Save, the division quickly prepared for the coming offensive, making last minute adjustments to organization, equipment, and supplies. All units reached war strength by August 11; the day before deployment commenced, the 21st Division's infantry fielded 11,922 riflemen and 24 machine guns.³⁹ The Czech and German *Landwehr* soldiers, their commanders, and their regiments, all about to fight for the first time, were ready for war, or at least as ready as the Habsburg Army could make them.

On August 12, the invasion of Serbia began, with the 5th Army's VIII and XIII Corps crossing the Drina, heading towards Valjevo and the Jadar valley, supported by the fording of the Save by 2nd Army's IV Corps. Potiorek, determined to win his first battle, not least to erase the embarrassment of having been commander in Bosnia-Herzegovina when the heir to the throne was murdered, noted confidently in his private diary, "Today my war has begun."⁴⁰ Units of IV Corps quickly captured the border city of Šabac, valued as a command and logistical centre. However, the crossing by XIII Corps proved easier than the more northerly movement of VIII Corps, which encountered considerable local resistance from Serbian border guards and irregulars. The 9th Division encountered two reinforced Serbian battalions supported by artillery, delaying the corps advance by a day. Thus the 21st Division's forward echelons, led by *Generalmajor* Panesch's 41st Brigade with its 6th and 7th Regiments, forded the shallow river just before dawn, reaching its east bank on August 13 at 6 am. Despite losses to enemy rifle and machine gun fire, the division's assault elements were successfully across by 10.45 am.⁴¹

The 21st Division's progress inland on August 13 was rather slow due to determined resistance by Serbian irregulars. Although the corps soon had reliable pontoon bridges over the Drina, the roughness of the hilly terrain, combined with the lack of good roads or railheads near the front, produced movement delays and considerable supply problems, not least because the movement of divisional service columns across the

³⁸KA/NFA, Fasz. 1187, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo, Abfertigung, 8.8.14.; Fasz. 1188, k.u.k. 5.Armeekmdo, Op.Nr.77,101.

³⁹KA, Sammlung Balaban 10, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo., Früherapporte. 11.8.14.

⁴⁰R, Jeřábek, *Potiorek: General im Schatten von Sarajevo* (Graz, 1991), 118.

⁴¹KA, Gefechts-Berichte, k.k.41.LBrig. Kmdo., 13.8.14. Before the autumn rains the Drina was in many places little more than a foot deep, so the 21st Division's infantry crossed wearing only their underpants, having removed their trousers to keep them dry.

Drina had been very slow. On August 14, the 6th Army's XV Corps also crossed the Drina, well to the south of 5th Army units, and it, too, encountered serious logistical difficulties and local resistance. Worse, the Serbian High Command at Kragujevac having by now accurately determined Potiorek's operational intentions, quickly and efficiently shifted its field forces. The 1st Army now faced IV Corps, the 2nd confronted VIII Corps, and the 3rd stood before the advancing XV Corps.⁴²

On August 14, the 21st Division, on the northern flank of VIII Corps, continued its advance in a southeasterly direction. Three of the division's regiments, following the shortest route to Valjevo, entered the Čer planina, a plateau twenty kilometres long and six wide, dominated by numerous hills and ridges between 300 and 900 meters high. The planina, surrounded by vast cornfields, dominated the Drina and Jadar valleys. The strenuous uphill marches proved difficult for the heavily burdened infantrymen, most of whom were recalled reservists.⁴³ Supply problems grew more serious, as the troops outpaced their logistical support; the division was also not equipped for mountain warfare, lacking mountain guns and pack animals for transporting supplies. The provision of fresh food and water was poor, the latter proving especially serious due to a high daytime temperature frequently in excess of thirty-five degrees. The inexperienced support troops had to contend with repeated *komitadji* attacks; infantry units and cavalry patrols were heavily involved with protecting supply and artillery units, whose columns proved quite vulnerable.⁴⁴

While the 21st Division advanced slowly southeast, Stepa Stepanović's 2nd Army prepared for battle. By August 15, Stepanović, the former Serbian war minister and successful commander of the 2nd Army in the Balkan Wars, was ready to send his experienced troops of the Combined and Šumadija I Divisions, supported by the Cavalry Division, to confront Habsburg units on the Čer planina.⁴⁵

⁴²Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 137.

⁴³The Habsburg infantryman's kit weighed at least fifty pounds and included a rifle and bayonet, ammunition, a spade, a knapsack (filled with emergency rations of tinned meats, coffee extract, sugar, salt, rice and biscuits; tin cooking and eating utensils; a second pair of shoes, an extra blouse, and a change of underwear), an overcoat, a tent quarter, and anything else the soldier might be ordered to carry. F. Kreisler, *Four Weeks in the Trenches* (Boston, 1917), 13.

⁴⁴KA, Nachlass Robert Nowak, Nr I/I, 261-3. M. Pitreich, *1914: Die militärischen Probleme unseres Kriegsbeginner* (Vienna, 1934), 103-4. Schön, *Šabac*, 99.

⁴⁵Djordjević, "Vojvoda Putnik," 573.

At 8 am on August 15, the 1st Battalion of the 6th *Landwehr* Regiment started to march: up Cer hill 630, a 705 metre-high peak which dominated the surrounding Mačva plain and Jadar valley, and was soon followed by elements of the 28th Regiment and other units. By the middle of the day, the 6th, 8th and 28th Regiments, a cavalry squadron and divisional headquarters were on or near the hill, adjacent to the village of Skakaliste, at the eastern edge of the Čer planina; divisional artillery and trains stayed back, protected by three full battalions. The hard march up the hill exhausted the infantrymen, largely because the troops had not received fresh food or water for two days. Frequent *komitadji* rifle fire from nearby woods only served to aggravate the soldiers further. By 4 pm the lead 28th Regiment had reached the summit, where it was stopped by exhaustion; after an hour's rest the troops prepared to move again, but a rainstorm discouraged further advance. Thus the division's advance ended, leaving two-and-a-half companies of the 28th Regiment and a company of the 8th as the forward element. Detecting no enemy units nearby, on Przyborski's orders the weak battalion formed a lager for the night. On the other hand, the four regiments of General Mihailo Rašić's Combined Division had also marched for hours through rainstorms, but they were ready to join battle.⁴⁶

At 1 am on August 16, elements of two Serbian regiments of the Combined Division approached the lager's positions. Sentries failed initially to react, as the Serbian infantry announced they were Croatian *Honvéd* troops, and most soldiers were asleep when the enemy opened fire at very close range. The murderous crossfire cut down many soldiers before they could even resist. The night attack caused terrible chaos, in which officers tried desperately to rouse their men to form defensive positions, before being overwhelmed by Serbian infantry, moving forward through the standing corn under cover of darkness and rain.⁴⁷

The forward positions of the 28th Regiment were rapidly shattered, despite desperate attempts at coordinating a defence by the regiment's officers. In the brutal struggle, most of the unit's officers fell, including the commander, Colonel Joseph Fiedler, the first of thirty-five Habsburg colonels to die at the head of their regiments in 1914. Soon *Feldmarschalleutnant* Przyborski was in action as well. Serbian assaults increased and Habsburg units counterattacked, causing a state of confusion for command elements, and the divisional headquarters was in the middle of the fighting. Przyborski

⁴⁶KA/NFA, Gefechts-Berichte 17, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.84/5, 31.8.14.; KA, Nachlaß Robert Nowak, Nr.1/I, 263.

⁴⁷KA, Gefechts-Berichte 17, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.84/5, 31.8.14.

helped to rally his startled soldiers, forming them into coherent units. As Serbian attacks came closer, the divisional commander, wielding a rifle, led the defence of the headquarters area. Przyborski at one point had only twenty men around him, many of them his staff, but the defence of the headquarters held, although the general was wounded.⁴⁸

The 6th Regiment also absorbed several enemy close assaults, including infiltration into its positions, resulting in bayonet and hand-to-hand fighting. Although Serbian companies used Habsburg bugle calls for purposes of deception when advancing on the 3rd Battalion, that regiment's line held, and was quickly reinforced by the 1st Battalion. Serbian rifle and machine gun fire was concentrated and accurate, inflicting terrible casualties. The confused *melée*, which continued for hours, was not so much an organized battle as essentially a series of firefights fought at extremely close ranges, producing heavy losses for both sides. *Generalmajor* Panesch, the 41st Brigade's commander, like his superior, found himself in the middle of the fighting. He assisted directly in the defence, and his troops formed a position around their general which withstood repeated enemy assaults.⁴⁹

By dawn both sides were exhausted, but Rasic committed a third infantry regiment and supporting artillery, which had been delayed by muddy roads. Two batteries were deployed very close to Habsburg positions, firing over open sights and inflicting heavy losses. Habsburg artillery support was inadequate, mostly because batteries were too far away or under attack themselves. The neighbouring 9th Division provided supporting artillery fires, but infantry-artillery cooperation was very poor, and in many cases utter confusion paralyzed coordination: in the chaos of the situation, many battalion and company commanders simply did not know where their subordinate units were.⁵⁰

By mid-morning word of the extent of the 21st Division's losses, and particularly the fate of the 28th Regiment, had travelled up the chain of command. Frank at 5th Army, fearing a debacle, wanted the division to retreat. Yet Giesl's VIII Corps had held its ground against Stepanović's veteran army. The 21st had managed to hold its positions and inflict heavy casualties on the enemy. Total Serbian losses included forty-seven officers and nearly 3,000 men; their 6th Regiment lost all four battalion commanders and thirteen of sixteen company commanders.⁵¹ However, the 21st Division's own losses had

⁴⁸Ibid. Schön, *Šabac*, 166-8.

⁴⁹R. Wagner, *Geschichte des ehemaligen Schützen-Regiment Nr.6* (Karlsbad, 1932), 75-8.

⁵⁰R. Martinek, *Kriegstagebuch eines Artillerie-Offiziers* (Vienna, 1975), 13.

⁵¹Djordjević, "Vojvoda Putnik," 577.

been crippling; it was certainly incapable of further offensive operations. On orders issued by VIII Corps, the 6th and 28th Regiments, which had borne so much of the fight, were the first to leave the battlefield on August 16. Their retreat was observed by Serbian King Peter, who watched the day's events from a nearby hilltop. During the day, despite cavalry patrolling, Serbian irregulars inflicted numerous casualties on the rear echelons, including the artillery and the 7th Regiment.⁵²

The retreating 21st Division was pursued by Serbian cavalry and irregulars, so there were several small but bloody engagements on August 17. The divisional artillery had two guns captured at Prnjavor, but *Generalmajor* Panesch's 41st Brigade at Petkovica on the northern edge of the planina defeated repeated enemy probes. The charge of a Serbian cavalry regiment was repulsed by the annihilation of two of its squadrons by a machine gun detachment of the 6th Regiment.⁵³ On August 18--Franz Joseph's eighty-fourth birthday, and also the day the 2nd Army began its withdrawal to Galicia--divisional elements continued to resist probes by Serbian infantry, cavalry, and irregulars, and attempted to support the nearby 9th Division, which was under severe enemy pressure. The defense of the village of Novoselo by the 8th Regiment, well supported by machine guns and artillery, was very successful. Although the troops continued to suffer from lack of sleep and inadequate supply of water and rations, the retreat was essentially orderly.⁵⁴ The next day, divisional units left the Čer planina, preparing to cross the Drina again. On August 20, Przyborski's soldiers reentered Bosnia, and by nightfall no units of the 21st Division remained on Serbian soil. The final day of the retreat had been quiet except for a small engagement against *komitadji*. The Serbian 2nd Army had delivered the Entente its first victory of the war.

The 21st Division established encampments just across the Drina, with divisional headquarters at Bijeljina, eight kilometres northwest of the river. Although the 21st had survived its ordeal, its losses had been very high, especially among officers, and particularly among company and battalion commanders. After only a week in Serbia and one major battle lasting a few hours, the division had lost nearly a third of its riflemen. The exact number of dead was difficult to determine, as the division was unable to attend properly to casualty counting during the retreat; thus many dead soldiers were listed as missing. In the worst case, the 28th Regiment lost 1,700 men, over half its strength, but

⁵²KA, Gefechts-Berichte 17, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.75/4, 22.8.14. *Geschichte des k.u.k. Dragoner-Regiment Fürst zu Windischgrätz Nr.14 im Weltkrieg* (Vienna, 1922), 31-3.

⁵³KA/NFA, Fasz.1188, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.77/1, 23.8.14. Wagner, *Geschichte*, 80.

⁵⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1188, k.k.42.LBrig. Kmdo., Nr.1, an das 21.LITD Kmdo., 18.8.14.

many of the two-thirds of the casualties officially listed as missing were dead on the Čer planina. Although losses were heaviest among the infantry, logistical units also had taken casualties, and the artillery was substantially weakened: field gun batteries had lost half of their pieces.⁵⁵

The division rapidly filled its ranks with replacements from Bohemian districts, *k.u.k.* as well as *k.k.*, and prepared for further action. Although losses of men and materiel could be easily replaced, trained leadership cadres could not be. Worse, the damage to the division's morale and cohesion caused by the Čer catastrophe would take considerable time to repair. The attitude of corps and army commanders towards the division was hardly conducive to such restoration of battleworthiness, and the situation only worsened.

The defeat of the 21st Division on the Čer planina caused the immediate failure of the 5th Army's offensive. The division's retreat from the battlefield made the positions of the badly depleted VIII Corps untenable in the face of numerically superior forces. The retreat of VIII Corps was soon followed by the retreat of XIII Corps to Bosnia, thus ending the 5th Army's ten-day offensive. The intervention of 2nd Army's IV Corps, departing for Galicia, could not save Šabac; a hundred kilometers further south, the 6th Army was not advancing. Therefore Potiorek reluctantly ordered a complete withdrawal by the *Balkanstreitkräfte*, and by sunset on August 24, no Habsburg units remained on Serbian soil.⁵⁶ The *k.u.k. Armee's* anticipated "brief autumn stroll" had ended disastrously.

The psychological impact of failure on the army was shattering. While the losses of men and materiel could be made good very quickly, the ancient Habsburg Army had failed ignominiously in the war's first offensive. It had been humiliated, driven from the field by the peasant forces of a small Balkan kingdom. At the cost of some 28,000 casualties, including 4,500 prisoners in Serbian hands, the army had gained little but an appreciation for Serbian fighting prowess. The Serbian Army had also suffered serious losses of 16,000 dead and wounded, an attrition of men and equipment which it could not afford. However, Putnik's victorious field armies, though battered, remained cohesive and ready to fight again.⁵⁷

In Vienna and throughout the Habsburg Army the search for a scapegoat for the disaster commenced immediately. Potiorek should have borne the commander's

⁵⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1188, k.k.21LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.76/6, 22.8.14.; Fasz.1191, k.k.21.LITD Kmdo, Op.Nr.,80/5, Verlust-Ausweise, 25.8.14.; k.k.LIR Čisek Nr.28, Frührapporte, 23.8.14.

⁵⁶*OUIK:I*: 134-46.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 152. Djordjević, "Vojvoda Putnik," 578.

traditional responsibility for failure, not least because his strategic plan had been poorly conceived and at best indifferently executed. Conrad complained numerous times about Potiorek's leadership, placing much responsibility for defeat on his shoulders of him and those of his corps commanders. However, Potiorek remained at his post as commander of the *Balkanstreitkräfte*, thanks to his excellent connections in the Emperor's military chancery.⁵⁸

As the Čer disaster was the immediate cause of the offensive's failure, inevitably the 21st *Landwehr* Division received a disproportionate share of the blame. Rather than find fault with army training and preparedness, much less Potiorek's questionable planning, many Habsburg Army officers placed culpability on the 21st Division and its supposedly poor, even dishonourable, showing in combat. Accusations that the division "simply melted away" and had "abandoned field guns and materiel" began to spread, from Conrad down the chain of command.⁵⁹ Worse, the division's alleged failings were attributed not to military shortcomings, but to ethnic disloyalty. Much of the officer corps, mistrusting Czech soldiers before the war, reverted to their deeply ingrained prejudices: to do so caused considerably less embarrassment and soul searching than finding fault with the army and its leaders.

Potiorek quickly blamed the 21st Division for the failure of his long planned offensive. He felt that the Bohemian formation had not done its duty, and that its retreat had been unjustified. On Potiorek's orders, an official board of inquiry convened at Sarajevo in late August. Despite the eloquent case presented by *Generalmajor* Podhajský, commander of the 42nd Brigade, that the 21st had fought bravely, the investigation concluded that the division had failed because of Przyborski's mistakes and insufficient courage on the part of its officers; it also explicitly blamed the division for the 5th Army's retreat. Potiorek similarly felt that the Čer disaster was attributable to the inadequate performance of the officers of the 7th, 8th and 28th *Landwehr* Regiments, i.e., the Czech infantry units. The division's supposedly disgraceful conduct and doubtful reliability gave Potiorek the excuse to immediately impose emergency military law on the division, now safely in Bosnia, to prevent further disintegration.⁶⁰

The portrayal of the Čer battle which emerged and became widely accepted throughout the Habsburg Army was one of battlefield breakdown caused by poor

⁵⁸Jeřábek, *Potiorek*, 137. Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 138.

⁵⁹Schön, *Sabac*, 175. F. Conrad von Hotzendorff, *Aus meiner Dienstzeit 1906-1918* (5 Bände, Vienna, 1921-5), *Band IV* (1922), 522.

⁶⁰KA, Nachlass Nowak, I/1, 268-9. Jeřábek, *Potiorek*, 121-4, 141.

leadership and cowardly, even treacherous, Czech behaviour. As the Official History concluded, "At the least it would be justified to blame the division's mishap--as it occasionally appeared--to national causes."⁶¹ The Sarajevo investigation announced that in the 21st, only the German 6th *Landwehr* Regiment had done its duty, a view endorsed by Potiorek, and one that quickly spread throughout the professional officer corps.⁶² Significantly, both Potiorek and the High Command singled out Czech soldiers as the cause of the failure of the invasion of Serbia; no other nationality found itself accused of cowardice by the army leadership. Blaming the failure of the 21st Division on Czech misconduct was convenient, but it contradicted what actually occurred. Many Czech units performed quite successfully in Serbia. The three-quarters Czech *k.u.k.* 74th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division, recruited from the intensely nationalist Jicin area of North Bohemia, fought very well in the Šabac region. The *k.u.k.* 9th Division, raised from the same Western Bohemian districts as the 21st, performed considerably more successfully than its *Landwehr* sister unit in VIII Corps. Potiorek, among others, managed to ignore such awkward facts, even though one of the hard fighting regiments of the 9th was Potiorek's own, the overwhelmingly Czech 102nd, which fought bravely and vainly to assist the 21st Division on the Čer planina.⁶³

In truth, the fate of the 21st *Landwehr* Division on the Čer planina had little or nothing to do with Czech disloyalty. An untried, relatively poorly trained division, tired from long marches and inadequately supplied and nourished, was surprised at night by an equal number of battle hardened, well led enemy soldiers: the result could well be anticipated. Przyborski and his staff had neglected to provide proper reconnaissance of the planina, in particular the Skaklišće area, a grave defect with a decisive impact on the battle's outcome. The division should not have taken by surprise. Yet Przyborski and his officers somewhat redeemed themselves by fighting very bravely when battle was actually joined. The 21st Division, as a *Landwehr* formation, had smaller regular cadres than *k.u.k.* units, including vital officers and sergeants; and most of its men were reservists, out of practice with soldiering, and certainly not in the physical condition of younger serving conscripts.⁶⁴ The long, hard marches in the scorching summer heat into

⁶¹ *ÖUk*: I: 151.

⁶² KA, Nachlass Nowak, I/1, 268-9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 269-74. Potiorek was titular colonel of the 102nd, a Central Bohemian regiment ninety-one percent Czech in composition.

⁶⁴ A reserve officer from III Corps commented honestly on his second-line troops' "comparative softness and lack of training"; the situation in the 21st Division was no different. Kreisler, *Four Weeks*, 13.

Serbia and up the Čer planina took their toll, much exacerbated by the division's poor supply system, which deprived troops of necessary fresh food and water. The efficient Serbian night attack took the tired troops by surprise, throwing units into a state of hopeless confusion. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the 21st Division's soldiers, of all regiments, did their duty: many of them never left the Čer planina. Overlooked in the indictment of Potiorek and other generals was the 21st Division's achievement. At an appalling cost, it had stopped the enemy attack, inflicting equally heavy losses on the veteran Combined Division. The *Landwehr* troops were forced to retreat because there were no reserves to replace them in the line, not because they had been defeated in detail. Only in retreat did any signs of demoralization appear in the division.⁶⁵

The headquarters of the 5th Army, setting the tone for the entire army, chose not to praise the 21st Division's efforts, but rather to criticize failings and to offer strong warnings against future misconduct. The performance of logistical units in the campaign was harshly, and justifiably, rebuked in official reports. The 5th Army's Service and Rear Area Command apologized for its gross inefficiencies, blaming "disorder and indiscipline" among the logistical units.⁶⁶ More ominously, both 5th Army and VIII Corps issued orders warning of severe punishment in the event of future unit collapse and flight from the battlefield; the threat of the death penalty, especially for desertion, was noted frequently.⁶⁷ Responsibility for unit discipline and order in the battle area was placed firmly on the officers and sergeants, particularly when dealing with morale and flight from battle. A further 5th Army report called for "the strongest obedience to discipline and duty," notably from officers; it added further that "iron discipline, the strongest discharge of duty guarantee the success of an army."⁶⁸ The General Staff and many other professional officers, confronted by an embarrassing and unanticipated defeat, were reverting to their deeply ingrained prewar suspicions of Czech troops. Thus the lesson learned by the Austro-Hungarian Army from the first offensive against Serbia was not that its training and tactics were inadequate, especially when confronting an experienced foe, but rather that its soldiers--and particularly Czechs--needed closer supervision, vigorously enforced.

⁶⁵Schön. *Šabac*, 175-81.

⁶⁶KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, k.u.k. 5. Armee-Etappenkmdo., Nr. 170, 21.8.14.

⁶⁷KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, k.u.k. 5. Armee-Etappenkmdo., Res. Nr. 120, 22.8.14.; k.u.k. 8. Korps Kmdo., Op. Nr. 108, 22.8.14.

⁶⁸KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, k.u.k. 5. Armeekmdo., Op. Nr. 402/15, 22.8.14. Emphasis in the original.

In the aftermath of the battle for the Čer planina, the Habsburg Army's leaders badly alienated their Czech soldiers, and particularly the men of the 21st *Landwehr* Division. The survivors of the horrible night of August 15-16, accused of cowardice and dereliction of duty by numerous superiors and generals, and compared very unfavourably to their German comrades-in-arms, became demoralized. Although Potiorek's imposition of emergency military law on the division was rescinded on Franz Joseph's orders, there was little enthusiasm for the next phase of the war against Serbia, which was soon to come. Through prejudice and insults, the generals' indictment of the 21st Division threatened to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

At the end of August, the 5th Army awarded decorations. The war's first awards for valour were given to two soldiers of the 21st *Landwehr* Division: Sergeant Rudolf Kulhánek of the 6th Regiment was awarded the Silver Bravery Medal, 1st Class, for his role in defeating the Serb cavalry assault at Petkovica on August 17; and Corporal Franz Řiha of the 23th Field Artillery Regiment was presented the same decoration, 2nd Class.⁶⁹ Ironically, both soldiers were Czech.

Putnik and gave Potiorek's forces little chance to rest. Although badly weakened by the Austro-Hungarian offensive, and lacking munitions and supplies for a protracted struggle, the tired Serbian forces quickly carried the war to Habsburg soil. Units of the 2nd Army crossed the Save into southeast Strymia on September 6, taking the city of Semlin four days later. Serbian units only remained in Slavonia until September 14, suffering a severe local defeat at Mitrovica, where one of their divisions was shattered by Habsburg forces; ominously, however, the invading army was greeted cheerfully by many Serbs in the Semlin area.⁷⁰ More threatening was the Serbian-Montenegrin invasion of Bosnia. Some forty battalions, supported by numerous irregulars, crossed into eastern Bosnia; fighting raged throughout September. Repeated engagements in the mountains east of Sarajevo forced the weakened Serb forces to retreat across the Drina, but not before Serbian units had reached the Romanja planina, only twenty kilometers from the province's capital.⁷¹

The 21st Division's positions in northeastern Bosnia were well west or north of any significant Serbian penetrations. Nonetheless the division formed a special security unit consisting of battalions of the 7th and 8th Regiments, supported by artillery, to

⁶⁹KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, k.u.k. 5. Armeekorps, zu Res. Nr. 35/72, 27.8.14. Army records Germanicized the Christian names (though never the surnames) of *k.u.k.* and *k.k.* soldiers.

⁷⁰KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.u.k. 8. Korps Kommando, Op. Nr. 515, "Nachrichten über den Feind."

⁷¹ÖUİK: I: 605-10. Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 138-9.

repulse any river crossings. However *komitadji* attacks, which had already caused the division such difficulties, remained a serious concern, particularly at night. Especially troubling were limited incursions by Serbian irregulars wearing captured Habsburg uniforms; they caused alarm far out of proportion to their actual military importance.⁷²

Units of the 21st Division quickly absorbed new officers, sergeants, and men, fresh from Bohemian depots, to replace the losses on the Čer planina, as well as new equipment, including machine guns and artillery pieces. In preparation for Potiorek's next offensive, elements of VIII Corps, principally the 21st Division, crossed the Save on September 9 into Slavonia, thus opening up the possibility of entering Serbia farther north than previously.⁷³

Over sixty kilometers to the south, on the Drina, the mountain brigades of the 6th Army were making some progress against the depleted Serbian 3rd Army. Therefore Potiorek ordered a supporting offensive by the 5th Army in the Save-Drina triangle region. The 5th Army's VII and XIII Corps, supported by the excellent 29th Division, prepared to invade Serbia again. Facing the 5th Army across the Save and Drina was the Serbian 2nd Army, consisting of two first line and one second line divisions, the Combined Division, and several independent detachments. These were formations which had suffered serious and irreplaceable losses of men and materiel, but which remained full of fight.⁷⁴

The planned September 14 crossing by the 5th Army involved considerable preparation for combat and service support units; the supply and fire support failures of the Čer planina could not be repeated. The 21st's assault element, half the division, was to be *Generalmajor* Alois Podhajský's 42nd Brigade and its 6th and 7th Regiments. Podhajský, a fifty year old Bohemian Czech, had performed his duties well during the first offensive and after in difficult circumstances. His career, begun in the cadet schools of Kassa and Pozsony, included line infantry service with Czech, Polish, German and Magyar regiments, but also considerable exemplary service on staffs. After graduating from the *Kriegsschule*, Podhajský spent several years in staff work at the divisional, corps and General Staff levels. Promoted to general officer rank and appointed to lead the 42nd *Landwehr* Brigade shortly before the war, Podhajský was in many ways the Habsburg

⁷²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1188, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., K.Nr.6, an 21.LITD Kmdo., 23.8.14.; k.u.k. 5.Armeekmdo., Op.Nr.403/20, 29.8.14.

⁷³KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.k.21. LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.95/8, "Situation am 10.9.14."

⁷⁴D. Lukić, *Bitka na Drini 1914* (Belgrade, 1966), p.22-3.

model of the "modern major general"; he was certainly more competent than many of his fellow field commanders.⁷⁵

Opposing the 21st Division across the Save were several Serbian battalions from the Timok II Division and the Parašnica Detachment, with the remainder of the former formation garrisoned to the southeast. Although the enemy units were under strength and weary, they were well supported by artillery and held defensible positions. As the *Landwehr* formation readied itself for battle again, it had to outward appearances recovered from the disaster of mid-August. Overall divisional rifle strength had reached 12,037 (of a manpower total of 19,402), actually higher than in early August; only the 28th Regiment, roughly a quarter understrength, showed any visible signs of Čer casualties. The division's losses in matériel had also been made good: the artillery had its required forty-four guns, and the infantry possessed twenty-three of the twenty-four machine guns prescribed in the tables of organization and equipment.⁷⁶ The division's quantifiable strength was considerable; on paper the 21st was combat ready. However, numerous trained officers and sergeants lost in battle had not been replaced, and many of the new men from the *Marsch* battalions were teenagers or middle-aged; few were well trained. Worse, the damage to the division's self-confidence and morale inflicted by the Čer battle and its unfortunate aftermath, invisible on the surface or on the order of battle charts, was a great potential weakness.

At 3 am on September 14 the guns of the 5th Army commenced their brief preparatory barrage, and soon the 9th, 21st *Landwehr*, 36th and 42nd *Honvéd* Divisions began their movement into Serbian territory. The 21st Division's offensive against the narrow Parašnica peninsula, which jutted little more than four kilometers into the Save just north of its confluence with the Drina, was initially well supported by sappers, pioneers, and artillery. The division's own batteries were enhanced by a 24 cm mortar battery of the 8th Heavy Howitzer Battalion; and in a rare instance of early combined operations, the division received aerial reconnaissance from a balloon detachment and direct fire support from a monitor group of the navy's Danube flotilla.⁷⁷ By noon

⁷⁵KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart. 2519, Alois Podhajsky. Like a significant number of Habsburg career officers, Podhajsky was of petit bourgeois background, his father having been a small-town sergeant in the *k.k. Gendarmerie*.

⁷⁶KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.518/8, "Nachrichten uber den Feind," 12.9.14.; Fasz.1191, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Frührapporte, 5. and 11.9.14.

⁷⁷KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.518/7, "Disposition fur den 14.9.14."; O. Wulff, *Die öst.-ung. Donauflotille im Weltkriege 1914-1918* (Vienna, 1934), 14-30.

Podhajský's eight battalions had forded the shallow river and defeated relatively light Serbian defences on the Save river bank, and had penetrated three kilometers into Serbia. The bridgehead was well established, and a three battalion-strong Serbian local counterattack was crushed, failing to dislodge the 42nd Brigade. Soon the remainder of the division began to cross the Save into Serbia.⁷⁸

The next day proved far more difficult for Podhajský and his men. Although securely across the Save, the division needed to continue the advance. Serbian battalions repeatedly launched intense counterattacks throughout the day and night, supported by well-hidden batteries. The 21st held its ground, inflicting grievous losses on the enemy. However, merely holding back and repulsing Serbian attacks cost the division approximately 2,000 dead and wounded on September 15. More seriously, some 150 of the injured soldiers had minor, self-inflicted wounds; the division's flagging morale was becoming evident. Potiorek immediately reimposed emergency military law on the division, including a decree punishing cowardice.⁷⁹

The 5th Army and VII Corps needed to advance, and the 21st *Landwehr* Division needed to get off the Parašnica peninsula. Scarcely more than a kilometer across at its widest point, and essentially flat, the peninsula offered the Habsburg units neither natural cover nor room to maneuver. The regiments of the 21st would have to simply bash their way through the Serbian defences, "without timidity about casualties," as Potiorek put it, which is what they proceeded to try to do for the next six weeks, until the end of October.

The division deployed Podhajský's 42nd Brigade in the front line, normally holding Panesch's 41st Brigade in reserve as a holding pool for battalions rotating between front and rear. To assist in the intended breakout, the 21st was reinforced by the 9th Division's *k.u.k.* 11th Infantry Regiment, a four-fifths Czech unit from southwest Bohemia.⁸⁰ Despite the additional strength, the division found it nearly impossible to advance as trench warfare set in. Without any room to maneuver laterally, assaults were entirely frontal and crowded, and artillery support was customarily poorly coordinated. The increasingly well entrenched Serbian units defending the base of the peninsula usually repulsed Habsburg attacks with heavy losses.⁸¹ The already inadequate Habsburg

⁷⁸KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.99/4, 14.09.14. *ÖUIK: I:* 617-8. Artillery and other road-bound support units needed bridges to reach the east bank; the existing stone bridge over the Save was supplemented by a pontoon bridge built by 21st engineers.

⁷⁹KA, Nachlass Nowak, I/1, 276. Lukić, *Bitka*, 111. Jeřábek, *Potiorek*, 146.

⁸⁰KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.521/34, 16.9.14.

⁸¹KA/NFA, Fasz. 1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.105/10, 21.9.14.

tactical doctrine broke down under the pressure of events, as officers fell in substantial numbers, and commanders often committed troops to the attack unprepared, inadequately supported by artillery, and in dense columns. An VIII Corps artillery officer noted that "there was no cooperation between the infantry and the artillery, and also no plan of action for the infantry." The Official History observed, more kindly, that, "a considerable degree of uncertainty in the choice of tactics was typical of all Austro-Hungarian forces during the initial battles."⁸² The lethal effects of such primitive tactics soon became obvious.

The experience of Prague's 8th *Landwehr* Regiment was typical: in the first four days in Serbia, the unit lost 1,124 soldiers, including eighty-one confirmed killed, 698 wounded and 345 missing, most of whom were actually dead.⁸³ Less than a week later, the regiment had fallen to a third of its normal strength, 1,183 riflemen in only two battalions. Similarly, the 6th and 7th Regiments were reduced to two battalions, with respective rifle strengths of 1,063 and 1,089. Casualties among officers were especially heavy. By September 24, the entire 7th Regiment had only eight officers, four ensigns (probationary officers) and two cadets to lead it into battle. Its twelve rifle companies averaged less than 100 men (three were down to sixty), and no company had more than a single officer remaining: four companies had no officers left at all.⁸⁴

Desperate to replace its heavy losses, the 21st Division absorbed replacements not only from its own *Ersatz* cadres, but from numerous Bohemian regiments. By the third week of September, the division was forced to commit to battle the 2,800 strong 15th *Marsch* Regiment, a composite field replacement unit not intended for combat. The mixed regiment was a confused amalgam of replacements from the depots of the *k.u.k.* 11th, 35th, 75th and 88th Infantry Regiments, the *k.k.* 28th Regiment, and a few independent companies. As the 2nd *Marsch* Battalions of the 6th, 7th and 8th *Landwehr* Regiments arrived at Parašnica on September 26, their fresh troops were thrown immediately into the line. The division was also reinforced by the addition of the 3rd Battalion of the *k.u.* 27th *Landsturm* Regiment, a unit of middle-aged Croat reservists, thus adding to the division's high state of disorder⁸⁵

⁸²Martinek, *Kriegstagebuch*, 13. *ÖUIK*: I: 449.

⁸³KA/NFA. Fasz.1189. LIR.8 zu 21.LITD Kmdo., 19.9.14.

⁸⁴KA/NFA. Fasz.1189, LIR.7 an 21.LITD Kmdo., 24.9.14.; LIR.6 an 42.LIBrig. Kmdo., 24.9.14.; LIR.8 an 42.LIBrig. Kmdo., 24.9.14.

⁸⁵KA/NFA. Fasz.1191. MaRegt.15, Früherapporte, 21.9.14.; Fasz.1189, *k.u.k.* 8.Korps Kmdo., Abfertigung, 24.9.14.

On September 26, VIII Corps concluded its twelve-day offensive on the Save and Upper Drina, momentarily halting its abortive and costly attempts to advance. Although the corps praised its soldiers, noting that, "the troops, filled with the finest spirit, have acted heroically," the repeated assaults had gained little. Both the 9th and 21st Divisions were stalled.⁸⁶ The fighting, particularly near the Parašnica bridgehead, had become essentially positional. As in France and Belgium, both sides had begun to dig in to escape the devastating effects of machine guns and artillery. Trenches and strongpoints proliferated, and were frequently surrounded by barbed wire. Serbian units, skilled in fieldcraft and combat engineering, prepared exceptionally good positions; thus repeated attacks by the 21st Division had failed, despite superior numbers and despite the fact that the opposing trenches were only 150 to 250 meters apart.⁸⁷

The static nature of the fighting encouraged experiments in combat engineering to overcome enemy entrenchments. The 21st Division's sappers were vitally necessary at every stage of combat, from preparing Habsburg positions to clearing Serbian minefields. Their specialist weapons, many of them still new and experimental, proved remarkably valuable, including handgrenades, flare pistols, illumination mortars,⁸⁸ and flamethrowers; twenty models of the last, with an effective range of only twenty meters, were loaned to the division by the neighbouring XIII Corps to help overcome Serbian defences on the Parasnica peninsula.⁸⁹ While strong Serbian defences prevented early breakthroughs, the sappers nonetheless gave excellent service.

Serbian artillery and irregulars remained a serious irritant for the 21st Division. Frequent *komitadji* raids on both sides of the Save required the constant deployment of a considerable guard force to protect the division's rear echelons, thus depriving the front line of several battalions, line as well as replacement. The divisional cavalry, redundant in positional warfare, was used to patrol the rear, and particularly to protect the vulnerable rail lines and railhead on the Bosnian side of the river.⁹⁰ Frequent shelling of divisional combat and service units by Serbian batteries proved equally frustrating and

⁸⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.531/2, 26.9.14.

⁸⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.111/6, 27.9.14. As a *Landsturm* officer serving in Galicia noted eloquently of the first days of trench warfare, "Centuries drop from one, and one becomes a primeval man, nearing the cave-dweller in an incredibly short time." Kreisler, *Four Weeks*, 64.

⁸⁸These light short-range mortars fired illumination ("star") shells, and were very important in night fighting.

⁸⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.532/12, 27.9.14.

⁹⁰KA/NFA, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.117/2, 3.10.14.

difficult to counter, as the enemy artillery was well camouflaged and deployed in small, isolated batteries. Thus Habsburg counterbattery fires were rarely completely effective, despite considerable attempts to locate targets, and the deployment of heavy batteries.⁹¹ The struggle of the 21st Division on the Parašnica peninsula had become a bloody, protracted duel. The division, unable to maneuver or break through, faced the bleak prospect of a costly stalemate unless the entire Serbian front were to collapse. By late September, as the autumn's cold and rainy weather approached, the aggressiveness of the 21st Division's troops in the attack had disappeared, and overall morale was unimpressive.⁹²

The declining combat spirit of frontline soldiers, as measured by figures for self-inflicted wounds and desertion, had spread to rear areas and replacement units; the enthusiasm of even a month earlier had evaporated. Bloody combat and the strict discipline imposed by the army served to dampen patriotic fervour. Czech recruits and recalled reservists in Bohemia were well aware of the fate of the 21st Division and the army's insulting behaviour towards it. By September, Czech discontent with the army had manifested itself, with open displays of nationalist protest by some troops in Bohemia, particularly in VIII Corps District.⁹³

On September 23, as the 2nd *Marsch* Battalion of the 8th *Landwehr* Regiment departed Prague for Parašnica, some soldiers of the lead company carried the Czech nationalists' red-blue-white flag and a tricolour plaque inscribed with "*S bohem Praho*" ("Farewell, Prague"). The army, ever suspicious of any sign of apparent subversion, especially when Czechs were involved, rapidly ordered an investigation of the individuals responsible for this rather mild display of Czech nationalism.⁹⁴ The quickly produced report of the incident concluded that indiscipline had flared up because the exceptionally large battalion of 2,500 replacements was led by a very inadequate number of officers, only four of whom were regulars. Nationalist and socialist propaganda in Prague, the regiment's garrison, was also blamed, in large part because the unit's barracks were located near the Czech working class district of Břevnov. The report recommended

⁹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.111/6, 27.9.14.; k.u.k. MaBaon.88, Nr.11, 29.9.14.

⁹²Martinek, *Kriegstagebuch*, 22.

⁹³C. Führ, *Das k.u.k. Armeeeoberkommando und Innenpolitik in Österreich 1914-1917* (Vienna, 1968), 30-1.

⁹⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1191, k.u.k. Militärkmdo. in Prag, Pras.Nr.3197 ex 1914, 27.09.14.

strongly that the regiment's permanent garrison and *Ersatz* cadre be quickly moved away from the poisoned atmosphere of Prague: otherwise, "a critical situation could arise."⁹⁵

The army then proceeded to institute a policy of territorial dispersion for numerous Czech *Ersatz* battalions. The process involved moving unit staffs and training cadres to politically "safer" areas, usually German or Magyar regions of the Dual Monarchy. Although a tremendous logistical complication, the policy was eventually extended to several other nationalities, and proved highly aggravating and alienating for the soldiers involved. In early October the 8th *Landwehr* Regiment's 3rd *Marsch* Battalion was moved from the Bohemian capital to St. Pölten in Lower Austria. Soon thereafter, the regiment's permanent staff and training cadre moved to Salzburg, where replacements were to be trained far from the distractions of their homeland. The policy quickly spread to other Czech units of the 21st Division, beginning with the dispatch of the 28th Regiment's *Ersatz* cadre from Pisek in southern Bohemia to Linz in Upper Austria.⁹⁶ The Czech soldiers' morale and enthusiasm for the war, already in decline, were thus further damaged, perhaps irreparably, by the army's overreaction to minor nationalist incidents. The army's generals revealed how little confidence they had in their Czech troops, whose disloyalty had been neither demonstrated nor proved: rather the contrary. Therefore many Czechs, badly alienated by insensitive and insulting treatment, proceeded to live up to the decidedly low expectations which their officers had set for them.

For most of October, the 21st Division held on to the Parašnica peninsula without making any tactical gains. The Serbian 2nd Army, while tenacious in defence, was too weak to evict the division from the east bank of the Save. Although the *Landwehr* troops' positions represented a bridgehead to nowhere, *AOK* and 5th Army were adamant that the peninsula not be evacuated. Instead, the generals wanted further offensives; a retreat, even for tactical advantage, was impossible. As VIII Corps Command emphasized, its units "will never be given orders to retreat." The appalling casualties of September's failed attacks mandated a determined defence: "There is no 'WITHDRAWAL'; the front lines bought with difficulty and sacrifice must be held at all costs."⁹⁷

The 21st Division's attacks during most of October were generally smaller than those launched in September, and casualties were therefore lighter. Habsburg positions

⁹⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1191, k.u.k. Militärkmdo. in Prag, Pras.Nr.3311, "Disziplinäre Verhältnisse beim ErsBaon des LIR. Nr.8." 26.9.14. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁶KA/NFA, Rasz.1191, k.u.k. Militärkmdo. in Prag, Pras.Nr.3669, "Verlegungen von Ersatzkörpern," 4.10.14.

⁹⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Körps Kmdo., Op.Nr.537/14, 2.10.14. Emphasis in the original.

continued to improve, so that by early October the 42nd Brigade possessed a well designed early trench network, protected by barbed wire, including hundreds of meters of communications trenches and supply tracks to support the front line.⁹⁸ Serbian units of the Parašnica Detachment, responsible for keeping the 21st bottled up, conducted limited attacks and raids, frequently at night. Such raids were usually effectively supported by field artillery and sappers, including the use of large underground mines; in one instance, four enemy mines were exploded fifteen meters in front of Habsburg positions, just before an attack. Serbian assaults, while never seriously threatening the 21st Division's foothold on the peninsula, were a constant source of concern and casualties for the troops.⁹⁹

Penetrations by *komitadji* units and shelling by Serbian batteries similarly continued to plague the division. Daily artillery duels, supported on the Habsburg side by batteries of 24 cm mortars and assisted by aerial observation, failed to silence the enemy artillery, which avoided annihilation through frequent repositioning.¹⁰⁰ Equally unfortunately for the 21st was the coming of autumn rains, colder weather, and early snow, which produced misery at the front as well as logistical complications in the rear. The flooding of trenches, usually without overhead protection, became a serious problem, with a constant struggle being waged against the water; the division had an additional pioneer company attached directly from the 5th Army to assist in flood control. In the poor conditions, the soldiers' health declined along with the weather. When the fighting had slackened, the division was reporting an average of only seven hospital admissions from wounds daily, but thirty-five from disease; of the latter, half had intestinal disorders, with the remainder typically suffering from fever, rheumatism or bronchitis.¹⁰¹

By the middle of October, Potiorek's strategic plan finally seemed to be working. The 6th Army, bearing the brunt of the campaign, had achieved considerable successes against the Serbian 1st Army in its second invasion, advancing far into northwestern Serbia. The *Balkanstreitkräfte's* overall situation had improved considerably, notably with respect to logistics, as earlier mistakes were corrected and supply bases and routes became firmly established. The Serbian Army, by comparison, was close to collapse, since its field forces were very tired and increasingly short of badly needed replacements

⁹⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.115/4, 1.10.14.

⁹⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.115/1, 1.10.14.

¹⁰⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.124/30, 10.10.14.

¹⁰¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.124/5, 10.10.14.; Op.Nr.127/5, 13.10.14.

of men and equipment.¹⁰² The numerous battles which had cost the 5th and 6th Armies so many men had also inflicted horrible losses on the enemy. Accordingly, Potiorek appeared close to achieving his strategic aims, albeit belatedly, and through attrition rather than finesse.

Therefore in the third week of October the 5th Army prepared to launch another general offensive to destroy the enemy's field forces. The objective was the annihilation of its by now familiar nemesis, the Serbian 2nd Army, followed by a rapid advance on Valjevo. For the Valjevo offensive, von Frank's 5th Army included the VIII and Combined Corps, a total of four-and-a-half infantry divisions and a *k.u. Landsturm* brigade. The VIII Corps, comprised of its usual 9th and 21st *Landwehr* Divisions, plus the Croatian 71st Brigade, was now commanded by *Feldmarschalleutnant* von Scheuchensteuel, as von Giesl had been relieved of his command on October 17 for poor leadership.¹⁰³

After the loss of so many soldiers in repeated, and usually futile, offensives, the 5th Army intended the Valjevo operation to be more methodical in planning and less costly in execution. The army command announced to its subordinate formations the end of the "reckless attack" (*rücksichtlose Angriff*) of recent battles, in favour of solid preparation.¹⁰⁴ Improved artillery techniques and infantry-artillery cooperation formed the basis of the tactical improvements. Before the offensive, enemy artillery positions and observation posts near the front were located, frequently by aerial reconnaissance, for the purpose of counterbattery fires to assist the infantry advance. In addition, artillery forward observers were put into the front lines and forward units, to make the artillery more responsive to the infantry's tactical needs, and to prevent the infantry and artillery from fighting separate, mutually unsupported battles, as had often been the case. The artillery of the Combined Corps was to assist VIII Corps in its initial breakthrough offensive, a significant increase in available firepower.¹⁰⁵ While the serious difficulties caused by poor communications between artillery and infantry units remained, the 5th Army nonetheless had begun to remedy some of its most serious tactical deficiencies.

Intelligence reports available to 5th Army and VIII Corps were encouraging in their unflattering appreciation of the enemy units opposing them. Serbian prisoners and deserters revealed that 2nd Army divisions and regiments were severely under strength,

¹⁰²KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.556/1, 21.10.14.; Op.Nr.558/4, 23.10.14.

¹⁰³ÖUIK: I: 659-60. KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Res.Nr.683, 17.10.14.

¹⁰⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, 5. Armeekmdo., Op.Nr.459/21, 17.10.14.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

critically short of officers, lacking ammunition reserves, hungry, weary, and often in low spirits.¹⁰⁶ The breakthrough "battle of decision" which soldiers of the 21st Division and other 5th Army formations had long anticipated during the weeks of stalemate seemed to have arrived.

The Valjevo offensive began on October 24, with the Croatian 71st Brigade defeating a substantial Serbian force at Ravnje, a few kilometers northeast of Parašnica, capturing more than a battalion of Serbs and their weapons; however, the brigade itself suffered serious losses in the face of concentrated enemy counterattacks.¹⁰⁷ The remainder of VIII Corps was committed to battle the next day. The 21st Division, just replenished with troops of the 3rd *Marsch* Battalions of its regiments, commenced its attack at 3 am with a two hour preparatory barrage. Although the artillery inflicted heavy losses on Serbian front line positions, the enemy was prepared for the Habsburg onslaught, and in many places offered intense resistance. Nonetheless, superior weight of shell and numbers of rifles carried the day, and the 21st finally advanced out of the Parašnica bridgehead, with *Generalmajor* Podhajsky's eight battalion-strong 42nd Brigade leading, as had become the custom. By October 27, the positions of the retreating Serbian 2nd Army had become untenable, and General Stepanovic ordered a general retreat to the second line of resistance.¹⁰⁸

The new tactical methods had proven a success: the benefits of improved planning and infantry-artillery cooperation were evident, both in relatively moderate losses and a comparatively rapid advance. In three days, the 21st Division had covered over ten kilometers, heading southeast across the Mačva plain towards Valjevo, and VIII Corps had taken over 530 Serb prisoners and killed more than 800 of the enemy.¹⁰⁹ However, as 21st Division units advanced, retreating Serbian units proved capable of stubborn, skilled resistance, particularly in villages; very few objectives were taken without a fight. While the offensive was obviously succeeding, repeated Serbian holding actions continued to wear down both sides. The Habsburg Army was still far from inflicting a death blow on the Serbian Army. As *Feldmarschalleutnant* von Scheuchensteuel, newly appointed VIII Corps commander, observed, "The war is adopting in its present course ever more the character of a stubborn wrestling match, in which in the end success will be awarded to

¹⁰⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.556/1, 21.10.14.; Op.Nr.558/4, 23.10.14.

¹⁰⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, Telegramm, 5.Armeekmdo. an das 8.Korps Kmdo., 25.10.14.

¹⁰⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.140/8, 28.10.14.

¹⁰⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1189, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo, Op.Nr.563/30, 29.10.14.; Telegramm, 5.op.Armeekmdo. an 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.470/5, 28.10.14.

the side--given similar personal and moral qualities--whose material resources endure longer."¹¹⁰

By November 6, Potiorek was ready to launch both the 5th and 6th Armies in a general offensive, to take Valjevo and to inflict decisive losses on Putnik's weakened field forces. However, the 5th Army's units were also tired and depleted. On the eve of the offensive, the 21st Division's order of battle reflected the losses incurred in recent advances: of the fifteen nominal battalions under Podhajský's 42nd Brigade, twelve were at half-strength or less; only the four battalions of Panesch's 41st Brigade were ready for further immediate combat.¹¹¹

Nonetheless the 21st attacked at 5 am on November 6, like the rest of VIII Corps. The preliminary artillery bombardment had little effect, for the division, now approximately ten kilometers southwest of Šabac, first had to clear the town of Dobrić of Serbian troops, while the 9th Division on the 21st Division's left flank assaulted the neighbouring town of Lipolist. Elements of the enemy's badly depleted but battle-hardened Timok I and Morava I Divisions held Dobrić, and offered determined resistance, particularly in the town's southern half. Units of VIII Corps made little headway on the offensive's first day, as the enemy launched a series of violent counterattacks to limit Habsburg advances. The battle for South Dobrić on November 6 cost the 21st over 560 casualties in the three participating regiments (370 in the 7th *Landwehr* Regiment alone), and a total of eighty-three killed in action.¹¹²

Elsewhere on the Serbian front, Habsburg units were making significant progress, especially XIII and XV Corps of the 6th Army, which had advanced considerably against the Serbian 3rd Army on the Jadar, weakening Putnik's front. As a result further offensives by VIII Corps, including the 21st, met with success against the 2nd Army, which was compelled by the deteriorating strategic situation to retreat deeper into Serbia. Attacks by the 21st on November 10 and 11 pushed the Timok I and Morava I Divisions out of Dobrić, forcing an enemy retreat five kilometers to the southeast. As the 6th Army continued to make impressive progress and Serbian units were in full retreat before it, the Serbian 2nd Army too began to withdraw eastward. Thus Valjevo fell to Habsburg forces on November 15, and the Serbian 2nd and 3rd Armies established defensive positions behind the Kolubara and Lijg. By November 17, the 21st Division, along with 5th Army, had reached Jabucje, on the west bank of the Kolubara, having advanced some sixty

¹¹⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.567/18, 2.11.14.

¹¹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr. 571/4, 5.11.14.

¹¹²KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.151/1, 7.11.14.

kilometers in five days, encountering next to no organized resistance.¹¹³ In the nine days of the Valjevo offensive, the 5th Army's VIII and Combined Corps had routed the Serbian 2nd Army, capturing more than 8,000 prisoners as well as forty-two field guns and thirty-one machine guns, an unprecedented total.¹¹⁴ The enemy had been forced to retreat deep into his homeland, where his final defeat seemed imminent.

The Serbian Army, battered by repeated Habsburg offensives, had suffered a severe battlefield reverse; the morale and combat power of field units had been diminished considerably. However, in this hour of crisis, as the high command at Kragujevac debated whether to conclude an armistice or retreat with the remnants of the army to the southern part of Serbia, *Vojvoda* Putnik intervened decisively. The old campaigner, determined to fight to the finish, ordered the retreat of the 2nd Army towards Kragujevac, essentially abandoning Belgrade, and dismissed General Bojović, commander of the 1st Army.¹¹⁵ He was trusting that Serbia's field forces, although badly depleted by battle and desperately in need of fresh men and ammunition, remained willing to fight to the bitter end.

Although Potiorek's armies had just achieved a considerable victory, it had not been without appreciable cost. The losses of men and equipment were serious, as the Habsburg Army was beginning to feel the disastrous effects of its lack of trained replacements. By November, the reserves of fresh, trained men were already beginning to dry up: fifty to eighty percent of officers, and thirty to forty percent of other ranks, in *Marsch* battalions sent to the front were returnees--men previously wounded or incapacitated on active service. The shortage of junior officers had become desperate, and officer training schools could not maintain anything like an adequate supply. As an expedient measure, the *Gendarmerie* had begun to release hundreds of sergeants to army field forces, to serve as replacement infantry platoon leaders at the front.¹¹⁶ Divisions in the field were forced to send *Marsch* battalions, without adequate leadership cadres, training, or equipment, into combat as units. In the Valjevo offensive, a third of the 21st Division's infantry battalions were actually replacement units sent into the line.¹¹⁷

¹¹³KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.161/1, 17.11.14.; Op.Nr.163/2, 18.11.14.

¹¹⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k 5.op.Armeekmdo., Op.Nr.489/23, 16.11.14.

¹¹⁵Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 141.

¹¹⁶Franek, "Probleme," 21. F. Neubauer, *Die Gendarmerie in Österreich 1849-1924* (Graz, 1925), 185.

¹¹⁷Replacements were dispatched to the front with obsolete rifles, with either the M.86/90 Mannlicher 8 mm, or the even more antiquated M.73/77 Werndl 11 mm. KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k 8.Korps Kmdo.,

Potiorek wanted to finish off the retreating enemy as quickly as possible before the weather worsened further. However, his units were exhausted and under strength from fighting and disease. The rapid advances of the *Balkanstreitkräfte* in the Valjevo operation had entailed long, tiring marches for foot soldiers. Worse, advancing formations quickly outran their logistical columns, and fighting units were short of food, ammunition, and other vital supplies. Nonetheless the offensive continued in pursuit of the enemy, across the Kolubara.

The tired 21st Division joined battle again, against remnants of the Timok I Division, a familiar opponent. The Serbs slowed the *Landwehr* formation's advance on Lazarevac, a town less than five kilometers due east across the Kolubara. The division reached Lazarevac, but only after intense combat with entrenched units of Timok I south of the town. Attempts to advance past Lazarevac on November 19 failed for lack of artillery fire support; batteries and their ammunition supplies were late in crossing the Kolubara. Intense Serb resistance stalled the division's further advance. Thus the division's progress came to a halt.¹¹⁸

Attempts to move forward the next day proved even costlier. Serbian infantry, supported by the accurate artillery fire of the Šumadija I Division which disrupted *Landwehr* divisional artillery and services, inflicted heavy losses on the 21st Division; on November 20, the 6th *Landwehr* Regiment alone lost sixty-nine killed and 432 wounded in frontal assaults at Lazarevac.¹¹⁹ Mounting casualties for the Bohemian division led to the 5th Army's assigning the 7th Division's *k.u.* 1st *Landsturm* Regiment as a reinforcement on November 22. The 21st Division was able to make slow progress past Lazarevac, although accurate Serb artillery fire repeatedly caused casualties and disruptions. By the end of November, after ten days of hard fighting on the Kolubara, the 21st Division's forward elements, led as always by *Generalmajor* Podhajský, had moved about five kilometers northeast of Lazarevac. However, by then the 21st was down to only 5,200 riflemen in just seven infantry battalions, and unfit for immediate offensive operations.¹²⁰ Potiorek, aware that his divisions and regiments badly needed time to rest

Op.Nr.571/4, 5.11.14. E. Steinböck, "Die Ausrüstung des österreichischen Soldaten im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Heereskunde-Kriegsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen siebenzig Jahre danach* (Vienna, 1988), 83.

¹¹⁸ÖUIK: I: 686-7.

¹¹⁹Wagner, *Geschichte*, 103.

¹²⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.k. 42.LIBrig.Kmdo., Op.Nr.33, 24.11.14.; k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.172/8, 27.11.14.; Fasz.1191, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Frührapporte, 1.12.14..

and replenish supplies, and confident that the enemy was nearly finished, ordered a brief, three day pause for the 6th Army on November 30.

Nevertheless, the 5th Army, and therefore the 21st Division, received no rest. Instead, Potiorek ordered a reorientation of Frank's force to the northeast towards Belgrade. The 5th Army was to take the Serb capital, an objective of political rather than military significance, and was then to send its divisions south, towards Kragujevac, to strategically envelop the enemy's field forces. Potiorek's plan, while creative and even dashing, actually exceeded the military capacity of the weary and understrength 5th Army.¹²¹

Belgrade fell to units of the 5th Army on December 2, by when the majority of the 21st Division, including the 42nd Brigade and the 6th, 7th and 8th *Landwehr* Regiments, had advanced against minimal resistance to the town of Beljina, some twenty kilometers due south of the capital.¹²² On the same day, *Vojvoda* Putnik issued the order for a counteroffensive to evict the Habsburg Army from Serbian soil. The 2nd and 3rd Armies were chosen to spearhead an attack against Potiorek's weakened 6th Army, concentrating on XV Corps. The meager resources remaining in the Serbian reserve pool, including gendarmes, student battalions, and raw recruits, were allocated to this last offensive; recently arrived ammunition from France was similarly divided among the divisions. Putnik denuded other parts of the line to concentrate sufficient forces at the decisive point, a considerable strategic gamble, but a correct and, as it proved, decisive one.¹²³

The Battle of Arangjelovac, beginning on December 3, quickly forced the retreat of XV Corps' southern flank, thus exposing the northern flank of its neighbour, XVI Corps, to Serbian attack. The 21st Division, well north of the major Serbian thrust, nonetheless saw action. Forward elements of the division fought a series of inconclusive encounter engagements with the Serbian Cavalry Division just north of the town of Sibnica.

The next day, as the 6th Army's operational situation deteriorated, the 21st Division advanced a few kilometers south, to confront the Serbian cavalry. The division's 6th Regiment, holding the summit of a hill south of Beljina, managed to repulse repeated assaults by the enemy's Obrenovac detachment and 2nd Cavalry Brigade.¹²⁴ The *Balkanstreitkräfte's* overall position continued to worsen, however, as XVI Corps

¹²¹Rothenberg, "Austro-Hungarian Campaign," 142-3. *ÖUIK: I: 710-12.*

¹²²KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.177/1, 2.12.14

¹²³*ÖUIK: I: 715-6.* Peball, "Feldzug," 30.

¹²⁴*ÖUIK: I: 718-9.*

commenced a retreat; on December 6 Potiorek announced a general retreat towards the Kolubara for the 6th Army.

To prevent the 6th Army's withdrawal from turning into a rout, the 5th Army was required to apply pressure on the northern flank of the Serbian 2nd Army. In truth, the 5th Army was only slightly more prepared for offensive action than the 6th Army, as constant combat and disease had taken a heavy toll of available manpower. By December 8, the 21st Division had only an effective rifle strength of 3,250, and the average strength of its four infantry regiments was well under 1,000; the 7th Regiment had only 400 combat soldiers left. The first week of December, with its fluid encounter engagements, had cost the division over 900 infantrymen (including 200 seriously ill), and twenty-seven artillery pieces, most of which had been lost to Serbian artillery and cavalry.¹²⁵ Two days' worth of probes against the Obrenovac Detachment, determined in the defence, accomplished little for the 21st, save for more casualties which could not be immediately replaced.

By December 9, Potiorek was forced by deteriorating circumstances to order a general withdrawal in the direction of Šabac, and over the following four days the 6th Army once again crossed the Save in defeat. The 5th Army, soon retreating north towards eastern Slavonia and southern Hungary, was initially ordered to hold Belgrade. The 21st Division, moving towards the Danube, fought the Obrenovac Detachment once more, on the night of December 11-12. The enemy, well supported by accurate artillery fires, advanced rapidly, quickly overwhelming the *Landwehr* division's left flank, thereby creating a significant gap in the Habsburg lines. A catastrophe for VIII Corps, and indeed for 5th Army, was averted only by a last ditch defence by the men of the 21st Division. The division's last reserves were committed in a valiant effort to stop the advancing enemy. Habsburg and Serbian infantry detachments fought desperate *melées* throughout the night, in many cases involving bayonet assaults, and by morning the Czech and German troops of the now-veteran 21st had prevailed; the division had sacrificed its last resources and energy to forestall disaster.¹²⁶ The 5th Army had been saved to retreat.

The order to hold Belgrade, now a clearly hopeless task, was rescinded, and the 5th Army's rear guard evacuated the Serbian capital on December 15, fighting to the end and blowing the bridges spanning the Danube to prevent enemy pursuit. The Serbian Army quickly retook the kingdom's capital, secure in its hard fought victory.

¹²⁵KA/NFA, Fasz. 1190, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.183/5, 8.12.14.

¹²⁶ÖUIK: I: 442-3.

What little remained of the 21st *Landwehr* Division was evacuated first to Dobanovci, just west of Semlin, but quickly moved across the Danube along with the remainder of VIII Corps to the Újvidék region of South Hungary, far from recent battlefields. The once powerful 21st Division had been destroyed in the last segment of Potiorek's bungled invasion of Serbia: only 1,025 infantrymen survived to reenter the Dual Monarchy. The combat strengths of its infantry units were only 625, 230, ninety, and eighty, for the 6th, 28th, 8th, and 7th *Landwehr* Regiments, respectively. While the infantry had borne a very disproportionate share of the fighting, and therefore of the casualties as well, the division's combat support and service units were proportionately shattered.¹²⁷

However, the 21st Division's losses in late November and the first half of December represented only a fraction of the formation's appalling casualties in the war against Serbia in 1914. From early August to mid-December, the division lost 21,552 men, including 8,644 wounded, 3,156 seriously ill, 241 prisoners of war, 7,892 missing in action (many of whom were dead, and the remainder captured), and 1,619 confirmed killed in action.¹²⁸ The 21st Division total losses represented 129 percent of its initial mobilized strength of 16,667 soldiers. The casualties were especially heavy in the infantry, so that, in effect, the entire division had been replaced at least once, and the infantry battalions at least three times over.

The casualties of the 21st Division were not uniquely high, however, and accurately reflected the losses suffered by the *k.u.k. Armee* in the opening battles of 1914. The Habsburg Army lost 273,000 soldiers in its failed attempt to crush Serbia. More than 100,000 soldiers were lost to the army permanently, with 30,000 killed in action and in excess of 70,000 in Serbian captivity. The enemy's losses of 132,000, including 22,000 dead, 91,000 wounded and 19,000 captured, were crippling.¹²⁹ Austro-Hungarian casualties could still be replaced, both in human and material terms, albeit with increasing difficulty, whereas heavy Serbian losses of men and equipment were essentially permanent. The small peasant army had been destroyed as an effective battlefield force in its valiant and surprisingly successful defence of its homeland; it represented no significant threat to the Dual Monarchy's southern border. In a negative sense, at least, Potiorek and his armies had succeeded.

¹²⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.190/4, 15.12.14.; Op.Nr.191/2, 16.12.14.

¹²⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1191, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.204/1, 29.12.14.

¹²⁹Peball, "Feldzug," 30.

Still, by any objective standards the Serbian campaign of 1914 was a defeat for the Habsburg Army. The *Balkanstreitkräfte* had been decisively beaten by Putnik's forces, despite two major offensives. Humiliation at the hands of a Balkan peasant kingdom badly wounded the self-confidence, pride and prestige of the Habsburg Monarchy and its military. Potiorek, like so many failed generals of 1914 whose prewar planning had failed to function as intended during the ultimate test of war, was among the first to be sacrificed; he was quickly replaced by Archduke Eugen as commander in the Balkans, thus closing a long career ignominiously.

The Serbian campaign illustrated not only Potiorek's limited vision and inability to adapt, but more significantly, the great weaknesses of the Habsburg Army in 1914. The understrength, undergunned 5th and 6th Armies had simply proven inadequate to the task of concentrating sufficient offensive force on the battlefield. The Habsburg Army's scandalously low number of infantry divisions doomed Potiorek's strategic scheme, just as it ensured the failure of Conrad's planning in Galicia. The Austro-Hungarian infantry division's inadequate firepower had been demonstrated repeatedly in Serbia, where enemy formations were generally armed with a greater number of more modern field pieces.¹³⁰

Similarly, logistical and supply problems continually dogged the *Balkanstreitkräfte* throughout the campaign, notably at inopportune moments of tactical and operational decision. Inadequate training and preparation were also evident in the application of tactical doctrine. In the field, infantry commanders repeatedly committed their troops with little or no effective fire support; artillery commanders preferred to fight their own battles. The artillery was not only undergunned and poorly supplied, but also incapable of reacting to changing tactical situations on the battlefield. Tactical reconnaissance frequently had been poor, permitting the enemy the luxury of surprise all too often, and divisional cavalry had been incapable of blunting the enemy's cavalry, which had proven effective against weak, retreating Habsburg units. Operational and tactical inexperience plagued the entire effort against Serbia.

At the level of the individual Austro-Hungarian soldier, unpreparedness for war actually increased during the campaign, as regular cadres were quickly lost in battle. The army's first-line troops and their combat leaders were lost in the first battles, at least in the infantry; the losses of the 21st Division at Čer were by no means unusually high in comparison with those of other divisions in August. The replacements for the dead and wounded were rarely well trained, particularly by the late autumn and early winter. In most cases, heavy officer casualties could not be rapidly replaced at all, and units had to

¹³⁰Jerábek, *Potiorek*, 170-1.

make do with fewer trained officers in the line. Newly recruited other ranks and recalled reservists were rarely in proper condition for the rigors of modern combat. Many soldiers in *Marsch* battalions were wounded or seriously ill men returning to the front, while the most of the remainder were middle aged reservists.

From the beginning of the campaign, the army had been forced to use *Landsturm* brigades in the front line, and then *Marsch* regiments and battalions as well, to supplement first line units. These formations, consisting of thirty-two to forty-two year old reservists, inadequately trained and often in poor physical shape, were thrown into action, with predictable results. Replacement units, collections of middle-aged men, nineteen year-old recruits, and *Ersatz* reservists who had never served together before, led by inadequate numbers of officers, were forced to bear the brunt of battle; they were armed with numerous different models of outdated rifles (and no machine guns or heavy weapons), poorly clothed (often they did not even have uniforms, but only a black-yellow brassard), and in no sense a match for experienced Serbian units. Replacements came increasingly from the ranks of *Ersatz* reservists, men who had received only six weeks of training--by no means necessarily in the infantry branch--usually years before. The untried reservists and recruits often fought well despite their poor readiness. However, by the last weeks of 1914, the replacement situation for both men and materiel had become desperate, with understrength *Marsch* companies arriving at the Serbian front without rifles. The stocks of even quite obsolete weapons had dried up, and the soldiers had to be given the rifles of the dead and wounded they had come to replace. Such a condition did not make for a cohesive, battle-ready force, but it was all that the Habsburg Army had to flesh out its depleted ranks once its small first line was destroyed in action.¹³¹

The heavy losses of the campaigns of 1914 sparked the beginning of tactical reform and innovation in the Habsburg Army. The lessons of the Serbian campaign, as articulated by VIII Corps, included the need for good reconnaissance, proper supply and administration, and constant interarm cooperation on the battlefield. The effects of the woeful state of infantry-artillery interaction had been realized, albeit belatedly: as the report noted in the third week of December, "The foundation of success in battle is the close cooperation of infantry and artillery, and the greatest possible support of the infantry by the artillery." The report repudiated virtually all existing artillery doctrine, and called for much better indirect fire capability, improved target acquisition (principally for counterbattery purposes, after so many men had been lost to undetected Serbian guns)

¹³¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.611/6, 51.12.14.; KA, Nachlass Nowak, I/1, 292-7.

and trained forward observers, the basis of any infantry-artillery cooperation.¹³² Never again would the artillery be permitted to fight its own battles, firing direct over open sights, without reference to, or knowledge of, the infantry's changing tactical needs on the battlefield. Doctrinal reform had started under the pressure of battlefield defeat, yet after so many good soldiers had been lost. By the end of 1914, the army had begun to correct the deficiencies of prewar doctrine, but would the beleaguered forces in the Carpathians and the Balkans survive long enough to make the required tactical changes?

At the end of the Serbian campaign, the army continued to emphasize discipline-- "the preserving and driving force of an army and the basis of all victories"-- as the solution to its morale problems.¹³³ While the army in the field had not simply collapsed, even in defeat, as so many pessimists had predicted, signs of low spirits and motivation were plainly evident. During the ignominious final retreat from Serbia in December, many units experienced desertions and field misconduct, although only among Bosnian Serbs did this constitute a grave difficulty.

The 21st Division had done its duty to the end, despite its egregiously insensitive and demeaning treatment at the hands of the army's leadership. However, the division's appetite for battle had died with so many of its soldiers on the Čer planina, and it never regained the fervour and enthusiasm of the first days of war. Indiscipline, while never of serious proportions, persisted throughout the remainder of the Serbian campaign, as evidenced by statistics for self-inflicted wounds and desertion, the latter particularly in the last, ailing weeks of the campaign. The High Command's self-destructive overreaction to the Čer defeat plagued the division throughout the Serbian campaign, despite its respectable, even heroic, fighting record on Parašnica, at Valjevo and on the Kolubara. While Potiorek's imposition of strict military discipline may have prevented some 21st soldiers from deserting, it doubtless alienated many more. Nonetheless, the frequently maligned *Landwehr* division fought on; its Czech soldiers, the majority of whom stayed admirably loyal, if unenthusiastic, in the fight against Serbia, were beaten by both the enemy and their own military bureaucracy.

The Habsburg Army's undisguised lack of faith in its Czech troops continued unabated. A report by VIII Corps at the end of December, commenting on the "dubious manner of discipline" in the last phases of the Serbian campaign, advocated ever stronger application of discipline and tightening of the chain of command, rather than the creation of inner motivation, as the solution to morale problems. The special power of officers

¹³²KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.617/15, 21.12.14.

¹³³KA/NFA, Fasz.1191, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Res.Nr.1360, 25.12.14.

over their men, supplemented by the good example of sergeants, was to provide sufficient motivation--or at least coercion--for the other ranks. If that failed, each corps now had a company-sized unit of rear area battle police, made up of *Gendarmerie* and *Landsturm* troops, to shoot deserters and malingerers.¹³⁴ While the army doubtless needed stronger discipline in some cases, the option of treating Czech troops more equitably to cure low combat motivation was apparently not considered.

Instead, the army counterproductively persisted in singling Czech units out for special treatment. The army's practice of territorial relocation of Czech *Ersatz* units continued, and indeed increased, with predictable effects on morale and enthusiasm. The fate of the 21st Division on the Cer planina, and its alleged ethnic and nationalist roots, haunted the division, and in a sense all Czech troops. The 21st Division's accomplishments in the Serbian campaign, as well as the excellent performance of other Czech units (including the exemplary record of Czech battalions fighting with the crack 3rd *Edelweiss* and 29th Divisions) tended to be forgotten, or at least greatly undervalued, by the High Command. The enthusiasm of Czech soldiers for war against Slav powers, never high, had been decisively and perhaps permanently blunted. Army insensitivity, combined with pessimism caused by defeats and horrible casualties, led to disaffection among Czech troops, especially in rear areas and depots. By the end of 1914 the summer's patriotic and bellicose slogans had disappeared from the lips of Czech recruits: trains of Czech replacements headed for Galicia were seen leaving Prague painted with the slogans "cannon fodder" and "shipment of Czech meat to Galicia."¹³⁵ Perhaps Czech soldiers never would have responded well to a long, costly war against Russia and Serbia; however, the Habsburg Army's repeated insults and mistreatment guaranteed serious problems with morale, discipline and combat motivation.

The 21st *Landwehr* Division, resting and recuperating in South Hungary, was far from the turmoil of Bohemia. The division absorbed replacements and changed its leadership at virtually all levels. *Feldmarschalleutnant* Przyborski was relieved of command on December 22, joining Potiorek and Giesl, his superiors at corps and army commands, on the long list of failed generals of 1914. Przyborski, despite his dedication and heroism, was judged to have been unequal to the rigors of battle: all his prewar training, a career of thirty-five years of preparation for war, had proven insufficient when war actually came. Przyborski, accompanied by *Generalmajor* Linde, the commander of

¹³⁴KA/NFA, Fasz. 1191, k.u.k 8.Korps Kmdo., Res.Nr.1360, 25.12.14.; Fasz.1190, k.u.k 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.619/7, 23.12.14.

¹³⁵KA, Nachlass Nowak, I/1, 325.

21st Divisional Artillery who had likewise been weighed in the balance and found wanting, was sent to Ujvidék, "waiting for further orders from the command of the *Balkanstreitkräfte*." The orders never came, of course, and Przyborski soon retired, never to command again.¹³⁶

Przyborski was replaced by *Generalmajor* Podhajský, whose leadership had driven the division to success on several occasions, and had prevented catastrophe on several others. Except for a brief six week stint in Vienna in 1917, the talented Podhajský would command the 21st Division for the next thirty-two months, seeing it through battles even more tumultuous and costly than Čer and Parašnica.¹³⁷ The division which Podhajský took over was but a shell of its former self. The leadership cadres had been destroyed, with brigades commanded by colonels, regiments by lieutenant-colonels and majors, and battalions by captains. Of the ten officers commanding infantry battalions on December 8, seven were gone--killed or wounded--in less than a week. The critical shortage of officers could not be quickly remedied. Even the provision of replacement riflemen was difficult. By the end of 1914, after two infusions of replacements from Bohemia, the 21st contained only 5,575 riflemen; three of its four infantry regiments included barely more than a thousand men each. The division had to be reduced temporarily to a single brigade with five infantry battalions.¹³⁸

In time the 21st Division recovered its numerical strength, but never again would it demonstrate the high combat motivation it enjoyed in the summer of 1914. It could replace lost men and equipment, but not fighting spirit. Podhajský's division, like most of the *Balkanstreitkräfte*, was soon dispatched to the Russian front, to the frozen hell of the *Karpathenwinter*, to combats and conditions worse than anything experienced on the Save, Drina or Kolubara. The Serbian front, where so many Bohemian soldiers, among tens of thousands of other men from all regions of the Dual Monarchy, gave their lives in Potiorek's grand but futile offensives, quieted down, falling into temporary obscurity. The 21st Division soon forgot most of its experiences in the Balkans, not least because so many of its soldiers were replacements who had never served there. Indeed, for the 21st *Landwehr* Division, as for the entire Habsburg Army, a long war had really only just begun. The heavy losses in the opening campaigns of leaders and excellent soldiers who

¹³⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.u.k. 8.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.618/25, 22.12.14.; KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart.2629, Arthur Przyborski.

¹³⁷KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart.2519, Alois Podhajsky.

¹³⁸KA, Sammlung Balaban, Schachtel 10, k.k. 21.LITD. Kmdo., Op.Nr.202/2, 28.12.14.; KA/NFA, Fasz.1190, k.k. 21.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.193/1, 18.12.14.; Op.Nr.202/3, 28.12.14.

could not be replaced, although crippling for the army, represented only a small fraction of the army's wartime casualties: the 6th *Landwehr* Regiment's total of 556 killed in action in Serbia surpassed the losses of the 21st Division's other units; however, 4,844 more soldiers of the 6th Regiment would lose their lives in battle before its long, total war would come to an end, nearly four years later.¹³⁹

¹³⁹Wagner, *Geschichte*, 379.

Chapter III: Carpathian Winter and Alpine Summer: The 17th Infantry Division, 1915

While Potiorek's failures in the Balkans cost the Habsburg Army much pride, prestige, and over a quarter of a million soldiers, the Austro-Hungarian catastrophe in Galicia in 1914 destroyed the prewar army, and nearly lost the war for the Dual Monarchy. The far larger scale and scope of the battles against Russia on the Northeastern front (as the Habsburg Army called it) befitted the size of the army's adversary, the formidable Imperial Russian Army.

Conrad was responsible for the strategic plan which nearly led to a complete debacle. The Chief of Staff's plan, developed in March 1914 in light of Colonel Alfred Redl's treachery, envisioned a massive Habsburg offensive into Russian Poland between the Vistula and the Bug in the direction of Lublin and Cholm. Conrad's strategy, although intended to relieve pressure on Germany while German armies attempted to knock France out of the war, could count on no support from German forces in East Prussia, and thus no pincer to assist in the envelopment of Russian armies in Poland. The plan pitted four Habsburg field armies against considerably superior Russian forces, in defiance of all logic; however, Conrad accepted this unenviable disadvantage out of a wish to preempt the inevitable powerful Russian offensive into Galicia with one of his own. Conrad intended to use the 1st, 3rd and 4th Armies at the outset, an impressive total of ten corps with over thirty-two divisions and numerous brigades, representing the vast majority of his army's fighting strength. The 2nd Army, required first to assist in the planned defeat of Serbia, was to arrive in Galicia in time to meet the slow-mobilizing Russian forces. Yet, as with Potiorek's plan against Serbia, Conrad's armies were to advance on separate and divergent axes, too far apart to provide mutual assistance against a numerically superior foe. Despite these problems, at the war's outbreak Conrad in a fit of hubris appointed a Habsburg governor of Warsaw.¹

Unhappily for Conrad's plan and the army, mobilization difficulties, only a minor irritant for the *Balkanstreitkräfte*, proved very serious for the forces facing Russia. Conrad's indecision, combined with rail delays and confusion, caused units to arrive at the front late and sometimes in the wrong place. The 3rd Army, slated to attack due east in support of the 1st and 4th Armies, arrived in Galicia only on August 18, two days

¹*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-8), *Band I: Das Kriegsjahr 1914* (1930), 69-81.; N. Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (New York, 1975), 70-1. G. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, 1976), 179.

before the offensive; it did not reach its designated concentration area, the Lemberg region, until August 26. Similarly, only half of the much delayed 2nd Army, some six divisions, arrived in Galicia by the end of August, too late to participate in the main action. As Churchill noted accurately of the ill fated 2nd Army, "It left Potiorek before it could win him a victory; it returned to Conrad to participate in his defeat."²

Despite these difficulties, Conrad kicked off with sweeping strategic reconnaissance by several cavalry divisions. This achieved little, for the Habsburg cavalry was unable to penetrate Russian infantry and cavalry screens. The reconnaissance-in-force culminated in the Battle of Jaroslavice on August 21, the last great cavalry engagement in history. This bloody *melee* ended the cavalry operation, which had achieved little except the mauling of several divisions.

In the meantime, Conrad's infantry divisions began their advance, slowly and blindly. Habsburg infantry collided with advancing Russian units on August 23 in East Galicia, near Lemberg, beginning a series of battles which would last until September 12. The 1st and 4th Armies performed well in the first engagements at Kraśnik and Komarów, both Austro-Hungarian tactical successes which continued until the end of August. However, considerable Russian forces now threatened the Habsburg right flank. Conrad, in an all-too-typical fit of wishful thinking, ordered the 1st Army to continue its advance northward. After several days of ferocious engagements which halted all Austro-Hungarian movement, Conrad was forced to order his exposed forces to retreat behind the San in central Galicia. The Russians continued their offensive in such strength that the San line could not be held. The result was a massive Habsburg strategic retreat of 150 miles across Galicia which only ended at the Dunajec slightly east of Cracow. Except for a considerable force left besieged in the fortress at Przemyśl, nearly all of Galicia had been lost to the enemy. The cost of Conrad's dismally failed offensive had been appallingly high. In just three weeks of fighting in Galicia, his army lost 400,000 men, including some 100,000 prisoners, a total of one-third of the Austro-Hungarian Army's combat effectives. Fully half of the Austro-Hungarian force which attacked the Russians on August 20 were dead, wounded, captured or missing. Russian casualties of 250,000 had also been excessive, but the Russians could replace their fallen and maimed

²Churchill quoted by N. Stone, "Austria-Hungary," in: E. May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, 1984), 59. Rothenberg, *Army*, 79. For a solid, brief account of the Galician disaster: K. Leppo, "Die Galizische Schlacht," *Ergänzungsheft 2 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1931).

soldiers relatively easily; the Dual Monarchy, lacking sufficient trained reserves, could not.³

Worse yet, Germany's failure to defeat France in six weeks meant that no significant contingents of German troops were available to assist the ailing Austro-Hungarian forces in West Galicia. The only strategic victory for the Central Powers in the East in 1914 was the decisive halting of Russia's invasion of East Prussia at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes. This success helped to inspire German contempt for the Habsburg Army, which seemed capable of little except retreating. However, the Germans failed to note that the sacrifices of their ally in Galicia, which occupied and significantly weakened four-fifths of Russia's field forces, made victory in East Prussia possible: as one scholar has stated, "Austria-Hungary bled to death in order to defend Berlin."⁴ Nonetheless, General Erich Ludendorff, German Chief of Staff to *Oberkommando-Ost* and architect of the victory in East Prussia, was soon accusing the Habsburg Army of "arrogance," a "lack of resistance," and "incompetence."⁵ Berlin, fearing an imminent Habsburg collapse in the East, reluctantly agreed to dispatch any available reserves to Galicia to help Conrad and his forces hold their weak defensive line.

The last three months of 1914 brought even greater suffering to the armies defending West Galicia and the Carpathians from Russian offensives. A combined Habsburg-German offensive in late September to push Russian forces out of West Galicia and away from the Carpathian passes yielded excellent results at first, including the reaching of the Vistula-San line and the relief of Przemyśl. However, Russian forces quickly counterattacked with great ferocity, inflicting substantial losses on the already weak forces of the *k.u.k. Armee*. The Russian advance rapidly eliminated any gains by the Central Powers; once again, Conrad's forces were defending in West Galicia and Przemyśl was besieged.

By the middle of November the Habsburg strategic situation had become critical, for the 4th Army had been forced to retreat south of Cracow and the 3rd Army was defending from positions deep in the Carpathians. Russian units were preparing to pour into the seventy mile gap between the two armies. This was prevented only by quick action at *Armeeoberkommando*: Conrad marshalled all available reserves, including a

³Rothenberg, *Army*, 180. Stone, *Eastern Front*, 91.

⁴N. Stone, "Moltke and Conrad: Relations between the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs, 1910-1914," in: P. Kennedy, ed., *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914* (Boston, 1979), 223.

⁵H. Herwig, "Disjointed Alliances: Coalition Warfare in Berlin and Vienna, 1914," *Journal of Military History*, 54, July 1990, 266.

German division, and counterattacked. The result was the Battle of Limanowa-Łapanów, which lasted from December 3 to 15. Heavy fighting in severe winter conditions ended in defeat of the weary and weak Russian forces, but the Austro-Hungarian field armies were too depleted to exploit their success. At least a Russian invasion of Hungary through the Carpathian passes had been prevented. The year ended with a Russian offensive which pushed the 3rd Army and elements of the 4th deep into the Carpathians, but the Russians this time lacked the energy and resources to advance further.

By the end of December 1914, after four months of combat, the Habsburg Army had lost altogether almost 1,269,000 soldiers--a total greater than the entire army's rifle strength on mobilization in August--including 115,000 killed, 358,000 wounded, 213,000 seriously ill, and some 259,000 missing or captured, many of whom were dead. Of these casualties, 995,000 had been incurred against the Russians. The army had lost 87,000 killed, 122,000 wounded, 47,000 seriously ill, and 77,000 missing or captured fighting the Imperial Russian Army in Galicia.⁶ In other words, the army had lost an average of 8,169 men a day.⁷

By the beginning of the new year, the Northeastern front had received a total of 1,340,000 soldiers, including the majority of the three-quarters of a million replacements dispatched in the infantry's *Marschbatallione*, so far five per regiment. But casualties had been so severe that the four Habsburg armies and one army group (despite the name, equal only to a large army corps) facing the Russians totalled no more than 254,400 riflemen. The average rifle strength of infantry divisions was 5,000, the equivalent of a strong regiment, and in many cases considerably less, equal to only two or three full strength battalions.⁸

The Habsburg Army never really recovered from the 1914 campaigns, above all the losses in Galicia. The prewar standing divisions and regiments of the *k.u.k.*, *k.k.* and *k.u.* forces were annihilated in the war's first season, and their trained, fit young men could not be replaced. Even worse for the army was the appalling loss rate among its officers. Of the 50,000 active and reserve officers mobilized in the summer of 1914, 22,000 had become casualties by the end of the year, including 3,200 killed and 2,800

⁶*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-8), *Band II: Das Kriegsjahr 1915/I* (1931), Beilage 1, Tabelle 3. F. Franek, "Probleme der Organization im ersten Kriegsjahre," *Ergänzungsheft 1 zum Werke ÖULK* (Vienna, 1930), 20.

⁷F. Franek, "Die Entwicklung der öst.-ung. Wehrmacht in den ersten zwei Kriegsjahren," *Ergänzungsheft 5 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1933), 5.

⁸*ÖUIK: II*: 9. Beilage 1, Tabelle 1,3.

missing and lost forever to the army.⁹ Losses among junior leaders, the vital commanders of companies and battalions, were almost unbelievably high. It was impossible for the army to find and train sufficient replacements quickly enough, and the forces in the field inevitably suffered. As a result of such heavy losses among its officers and men, Austria-Hungary was essentially forced to raise a "second army,"¹⁰ a force comprised of teenaged and middle aged *Landsturm* and *Ersatz* replacements, who were dispatched to the front inadequately trained, equipped and even clothed. This improvised force, "a *Landsturm* and militia army," as accurately described by the Official History, by its sacrifices saved the Habsburg Army and Monarchy from total defeat in late 1914 and early 1915. The wartime conscripts who followed, known to their jackbooted German allies as "comrade laced-shoe" (*Kamerad Schnürschuh*), would bear the burden of fighting until the war's end.

The experience of the *k.u.k.* 17th Infantry Division on the Northeastern front was typical in most respects. Initially assigned to the 2nd Army, the division and its corps, VII (Temesvár), saw limited action against Serbia in August, but arrived too late to participate on a large scale in Conrad's initial Galician offensive. However, the 17th Division had fought in every major engagement against the Russians since early September 1914. In the last week of December, now assigned to the 3rd Army on the Hungarian-Galician frontier, it had been forced over the Dukla Pass in the Carpathians by the Russian XII Corps. At considerable cost, the 17th had halted further enemy advances through the mountain passes, and at the beginning of 1915 was defending the frontier of its native Hungary. Four months of war had inflicted some 34,500 casualties on the division, approximately twice its strength on mobilization. Some 5,356 of the division's soldiers were known dead, and a further 1,500 missing, many of them presumed dead.¹¹

As a result, the 17th Division was severely under strength at the beginning of the new year. Its five infantry regiments each contained only one battalion, with an average rifle strength of barely 650; including a composite replacement battalion, the entire division had only 3,685 combat-ready infantrymen. Each battalion-cum-regiment included only two field grade officers, and between one and ten subalterns and junior

⁹*ÖUIK: II*: 10. Among the dead was Lieutenant Herbert Conrad von Hötzendorff, 15th Dragoons, the twenty-three year old son of the Chief of Staff, killed in Galicia on September 7; he was one of several sons of prominent Habsburg generals to fall in battle in the war's opening campaigns. P. Broucek (ed.), *Ein General im Zwielficht: Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaises von Horstenau* (2 Bände, Vienna, 1980), *Bd.I*, 299.

¹⁰R. Kizling, *Österreich-Ungarns Anteil am Ersten Weltkrieg* (Graz, 1958), 24.

¹¹KA/NFA, Fasz. 1018, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr. 195/6, 30.12.14.

officers. Even a draft of replacements arriving in the first week of 1915 barely improved the division's manpower shortage, raising the total rifle strength to 4,131 and adding a handful of new officers.¹² The severe lack of leaders was evident in the 39th Infantry Regiment, the division's strongest. A week into 1915, after receiving yet another replacement draft which brought it up to a strength of two-and-a-half battalions, the 39th was led by a major, and all battalion commanders were captains: significantly, all these officers were new to their posts. The original regimental commander had been sent home seriously ill, as had the 39th's machine gun detachment commander; the commanders of the 1st and 2nd Battalions had been killed in action, while the 3rd Battalion's commander had been invalided due to wounds.¹³

The division was also suffering from a shortage of equipment, particularly machine guns and artillery pieces, although not on the scale of its manpower shortfalls. The entire army was plagued by a grave lack of modern weaponry and ammunition, despite an improvement in the situation since the war's outbreak. The main rifle arsenal at Steyr produced only 2,000 rifles in September 1914, but managed to increase its monthly output to 32,000 by January 1915. The provision of new artillery was more difficult, however, as the army lost some 1,000 field guns in the first six months of the war, with only 278 replacements on hand. The army's first task was to replace its lost guns; then to increase the number of cannon per division, to make it a match in firepower for other armies; and only then to modernize the artillery arm, which was desperately needed. Much progress had been made by early 1915, as military industrial output began to increase drastically, but much still remained to be done. Most serious for the army was the need to provide adequate munitions for the field guns it did have. Like all armies in 1914-15, unprepared for a long war, this army experienced a serious shell shortage once its limited shell reserves were spent. Austro-Hungarian industry produced 116,000 artillery shells in December 1914, versus a minimum weekly requirement of 240,000. In the first weeks of 1915, Habsburg arsenals were still producing only 6.6 rounds per field artillery piece per day.¹⁴ Thus the 17th Division, like the rest of the Austro-Hungarian forces, had to improvise and economise to survive.

The *k.u.k.* 17th Infantry Division was an ethnically diverse formation, with many potential nationalist difficulties lurking in its ranks. Headquartered in peacetime in the

¹²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1018, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.194/8, 29.12.14.; Fasz.1041, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Nachweisung, 31.12.14-1.1.15.

¹³KA/NFA, Fasz. 1020, Telegramm, k.u.k.IR.39 an das k.u.k.17.ITD Kmdo., 7.1.15.

¹⁴Franek, "Probleme," *Ergänzungsheft 1*, 25,27. *ÖUIK: II*: 15. Stone, *Eastern Front*, 123-4.

city of Nagyvárad, the division recruited in the Banat, in the south-central Hungarian plain. The region's cities and towns were populated by Magyars and some Germans, surrounded by rural areas which were predominantly Romanian, with some Serbs in the southern Banat. Its senior infantry unit, the 39th Regiment from Debrecen, was over ninety percent Magyar. Szeged's 46th Infantry Regiment was almost eighty percent Magyar. In contrast, the 43rd Regiment, recruited in Karánsebes, was over three-quarters Romanian in composition. Even more complex was Temesvár's 61st Regiment, made up of two-fifths Romanian and two-fifths German soldiers, the remainder being Magyars and Serbs. The 17th Division had been reinforced by the purely Croatian 96th Regiment from Karlovac, actually a XIII Corps formation. Divisional combat support and service support units were a mix of Magyars, Germans, Romanians and Serbs.¹⁵

The 17th Division's problem was the tense relationship between Hungary's Magyars and Romanians. While Magyars represented only half the population of the Kingdom of Hungary, they controlled the government and all its organs. The policy of Magyarization through the schools, the bureaucracy and the *Honvéd* pursued by Budapest since the *Ausgleich*, while successful at producing Magyar speakers among Hungary's minorities, badly alienated many non-Magyars. Romanians were Hungary's largest and most alienated minority. Concentrated in Transylvania and the Banat, Hungary's Romanians had proved relatively immune to Magyarization (in 1910, after over three decades of Magyarization, only 12.7% of Hungary's Romanians could speak Magyar, compared to 22.6% among other minorities)¹⁶ and instead had grown increasingly hostile to Budapest's rule in response. While this Magyarophobia was not necessarily anti-Habsburg (indeed, some prominent Habsburg Romanians, such as the political thinker Aurel Popovici, were as strongly pro-Vienna as they were anti-Budapest), it caused marked difficulties in mixed Magyar-Romanian army units.

The superficially German character of the *k.u.k. Armee*, so offensive to Magyar nationalists, presented no problems for Romanian soldiers. However, the overtly Magyar character of the *Honvéd* was unpopular with many Romanians, who resented coercive Magyarization in military as much as civil matters, and *Honvéd* units experienced far

¹⁵M. EhnI, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht nach Aufbau, Gliederung, Friedengarnison, Einteilung und nationaler Zusammensetzung im Sommer 1914," *Ergänzungsheft 9 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1934), 24-38.

¹⁶L. Katus, "Die Magyaren," *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (6 Bände, Vienna, 1973-89), *Band III: Die Völker des Reiches/I* (1980), 431-436.

more morale problems with Romanian troops than the army did as a whole.¹⁷ Indeed, Romanian troops had proved surprisingly loyal in the 1914 campaigns, especially in *k.u.k.* units; a 1915 *Armeeoberkommando* report on the reliability of Austria-Hungary's nationalities, bluntly critical of several minorities, concluded that Romanian troops were "loyal, contrary to expectations."¹⁸ Naturally there were some fears about the reliability of Romanian units in the event of war with Romania: the commander of the Transylvanian XII Corps District (Nagyszeben) reported in January 1915 that hostilities with Romania would result in rebellion on the part of Romanian officers and men in the Habsburg Army.¹⁹ However, despite some army, and particularly Magyar, fears about Romanian loyalty, no serious signs of Romanian disaffection were yet evident. Romanian troops, although Orthodox Christians, had little sympathy for Russia or susceptibility to pan-Slav propaganda. The morale problems which did exist with Romanian soldiers owed much more to Magyar arrogance, a regrettable dearth of Romanian-speaking officers, and most importantly the generally horrible conditions in which Habsburg soldiers lived and died in early 1915.

The Magyar soldiers who represented the bulk of the 17th Division's strength, as well as a very disproportionate number of its officers, had proved themselves to be exceptionally loyal and tenacious in battle. Magyar soldiers had completely reversed their poor reputation in 1866, when many units proved unreliable in battle, and had extinguished any lingering doubts from 1848. Despite decades of Budapest's hostility to the *k.u.k. Armee*, it experienced no problems of nationalist tension or disaffection in Magyar units. Such loyalty had much to do with Magyarism's essential satisfaction with its dominant position in Hungary since 1867; in addition, Magyars, unlike many other nationalities--including Austria's Germans--were not magnetizable, i.e., did not have conationals in neighbouring independent nation-states. In recognition of this, indeed, Franz Joseph once told Conrad that he considered the Magyars to be "the only reliable element."²⁰ Lastly, the general Slavophobia of the Magyars, and strong Russophobia in particular, gave Magyar units enhanced reliability in combat on the Northeastern front, even in the terrible conditions in the Carpathians. The 17th Division, fighting alongside

¹⁷KA, Nachlass Nowak, B/726, Nr. 1/1, "Das Klammer des Reichs: Das Verhalten der elf Nationalitäten Österreich-Ungarns in der k.u.k. Wehrmacht 1914-1918," 653-56.

¹⁸Ibid., 377.

¹⁹J. Galantai, *Hungary in the First World War* (Budapest, 1989), 113.

²⁰N. Stone, "Constitutional Crises in Hungary, 1903-1906," *Slavonic & East European Review*, Vol. XLV, No. 104, January 1967, 170.

the 20th *Honvéd* Division in VII Corps, led by the strongly Magyarophile Archduke Joseph, was set to defend the Dual Monarchy and Hungarian soil against the invader.

The commander of the 17th Division at the beginning of 1915, *Generalmajor* Aurel Le Beau, was himself a Magyar. The forty-eight year old, Budapest-born Le Beau had risen to command the 17th at the end of November 1914. He had previously led the Magyar 61st Brigade of the 31st Infantry Division (Budapest) in the summer and autumn Galician battles, being wounded in combat in the second week of September. Le Beau's career had begun nearly three decades earlier, after graduation from the *Theresianische* Military Academy. Except for early service with a Bohemian *Jäger* battalion, his troop commands had been in Magyar infantry units; he was also a graduate of the *Kriegsschule*, having spent several years on the General Staff and the staffs of various corps and divisions. Le Beau had no previous experience with Romanian troops; nor, like most officers--and virtually all Magyars--did he speak Romanian.²¹

In his New Year's greeting to the division, guarding Hungary's threatened northern border, *Generalmajor* Le Beau invoked not only dynastic patriotism, but Hungarian, and perhaps Magyar, sentiment as well: "Let us remain furthermore united in our aspiration to defend our land to the last drop of blood, to secure a victorious, lasting peace."²² The first three weeks of 1915 presented the 17th Division with an opportunity to recover from its heavy losses, before eventually going on the offensive to evict Russian forces from the strategic Carpathian passes. At the beginning of the catastrophic *Karpathenwinter*, the division was garrisoned in the mountainous Felsőódor region of North Hungary, some ten kilometers south of the Galician border, keeping rotating battalions in the front lines.²³

The 17th had to contend with regular enemy night infiltration and attacks by the opposing 12th Siberian Rifle Division of XII Corps; Russian raids, although more an irritant than a serious problem, nonetheless steadily inflicted casualties. The Siberian troops enjoyed success in their raids largely because of the natural camouflage provided by darkness, snow and dense fog, permitting Russian subunits to close in on and infiltrate exposed or isolated Austro-Hungarian outposts without being detected. The 17th Division remedied this by getting its depleted battalions to employ better flank security,

²¹KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart.1702, Aurel Le Beau.

²²KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo.,Op.Nr.197/1, 1.1.15.

²³The *Ost-Beskiden*, as this region of the Carpathians was known to the *k.u.k. Armee*, were a series of forested peaks 500 to 700 metres high.

to prevent encirclement; and by placing barbed wire all around emplacements, rather than just on two or three sides.²⁴

Although regular heavy snowfalls made foot reconnaissance difficult in mountain areas, the 17th Division was neither unresponsive nor inactive. In the first week of January, the division conducted a limited raid by the 39th Regiment with artillery support for the sake of disturbing the enemy's Christmas ("as they disturbed ours"); in a similar vein, a week later the division's guns, acting in concert with those of the neighbouring 20th *Honvéd* Division, subjected the 12th Siberian Rifles to intense shelling--a "New Year's Greeting" for the enemy.²⁵ In the main, however, the 17th Division used the first three weeks of January to rebuild itself. Despite the arrival of some replacements, divisional strength remained inadequate, thanks to constant losses to disease, frostbite, and enemy raids and shelling. To increase rifle strength, 3rd Army ordered each of the division's two cavalry squadrons, redundant in positional warfare, to provide a 100 man dismounted detachment to the infantry. Even with this expedient, the 17th Division, like other formations on the Northeastern front, remained notably deficient in available manpower. In the third week of January, on the eve of the First Carpathian Offensive the infantry of the 17th Division (minus the 39th Regiment, temporarily detached as VII Corps reserve), totalled just under 6,000 riflemen in nine battalions, supported by fifteen machine guns.²⁶ While this represented an improvement over the division's strength at the New Year, the 17th was hardly ready for significant offensive action.

Conrad, however, felt a vital need for an offensive: firstly, to push the Russians back from their positions in the Carpathians threatening North Hungary; secondly, to relieve the 120,000 Habsburg troops trapped at Przemyśl, nearly a hundred kilometers behind Russian lines; and thirdly, to evict the enemy from Galicia. Yet again, though, the scope of Conrad's strategic vision vastly exceeded the actual capabilities of the forces at his disposal. The available forces, the 3rd and 4th Austro-Hungarian Armies, the Imperial German *Südarmee*, and the corps-sized *Armeegruppe* Pflanzer-Baltin, a total of some forty-one divisions, were all seriously understrength and underequipped. The three Russian armies facing them across the Carpathians, although also depleted by combat and

²⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k. 3.ArmeeKmdo., Op.Nr.2718, 4.1.15.; k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.3/4, 4.1.15.

²⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.200/5, 4.1.15.; k.ung. 20.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.353/3, 13.1.15.

²⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1041, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Nachweisung, 23.1.15.; Fasz.1020, k.u.k 3.ArmeeKmdo., Op.Nr.2725, 6.1.15.

winter conditions, held defensible positions and were somewhat better prepared for warfare in severe weather. Most seriously, Conrad expected his armies to make significant headway in appalling conditions, including freezing temperatures and driving snowstorms; as well, they had to contend with the usual difficulties of mountainous terrain.

Like its sister formations in the Carpathians, the 17th Division found the weather at least as troubling--and lethal--as the Russians. The army did not have adequate stocks of battledress when the war broke out; its provisioning of winter protective gear was no better. Thus frontline soldiers were forced to wear civilian winter clothing, often sent by relatives, to survive, including fur hats, coats and scarves, and "peasant pelt coats," in various unmilitary colours. Such expedients, while unpopular with officers (17th Division command disliked "fantastic clothing," and other garb "which make it difficult to recognize the wearer as a soldier")²⁷ were accepted as a necessary protective measure. Nonetheless, all units in the Carpathians continually lost men to the elements, especially frostbite; the Croatian regiment which lost 28 officers and 1,800 men to frostbite in one night spent in the snows, while an especially bad case, was not altogether atypical.²⁸

In preparation for the offensive, the 17th Division attempted to increase the effectiveness of its artillery, particularly in cooperation with the infantry. This was significant, for the understrength division had regained a full complement of artillery, fifty-two field pieces. Recognizing that all tactical progress depended on the proper coordination of infantry and artillery, VII Corps ordered its infantry commanders to brief artillery commanders fully on the current tactical situation, so as to ensure that the gunners did not fight their own battle. Furthermore, it mandated that artillery commanders must visit the front line themselves, and artillery units must employ effective forward observers to achieve decisive results. Corps advised against using shrapnel, as in earlier barrages, for it was useless against entrenched units; it also advised caution about artillery-induced "friendly fire" casualties, which were proving especially damaging to infantry morale, what with poor visibility and general inexperience with long-range indirect shelling. Lastly, VII Corps was interested in innovation, and thus in the third week of January requested that field batteries respond to an artillery questionnaire which asked about the proper number of guns in a battery, the ideal proportion of howitzers to guns, the necessary amount of heavy artillery at corps level, and whether heavy mortars

²⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1015, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Abfertigung, 14.4.15.

²⁸Stone, *Eastern Front*, 314.

should be corps- or army-level assets.²⁹ After so many lost battles, Habsburg field units, like all belligerent armies in the first year of the First World War, were beginning to learn the tactical methods required to achieve success on the battlefield in the conditions of modern, machine-dominated warfare.

The brunt of the First Carpathian Offensive was borne by the *k.u.k.* 3rd Army, commanded by *General der Infanterie* Svetozar Boroević von Bojna, a very capable Croatian officer. The 17th Division and its VII Corps were among the seventeen divisions and six corps under Boroević when the offensive began on January 23. After preparatory artillery bombardment, the 17th attacked the enemy's XII Corps in the area of the strategically vital Dukla Pass. Like the other assaulting divisions, however, the 17th made little progress, despite all the preparation and sacrifices. Only on the 3rd Army's right flank did Habsburg units advance significantly, taking the Uzsok Pass a hundred kilometres to the east.

All along the Carpathian front soldiers found it impossible to move forward in face of stiff enemy opposition, made worse by deep snow, ice storms, and fog- and snow-induced blindness. In the frigid mountain temperatures, weapons froze and ice made the few roads impassable for supplies. In retrospect, it is remarkable that Habsburg units made any progress whatsoever. Conrad's scheme had collapsed entirely, and the blame was largely his; as a senior German officer noted, "The soldiers were certainly not responsible for the failure."³⁰

The 17th Division suffered less than many units in the first days of the offensive. However, on January 26 its 34th Brigade, leading the supposed advance, was attacked by three battalions of the 12th Siberian Rifle Division west of the Dukla Pass. Although the Hungarian troops held most of their positions, a brief tactical retreat followed in which the division incurred serious losses, having to be quickly reinforced by the 17th *Honvéd* Regiment to bolster its defences.³¹

By January 28th, following several Russian forays, the 17th Division was barely holding on. Austro-Hungarian casualties in the First Carpathian Offensive, as in the *Karpathenwinter* generally, have proved difficult to calculate due to poor record keeping and massive losses to disease and the elements. However, the first five days of the offensive cost the infantry alone of the 17th Division over 2,000 soldiers, many of whom

²⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.765/6, 22.1.15.; Op.Nr.760/20, 17.1.15.; k.u. 20.LITD Kmdo., Res.Nr.407/16, 15.1.15.

³⁰A. Cramon, *Unser österreichisch-ungarischer Bundesgenosse im Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1920), 7.

³¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, m.kir. 17.gyatogezred, Nr.1 Sz., 26.1.15.

were captured or lost to frostbite.³² By the end of January the 17th Division was exhausted. The ravages of frostbite, including fatalities, continued to arise alarmingly, so that the emaciated division's front line was being held by only 3,360 men, with a mere 400 riflemen in reserve.³³

The Russian 8th Army, led by the talented General Alexei Brusilov, then launched an offensive to push back the *k.u.k.* 3rd Army. Despite orders to hold its positions at any cost, the 17th Division, like its neighbouring units, was soon forced to retreat before Brusilov's advancing divisions. In the first week of February, the Russian army recaptured the minor pieces of territory lost to Conrad's offensive, and the Habsburg forces before it were retreating rapidly. The 17th Division marched fifteen kilometers south along the Ondava river valley, making its stand at the town of Sztrópkó, twenty-two kilometres south of the Dukla Pass. Surrounded by 300 to 500 metre-high peaks, the Slovak trading town stood at the edge of the north Hungarian plain. The disorganized, weakened formation held Sztrópkó against repeated assaults by five Russian regiments. Weak Habsburg infantry defences, equivalent to only three battalions, managed to repel numerous enemy attacks with excellent artillery support. Marshalling all available guns, the 17th Division's artillery consistently provided accurate and rapid fires to hold back the Russians; without the artillery's decisive performance, notably improved over earlier battles, Sztrópkó would have been lost to the enemy, together with what remained of the division. Soon Brusilov's initially successful offensive fell victim to weather and heavy casualties just as Conrad's had, so that the 17th Division's front was essentially quiet by February 10.³⁴ Like the entire 3rd Army, the 17th Division had survived, but just barely.

For the next six weeks, the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Armies duelled for control of the Carpathians, with no significant effect except heavy losses on both sides. Conrad's Second Carpathian Offensive in late February was no more successful than the first, but similarly costly and futile. Russian offensives in March bled their 3rd and 8th Armies badly, for no decisive return. On March 23, the long isolated Habsburg garrison at Przemyśl, without hope of relief or reinforcement, was forced to capitulate, handing over to the Russians forty-two rifle battalions and many supporting units, a total of nine generals, 2,500 officers, and 117,000 soldiers.³⁵ Buoyed by this success, the Russians

³²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1041, k.u.k 17. ITD Kmdo., "Stand der Division am 28. Jänner."

³³KA/NFA, Fasz. 1020, k.u.k 17. ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.226/5, 31.1.15.

³⁴KA/NFA, Fasz. 1020, k.u.k 17. ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.227/8, 1.2.15.; Op.Nr.231/15, 5.2.15.; Op.Nr.235/5, 8.2.15.; Op.Nr.236/10, 10.2.15.; k.u.k HR.7 an das 17. ITD Kmdo., 10.2.15.

³⁵ÖUIK: II: 121, 216.

went on the offensive in the Carpathians in April, achieving notable tactical advances against the ailing Habsburg Army. As was so often the case in the First World War, however, and particularly in the terrible Carpathian conditions, the Russians were unable to exploit their advances to achieve strategic gains. The Habsburg Army survived because the Russians were equally battered, weakened and exhausted.

The 17th Division was involved in most of the major battles of March and early April, although it was not as badly punished as many Habsburg divisions. Nonetheless in the first two months of 1915 the division lost 7,186 soldiers, including 645 killed and 1,276 missing in action; a further 1,622 were seriously ill or frostbitten. As always, the vast majority of losses--in this case, in excess of ninety-five percent--were inflicted on the division's foot soldiers.³⁶ Casualties continued to mount in alarming numbers through March, with the division losing over half of its rifle strength of 5,250, many of them victims of the winter weather. Many of the fallen soldiers were lost in relatively small but savage battles, often fought at night in several feet of snow.³⁷ Among those killed in battle was Colonel Silvio Spiess von Braccioforte, commander of the 39th Regiment, who fell at the head of his unit on April 5, personally directing the defence against a Russian assault at Erfalu, a village near Sztrópkó. Spiess, one of sixteen Austro-Hungarian colonels to fall in battle with their units in 1915, was awarded posthumously the Knight's Cross of the Order of Maria Theresia for his heroism, a rare honour. His sacrifice had helped save his regiment at Erfalu, one of dozens of comparatively minor and ultimately inconsequential, but very bloody, engagements fought by the 17th Division in the Carpathians.³⁸

Three months of tug-of-war in the Carpathians cost the Habsburg Army an average of 6,600 soldiers every day, for a likely total of over 600,000 casualties; the actual figure may have been nearer to 800,000. In the confusion and paralysis of the *Karpathenwinter*, the army could not exactly keep track of its enormous losses.³⁹ Barely recovered from the Galician disaster of 1914, the army had been subjected to an equally dreadful series of needless offensives; indeed, for the soldiers, freezing in the high Hungarian mountains in mid-winter, the *Karpathenwinter* was far worse than even the nightmarishly intense

³⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1041, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.280/11, "Verluste 10.1--1.3.15."

³⁷*61 in Waffen: Kriegsalbum des k.u.k. IR Nr.61, 1914-1917* (Budapest, 1918), 151-2.

³⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1015, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Abfertigung, 8.4.15.; Fasz.1041, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Standsnachweisung, März 1915.

³⁹Franek, "Entwicklung," *Ergänzungsheft 5*, 3. E. Ratzenhofer, "Verlustkalkül für den Karpathenwinter 1915," *Ergänzungsheft 1 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1930), 31-39.

Galician maneuver battles of August and September 1914. Conrad's failed offensives dealt the Habsburg Army on the Eastern front a blow from which it would never fully recover.

Signs of serious problems of leadership, discipline and morale emerged in many Austro-Hungarian units in the Carpathians. Without much hope of success or even survival in the snow-covered mountain valleys and passes, many soldiers, not surprisingly, began to lose their fighting edge. While every regiment and division suffered from understandably low morale after Conrad's First Offensive, some units and nationalities in particular began to experience grave difficulties.

Disaffection emerged first and strongest among units composed of nationalities which never desired a war with Russia in the first place. As in the battles of 1914, Czech formations experienced the most obvious motivational problems. During the depths of the *Karpathenwinter*, several Czech regiments offered little resistance to Russian assaults, amounting in some cases to a total failure to function as coherent fighting units. The 102nd Regiment, which had performed effectively in Serbia, lost a well positioned battalion inexplicably in late March to a Russian assault. More seriously, the 36th Regiment, previously praised by *AOK* for its bravery, collapsed under enemy attack without offering noticeable resistance, losing 1,500 prisoners. In an act of retribution for cowardice, the High Command disbanded the 36th, dividing its survivors and recruits in the replacement depot among eight, mostly Magyar, regiments.⁴⁰

The most infamous incident involved the collapse of the *k.u.k.* 28th Regiment during a Russian attack on the Dukla Pass on April 3. The 28th, the ancient Prague *Hausregiment*, a purely Czech unit known to its city as the "*Pražské děti*" ("Prague's children") had experienced some disturbances earlier in the winter. However, of the 2,200 soldiers who entered the battle on April 3, only 150 could be assembled at the end of it; virtually all the missing men were in Russian captivity. The regiment apparently had failed to stand up to the enemy. The army hierarchy concluded that all Czech troops were now deeply suspect, at least on the Northeastern front; as a result the 28th Regiment was disbanded, like the 36th. Unfortunately, the claims of many Czech nationalists that the 28th had gone cheerfully into "brother Slav" captivity, which coincided with Habsburg suspicions, were somewhat distorted accounts.⁴¹

Reality was rather more complex, and less mysterious, or less inspiring, depending upon one's viewpoint. The 28th, a unit comprised mostly of urban Czech industrial

⁴⁰KA, Nachlass Nowak, I/I, 300-01, 410-75.

⁴¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1032, k.u.k 3.ArmeeKmdo., Res.Nr.2762, 18.4.15.

workers, for a decade had been associated with the Czech national socialist movement. Its proletarian soldiers had been offended by the army's general treatment of them as peasants, and especially by the "preventative" relocation of the regiment's *Ersatz* battalion in early January 1915 to Szeged in south-central Hungary. Szeged was a particularly lamentable choice, for relations between the 8th *Marsch* Battalion's Czech soldiers and the Magyar townsmen, never cordial, were frequently little short of explosive, marked by regular brawls between soldiers and civilians, with Magyar soldiers occasionally assisting their conationals. Inevitably unit morale suffered.⁴² The 8th *Marsch* Battalion contained many soldiers who were members of the *Sokol*, the Czech nationalist organization (the regimental band frequently played a popular *Sokol* march); the battalion's few officers, most of them reservists or newly commissioned students of Czech nationality, proved incapable--and perhaps unwilling--to impose tighter discipline. The disgruntled and ill-disciplined 8th *Marsch* battalion left Szeged in late March for the bloody and frozen Carpathians. The vast majority of the 28th Regiment's soldiers at the Dukla Pass on April 3 were such recent arrivals from Szeged, and most of them refused to offer determined resistance to the Russians. They simply opted out of the war.⁴³

Despite the fact that even Tomáš Masaryk, not known for his pro-Habsburg sentiments, concluded that the 28th went over to the Russians because of strong antiwar, not anti-dynastic, sentiments, the army as ever assumed the worst. Rather than recognize that heavy-handed military behaviour had worsened the morale of Czech troops, the generals preferred simply to disband units and spread the redeployment of Czech *Ersatz*

⁴²Refer to: J. Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk and His Fortunes in the World War* (trans. C. Parrott) (New York, 1975). This well known novel, although highly exaggerated and biased against the *k.u.k. Armee*, nonetheless captures accurately the depth of Czech-Magyar antagonism, and its lamentable impact on unit morale (based no doubt on Hašek's own experiences in 1915 while serving in the *k.u.k.* 91st Infantry Regiment in the Carpathians).

⁴³KA, Nachlass Nowak, 1/I, 423-4. R. Plaschka, "Zur Vorgeschichte des Übergangs von Einheiten des IR Nr.28 an der russischen Front 1915," *Österreich und Europa: Festgabe für Hugo Hantsch zum 70.Geburtstag* (Vienna, 1970), 357-63. *ÖUIK: II: 252*. Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Break-Up of the Habsburg Empire 1914-1918: A Study in National and Social Revolution* (London, 1961), 56-7. Despite revisionist scholarship of the 28th incident, many historians continue to recount the event in a simplistic manner; hence the recent assertion of an otherwise competent Czech-American scholar, "On one occasion a whole Czech regiment went over to the Russians."--J. Kalvoda, "Czech and Slovak Prisoners of War in Russia during the War and Revolution," in: S. Williamson and P. Pastor, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol.V:Essays on World War I: Origins and Prisoners of War* (New York, 1983), 216.

units.⁴⁴ Soon suspect Czech regiments in the East were stiffened by the addition of reliable German, Magyar, or Bosnian battalions. Isolated Czech depots, located outside Bohemia, began to experience disturbances, in some cases short-lived mutinies.⁴⁵ In Bohemia, AOK extended its supervisory powers, via the *Kriegsüberwachungamt*, essentially usurping civilian rule, using Czech military unreliability as a justification.

As the *Karpathenwinter* continued, and the Habsburg Army lost thousands of men daily for no noticeable gain, disaffection spread to other units. Serbian units had never been considered very trustworthy, but now Ruthene regiments, sometimes affected by pan-Slav sympathies, were found to be suspect, in some cases as unreliable as Czech units. After months of futile combat in appalling conditions, the army, especially Boroevic's shattered 3rd Army, was finally experiencing some of the ethnic problems so widely anticipated before the war.

The 17th Division, without Czech or Ruthene battalions, was spared serious ethnically-based disaffection, although some desertions were reported among Serbian soldiers in VII Corps units recruited in the southern Banat. Despite much general concern about "rabble-rousing Romanian priests" propagandizing young replacements to desert as soon as possible, the division experienced few problems with its Romanian troops, especially when compared to other Habsburg formations. In April the Transylvanian 38th *Honvéd* Division ran into serious desertion and surrender problems with its Romanian soldiers while engaged in the Carpathians. The division's heavily Romanian 304th *Honvéd* Regiment was the source of much of the difficulty, so Budapest increased the numbers of Magyars and Germans in the unit. When this failed to cure Romanian unreliability, the regiment was disbanded.⁴⁶

The 17th Division, typically of *k.u.k.* units, treated its Romanian soldiers with considerably more tact than the *Honvéd* did, and suffered fewer problems as a result. While the conduct of the division's Romanian soldiers was not without misunderstandings, the root causes of Romanian dissatisfaction were obvious enough, and neither intrinsically malevolent nor disloyal. The crux of the problem was that far

⁴⁴The "crackdown" included such acts of unintended comedy as the disbanding by AOK of a Prague Free Thinkers group, on the grounds that its advocacy of the "destruction of religion" was subversive of army morale; this despite the army's admission that the small intellectual group's impact on army morale was "unknown." KA/NFA, Fasz.1032, AOK Bef.K.Nr.9148, 11.6.15.

⁴⁵Zeman, *Break-Up*, 57.; KA, Nachlaß Nowak, 1/1, 422,452-6. One of the most serious incidents occurred in the Innsbruck-based *Ersatzbatallion* of the 21st Division's 8th *Landwehr* Regiment.

⁴⁶KA, Nachlass Nowak, 1/1, 658-62.

too few officers could speak any Romanian, a significant complication, given that as 17th Division command noted, "knowledge of the regimental language is the basis for officers, not only of leading but also of training their men, and if necessary to carry along and inspire them."⁴⁷ The regimental language system had functioned passably in peacetime; in wartime it essentially broke down. Even few regular officers knew Romanian. In the 17th Division, for example, only three battalion commanders spoke the language; neither the divisional commander nor his chief of staff, neither of the two brigade commanders, and none of the regimental commanders could. Among reserve and newly commissioned officers--those actually responsible for all command below battalion level, given the desperate officer shortage--the situation was even worse.⁴⁸ Among the young Magyars who comprised the bulk of the division's lieutenants, ensigns, and officer cadets, knowledge of Romanian, a despised "peasant" tongue, was virtually nonexistent. Although the division and the army appreciated the danger of the situation, wartime conditions gave new officers no real opportunity to acquire regimental languages.

This language dysfunction led to occasionally serious communication problems at the front, not to mention general Romanian resentment. However, the division was spared difficulties that might have profoundly impaired its combat effectiveness. Le Beau's command was very aware of "chauvinist-nationalist and other pernicious influences," including the junior officer corps. However, a divisional report in the middle of the dreadful bloodletting in the Carpathians concluded that what it politely termed the "modest tenacity" of Romanian troops, especially of insufficiently trained soldiers, was "certainly a national characteristic." "It has nothing to do," it continued, "with nationalist or antimilitary incitement."⁴⁹ This response, while perhaps stereotyped, was close to the truth. Romanian soldiers, like most of the Dual Monarchy's fighting men, when properly led and decently provisioned, could still be expected to perform well in combat.

Meanwhile, the army's officer crisis had grown as grave as the manpower shortage and the perceived nationalities crisis; indeed, the officer crisis was perhaps the most serious of all. Despite desperate measures to commission new ensigns to fill the officer corps's depleted ranks, front line units continued to be desperately underofficered. By the spring of 1915, the 17th Division's *Marsch* battalions, while staffed with a full complement of a thousand soldiers, were commanded by captains, and contained on average only five officers, few of whom were regulars; often, only the battalion

⁴⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.218/8, 15.2.15.

⁴⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1041, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.345/8, 4.6.15.

⁴⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., "Fragen," 22.1.15.; Op.Nr.218/8, 17.2.15.

commander had been on active duty before the war. To produce even these inadequate numbers of officers, the army had rapidly commissioned thousands of bourgeois young men, some of whom admittedly lacked the "moral qualities" which the army so prized in officer selection and training.⁵⁰ Certainly few shared the *Weltanschauung* of the prewar regular cadres, while their training, often only rudimentary tactically, was similarly too brief to transform young men of numerous nationalities into ideological clones of the *kaisertreue* regular officer corps. On the whole, nonetheless, the army's front line officers conducted themselves as efficiently as possible under the terrible conditions at the front in 1915. Indeed, it is remarkable that the Habsburg Army survived the Carpathians at all.

By late April the Habsburg Army's positions on the Northeastern front were far from reassuring, sagging as they did at their deepest point twenty-five kilometers into north Hungary. The formation farthest south was the 17th Division, which in early April had been forced to evacuate Sztropkó, after many costly fights. Conrad had long wanted to achieve a strategic breakthrough in the northern Carpathians, and then envelop the Russian 3rd and 8th Armies. Despite the Russians weaknesses, however, the Austro-Hungarian armies facing them were certainly not strong enough to inflict the required damage on the enemy. Indeed, they were in danger of total collapse.

Although General Erich von Falkenhayn, head of the Imperial German Supreme Command (*Oberste Heeresleitung--OHL*), did not want to deprive his forces in France of a single soldier to assist the Austro-Hungarians, the prospect of further Habsburg defeats required that something be done. With German assistance, Conrad's plan could be achieved, for the troops of the Russian Southwestern front, after months of Carpathian combat, were ill-equipped and unprepared to defend their lines against determined attack. Falkenhayn reluctantly dispatched four corps and a field army, the 11th under von Mackensen, to the Carpathians in the hope of achieving a decisive strategic defeat of the Russians, thereby saving the Habsburg Army and the Central Powers' position in the East.

The 11th Army, eventually including three German and one *k.u.k.* corps, a total of eight German and two Habsburg divisions, reinforced by considerable heavy artillery, was to bear the brunt of the breakthrough, against the Russian 3rd Army between Tarnów and Gorlice, at the western edge of the Carpathians. Supporting the 11th on its northern flank was the *k.u.k.* 4th Army, with its six Austro-Hungarian and one German divisions; on Mackensen's southern flank was Boroević's 3rd Army, made up of twelve *k.u.k.* and

⁵⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1020, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.218/8, 15.2.15.; Fasz.1041, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Nachweisung, 5.15.; Fasz.1032, k.u.k. 3.ArmeeKmdo., Res.Nr.2438, 25.3.15.

three German divisions. The Germans were now the senior partners in the alliance, as they would remain in the East until the end of the war. The unified command and control system developed for the Gorlice-Tarnów offensive reflected this change, despite appearances: although *AOK* retained titular command, Mackensen and his chief of staff, von Seeckt, actually controlled strategy and operations; Conrad could not issue orders to "his" units without Falkenhayn's approval.⁵¹

The German divisions arriving in the East from the Western front brought with them considerable experience in modern, positional warfare, particularly artillery techniques. The Germans were notably more advanced in terms of target acquisition, fire control, and counterbattery fires than either the Habsburg or Russian forces; they also had at their disposal far more heavy guns than their ally or adversary. Fighting the Russians offered the Germans the possibility of a breakthrough and exploitation inconceivable in Flanders, for troop density was so much lower on the enormous Russian front: one-and-a-half German divisions in the East occupied the space held by five divisions in the West.⁵²

The initial role of the 17th Division in the general offensive, like those of VII Corps and indeed the entire 3rd Army, was to be a supporting one. By the eve of the breakthrough the division had rebuilt its regiments to a more combat-ready level, with an average rifle strength of 1,800. Total infantry strength had reached 9,010 effectives, divided into five battalions per brigade. Although thirty to forty percent of the recent reinforcements from depots (and fifty to eighty percent of replacement officers) were not fresh men, but wounded or ill soldiers returning to the front after convalescence (the Habsburg Army had returned 16,500 officers and 399,000 men to the front by May 1915), the division was nonetheless fitter for battle than at any point since mid-January.⁵³ The foot soldiers were supported by a full complement of twenty-eight machine guns and forty-four guns and howitzers, including two heavy batteries. The division's troops were also supported by a few light mortars (*Minenwerfer*), a recently introduced weapon whose high trajectory and excellent explosive-to-weight ratio (by virtue of its low velocity) made it deadly against entrenched opponents; the mortars' comparatively easy portability and deployment just behind the front line also made them more responsive to changing tactical situations than conventional tubed artillery.⁵⁴

⁵¹Rothenberg, *Army*, 185-6.

⁵²Stone, *Eastern Front*, 93-4.

⁵³Franek, "Probleme," *Ergänzungsheft 1*, 21.

⁵⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1023, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.866/5, 5.5.15. *61 in Waffen*, 152.

The main initial attack by the 11th Army commenced before dawn on May 2. Preceded by an intense barrage, Mackensen's twelve divisions, advancing on a narrow, concentrated front of less than twenty-five kilometers, quickly took Gorlice, overwhelming the enemy's III and XXIV Corps. A half dozen Russian divisions, outnumbered and outgunned at Mackensen's chosen *Schwerpunkt*, understrength, poorly entrenched and suffering from low morale, dissolved before the 11th Army.⁵⁵ Soon the entire Russian 3rd Army, or what remained of it, was in hasty retreat.

Habsburg supporting attacks helped to push the 3rd and 8th Armies out of the Carpathians. The 17th Division entered the offensive on the left flank of VII Corps, attacking in support of the 20th *Honvéd* Division's assault on Hill 386, the corps' objective for May 2; it was assisted on the corps' right flank by the *k.u.k.* 1st Cavalry Division, itself reinforced by the 17th Division's 96th Regiment. The 17th Division's attack was well supported by artillery and sappers, so vital in achieving breakthroughs. The sappers were armed with grenades and supported by *Minenwerfer*--altogether it was certainly the most complete and effective combined arms approach yet seen in the division.⁵⁶

Within two days, the enemy's XII Corps was in full retreat before the *k.u.k.* VII Corps. The 17th Division quickly retook Sztropkó and continued to advance to the northeast towards the Dukla Pass. In most cases, Russian units offered little resistance, as they either surrendered or attempted to escape. In their haste, withdrawing enemy formations abandoned substantial quantities of equipment, including spare parts and repair kits, which were quickly taken over by Habsburg divisional maintenance units and put to effective use. By May 7 the 17th Division's forward elements, the Romanian 43rd and Magyar-German-Serbian 61st Regiments of Colonel von Pacor's 33rd Brigade, had crossed the Carpathians and advanced into Galicia, the first time units of the division had left Hungarian soil in half a year.⁵⁷

As the Russian Southwestern front lapsed into a strategic withdrawal, leaving behind the remnants of shattered divisions and corps, the German and Habsburg armies in the East commenced an unprecedented general advance, one measured not in meters, but in dozens of kilometers. For the 17th Division, this brought a deeper march into Galicia.

⁵⁵I. Rostunov, *Russkii front pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow, 1976), 233-6.

⁵⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1023, k.u.k. 7.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.865/29, 2.5.15.; Op.Nr.866/18, 3.5.15.; k.ung. 20.LITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.603/22, 3.5.15.

⁵⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1023, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.322/15, 6.5.15.; k.u.k. 7.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.868/14, 5.5.15.; Op.Nr.868/57, 6.5.15.; Op.Nr.859/26, 7.5.15.

Its daily average advance of fifteen kilometers was difficult for the division to sustain; however, this was due more to its frequently outrunning its cumbersome logistical tail than to determined Russian resistance. Indeed, the Russian retreat was so rapid that 17th Divisional cavalry often proved unable to maintain contact with enemy units. By May 11, the division, with the rest of VII Corps, had reached the town of Bukowsko, twenty-five kilometres northeast of Dukla, on the edge of the Galician plain. It had crossed the once unpassable Carpathians, advancing over fifty kilometers in little more than a week, yet suffering few casualties in the process. After this heady experience, the division's tired soldiers settled down to what they hoped would be a rest in Bukowsko.⁵⁸

While the division and its corps halted, partly to permit logistical units to keep pace, the Russian Army in the East was being mauled by the German-Habsburg advance. Soon nearly all of West Galicia was again in Habsburg possession; Przemyśl was yet again retaken, for the final time. When the advance of the Central Powers concluded in mid-July, nearly all Austro-Hungarian territory was again under their control and the Russians had been pushed back deep into their own territory. The strategic balance had been altered decisively in favour of the Central Powers. The Russian Army had been dealt a severe blow also in terms of lost men and materiel: the Tsar's armies lost over a million prisoners alone in 1915, the majority of them in the two months following the Gorlice breakthrough.⁵⁹ Although the Central Powers had not won the war against the Russians, the Dual Monarchy and its army unquestionably had been saved. The Habsburg forces in the East had served under overall German command, and German planning and expertise had been responsible for much of the success, yet the Imperial- and-Royal forces had performed well. The 17th Division, though, did not participate in the triumphant advance across Galicia in June and July. Its soldiers, who had suffered so much at the hands of the Russians in the Carpathians, did not help liberate Habsburg territory lost in 1914. Instead, the now-veteran soldiers of VII Corps were moved across the Dual Monarchy, across half of Europe, in late May 1915, to take part in a new war against a different, untried enemy.

A war with Italy had occupied the minds of many of Austria-Hungary's generals for years before the First World War, even though Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance. Conrad himself was a longtime advocate of a preventative war against Italy;

⁵⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1023, k.u.k. 7.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.872/50, 9.5.15.; k.u.k HR.7 an das 17.ITD Kmdo., 9.5.15.; m.kir. 81.dandár, Nr.207/3 Sz., 7.5.15.; k.u.k 7.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.872/54, 9.5.15.; k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.328/5, 14.5.15.; Op.Nr.327/10, 11.5.15.

⁵⁹Stone, *Eastern Front*, 165.

however, after August 1914 the thought of conflict with Italy terrified the Chief of the General Staff and other senior officers. Few believed that the Dual Monarchy's forces, incapable of defeating Serbia and barely able to survive the *Karpathenwinter*, could withstand an Italian onslaught: Conrad, typically alarmist, was not alone in his belief in early 1915 that a war with Italy would mean the end of the Habsburg Army and Monarchy in six weeks.

The army's defenses against Italy in early 1915 were unimpressive. Only in the Tyrol were there any modern fortifications. Even though few generals believed that Italy would remain neutral indefinitely, the field armies could not spare more than a handful of line battalions to defend against a mere threat. Thus the security of Austria-Hungary's border with Italy had been left mostly in the hands of *Marsch* and *Landsturm* reserve units, assisted by *Gendarmerie* and Finance Guard detachments; in the Tyrol, because the *Landeschützen* regiments intended for home defence had been dispatched to Galicia months earlier, the main burden of defence rested with forty battalions of *Standeschützen*, rifle clubs composed of teenagers and old men, those too young or too elderly to serve at the front.⁶⁰

Confronting the Habsburg forces was the untried Italian Army, under the command of General Luigi Cadorna. At Cadorna's disposal was a force of 850,000 soldiers, divided into twenty-five first-line and ten reserve infantry divisions, an élite *Bersaglieri* division, the equivalent of four brigades of *Alpini* mountain troops, and four cavalry divisions. Cadorna's strategy for victory was centered on a main thrust across the Isonzo. The initial breakthrough would take Trieste, then could be exploited through the Laibach gap; from there, the victorious Italians would flood into the interior of the Dual Monarchy, taking Vienna and perhaps Budapest, and meeting with Russian and Serbian forces deep in the interior of Austria-Hungary.⁶¹

Cadorna's grandiose scheme was not entirely implausible, given that the Habsburg forces opposing him were numerically so paltry. Conrad, believing that Italy would soon enter the war, called in early April for the immediate withdrawal of seven Habsburg divisions from Galicia to hold the Italian frontier; Falkenhayn, exercising his authority as the dominant partner in the Berlin-Vienna alliance, denied Conrad's request. Although

⁶⁰KA, Gefechtsberichte, Schachtel 65, k.k. KSch.R.Nr.III, "Das k.k. KSch.R.Nr.III im Weltkriege." 1-3, 35-6. F. Neubauer, *Die Gendarmerie in Österreich 1849-1924* (Graz, 1925), 135-40.

⁶¹H. Schafer, "Die Kriegspläne Italiens gegen Österreich-Ungarn." *Ergänzungsheft 2 zum Werke ÖUk* (Vienna, 1931). Rothenberg, *Army*, 187-8. G. Rochat, G. Massobrio, *Breve storia dell'Esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin, 1978), 182-3.

AOK desperately attempted to collect available formations, when Italy formally entered the war on May 23, the vital Isonzo valley, virtually unfortified, was defended by only one Austro-Hungarian division, the 57th, a mountain unit rushed from the Balkans in mid-May.⁶²

Still, Habsburg forces on the Italian frontier did enjoy the crucial, perhaps decisive, geographic advantage. In all theatres of the Southwestern front (as it was known to the Austro-Hungarian Army)--Tyrol, Carinthia and Isonzo--the defenders occupied the high ground, literally looking down on any attackers; the Isonzo river also added to the natural strength of Habsburg defences. All along the front, Austro-Hungarian units held the vital bridgeheads, passes and plateaus. Offensives against entrenched opponents have always proved exceptionally difficult and costly, and opponents entrenched in rough, mountainous terrain posed a doubly difficult problem for Cadorna's army.

Additionally, Cadorna's armies, while numerically impressive, suffered from serious defects. The Italian Army was fresh, unlike the weary Habsburg forces opposing it, but it was also untried in battle. As the Italians had not fought a modern adversary since 1866, their tactical doctrine particularly betrayed a dearth of experience in the vital techniques of modern combat--inexperience which would soon cost them many unnecessary casualties. In contrast, by mid-1915 the Austro-Hungarian Army at least had a great deal of practical experience, won at terrible cost, with the modern, machine-dominated battlefield. While Habsburg formations in most cases were tired and suffering from a lack of trained manpower, at least their soldiers had become well acquainted with current tactical doctrine. The traditional Habsburg expertise in Alpine warfare would prove a further valuable asset.

An unquantifiable, but very real, prop for the Austro-Hungarian Army on the Italian front was the common soldier's hatred of the enemy. There existed a sincere sense of outrage against a former ally which had attacked beleaguered Austria-Hungary on its exposed frontier. Habsburg subjects of all nationalities shared this sentiment, so that the war against Italy, the "hereditary enemy" (*Erbfeind*), was perceived as necessary and just by all, to an extent that was never true of the conflicts with Serbia and Russia; enthusiasm for the war ran especially high among the monarchy's traditionally Italophobe Germans and South Slavs, who felt justifiably threatened by Rome's expansionist tendencies. The war against the Italian invader gave the Dual Monarchy a common cause, and helped to make the Habsburg Army genuinely popular with its soldiers and the Emperor-King's

⁶²Rothenberg, *Army*, 188. *ÖULK: II: Beilage* 14, 24-5.

subjects. Therefore the Habsburg Army, by mid-1915 seriously weakened by almost a year of total war, paradoxically enough, was strengthened by the new burden of defending the Southwestern frontier.

The army responded enthusiastically to the task of defeating the Italians; for the officer corps particularly the conflict was a question of personal and dynastic honour.⁶³ Until the end of the war, the army would regard the Italian front as the main struggle, even though until 1917 the East actually occupied many more Habsburg soldiers and formations. The war with Italy was much more popular, not least because of the army's early successes, and the perceived righteousness of the cause: as a common officers' witticism noted, "Maria Theresia Crosses only grow on palm trees."⁶⁴ Most significantly for the Habsburg military, there was a long tradition of fighting--and defeating--Italians, whereas Tsarist Russia was historically not an enemy. War with Italy recalled past glories involving many of the army's most cherished leaders, myths and beliefs. This valuable tradition was recalled in Franz Joseph's May 23 manifesto to the troops, issued upon Italy's entry into the war: "The great memories of Novara, Custoza and Lissa, which formed the pride of My Youth, and the spirit of Radetzky, Archduke Albrecht and Tegethoff, which lives on in My Land and Sea forces, guarantees that we will also successfully defend the borders of the Monarchy against the South."⁶⁵ Living up to the legacy of victory, the Habsburg Army prepared to throw back Cadorna's hordes.

In mid-May, AOK marshalled all available forces to supplement the newly created Southwestern front under the command of *Generaloberst* Archduke Eugen. The crucial Isonzo theatre was placed under the also newly created *k.u.k.* 5th Army. General Svetozar Boroević von Bojna, commander of the 3rd Army, was appointed to lead it, leaving Galicia and arriving in Laibach on May 27. Boroevic, one of the army's best field commanders, was to prove an excellent choice. The weak forces on the Isonzo had been reinforced by the end of May by rapidly arriving formations, principally XV and XVI Corps, both dispatched from the now quiet Balkan front; the latter, three divisions strong, took up the defence of the important lower Isonzo, in the area of Görz. *General der Kavallerie* Franz Rohr's forces in Carinthia, amounting to little more than a division, were reinforced in the last week of May by *General der Kavallerie* Archduke Joseph's VII Corps. The battle-hardened Hungarian corps, including the usual 17th and 20th *Honved*

⁶³Cramon, *Unser österreichisch-ungarischer*, 55.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁵G. Stockelle, "Der letzte Waffengang 1914-1918," *Unser Heer: 300 Jahre österreichisches Soldatentum in Krieg und Frieden* (Vienna, 1965), 299.

Divisions, followed their army commander, Borojevic, to the Italian front, where it would remain for the rest of the war.⁶⁶

The 17th Division's forward elements arrived in Oberdrauburg in Carinthia on May 27, and were soon followed by the remainder of the division. The 17th, suffering relatively few casualties during the Gorlice breakthrough and exploitation, had recovered much of the manpower and equipment losses of the *Karpathenwinter*. It left Galicia with a ration strength of 478 officers and 17,464 men, of which 284 officers and 12,020 men belonged to the five infantry regiments, divided between Colonel von Pacor's 33rd and Colonel von Henneberg's 34th Brigades. The regiments averaged two strong battalions, well supported by machine guns. Over three hundred cavalymen in two squadrons of the 7th Hussars provided reconnaissance. Colonel Žagar's all-important 17th Field Artillery Brigade had reached an impressive strength of sixty field pieces--forty-six guns, six howitzers and eight heavy howitzers--divided among twelve batteries. Sappers, pioneers, and other divisional support units were similarly up to strength for the coming struggle.⁶⁷

The 17th Division also left Galicia with a new commander, *Generalmajor* Le Beau having been replaced on May 15. The new commander, *Feldmarschalleutnant* Karl Gelb von Siegesstern, was in all respects a most appropriate choice to lead the 17th in Alpine combat. Gelb, a German-Austrian, had been born nearly fifty-eight years before in the Isonzo valley, in Görz itself; like so many officers, he followed in the family profession, his father having been a *k.u.k.* lieutenant-colonel. His entire career, beginning at age seventeen, had been spent in the empire's Alpine provinces, including attendance at Innsbruck's *Kadettenschule*. Gelb was purely a line officer, never having attended the *Kriegsschule*, so his rise to divisional command was exceptional. Most of Gelb's service had been with the élite *Tiroler Kaiserjäger*, including command of their 4th Regiment. At the war's outbreak, Gelb was commander of Graz's *k.u.k.* 6th Infantry Division, recruited in Styria and Carinthia. He led the 6th through the costly campaigns in Galicia and the Carpathians. Although Gelb spoke neither Magyar nor Romanian, he compensated for this with his intimate knowledge of the Italian-Austrian frontier and the unique requirements of Alpine warfare.⁶⁸

The new commander addressed his division on May 24 with the news that Italy had entered the war, and that the 17th was being immediately dispatched to halt the

⁶⁶G. Veith, "Die Isonzoverteidigung," *Ergänzungsheft 3 zum Werke ÖULK* (Vienna, 1932), 5-6. *ÖULK*: II: Beilage 14, 21-5.

⁶⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1023, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.335/1, Anmeldeausweis, 19.5.15.

⁶⁸KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart.774, Karl Gelb, Edler von Siegesstern.

enemy: "Soldiers of the 17th Division! We are going to war against Italy! This state, which for years was our ally, which has made thorough use of all the advantages of our alliance, has attacked our rear in the most devious and cowardly manner."⁶⁹ At the end of May, the division, recently arrived in Carinthia, moved south of the Drau, locating its headquarters in Kötschach, with the headquarters of VII Corps. Rohr's corps-sized army group defending the Carinthian frontier badly needed reinforcement, once the Italians launched limited, secondary attacks there soon after the declaration of hostilities. However, to gain time to make further preparations, Cadorna had delayed his main thrust across the Isonzo, a crucial decision, for it granted Boroevic a month to assemble his diverse army.

The only other division in Carinthia, the *k.u.k.* 92nd, illustrated both the desperate condition of Habsburg forces in the Southwest and the extent to which the defence against the Italians was a people's war for several nations of the Dual Monarchy. The 92nd included *Marsch* and *Landsturm* battalions, rear echelon troops pressed into front line service, and volunteer battalions raised in the spring of 1915 to fight the Italians. The *Freiwillige Schützen* formations provided 25,600 men for Rohr's weak defences. Four volunteer regiments, some 10,000 men, came from Carinthia, supplemented by six Salzburg and four Upper Austrian battalions. The enthusiastic sixteen and seventeen year olds, too young to have been called up for military service, were filled with both patriotic and *deutschnational* fervour to repel the invader. Although poorly trained and equipped with a myriad of different rifles and few machine guns, the volunteers helped prevent an Italian invasion of Carinthia.⁷⁰

Throughout June and into early July the 17th Division was involved in sporadic combat with Italian units on the Carinthian mountain frontier. Italian attacks were usually regiment- or brigade-sized actions, not large scale offensives. Nonetheless, enemy assaults were supported by considerable artillery, and Habsburg forces absorbed steady losses in preventing Italian movement into Carinthia. Sometimes they drove them back with intense counterattacks. Because of the mountainous terrain, Gelb's division was forced to fight in small detachments, frequently no larger than a battalion, mixed among other VII Corps units. The division arrived with no experience, training, or equipment for Alpine warfare, but was expected to participate in battle immediately. The

⁶⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1023, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.340/1, 24.5.15. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁰KA, Gefechtsberichte, 48, k.u.k. IR.7, Ing. L. Poppmeier, 6.5.81., 1-2. W. Czermak, *In deinem Lager war Österreich: Die österreichisch-ungarische Armee, wie man sie nicht kennt* (Breslau, 1938), 65. I. Pust, *Die steinerte Front: Auf den Spuren des Gebirgskrieges in den Julischen Alpen vom Isonzo zur Piave* (Graz, 1980), 13.

17th temporarily absorbed the 59th Mountain Brigade to enhance its strength in mountain conditions.

The division's tactics in the Carinthian border battles were designed to inflict crippling losses on attacking enemy infantry and thereby to damage enemy morale. Italian foot units were permitted to close with Habsburg positions, only to be destroyed at very short ranges by the infantry's rifles and machine guns; larger concentrations of Italian infantry were annihilated by a combination of coordinated infantry and artillery fires. However, infantry-artillery cooperation remained imperfect, especially in counterattacks; more seriously, inadequate target acquisition, combined with the unusual topographic and climatic Alpine conditions, resulted in several incidents of self-inflicted barrages and stray shells falling on friendly units, a serious drain on morale. Combat leadership too was sometimes found wanting, as for example, when several of the division's battalion and regimental commanders were content to remain at their telegraph stations, well behind their own troops, monitoring their subunits' progress in combat. This was a practice strictly condemned by the divisional command. Personal leadership in battle, while difficult in disorganized high-altitude conditions, remained the rule.⁷¹

Nevertheless, Italian formations generally suffered much heavier losses, although on occasion heavy Italian bombardment did inflict crippling casualties on poorly entrenched battalions. In such cases, rapid reinforcements had to be sent up mountains to assist in defence, a task which fell repeatedly to units of the 17th Division in June and early July. Still, the division's losses in the early Italian battles did not compare with casualty rates on the Russian front. By early July, despite recent casualties, divisional strength had reached 18,245, with 11,902 in rifle units. The division's thirteen infantry battalions, although diverse (they included, on temporary assignment, a West Galician battalion, an East Galician *Jäger* battalion, a Carinthian *Marsch* battalion, and several *Freiwillige Schützen* companies, in addition to many of the usual Magyar and Romanian units), were nearly at full strength, with all companies having 200 men or more; they also had altogether thirty-five machine guns. Divisional artillery totalled forty-eight guns and howitzers, thirty-three of which were assigned directly to brigades, to increase tactical flexibility and responsiveness in Alpine terrain, where division-controlled batteries often could not be deployed close enough to forward units. The artillery included several *Minenwerfer*, which proved very useful and deadly on the Italian front, and two mobile quick-firing 47 mm guns loaned to the division by the navy; these were able to provide

⁷¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1015, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Abfertigung, 1.6.15.; Fasz.1025, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.376/13, 7.7.15.

direct-fire support to the infantry more rapidly than the 8 cm guns of conventional field batteries, which proved cumbersome on poor mountain roads.⁷²

During the first month of the war with Italy, while the Carinthian front was active with increasingly costly skirmishes, the vital Isonzo sector was dormant. However, on June 23, after four weeks of final mobilization and preparation, Cadorna launched his awaited offensive. Following an extended preparatory bombardment by nearly 700 guns, the 2nd and 3rd Italian Armies assaulted the Isonzo line, from Flitsch to the Adriatic. Fourteen Italian divisions, supported by four in reserve, failed to make notable gains against Borojević's 5th Army with its six divisions in the line. Both on the upper and the lower Isonzo, the latter dominated by the bridgehead at Görz and the strategically vital Doberdò plateau, badly outnumbered and outgunned Habsburg formations held their ground. When Cadorna's first offensive shut down on July 7, his 2nd and 3rd Armies had lost over 15,000 men, gaining virtually nothing in return. Borojević's units had suffered 10,000 casualties in stopping the Italians; contrary to all expectations, composite and mostly second-line Habsburg units had defended their positions.⁷³

Habsburg success in the First Battle of the Isonzo was attributable to several factors. Perhaps primary among these was Italian military incompetence. Highly offensively oriented, Italian tactics emphasized mass infantry wave attacks, poorly supported by artillery; indeed, Italian infantry-artillery cooperation seemed essentially nonexistent.⁷⁴ Cadorna's army was using 1914-style tactics, at best, while their opponents, veterans of a year of modern war, had already begun to adopt the techniques of the modern battlefield. Given the high troop density on the Southwestern front (the Habsburg Army deployed one rifle per two meters of front in the East, but three rifles per metre against the Italians)⁷⁵ Borojević's forces inflicted crippling losses on massed Italian infantry formations, really fearing only the Italians' massed artillery.

⁷²KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.941/21, 3.7.15.; Fasz.1015, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Abfertigung, 15.6.15.; Fasz.1041, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Kampfstand, 25.6.15.; Sammlung Balaban, Schachtel 10, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Frühberichte, 1.7.15.

⁷³M. Farkas, "Doberdo: The Habsburg Army on the Italian Front, 1915-16," in: B. Király, N. Dreisziger, A. Nofi, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol.XIX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985), 322.

⁷⁴J. Gooch, "Italy in the First World War," in: A. Millett and W. Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness* (3 Vols., Boston, 1988), *Vol.I: The First World War*, 171, 179.

⁷⁵Stone, *Eastern Front*, 93.

The Austro-Hungarian forces on the Isonzo also benefitted from the desire of many soldiers to fight to the bitter end. Many of the formations of Boroević's army were made up of South Slavs, whose hatred of the Italians was unparalleled, even among German-Austrians. The Italians justifiably considered South Slav units among the toughest they faced. Few Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had any illusions concerning Italy's plans for territorial aggrandizement at the expense of South Slav territory, and the outbreak of war was met with enthusiasm similar to that seen in Carinthia and other *deutschnational* areas of Austria: "For the South Slavs it was not just the Emperor's war, but also a people's war."⁷⁶ As a result, South Slav units generally performed exceptionally well on the Southwestern front, including Serbian formations which had proven unreliable on the Balkan and Russian fronts; even the most anti-Habsburg Serbs feared Italian intentions, and were willing to fight to prevent an Italian invasion of South Slav territory. Motivated by a desire to defend their homelands, "Croats, Slovenes and Serbs in the armies of Franz Joseph fought the Italians with unexampled resolution and passion."⁷⁷ South Slav morale was further enhanced by Boroević's command of the 5th Army, for he was not only an effective leader, popular with his troops, (who called him "Bosco," or affectionately "the Croatian thick-skin"); he was himself a South Slav, from a old Croatian *Grenzer* family.⁷⁸

The burden of defending the vital Görz bridgehead in the initial battles on the Isonzo belonged to the 58th Division, a mixed *k.u.k.*--*Landwehr* South Slav formation of Dalmatian Serbs and Croats; although Dalmatian units experienced morale and discipline problems in the Balkans and in the East, they fought most heroically on the Isonzo, not least because Dalmatia was claimed by Italian irridentists. During the First Battle of the Isonzo, the 58th Division suffered severe losses holding off repeated assaults by four Italian divisions well supported by heavy artillery, without yielding a metre of ground.⁷⁹

Troops and units of all nationalities performed well on the Isonzo.⁸⁰ The composite 57th Division, which successfully defended the Doberdò plateau against

⁷⁶F. Weber, *Isonzo 1915* (Klagenfurt, 1933), 70.

⁷⁷A. May, *The Passing of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1914-1918* (Philadelphia, 1966), 200.

⁷⁸Veith, "Isonzoverteidigung," 3. R. Spence, "The Yugoslav Role in the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1914-1918," *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol.XLX* (New York, 1985), 361.

⁷⁹KA, Sammlung Balaban, Schachtel 15, k.u.k. 58.ITD Kmdo, Op.Nr. 217/7, 15.5.15. R. Kiszling, *Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalweg eines Südslawenvolkes* (Graz, 1956), 101.

⁸⁰The army's Italian soldiers--a very small percentage of *k.u.k.* strength in any case--fought against their conationals, although the High Command did remove some Italian troops to the East as a preventative measure.

numerous Italian assaults, was perhaps the most ethnically diverse division in the army, including battalions from South, West, and Central Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, the Banat, North Bohemia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and two from Moravia. Thus the polyglot division included substantial contingents of Magyars, Germans, Czechs, Croats, Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, Romanians, and Slovaks.⁸¹ Even units which had failed ignominiously on other fronts often performed efficiently and gallantly against the Italians. The 10th *Marsch* Battalion of the *k.u.k.* 28th Regiment, whose parent unit had been disbanded because of the Dukla Pass incident, fought effectively with Borojevic's 93rd Division on the Doberdò plateau in July. Indeed, the battalion was praised for its "steadfastness," "good spirit," and general soldierly honor, "withstanding the severest test of discipline," and proving tenacious in defence and aggressive in the attack. Its continued performance on the Isonzo, both defensively and offensively, was so consistently good that in late December, on the orders of Franz Joseph, the 10th *Marsch* Battalion, a provisional unit, was established as a permanent field battalion.⁸² The experience of the army in 1915 indicated the variable reliability of units, based upon numerous factors such as leadership, morale, training, inner motivation, and the perceived justice of the cause, all within the framework of the Dual Monarchy's national, political and social tensions.

On July 6, as Cadorna's abortive first effort came to an end, the 17th Division, along with the entire VII Corps, received orders to move to the lower Isonzo to meet the next Italian thrust, which was sure to come. The division disengaged itself from the Carinthian sector, moving by echelons to the southeast: first, divisional headquarters and the 33rd Brigade, followed by the 43rd Brigade, and lastly divisional heavy artillery and replacement troops. Upon arrival in the area of the Doberdò plateau on July 16, the division was left in temporary reserve at Kostanjevica, seven kilometers behind the front, while the 20th *Honvéd* Division headed into the line.⁸³ The 17th was stronger in men and materiel than it yet had been at any point in the war. The 43rd Regiment, the best

forming them into *Südwestbatallione* (invariably known colloquially as "*Italienerbatallione*"). Even the élite *Kaiserjäger* regiments reduced the numbers of Tyrolean Italians in their ranks, raising all-Italian companies to fight in Galicia. L. Sondhaus, *In the Service of the Emperor: Italians in the Austrian Armed Forces 1814-1918* (New York, 1990), 105-15.

⁸¹KA, Sammlung Balaban, Schachtel 15, k.u.k. 57.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.1271, 11.5.15.

⁸²KA, Nachlass Robert Nowak, I/I, 484-9.

⁸³KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k Kmdo. der SW. Front, Op.Nr.6100/1, 7.7.15.; k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.380/6, 9.7.15.; Op.Nr.381/7, 10.7.15.; k.u.k. 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.955/24, 16.7.15.

prepared, had a ration strength of ninety-nine officers and 4,527 men in four battalions, supported by three machine gun detachments, a detachment of *Minerwerfer*, and three detachments of flare dispensers, vital in night combat.⁸⁴ However, nothing could have prepared the division for the intensity of the ordeal it was about to endure.

Cadorna gave his battered armies almost two weeks to rest and refit. On July 18 he started the Second Battle of the Isonzo, even greater than the first, with eighteen divisions and 900 guns, pitted against Boroević's nine divisions and 431 guns.⁸⁵ The main Italian effort was aimed at the Doberdò plateau, which dominated the lower Isonzo; the town of Doberdò lies on the plateau, six kilometres southeast of the river. The enemy first had to cross the Isonzo, a fast moving Alpine river noted for its bluish-green hue and steep gorges. Monte San Michele, a 274 metre-high peak on the northern edge of the plateau, looks down on Görz, dominating the whole valley. The entire Italian 3rd Army, three corps and nine divisions strong, attacked the Doberdò plateau and its defenders, VII Corps. The tremendous Italian bombardment commenced at 4 am on July 18, its shells falling on the 20th *Honved* and 61st Divisions holding the line. Consequently 17th Division battalions were dispatched immediately to forward positions to assist in the defence against the inevitable enemy mass attacks.

Gelb's battalions entered an unending, drum-like Italian barrage on the Doberdò plateau, "the little Verdun," far heavier and more intense than any the division had previously encountered: "The gigantic, hardpounding hammering of thousands of shells, which no words on God's earth can express."⁸⁶ Soldiers and units could survive only by improving positions and digging in deep. This had been evident during the first Italian offensive, and in recent weeks Habsburg sappers and pioneers had worked endlessly to build static defenses which could withstand heavy bombardment. As VII Corps command observed, "Modern war, and especially the defence, which for the moment is forced on our troops by high-level orders, demands the intensive building of entrenchments."⁸⁷ The ideal countermeasure to Italian artillery was the *kaverne*, a three to four metre-deep position blasted into rock, which proved invulnerable to direct hits from even the heaviest of shells, none of which could penetrate more than one-and-a-half metres of karst. Considerable quantities of materials and man-hours were required to construct *kavernen*, including prolonged work by hard pressed engineering detachments,

⁸⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k IR.43, Anmeldungsausweis, 11.7.15.

⁸⁵ÖULK: II: 746.

⁸⁶61 in *Waffen*, 174.; KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k.17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.387/1, 19.7.15.

⁸⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1026, k.u.k. 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.976/10, 6.8.15.

in addition to intensive labour by the infantry, who actually did much of the manual digging and preparation. Despite heroic building efforts, however, by late July there were insufficient *kavernen* even for troops in forward positions; VII Corps possessed too few engineers to direct the necessary construction, and the infantry had too many other tasks to devote enough time to working with sappers and pioneers.⁸⁸

Therefore most Habsburg front line positions on the Doberdò plateau essentially resembled typical entrenchment networks found on other fronts during the First World War. Trenches and weapon emplacements were hacked into stone, reinforced by large numbers of sandbags, occasionally protected by steel shields, and surrounded by barbed wire and *spanische Reiter*⁸⁹ In addition to command emplacements and communication and supply trenches, the network included one metre-deep trenches and foxholes immediately behind the front for infantry reserves, which provided badly needed reinforcements at decisive moments in enemy assaults. The construction of forward trenches was entirely the responsibility of the infantry, although the division supplied the necessary materials, and sappers were available to assist in the design of entrenchments. Thus infantry units out of the line were invariably involved with construction, which proved as exhausting--if not as dangerous--as occupying forward positions in face of the enemy. The battle to improve positions was as incessant as the actual combat at Doberdò, with all available soldiers being employed in construction tasks; every soldier returning to forward trenches carried, in addition to his considerable kit, two sandbags.⁹⁰

Sappers and pioneers were equally invaluable for other important tasks. Among these was the impressive civil engineering required to keep troops of VII Corps supplied with water. There was little fresh water available on the Doberdò plateau; soldiers went to great lengths to collect rainwater, but virtually all the water required by front line troops had to be piped up to them. The plateau was also devoid of trees, so the provision of the considerable quantity of wood required for the construction of sturdy positions, not to mention for cooking and heating, represented a further large engineering task. Additionally, the rough terrain and lack of decent roads made resupply difficult; and, in

⁸⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k. 7.Korps Kmdo., TNr.2297, 29.7.15.

⁸⁹Named after Vienna's famed Hofburg riding school, these were high wooden supports for masses of concertina wire, intended to block the advance of enemy infantry.

⁹⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k. 7.Korps Kmdo., TNr.2080, 24.7.15.; k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.386/2, 17.7.15.; Fasz.1026, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.399/14, 2.8.15.

the opposite direction, casualty evacuation was a prolonged, complicated process frequently involving airborne stretchers, propelled by ropes and pulleys.⁹¹

Despite these difficulties, including the Italians' overwhelming numerical and firepower superiority, the 17th Division held its ground during the Second Battle of the Isonzo. Soon after the Italian offensive began, the division assumed its place in the line, in the middle of the Doberdò plateau's front, between the 20th *Honvéd* and 61st Divisions. After two days of enemy shelling and repeated infantry assaults, VII Corps had lost two vital positions to the reinforced Italian XI Corps: Hill 143 at the western edge of the plateau, and even more significantly, Monte St. Michele. The task of VII Corps was first to prevent any further loss of ground on the plateau--"to the last man," if necessary--and then to recapture both positions, and especially Monte St. Michele. This it proceeded to do by August 7, when Cadorna called off his second failed offensive.

The soldiers of VII Corps were able to prevent greater Italian successes, and to recapture their lost territory, mostly because of the Italians' lack of tactical expertise. In the offensive's first two days, Habsburg forward defences had been simply blown apart and overwhelmed, although not before inflicting heavy losses on the advancing enemy. Italian infantry tactics in 1915 were exceptionally crude, reminiscent of the worst methods of the summer of 1914, and lacked any discernible appreciation for effective fire support, unit dispersal, or artillery-infantry coordination. Forward positions of the 17th Division were usually confronted by successive waves of enemy infantry, "nearly disorganized crowds," yelling "*Avanti.*" These were led at the front by conspicuous officers, and accompanied by standard bearers armed only with large flags. Italian artillery, frequently inaccurate, gave little or no fire support during the all-important last phase of the attack; indeed, Habsburg officers noted that Italian artillery often inflicted greater casualties on their own men than on Austro-Hungarian forces. Given such disorder, and of course determined Habsburg resistance, most enemy assaults were easily broken up by the 17th Division's machine guns, artillery, and rifles; few Italian soldiers ever got close enough to use cold steel. Even initially successful Italian infantry attacks as a rule were thrown off balance and broken up by well timed Habsburg counterattacks by coordinated infantry and artillery. As a report from Gelb's headquarters, written during the battle, noted, "Only the enemy's artillery is effective; our troops have nothing to fear from the enemy's infantry." Given sufficient ammunition and nourishment, Habsburg forward positions could hold out almost indefinitely against Italian infantry. A

⁹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1026, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.409/5, 12.8.15.; Fasz.1025, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.393.9, 28.7.15.; Op.Nr.387/1, 19.7.15.

well entrenched company of the division's 61st Regiment on Hill 143 managed to repel and destroy repeated enemy wave attacks; its hundred surviving riflemen eventually surrendered only because they had exhausted their supply of ammunition, were surrounded, and thus could not be resupplied.⁹²

Italian artillery was another matter entirely. Soldiers of the 17th Division quickly grew to respect and fear the enemy's guns. Although its fire was primitively executed and often inaccurate, the Italian artillery had many more guns and much more ammunition than *k.u.k.* 5th Army batteries. The division tried to keep reserve units as far behind the front as was practical, to shield them from shelling; however, battalions moving into the line, or launching attacks or counterattacks, were particularly vulnerable to shellfire. On August 2, in one of the battle's final major engagements, the division's 2nd Battalion of the 96th Regiment was struck by heavy enemy fire while marching into the line. Pinned down by Italian artillery and machine guns, in a matter of minutes the battalion lost over three-quarters of its soldiers. Only 105 riflemen escaped the slaughter, and they were incapable of immediate fighting; the commander of the once-efficient Croatian battalion noted that the surviving soldiers' morale was "completely ruined."⁹³

Massed preplanned enemy artillery fires made up in weight of shell for what they lacked in accuracy and responsiveness. The defending Habsburg artillery, although doctrinally more advanced, experienced great difficulties in responding to changing tactical situations. Communications lay at the centre of the problem. The difficult terrain made coordination between forward observers and their batteries problematical, even with the widespread use of signal flags, flares, and field telephones. In addition, 17th Division artillery, like other 5th Army units, suffered from periodic shell shortages and a lack of spare parts for broken or battle damaged guns and howitzers. As a result, the infantry could not always rely on its supporting batteries to provide adequate fire support to break up attacks. Therefore the 17th Division's infantry depended increasingly on its intrinsic indirect firepower, *Minenwerfer* fire, which although short-ranged and inaccurate compared to tubed artillery, was available immediately. Even when a regiment's rifle companies absorbed crippling losses, great care was taken to preserve and maintain the

⁹²KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k. 5.Op.Armeekmdo., Res.Nr.989, 22.7.15.; k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.391/15, 25.7.15.; Fasz.1026, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.399/16, 2.8.15. *61 in Waffen*, 176.

⁹³KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k. 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.965/55, 28.7.15.; Fasz.1026, Telegramm, k.u.k. II Baon /IR.96., an das k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., 2.8.15.

limited number of crew-served weapons--light mortars and machine guns--which formed the basis of the regiment's combat power, especially in the defence.⁹⁴

Clearly the best service the 17th Division's artillery could have rendered the infantry would have been effective counterbattery fire to suppress Italian guns, the Habsburg foot soldier's real enemy on the Doberdò plateau. Yet divisional and corps batteries lacked the reconnaissance and weight of shell necessary to silence the enemy's guns. Accurate target acquisition proved exceptionally difficult, as most enemy batteries were located high on reverse slopes. The only reliable method of spotting them was aerial surveillance, which was quite effective, but the 5th Army lacked sufficient aircraft to perform adequate counterbattery reconnaissance. Moreover, the counterbattery mission required heavy guns, howitzers, and mortars, which were still in short supply in the Habsburg Army of 1915. During the Second Battle of the Isonzo, the 17th Division had only two M 14 15 cm howitzers, which by virtue of their range, hitting power, and mobility were the ideal division-level counterbattery weapon; VII Corps had but three of the deadly 30.5 cm siege mortars, and their ammunition supply was irregular. Numerous attempts were made to increase Habsburg firepower during the battle. The division's 21st Field Gun Regiment included a "China battery," made up of guns originally intended for export; and VII Corps received two long-range 13 cm German siege guns, which proved very accurate (although their ammunition supply, too, was often inadequate).⁹⁵ Despite these efforts, however, the 17th Division and the other units of VII Corps remained badly outgunned in the face of Italian superiority.

All the same, the 17th Division and VII Corps emerged victorious from the Second Battle of the Isonzo. Tenacity in defence and determination in numerous counteroffensives defeated Cadorna's comparatively well equipped but poorly trained armies. The all-important Doberdò plateau remained in Austro-Hungarian hands. The cost had been high, though, as in all attritional battles. The *k.u.k.* 5th Army lost 46,640 soldiers between July 15 and August 15, more than half of them in VII Corps, including some 7,721 killed, 26,629 wounded, and an appalling total of 12,290 missing, most of whom were dead; approximately 6,400 more soldiers fell seriously ill. VII Corps was mostly responsible for the invalids, for it had brought not just men and materiel from the

⁹⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1026, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.409/5, 12.8.15.; Fasz.1025, k.u.k. 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.960/62, 23.7.15.; Fasz.1041, k.u.k. IR.46, Op.Nr.393/4, 28.7.15.

⁹⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1025, k.u.k. FKR.21, Op.Nr.476, 21.7.15.; k.u.k 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.960/62, 23.7.15.; Fasz.1037, k.u.k 7.Korps Kmdo., Op.Nr.971/26, 1.8.15.; Fasz.1041, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Kampfstand, 2.8.15.

Carpathians, but also cholera. The 17th Division lost 9,566 soldiers in the Second Battle of the Isonzo, two-thirds of them in the last two weeks of July.⁹⁶

Although the fighting for the Doberdò plateau was a relatively small engagement by the standards of the First World War, involving one Habsburg and three Italian corps on a front of less than ten kilometers, it was as savage as any in the entire war. Close, intense combat between courageous enemies produced heavy casualties for both sides: in just one exhausting attempt to retake Monte St. Michele, the 46th Regiment lost nearly a thousand men.⁹⁷ The 17th Division's strength dropped rapidly as it suffered such losses. Regiments of four strong battalions were quickly reduced to two weak ones; by early August the division's rifle strength had fallen to eight battalions and 4,560 men. Fortunately VII Corps brought substantial *Marsch* formations with it to the Isonzo, so depleted units received replacements very quickly. On August 5, the 61st Regiment lost 482 infantrymen (including 140 confirmed dead) in a bloody skirmish near Monte St. Michele, lowering overall strength to only 820 rifles; but owing to the rapid supply of fresh men, less than twenty-four hours later the 61st had 1,786 riflemen.⁹⁸

Like other Habsburg formations after a year of total war and unprecedented casualties, the 17th Division was rarely satisfied with the replacements it absorbed. By mid-1915, the army's manpower pool already had been considerably drained, so that *Marsch* units were filled with either very young or distinctly middle aged *Landsturm* recruits, few of whom were in adequate physical condition. Furthermore, the quality of the army's training of replacements had declined considerably; during the *Karpathenwinter* crisis, *Ersatz* units cut their training regimen to keep the field army alive, and many soldiers arrived at the front ignorant of basic military skills, including an alarming deficiency in rifle training. Many of the "fresh" replacements were in fact veterans, some of them quite battle weary. Perhaps more seriously, the army's grave lack of officers had yet to be effectively remedied. A company of the 12th *Marsch* Battalion of the 61st Regiment (which needed reinforcements badly, having lost 3,056 casualties--a loss rate of over 100 percent--in the last two weeks of July) arrived at Doberdò on August 2, well staffed with 251 soldiers. However, a majority of them, some 134 men, were returning to combat after convalescing from wounds or illness; of the remainder, 110

⁹⁶ÖUIK: II: 762. Weber, *Isonzo 1915*, 87. KA/NFA, Fasz.1041, k.u.k 17.ITD Kmdo., Telegramm.

"Verluste Jli II. Hälfte," "Verluste, 1.--14. August."

⁹⁷Weber, *Isonzo 1915*, 85-6.

⁹⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1041, Kampfstand, k.u.k. IR.61, 31.7--24.8.15.; Kampfstand, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., 2.8.15.

soldiers were recruited only in late April and early May, and were poorly trained for the rigors of combat. The company had only four officers, but three of them were officer cadets; only the commander was a lieutenant, of the reserve, not the regular army.⁹⁹

The nationality issue, although not a serious concern in the Isonzo battles, never disappeared. Nor could it be expected to do so, considering the army's diversity: the aforementioned company of the 12th *Marsch* Battalion of the 61st Regiment (the 17th Division's most polyglot regiment) included a hundred Romanians, ninety-seven Germans, thirty-three Serbs, and twenty-one Magyars. Morale among the division's soldiers was generally very good, regardless of nationality, despite the horrible losses. Incidents of desertion or self-inflicted wounds were rare, particularly when compared to the numbers for other fronts. But Romanian resentment of Magyar officers, virtually none of whom spoke their language, remained a concern. One of the 17th Division's few reports of nationalist tension during the Second Battle of the Isonzo involved such a situation, noting without reservation that "The spirit of the troops appears to be good, excepting the Romanian company of the 3rd *Jäger* Battalion, where the crucial fact is that none of the officers speak Romanian."¹⁰⁰ The Habsburg Army could do little to remedy such problems during the war when officer casualty rates remained so high, and few educated Magyars or Germans spoke Romanian anyway.

The successful defence of the Doberdò plateau, the crucial episode of the Second Battle of the Isonzo, was a particularly Hungarian--but by no means exclusively Magyar--triumph.¹⁰¹ The "Hungarian" Archduke Joseph's VII Corps blunted the Italian 3rd Army's numerous blows, repulsing the invader at a great cost, thereby nullifying Cadorna's strategy for defeating the Dual Monarchy. Such sacrifices led to much commotion in the Hungarian parliament (which remained in session during the war, unlike Austria's) and in the relatively uncensored Hungarian press. Reports about the disproportionate losses of Hungary and her "heroic Magyar race" became a wartime rallying cry of Budapest's nationalists, who therefore demanded further constitutional concessions from Vienna. In fact, in the first two war years heavily peasant Hungary did give 200,000 more soldiers to

⁹⁹KA/NFA, Fasz. 1026, Telegramm, 3.Komp./XII MaBaon, IR.61, an das k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo, 2.8.15.; Fasz. 1025, k.u.k. 17.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.397/8, 31.7.15.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹L. Szabó, *Doberdo, Isonzo, Tirol* (Budapest, 1980), 130-1.

the Habsburg Army than her proportion of population in the Dual Monarchy called for, though the troops were hardly all Magyars.¹⁰²

Despite his failure and the appalling casualties suffered by his soldiers, Cadorna initiated two more general offensives in 1915, sending his armies against Borojević's divisions on the Isonzo; the *k.u.k.* 5th Army prevailed again, and neither Italian effort was any more successful than the first two. By the end of the year, after only six months of combat, Cadorna's armies had lost 66,000 killed and 180,000 wounded in battle, the vast majority of them before Doberdò and Görz, for nothing in return.¹⁰³ The 17th Division resisted the Italians' Third and Fourth Offensives successfully, reprising its victorious role in the defence of Austria-Hungary's Southwestern frontier. For the Banat division, as for the Habsburg Army as a whole, 1915 proved a difficult year of terribly bloody campaigning, although considerably more successful and less costly than 1914.

At the beginning of 1915, the Dual Monarchy and its army seemed on the verge of total collapse, defeated by Serbia and reeling from Russian blows. Indeed, the badly understrength army barely survived the *Karpathenwinter*, losing perhaps three-quarters of a million soldiers in Conrad's failed offensives and their aftermath. However, the Gorlice breakthrough, exploitation, and strategic advance destroyed the Russians' Southwestern front. Although the Tsar's armies regained sufficient strength to resist more successfully in the late summer and autumn of 1915, by the end of the year Habsburg forces in the East--five armies totalling twenty corps of forty-four infantry and twelve cavalry divisions, representing the vast majority of the army's field formations--stood on a line from Czernowitz to the Pripiet marshes, often deep in Russian territory.¹⁰⁴ The Habsburg Army achieved this while under *de facto* German command; in the East, after the *Karpathenwinter*, Conrad's armies were increasingly strategically and operationally subordinate to their German ally. Yet it cannot be denied that the Austro-Hungarian forces confronting the Russians achieved numerous tactical and operational successes and overcame the specter of defeat which had plagued the army in the Carpathians.

The last months of 1915 gave the Habsburg military a further triumph. Despite the humiliation suffered at the hands of Serbia in 1914, Conrad had little desire to avenge the

¹⁰²*Österreich Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-8), *Band VII: Das Kriegsjahr 1918* (1938), 37. Unfortunately Archduke Joseph, a convert to Magyar nationalism, expounded this view, especially in his postwar memoirs.

¹⁰³Rochat and Massobrio, *Breve storia*, 184.

¹⁰⁴*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38), *Band III: Das Kriegsjahr 1915/II*, (1932), 15-48, 526-7.

Habsburg defeat; he was perhaps understandably more concerned with the Russian threat. Actually, it was Falkenhayn who wanted to destroy Serbia, not to restore the honour of the House of Habsburg, but rather to open supply lines to the Central Powers' ailing Ottoman ally. Once Bulgarian assistance was promised, the reluctant Conrad was persuaded to participate in the invasion. Overall command was in the hands of Mackensen (although AOK retained titular control over Habsburg units, all significant decisions were actually made by the Germans, or at least in close collaboration with them), whose order of battle included the *k.u.k.* 3rd Army, as well as a German and two Bulgarian armies. The offensive commenced on October 5, and the Serbian Army, weakened by the previous year's campaigning and months of equally costly epidemics, was overwhelmed in just six weeks, its last remnants retreating across the *Kosovopolje*¹⁰⁵ to the Adriatic to be rescued by Entente ships. For Vienna, the brief and entirely successful campaign avenged Potiorek's defeat and provided a badly needed boost to civilian and military morale. All the same, although Habsburg divisions performed well against Serbia in 1915, the operation was from the outset clearly a German production, illustrating the extent to which the Dual Monarchy had come to depend upon Berlin for its very survival.¹⁰⁶

By contrast, the war with Italy remained Austria-Hungary's own. The Germans had no interest in becoming involved on the Southwestern front, and had no reserves to spare in any event. The defensive victories on the Isonzo belonged exclusively to the Habsburg Army. Halting Cadorna's offensives, although costly, gave the monarchy and the army renewed vigor and inspiration to fight on. By the end of 1915, the Habsburg Army could look back on the war's first seventeen months with some sense of accomplishment. After many initial setbacks, Serbia had been crushed and Russia thwarted and severely mauled, while Italian attempts to invade the monarchy had proved a dismal failure.

Yet, the Austro-Hungarian Army and the polyglot society it served would need as much motivation as they could find to continue the struggle, which was very far from finished, for the cost of total war was extortionate. The Habsburg Army lost 2,118,000 soldiers in 1915, including 242,000 killed in action, 646,500 wounded, 497,000 taken prisoner, and an appalling total of 732,500 seriously ill. The average daily loss rate was

¹⁰⁵The battlefield in southwestern Serbia where a Turkish army routed the Serbs under Prince Lazar in 1389, leading to five centuries of Ottoman occupation.

¹⁰⁶G. Silberstein, "The High Command and Diplomacy in Austria-Hungary, 1914-1916," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol.42, No.4, December 1970, 591. Rothenberg, *Army*, 190-2.

5,803 men, the greatest percentage of whom had fallen victim to the weather and disease, not the enemy. Although considerably lower than the totals for the five months of campaigning in 1914, the losses were cumulatively terrible. By the end of 1915, the war had cost the Habsburg Army some 3,368,000 soldiers lost to death, wounds, illness and capture, a figure equivalent to more than seven times the army's prewar strength.¹⁰⁷ To replace these catastrophic losses, the army mobilized 3,498,000 men into the *Landsturm* in 1915, dispatching thirteen *Marschbatallione* per infantry regiment to the front during the year; the age of obligation for service was lowered to eighteen and increased to fifty to produce sufficient numbers of conscripts. Thus at the end of the year the field army included 2,700,000 combatants, fully a million more than twelve months earlier.¹⁰⁸

The army's replacement system functioned as well as could be expected of such a rambling bureaucracy. Indeed, by the end of 1915 the Habsburg Army had expanded considerably, having raised six new corps and nineteen new infantry divisions for the war, in addition to keeping existing units up to strength. But the essential difficulty was that so many of the Dual Monarchy's best men were already dead, invalidated, or in Russian captivity. Even the impressive numbers of replacements included 1,070,000 officers and men returning to the front after convalescence, one-third the total figure. Many of these losses could not be made good, and the army would be plagued by a shortage of well trained junior officers and men until the very end of the war.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps most significantly, the Habsburg Army did not collapse from within during 1915. The generals' fears of massive Slav disloyalty failed to materialize, although there were serious and increasing problems with Czech, Ruthene, and Serbian units on the Russian front. Even during the most desperate days in the Carpathians, the fate of the army was not determined by ethnic or national factors; rather, ultimate success or failure depended on effective leadership, which was frequently inadequate or altogether lacking. The case of the 17th Division in the Carpathians and on the Isonzo in 1915 illustrated the changing nature of troop loyalty and performance, depending upon numerous internal and external factors, including leadership, logistics, the perceived justice of the cause, and the ethnicity of the enemy. The divisions of Austria-Hungary's war-raised "second army" were compensating in the field for the inadequacies of the

¹⁰⁷ÖUIK: VII: 46. *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38), *Band IV: Das Kriegsjahr 1916/I* (1933), 87-9.; ÖUIK: IV: Beilage 4, Tabelle 2. I. Deák, "The Habsburg Army in the First and Last Days of World War I: A Comparative Analysis," *War and Society: Vol. XLX*, 305.

¹⁰⁸Franek, "Enwicklung," *Ergänzungsheft 1*, 9-10. ÖUIK: IV: 87.

¹⁰⁹Franek, "Probleme der Organization," *Ergänzungsheft 5*, 29-30. ÖUIK: IV: 89.

prewar army, learning to survive on the modern battlefield, and sometimes to prevail, guided by evolving tactics and often high combat motivation. Despite all the difficulties, inadequacies and follies of the Habsburg Army's structure, the overwhelming majority of Austria-Hungary's soldiers continued to do their duty.

Chapter IV: Steamrolled in Galicia: The 12th Infantry Division, 1916

In the first half of 1916 the Habsburg Army, particularly the forces engaged on the Russian front, recovered substantially from the enormous casualties and traumas of the previous year. The unprecedented advances resulting from the Gorlice breakthrough inflicted crippling losses on the Russian Southwestern Front, rendering it incapable of effective resistance for much of 1915. Thus by the beginning of the new year the Central Powers held a line deep in Tsarist territory, stretching from near Riga on the Baltic to the Romanian border just east of Czernowitz. The six Habsburg armies of the Austro-Hungarian *Ostfront* stood almost everywhere in enemy territory, extending from the Pripet marshes to the prewar eastern frontier in the Bukovina. Habsburg and German forces now occupied all of Congress Poland, and only a small strip of far eastern Galicia, centered around Tarnopol, remained in Russian hands.

A major Russian offensive against Habsburg forces on the Strypa river in East Galicia in the last week of 1915, which continued for more than two weeks into the new year, failed to achieve any notable operational or strategic objectives. Although the Tsarist armies were well supported by a considerable number of guns and ammunition, the defences of *Generaloberst* von Pflanzer-Baltin's *k.u.k.* 7th Army held, losing 30,000 men to over 70,000 Russian casualties. As was so frequently the case during the First World War, Russian units failed to exploit even limited tactical gains, and forward detachments were usually annihilated by well entrenched Habsburg machine guns and pre-registered artillery. The Austro-Hungarian forces in the East, relying on strong, well defended forward positions supported by nearby tactical reserves, had blunted the once-formidable Russian Southwestern Front, thereby winning an impressive military as well as psychological victory.¹

An even greater Russian offensive in late March 1916 proved yet more disastrous for the Tsarist Army. The Russian 2nd Army, consisting of 350,000 men and nearly a thousand guns (the Russians here enjoyed, in terms of weight of shell, a much greater superiority than the Central Powers had at Gorlice in May 1915), attacked fewer than five German divisions, some 75,000 men with 300 guns, at Lake Narotch east of Vilna. However, as armies on other fronts also discovered, the application of huge amounts of high explosive did not guarantee success, especially against a tactically clever enemy;

¹*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38), IV: *Das Kriegsjahr 1916/1* (1933), 8-30.; N. Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (London, 1975), 232-6.

indeed, mere weight of shell, instead of destroying specific targets, often produced general destruction, including to vital roads and bridges needed by advancing troops. Thus the Russian effort at Lake Narotch was a catastrophic failure, despite the generous and unprecedented (at least on the Eastern front) expenditure of ammunition. In the winter snows and frozen marshes of the surrounding lakes, the Russians lost 100,000 soldiers (including 12,000 dead of exposure) in exchange for only 20,000 German casualties, thereby achieving nothing of significance. The blow to the Russian Army's confidence was considerable.²

The Habsburg Army in the East therefore enjoyed a refreshingly quiet period in the first months of 1916, particularly after the Russians' failed Strypa offensive. Naturally, the relative inactivity of the *Ostfront* was eclipsed by the deeds of Borojević's 5th Army in March, when he successfully repelled continued Italian assaults against Doberdò and Görz in the Fifth Battle of the Isonzo. The Austro-Hungarian Army lost only 368,000 soldiers in the first four months of 1916, including only 206,455 on the Northeastern front (versus 132,101 on the Southwestern front). Remarkably enough, eighty percent of the army's overall losses were due to illness, a total of 292,100 men; only 15,150 Habsburg soldiers actually died in battle from January to the end of April, an unprecedentedly small number, representing only four percent of total casualties (compared to fifteen and eleven percent in 1914 and 1915, respectively).³

Typical in most ways of the Habsburg Army in the East was the *k.u.k.* 12th Infantry Division, a formation serving on the Russian front in mid 1916, as it had for the entire war. In the first week of June the division was defending the southeastern border of its native Galicia, from well established positions it had held for several months. The 12th, along with the 39th *Honvéd* Division, formed von Arz's VI Corps, which was defending the northern flank of *Generaloberst* von Pflanzer-Baltin's 7th Army, the southernmost army of the Austro-Hungarian *Ostfront*.

The 12th Division, headquartered before the war in Cracow as part of the West Galician I Corps, was a heavily Polish formation, including townsmen from Cracow and its environs, peasants from surrounding areas and the foothills of the Carpathians, and factory workers from the Teschen region. In mid-1916, it contained two brigades (*Generalmajor* von Metz's 23rd and Colonel Schubert's 24th) and five *k.u.k.* infantry regiments; despite the many chaotic campaigns the division had fought--the opening maneuver battles in Galicia, the *Karpathenwinter*, the Gorlice breakthrough, and the

²Stone, *Eastern Front*, 227-31.; *ÖUIK: IV*: 239-40.

³*ÖUIK: IV*: Beilage 4, Tabelle 1,2.

defence of the Strypa--these were the same five regiments it had mobilized with in 1914. The rank and file of three regiments, the 20th (Neusandez), the 56th (Wadowice), and the 57th (Tarnów), were essentially entirely Polish in composition. The Silesian 100th (Teschen) was ethnically mixed, being roughly one third each German, Czech, and Polish, like the polyglot industrial region which was its home. The North Moravian 3rd Regiment (Kremsier), actually belonging to the II Corps District (Vienna), was named after the Archduke Charles, victor at Aspern; like its homeland, the regiment was made up of more than three-quarters Czech soldiers. Divisional support and service units, including the 12th Field Artillery Brigade, elements of the 1st (Cracow) Sapper Battalion, and supply and medical detachments, were also largely Polish in composition, although with strong minorities of German and Czech soldiers.

In early June 1916, the 12th Division was in the best fighting trim it had enjoyed since mobilization, like most formations in the East at the time. Several months of minimal military activity since the winter had offered the division an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild its numerical and material strength. Thus its five infantry regiments totalled over seventeen battalions, some 16,300 riflemen; even these impressive numbers were about to be reinforced by the 20th *Marschbatallion*, scheduled to arrive at the front in less than a week. Divisional artillery was very strong, including six field gun batteries, four howitzer batteries, and three heavy batteries, altogether sixty-nine field pieces, and a dozen heavy *Minerwerfer*.⁴

The 12th Division's commander in June 1916 was an experienced officer, *Feldmarschalleutnant* Alfred, *Edler* von Hinke. Like so many professional officers, Hinke was a *Tornisterkind*, his father having been a colonel in the Emperor's service. Hinke's career had begun in cadet schools, followed by study at the Technical Military Academy. Here he learned the gunner's craft, excellent preparation for the artillery-dominated war in which he would fight decades later. In the Habsburg Army, the field artillery was clearly inferior socially (as well as from a career point of view) to the infantry and the cavalry, so Hinke's attainment of general officer rank before the age of fifty, in 1913, represented quite an achievement. On his way up, Hinke spent most of his career with artillery units, naturally, but also served with the General Staff in the 1890's and commanded infantry subunits as well. The majority of Hinke's time with field formations had been with German-Austrian regiments, but he also served for a period with the Moravian 3rd Infantry Regiment. Nonetheless, Hinke spoke only Italian fluently (in addition to German, of course), and could get by in Serbo-Croat; he had never learned

⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.602/15, 3.6.16.; *ÖUIK: IV: Beilage 2, 29.*

any Polish. Hinke was, however, a competent, battle-trying field commander, particularly against the Russians, having led the Slovene-German 55th Infantry Brigade in the Galician battles of 1914.⁵

Hinke's division was similarly reliable and battle-hardened. The Dual Monarchy's Poles had fought consistently well against the Russians; unlike their Czech and Ruthene neighbours, the Poles had no stains on their war record dating from the *Karpathenwinter*. Only the Poles among Franz Joseph's Slav subjects actually derived satisfaction from fighting Tsardom. Austria's Poles displayed neither the naive Russo- and Slavophilia of the Czechs, Serbs and Ruthenes nor even the ambivalence of the otherwise *kaisertreu* Croats and Slovaks in the fight against Russia. Indeed, the monarchy's Poles had shown unrivalled enthusiasm for the war against Russia. Józef Piłsudski, the Austro-Polish Socialist leader, even succeeded in raising an impressive volunteer Polish Legion of three infantry brigades--six full regiments--supported by its own cavalry and artillery, which fought well under Habsburg operational control.⁶

The Austro-Hungarian Army as a whole took advantage of the half-year lull in fighting to rebuild its strength, both numerically and materially. At the beginning of 1916, despite the enormous losses of the previous year, the army's field forces totalled 2,800,000 soldiers, with slightly more than half, some 1,442,000, on the Northeastern front. There were also 1,358,000 troops on the home front, absorbed in rear area tasks, including static defences as well as numerous headquarters, depot, and training establishments. Finally, there were 378,000 soldiers convalescing from wounds and disease.⁷ However, in 1916 the army confronted significant challenges in keeping its impressively large field armies up to strength. For a start, there was an incessant battle for manpower, in which the army competed for increasingly scarce human resources with the all-important industrial and agricultural sectors of the Dual Monarchy's wartime

⁵KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart. 1072, Alfred, Edler von Hinke. There were several senior Polish officers in the division, including *Generalmajor* Tadeusz Rozwadowski, commander of the 12th Field Artillery Brigade, and Colonel Franz Latinik, commander of the 100th Infantry Regiment. M. Klimecki, *Gorlice 1915* (Warsaw, 1991), 80. Rozwadowski, former Inspector of *k.u.k.* Sappers, rose to higher rank in Piłsudski's renascent Polish Army, becoming Chief of the General Staff during the victorious 1920 defence of Warsaw against the Red Army.

⁶A recent detailed account: M. Klimecki and W. Klimczak, *Legiony polskie* (Warsaw, 1990).; otherwise: L. Ratajczyk, "The Evolution of the Polish Army, 1914-1922," and L. Dudek, "Polish Military Formations in World War I," *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XLIX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985).

⁷ÖUİK: IV: Beilage 4, Tabelle 3,4.

economy. Despite the army's overall control of the entire war effort, including its ostensibly civilian aspects, it had difficulties finding acceptable compromises on manpower issues.⁸ Increasing "comb-outs" of industry supplied the army with 300,000 additional soldiers, but eventually 110,000 of them had to be returned to civilian labour to prevent unacceptable disruption of the war economy. Therefore the army in early 1916 began to dispatch eighteen year olds, previously only eligible for rear area duty, to active service; *AOK* started to consider the conscription of seventeen year olds into the *Landsturm*. Regardless of numerous complications, the army's replacement system had become considerably more rational and better structured than in the first months of war. The army managed to dispatch five *Marschbatallione* per regiment (the 18th through 22nd of the war) to the field forces in the first five months of 1916, as scheduled, thus keeping field units at or above full authorized strength⁹

However, the enormous bureaucratic chore of conscripting and training replacements, encompassing several hundred thousand soldiers at any given point, was still subject to considerable defects and weaknesses, particularly by 1916, when so many of the monarchy's best soldiers had been lost long before on countless battlefields. Teenagers and middle aged men continued to form the main element of the Habsburg Army's fighting units, supplemented by increasing numbers of physically unfit soldiers, returned to the front out of necessity: in March 1916 the 311th *Honvéd* Regiment, engaged on the Russian front, formed a special "intestinal ailment" battalion, much like the *Wehrmacht's* numerous "white bread" units of 1944-45.¹⁰

By mid-1916 *AOK* had become concerned about the state of tactical training in *Ersatz* units. Conrad, for example, feared that "by the book" tactical knowledge was being badly neglected, and recruits were thus rarely prepared for the rigors of combat. This valid concern could not be entirely explained by the brief training period to which recruits were exposed, for there was now less urgent pressure to produce men for the front than there had been at any point in the war. The decentralized nature of most combat training, although positive for unit cohesion and morale, meant that the quality of regimental instruction varied widely. The root of the problem was that few regiments

⁸Hence the arrogant but rather accurate claim of *Freiherr* Bolfras, Franz Joseph's Adjutant-General, in the early spring of 1916 that "The chief command of the army is now the exclusive government in our country." O. Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, 1929), 15.

⁹*ÖUIK: IV: 88-9.*: F. Franek, "Die Entwicklung der öst.-ung. Wehrmacht in den ersten zwei Kriegsjahre," *Ergänzungsheft 5 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1933), 9-10.

¹⁰Franek, "Entwicklung," *Ergänzungsheft 5*, 24.

were willing to surrender good officers and sergeants to their training cadres, as competent and experienced leaders were so scarce at the front. Instead, *Ersatz* battalions were sometimes led by old, tired officers, or more often by young, inexperienced men with scarcely more knowledge of soldiering than their recruits. This occurred despite warnings to regiments from higher commands that staffing their training units with competent instructors obviously served the units' own best interests. Inadequate, unrealistic training was the inevitable result. Additionally, by the middle of 1916, *Ersatz* units began to suffer serious difficulties in providing sufficient numbers of officers in important specialties, such as field and combat engineering, so vital in positional warfare.¹¹

All the same, the Habsburg Army in the first half of 1916 remained a competent fighting machine, superior, indeed, in many ways to the force which survived the costly struggles of 1915. Its strengths and weaknesses were accurately assessed by General Hans von Seeckt, chief of staff of the Imperial German *Südarmee* and therefore an experienced observer--and frequent critic, like so many of his countrymen--of the Habsburg Army. He considered Austro-Hungarian soldiers to be "excellent," as they were mostly peasants, "physically strong and humble, as well as accustomed to work and subordination." However, Seeckt was harsh in his judgment of much of the army's training, "which is poorly organised and frequently fails," and which "does not meet the standards of the war." He was no less critical of the officer corps, which he also considered irregularly trained; Seeckt noted that the majority of the Habsburg Army's war-commissioned officers "are not suitable for a military career." He considered the army's leadership at all levels to be occasionally "clumsy" and "too schematic," frequently incapable of efficient and independent thinking and action. While Seeckt considered the Habsburg Army's weapons and equipment to be generally first-rate, he was sharply critical of the army's administration, which he held to be inferior and riddled with *Schlamperei*. The result, he noted, was sometimes poorly maintained equipment, or often depleted units with soldiers inadequately supplied with the necessities of war. Seeckt was obviously comparing the Habsburg Army unfavourably with his own exceptionally tactically astute and administratively efficient army, a test which all other armies of the First World War would have failed in some respects. Still, his criticisms were quite

¹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. AOK, Op.Nr.27.760, 18.7.16.; Fasz.734, k.u.k. 6.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.518/14, 18.5.16.; Res.Nr.537, 22.5.16.

valid, and similar judgments were pronounced by many Austro-Hungarian generals, although rarely so comprehensively and forthrightly.¹²

In one area the Habsburg Army of the first half of 1916 represented a dramatic improvement over the army of 1915. The nationality problem, more specifically the crisis caused by the exaggerated fears of ethnic disloyalty, all but disappeared as a serious concern early in 1916. The successes on the Italian front, the result of genuine and enthusiastic multinational cooperation and sacrifice, tended to promote greater loyalty in the army generally and served to nullify some of the generals' misgivings about troop disloyalty. Additionally, the relative inactivity of the army on the Russian front through most of the first half of 1916 offered few opportunities for embarrassing incidents like those which plagued the army during the *Karpathenwinter* of 1914-15.

The army nonetheless stuck with its policy of territorial dispersion of *Ersatzbatallione* of suspect nationalities. A handful of regiments, mostly Czech, were considered so unreliable that they lost their recruiting districts entirely, and had their ranks filled with an ethnic mix. In some cases, Czech recruits were dispersed among Magyar regiments, rarely with amicable or efficient results. However, Czech troops were no longer considered quite the liability they had been in 1915, even on the Russian front. The *Ostfront's* 25th Infantry Division (Vienna), which included a considerable minority of Slav soldiers recruited from the Czech communities in Lower Austria and Southern Moravia, was praised by *AOK* and held up as a model for other formations for its apparently successful efforts at raising morale among its Slav troops through "ethical instruction." The division gathered the Czech soldiers of its 4th and 84th Regiments into two all-Czech companies. The companies then received regular "religious preparation" from Czech priests, including Sunday field masses, supplemented by encouraging words from the divisional commander during the week. This effort to bring Czech soldiers to "a higher ethical level...through personal influences on the men, to have an effect on arousing their self-confidence," combined dynastic and religious messages in a typical *schwarz-gelb* manner and was considered by *AOK* to be a remarkable success.¹³

In contrast, units on the Russian front with Serbian soldiers continued to experience abnormally high rates of desertion; fortunately for the army, there were

¹²K. Peball, "Führungsfragen der österreichisch-ungarischen Südtiroloffensive im Jahre 1916." *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchives*, 31, 1978, 420-1.

¹³KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. AOK, Op.Nr.50.058, "Ethische Erziehung des Mannschaft im Felde." 23.5.16.; Nachlaß Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr.1/III, *Das Klammer des Reichs: Das Verhalten der elf Nationalitäten der k.u.k. Wehrmacht, 1914-1918*, 713,772.

comparatively few Serbian troops remaining in the East, large numbers of them being employed successfully against the Italians. However, Ruthene loyalty remained questionable. Several majority-Ruthene regiments from East Galicia experienced serious morale and desertion difficulties throughout the *Karpathenwinter* of 1914-15, and the High Command remained dubious about their dependability well into 1916. This was particularly the case with several regiments recruited from districts lost to the Russians from September 1914 until mid 1915. The close ethnic and linguistic ties between Habsburg Ruthenes and the Russians continued to worry the army, with the result that *AOK* was never fully confident in any Ruthene formations in the East.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the Austro-Hungarian Army's nationality problems, both perceived and genuine, were not a serious concern for the army or the high command throughout the first half of 1916. The general confidence of the army in its fighting abilities, buoyed by repeated successes on all fronts in the latter half of 1915, far outweighed any concerns about the potential unreliability of some Slav troops against Russia.

Much of the Habsburg Army's renewed confidence in its combat prowess, both offensive and defensive, was due to its considerably improved organization, weapons, and tactics introduced in late 1915 and early 1916 on the basis of much hard-won experience. In general outline, the army's tactical organization had changed little, except that it had expanded considerably.¹⁵ Infantry formations included sixty-nine infantry divisions and the higher organization of the cavalry arm included eleven cavalry divisions.¹⁶

By the middle of 1916, tactical organization at divisional level and below had been altered considerably since 1914, with the general aim of increasing battlefield effectiveness. Appropriately for a war of attrition, and increasingly material attrition, this entailed the widespread substitution of the firepower of modern machine weapons for manpower. Rarely were two divisions organized exactly alike, however, and divisional orders of battle varied considerably depending upon local conditions: units involved in Alpine warfare, for example, had their own decentralized organizations, with many divisional assets being permanently attached to brigades and regiments. Nonetheless a broad outline of Habsburg tactical structure and organization can be discerned.

¹⁴KA, Nachlaß Nowak, B/726, Nr. I/II, 531-5, 545.; KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 11.ITD Kmdo., Res.Nr.828, "Bericht über die Affäre am 4.11.15."

¹⁵By May 1916 the army contained twenty-six corps and one cavalry corps.

¹⁶*ÖUIK: IV*: Beilage 4, Tabelle 8. The order of battle totalled 111 divisional and thirteen nondivisional infantry brigades, as well as twenty-three divisional and three nondivisional cavalry brigades.

The infantry, the dominant arm, had not undergone the radical expansion experienced by other branches. In fact, the overall number of first-line infantry battalions had only increased from 929 at the war's outbreak to 1041 by the beginning of May 1916.¹⁷ Indeed, the army had raised few new regiments; instead, the increase mainly represented the addition of fourth and fifth battalions to existing regiments.¹⁸ However, the small increase in infantry numbers was deceptive, for the lethality of infantry units had increased substantially since 1914. The infantry battalion, at the war's outbreak a unit of nearly a thousand riflemen supplemented by two machine guns, had become by mid- 1916 a formidable combined arms formation equipped with a wide array of direct and indirect fire systems.

At the company level, the infantry's firepower was enhanced by large numbers of hand and rifle grenades, both of which were very effective in close combat. At the battalion level, the machine gun detachment had been increased to four Schwarzlose M. 7/12 weapons, a doubling of direct firepower. The infantry regiment received the most new weapons, which were usually assigned to battalions as necessary. Each regiment included a detachment of two 9 cm light mortars (*Minenwerfer*), as well as a pair of portable light mortars (*Granatwerfer*) for employment even closer to the enemy. Both systems, while neither as long ranged nor accurate as tubed artillery, were organic to infantry units, and thus proved more responsive to the infantry's needs by virtue of their comparatively easy portability, rapid rates of fire, excellent explosive-to-shell weight ratios, and very high trajectories. Infantry divisional firepower was also enhanced by the addition of heavy mortar detachments manned by sappers, including four 12 cm and four 22 cm *Minenwerfer*.¹⁹ Infantry regiments were further strengthened in 1916 by the addition of a detachment of two 37 mm infantry guns. These light, portable (usually by dog teams) systems, while not as lethal as standard field guns, nonetheless gave the infantry an excellent short range (up to 2.4 kilometres) direct fire potential, considerably more responsive and available than divisional artillery. The light infantry gun proved a valuable addition to the infantry's combat power as it substituted integral firepower for

¹⁷*ÖUIK: IV*: Beilage 4, Tabelle 5. By May 1916 there were also forty-two volunteer battalions carried on the order of battle: eighteen of Poles, two of Ukrainians, two Bukovinian, ten German-Austrian, one youth battalion, and nine battalions of the "Albanian Legion."

¹⁸*Ibid.* There were as yet only two war-raised *k.u.k.* line regiments, as well as ten *Honvéd* regiments, in addition to three *k.u.k.* and seven Bosnian-Herzegovinian *Feldjäger* battalions.

¹⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.743, k.u.k. AOK, Op.Nr.30662 u. 30791, 25.9.16.; Fasz.734, k.u.k. IR.20, Exh.Nr.1083, 22.5.16.; k.u.k. VI. KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.529/14, 6.6.16.

the manpower in overwhelming strength which the army could no longer afford. Of course, it took time to produce sufficient numbers of these and other new weapons for all infantry units, and the army experienced regular shortfalls; nonetheless, by mid-1916 the infantry's new direct and indirect fire weapons were very much in evidence on all fronts, serving as excellent enhancements to the foot soldier armed with rifle and bayonet, both offensively and defensively.²⁰

The most significant changes and improvements in divisional organization and firepower involved the artillery, the deadliest of the combat arms, particularly during the First World War.²¹ The rather haphazard organization of divisional artillery had been considerably rationalized since 1914, with overall quality and numbers of field pieces being increased substantially. In keeping with the official slogan "*jeder Division ihre Artillerie*," the infantry division's artillery brigade by 1916 included a field gun regiment of four batteries, a field howitzer regiment of six batteries, and a heavy artillery regiment of four batteries. In practice the number of batteries varied, but most divisions averaged sixty guns and howitzers at full strength, a considerable improvement over 1914; the increase in howitzers especially was useful in the positional warfare which prevailed to some extent on all fronts.²² The strength of the artillery arm grew on an army-wide basis, so that by May 1916 it reached 804 field batteries with a total of 4,018 guns and howitzers, compared with 483 batteries with 2,610 pieces in August 1914.²³ All branches of the artillery had expanded considerably, with the greatest increases among heavy guns and howitzers. The mobile fortress artillery, so important in siege-like fighting, had similarly grown dramatically, nearly doubling since the war's outbreak.

²⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.141/3, 20.5.16. For an excellent review of wartime improvements in Habsburg weaponry: E. Gabriel, "Die wichtigsten Waffen der öst.-ung. Armee 1918," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, (henceforth *ÖMZ*) 1968.

²¹Roughly sixty percent of casualties during the war were caused by artillery; on the Italian front, with its sustained gun duels on the Isonzo, the figure was undoubtedly higher.

²²KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. FKR.12, Op.Nr.512, 25.5.16.; Franek, "Entwicklung," *Ergänzungsheft 5*, 29-30. To achieve uniformity, all three divisional artillery regiments now bore the divisional number.

²³*ÖUIK: IV*: Beilage 4, Tabelle 9. The army counted its artillery park by batteries, for the strength of artillery "divisions" (e.g., battalions) varied widely, from two to four batteries. By mid-1916 there were 328 field gun batteries with 1,792 guns, 186 field howitzer batteries with 1,032 howitzers, 142 mountain batteries with 568 pieces, and 112 heavy batteries with 386 guns and howitzers; thirty-six composite batteries and several dozen independent detachments added 240 field pieces. There were also 123 mobile fortress batteries with 420 heavy and super-heavy guns, howitzers, and mortars, compared to seventy-six batteries with 280 pieces in August 1914.

Just as significant as the increased quantity of artillery available to the army was the improved quality of many new field guns and howitzers. New models, many of which actually had been designed before the war but not produced because of insufficient funds, offered better range and accuracy, and included modern design features; by May 1916 1,358 of the field artillery's 4,018 pieces were such new models. They included the M.14 field gun and M.15 mountain gun to replace the M.5/8, and the M.15 15 cm field howitzer to replace the antiquated M.99.²⁴ The super-heavy artillery similarly received new equipment, including excellent 24 cm guns, as well as 38 cm and 42 cm howitzers. The army even began issuing some field batteries mobile anti-aircraft guns, unknown in 1914, based on the obsolete M.5/8.

In contrast to the artillery's unprecedented expansion, the cavalry had declined considerably in both numbers and significance since 1914. Although the plains of East Galicia offered the *arme blanche* occasional opportunities for mobile operations, the army's mounted troops proved generally irrelevant by the middle of the war. Mounted units were of little use in mountainous terrain and in the face of concentrated machine weapons; they were hardly worth the considerable strain and cost they placed on the army's logistical system. Therefore from early 1915 the army gradually reduced the cavalry arm. Although no proud regiments were actually disbanded, regimental strength fell from six squadrons to four, and authorized squadron strength went from 150 to 110; by mid 1916 there were 315 cavalry squadrons, compared with 383 in 1914, and considerably fewer troopers. The surviving squadrons fought less and less with lance and sabre, being used instead as infantry units armed with carbines and strengthened by increased numbers of machine guns; only divisional cavalry squadrons remained mounted for reconnaissance purposes, and by no means always fought horsed. The eleven cavalry divisions functioned as mobile but weak infantry divisions, feeble in man- and firepower. Their units bore the ancient names and numbers of Dragoon, Hussar and Lancer regiments, but were now basically foot formations, virtually indistinguishable from the infantry.²⁵

While the mounted arm was in terminal decline, the army's combat support and service branches had grown considerably since the war's outbreak. The engineers had expanded greatly, with each infantry division now having at least one strong sapper company permanently attached; several more, as well as pioneer and construction companies, were added as necessary. Additionally, divisions included a special

²⁴ÖUIK: IV: 93.; Beilage 4, Tabelle 9.

²⁵Franek, "Entwicklung," *Ergänzungsheft 5*, 26-7.; ÖUIK: IV: Beilage 4, Tabelle 7.

entrenchment unit (*Schanzzeugkolonne*), nearly company-sized, to assist in the incessant construction of field works.²⁶

The signal arm also had expanded unprecedentedly, so that every division now had a signal detachment, varying in size between a company and a small battalion, depending upon local needs, responsible for the maintenance of a complex net of telephone and telegraph systems in the divisional area. As the technical complexity of the army increased as never before, and units consumed unheard of quantities of ammunition, supply and maintenance units grew commensurately. Thus each division now had its own *Trainkommando*, responsible for keeping the units' troops fed, and their equipment maintained. Among the division's service units were supply and transport companies (some of the latter were truck units), and field bakeries and veterinary depots. To care for its soldiers, each division also contained a field medical unit, usually battalion-sized. Of course, these considerable divisional assets were supported by a vast system of corps- and army-level service units, which were in turn kept functioning by an enormous--and apparently ever growing--array of rear area bases and depots, the *Etappe* so detested by the men in the front line.²⁷

As much as changes in combat organization and weaponry, this unprecedented expansion of manpower and effort in non-combat positions, well removed from the dangers and rigors of combat, differentiated the Habsburg Army of 1916 from the infantry-based prewar force. The *Frontkämpfer*, now wearing a steel helmet in battle instead of the cloth *kappi*, and clad in a uniform of field grey rather than *hechtgrau*, even looked different from his prewar counterpart, and markedly distinct from the many support troops in the rear, safe from battle.²⁸ These foot soldiers still did most of the fighting and dying, sustained by memories of ancient regimental and *schwarz-gelb* glory, but their army had become a modern, twentieth century bureaucratic institution, like all other armies of the First World War.

²⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.743, k.u.k. AOK, Q.Op.Nr.167700, 8.1.16.

²⁷ÖUIK: IV: Beilage 4, Tabelle 6,10.

²⁸The bluish *hechtgrau* uniform (not too different in colour from the French Army's *bleu d'horizon*), while appropriate for Alpine terrain, was found to be too conspicuous on the plains of Galicia and Serbia, and was therefore gradually replaced with a *feldgrau* one, very close to the German uniform colour. The steel helmet too was virtually indistinguishable from the German model. The helmet and new uniform were both introduced in September 1915, and were in frontline use by the spring of 1916. E. Steinböck, "Die Ausrüstung des österreichischen Soldaten im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Heereskunde-Kriegsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen siebenzig Jahre danach*, (Vienna, 1988), 87-8.

The West Galician combat soldiers of the 12th Division, mostly Poles, were motivated to fight by nationalism as well. The stateless Poles' animosity towards Russia, while rooted in centuries of warring and mutual Catholic-Orthodox hostility, dated particularly from the brutal Tsarist suppression of the 1863 revolt in Congress Poland and the draconian Russian rule which had prevailed in the half century since. In the decades before the First World War, Austria's policies towards its Poles appeared increasingly benevolent when contrasted with the policies of Tsarist oppression and Imperial German authoritarianism. Growing loyalty to Vienna among many Habsburg Poles owed much to the favoured position of Poles in the Dual Monarchy. Although Austria's almost five million Poles represented less than a fifth of Cisleithania's population (Hungary had no Polish minority), they effectively played the role of powerbroker in the *Reichsrat*. In the last decades of the monarchy, the Polish Club in the Austrian parliament offered an indispensable element in coalition building, and hence in the functioning of the precarious political order. Even more significantly, the Polish ruling gentry, the ancient *szlachta*, was granted effective dominance in Galicia after 1867 in all matters of local administration, education, economic development, and language policy. Polish control over Galicia, where they represented less than sixty percent of the population, gave Austria's Poles their own pseudo-state and an opportunity for national development, all within an Austrian framework, if at the expense of Galicia's substantial Ruthene minority. Galicia and its capital Cracow soon became political and cultural meccas and inspirations for the many Poles living under German and especially Russian oppression: Galicia was envisaged as the Piedmont of the eventual Polish national renaissance. This odd Austrian province managed in the last decades of peace to combine intense Polish nationalism and sincere loyalty to the Habsburg throne, for the two aims were perceived to be complementary, not contradictory. A 1915 AOK report accurately analysed the sentiments of the army's Polish soldiers as, "loyal, not on account of Austria; but Russophobe, on account of Russia."²⁹ Thus Austria's Poles fought with considerable enthusiasm against their hated Russian neighbour, proving one of the army's most reliable elements in the great struggle in the East.³⁰

The 12th Division used the half year of relative tranquility to good effect. By early June defences against enemy attack were well developed, after weeks and months of

²⁹KA, Nachlaß Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr.1/II, 377.

³⁰H. Batkowski, "Die Polen," *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (6 Bände, Vienna 1970-89), Bd.III/1: *Die Völker des Reiches*(1980), 526-30.; R. Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918* (2 Vols., New York, 1977), Vol.I, 221-32.

preparation. The West Galicians' positions were firmly established, with divisional headquarters at Przewłoka, a village on the Strypa, a tributary of the Dniestr. The division's sector lay just north of the medieval city of Buczacz, most of whose 15,000 residents had long since departed for safer territory. The 12th's sector was a combination of low hills and fields, interspersed with numerous creeks and small forests, and occasional villages. The division's entrenchments and positions were typical of most units on the Russian front. Based on the tactical lessons of previous battles, they were particularly designed to hold the main line of resistance, if necessary with the assistance of nearby reinforcements. The division's heavy, crew-served weapons, on which any successful defence depended--machine guns, infantry guns, and mortars in forward positions, supported by field artillery further back--were carefully positioned, dug in for protection, presighted on suspected enemy paths, and well supplied with ammunition. The first-line infantry positions on the division's front were similarly well constructed, supported by numerous communication and supply trenches, and protected by deep, interconnecting belts of mines, barbed wire, and *spanische Reiter*. Given the wealth of obstacles and heavy weapons available, the company frontages of two to four hundred metres were by no means excessive.

However, the tactical emphasis on placing the maximum number of troops in forward positions, some two-third of the division's foot soldiers, while proven and logical was also questionable on a number of counts. Principal among these was the vulnerability of first-line infantry and nearby reserves--often only a hundred metres behind the front--to enemy shelling. Besides that, there were the dangers inherent in placing so much combat power in forward positions: any serious penetration of the division's main line of resistance could be fatal, for the division lacked sufficient general reserves to provide an effective counterstroke. Nonetheless, the overall appearance of the 12th Division's defences in the first week of June 1916, as with units throughout the Habsburg *Ostfront*, was one of unprecedented strength. Hinke's division, like nearly all Habsburg formations in the East in early June 1916, was fully confident of its ability to hold its first line of defence in the face of any Russian assault.³¹

Confidence this state of affairs encouraged was not entirely unwarranted, for the Russian failures on the Strypa and Lake Narotch, in spite of overwhelming numerical and fire superiority, had led to severe demoralisation in the Tsarist Army, among senior leaders as much as the fighting men. The apparent tactical contradictions of the

³¹KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. IR.56, Op.Nr.139, 18.5.16.; k.u.k. IR.57, Res.Nr.279, 18.5.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.153/3, Sap.Komp. 5/1., "Minenplan," 1.6.16.; k.u.k. IR.20, Exh.Nr.1213/Adj., 1.6.16.

requirements of the offensive dogged the Russian Army in early 1916, as they did every other belligerent army during the war. In particular, the need to concentrate sufficient offensive force in secret seemed impossible, as did the likelihood of effective--but not overly destructive--preparatory barrages. Worse, the much bloodied Russian Army could not afford many more catastrophically costly failures. Perhaps most ominously for the Tsar's forces, the Russian war machine could not hope to match the combined Central Powers in materiel, and had to be content with relatively modest numbers of guns, at least when compared to the weight of shell available on other fronts.

Nonetheless, the relatively low troop density on the Eastern front still offered the possibility of a genuine breakthrough and strategic exploitation, if only the enemy's main line of resistance could be penetrated and rolled up. This was precisely the goal of the Tsarist General Alexei Brusilov in the first months of 1916. Since April the commander of the Southwestern front and clearly the most talented of Russia's generals, Brusilov was determined to achieve the operational and strategic success which had eluded the Russian Army in late 1915 and early 1916. Russia had to go on the offensive again, against the wishes of many senior officers, to relieve pressure on her French allies being bled white at Verdun and her Italian allies ailing on the Isonzo. Few Tsarist generals were optimistic in the wake of the Styra and Lake Narotch failures, but loyalty to the Entente mandated offensive action. Brusilov, more confident, surrounded himself with exceptionally able senior staff officers, many of whom would rise to prominence in Trotsky's Red Army. One such, Kirey, was the Southwestern front's all-important artillery specialist.

Brusilov and his staff devised original tactical and operational solutions to the distinctive problems of positional, artillery-dominated warfare in 1916. The plan called for a series of four major attacks--one for each of Brusilov's four armies, the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th--conducted along the Southwestern front. All four actions were to be large, each on a front of about thirty kilometres, with the 8th Army's being the strongest and potentially most decisive.³² As Brusilov had neither the number of guns (especially in heavy calibres) nor shells to devastate the Austro-Hungarian lines, the barrage was to be brief but well prepared. Russian gunners and aviators went to unprecedented lengths to provide excellent artillery reconnaissance, so that the short preparatory barrage would be exceptionally accurate and effective, silencing Habsburg batteries before they could disrupt the Russian advance. Infantry-artillery cooperation in the planning of the great

³²I. Rostunov, *Russkii front pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow, 1976), 294-310. Stone, *Eastern Front*, 232-8. For an excellent brief discussion of Kirey's artillery plan: C. Bellamy, *Red God of War: Soviet Artillery and Rocket Forces* (London, 1986), 31-41.

offensive was also much better than in any previous Russian effort. Showing the same initiative, the first several assault waves, with considerable engineering assistance, dug their way very close to Habsburg lines, so that they could take the Austro-Hungarian first line almost immediately after the preparatory barrage halted. Reserves were also brought very near to the front and concealed in dugouts in forward positions. Thus they could provide instant reinforcement of success, before Habsburg counterattacks could throw the Tsarist advance off-balance. All this was done with considerable secrecy. Brusilov did not move operational reinforcements, especially massed cavalry, too close to the front in the interests of maintaining surprise; this tradeoff, while depriving the Russian attack of immediate mobile exploitation forces, nonetheless succeeded in keeping the general offensive a secret. Brusilov set June 4 as his start day.

Despite all these preparations and in violation of most of the supposed lessons of the first two years of the war, Brusilov enjoyed only minimal man- and firepower advantages over his opponent. His four armies totalled over 600,000 men in forty infantry and cavalry divisions, supported by 1,700 light and 168 heavy guns; however, the Habsburg *Ostfront* included one German and four Austro-Hungarian armies, a half million soldiers in thirty-nine infantry and eleven cavalry divisions, supported by 1,301 light and 545 medium and heavy guns. Only Kaledin's 8th Army, Brusilov's *Schwerpunkt* with thirteen infantry and seven cavalry divisions, enjoyed any notable local superiority. The other three Russian armies--Sakharov's 11th, Shcherbatschev's 7th and Letshitski's 9th--had numerical advantages over opposing Habsburg forces marginal enough to be considered operationally insignificant.³³ The great Russian offensive was designed instead to succeed on the basis of surprise and tactical innovation. Brusilov and his army staff received considerable unwitting assistance in both respects from their Habsburg opponents.

The renewed self-confidence and self-assurance of the Habsburg Army in the East by the middle of 1916 served to blind it to numerous indications of an impending Russian offensive. The recovery and rebirth of the Austro-Hungarian Army in 1915, including the successful blunting of numerous Italian efforts on the Isonzo, as well as the victories in Galicia and Volhynia, generated dangerous levels of optimism, which combined with negligence to create a fatal mixture by June 1916.

Reconnaissance at all levels of the Habsburg *Ostfront* in late May and the first days of June brought in a wealth of information about enemy unit concentrations and feverish engineering projects: even Brusilov's careful attempts at preserving surprise

³³Rostunov, *Russkii front*, 305. Stone, *Eastern Front*, 239. *OUIK: IV: Beilage 2*, 26-39.

could not altogether conceal the frenetic pace of Russian activity all along the Southwestern front. Aerial observation, signal intercepts, deserters' testimonies, and most importantly countless reports from frontline units all gave solid indications of impressive Russian preparations. However, the Habsburg Army in the East, crippled by what one noted historian has termed an "almost Spanish-Habsburg combination of serenity and incompetence," failed to execute any countermeasures; the result was an intelligence failure of epic proportions.³⁴

In the weeks and days before disaster struck, the 12th Division, like all Habsburg units occupying forward positions, observed and reported considerable enemy activity. Divisional headquarters at Przewłoka received dozens of detailed reports concerning Russian sapping as it moved ever closer to Austro-Hungarian positions. The months of relative inactivity and peace, marred only by occasional Russian shelling and night patrols, came to an end in the last week of May.³⁵ The 100th Regiment was the first unit to observe noteworthy Russian night movements and activity, from May 21; other forward regiments became aware of similar activities in their own sectors beginning on the night of May 23-4. By May 28, divisional headquarters had detailed confirmation of troop movements and heavy digging from Russian deserters.³⁶

Evidence of considerable Russian nocturnal excavations mounted in late May, as enemy activity increased every night along the division's front, particularly before the trenches of the 57th and 100th Regiments. In the first four days of June, the Russian entrenchments moved steadily closer to the 12th Division's forward positions at the pace of several metres per night. When the offensive started, Russian troops were dug in less than a hundred metres from Habsburg lines; in other East Galician sectors, the enemy had been permitted to dig to within less than a hundred paces. Divisional and corps headquarters were well aware of the extent of enemy digging, mining, and troop movements, not just in their own sectors, but all along the entire front.³⁷ However, as with Habsburg formations throughout the *Ostfront*, the 12th Division did nothing to interfere with Russian movements or entrenching operations, despite the obvious and

³⁴Stone, *Eastern Front*, 240. M. Ronge, *Kriegs- und Industriespionage* (Vienna, 1930), 222-3.

³⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.137, 16.5.16.; Tagesmeldung, k.u.k. IR.3. 20, 56, 57, 100, 16.5.16.; k.u.k. Generalstabschefs des VI.Korps, Op.Nr.517/17, 17.5.16.

³⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. IR.100, Tagesmeldungen, 24.5.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., K.Nr.272, 28.5.16.

³⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.152, 31.5.16.; k.u.k. 57, 100, Tagesmeldungen, 31.5.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.153/7, 1.6.16.; k.u.k. Generalstabschef des VI. Korps, Op.Nr.601/21, 1.6.16.; k.u.k. IR.57, 100, Tagesmeldungen, 2.6.16.

immediate threat they represented. Countermeasures would perhaps have required too much effort. Instead, divisional and regimental headquarters expressed considerable confidence about the strength of their defences, regardless of the enemy's labours. The 3rd Regiment noted confidently that its main position, the *Preußen Stellung*, protected by all-around entrenchments and covered by nearby reserves, would prove virtually impossible for the enemy to take, despite all the recent Russian activity. However, by early June more realistic thoughts began to take shape in some high places. The command of 7th Army ordered its divisions, including the 12th, to begin more accurate observations of enemy movements by June 7 and take appropriate countermeasures. By then it was too late.³⁸

The inexcusable lethargy of the Habsburg forces in the East in May and early June was complemented by the distraction of the army leadership's attention, including Conrad's, by events on the Italian front. Conrad had desired a knockout blow against Italy, the "hereditary enemy" (*Erbfeind*) since Italian intervention (if not, indeed, since long before 1914), a sentiment shared by many senior Habsburg soldiers. The war with Italy offered Conrad an opportunity to act autonomously, as he could not elsewhere, because in Russia and the Balkans, the Austro-Hungarian Army had become a near-appendage of its German ally's.

By the late spring, with the East apparently secure, Conrad felt he could build up his forces in Tyrol to deliver a war-winning offensive against the Italians by cutting off the enemy's entire Isonzo front with an attack to the southeast out of South Tyrol. By mid-May, Archduke Eugen's Tyrolean Army Group, the 3rd and 11th Armies with the equivalent of fifteen infantry and mountain divisions (including many of the army's best formations, such as the crack *deutschösterreich* 3rd *Edelweiß* and 8th *Kaiserjäger* Divisions) supported by 1,056 guns, was ready to attack.³⁹ Conrad weakened the *Ostfront* to realize his great Tyrolean offensive. While only a handful of divisions were actually diverted from the East (although those which were sent were among the best available), the *Ostfront's* heavy artillery park and shell reserves were depleted considerably to provide fire support for Conrad's offensive.

The gamble seemed to pay off handsomely at first, as the intended knockout blow against the Italians, commencing on May 15, proved a great initial success. Artillery preparation was effective and Italian forward positions were quickly overrun, despite the

³⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. IR.20, Exh.Nr.1213/Adj, 1.6.16.; k.u.k. IR.57, Res.ExNr.287/Adj, 1.6.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.153/4, 1.6.16.

³⁹ÖUIK: IV: 224-30. Beilage 2, 18-24.

difficulties of the high mountain terrain: Habsburg expertise in Alpine warfare yet again proved temporarily decisive. By the end of May, the *k.u.k.* 3rd and 11th Armies had lost 43,000 men, but had inflicted 76,000 casualties on the enemy--including over 40,000 prisoners (and more than 300 guns lost)--and were nearly out of the high Alps.⁴⁰ But Conrad's promising offensive was soon cut short prematurely by Brusilov's far greater effort in the East; the impressive Habsburg achievements in the Alps were quickly overshadowed by the unprecedented catastrophe unfolding in Volhynia and East Galicia.

Brusilov's offensive began on June 4, with intense and accurate preplanned barrages. Particularly in Kaledin's 8th Army, Russian guns fired with remarkable effectiveness at carefully selected targets; they quickly took a heavy toll of both Habsburg entrenchments and field artillery. Austro-Hungarian counterbattery fires were generally ineffective, as batteries rapidly ran out of ammunition. The destructive and disruptive power of such a barrage had never been experienced by the Habsburg Army. Brusilov's preparatory barrage, while unimpressive in terms of guns, shells, and duration compared to the enormous artillery duels in Flanders, nonetheless was supremely effective, quickly destroying or silencing vital targets. Brusilov's infantry did not advance until June 5, after the artillery had done its work, but the carefully constructed Habsburg defences, especially in the important *k.u.k.* 4th Army sector, were already damaged beyond repair.

The grim fate which quickly befell *Generaloberst* Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's 4th Army was one of the worst reverses suffered by any army in the First World War. The 4th Army was the most haphazardly led and administered of all the Habsburg armies in the East, but its defences were mainly well constructed.⁴¹ The Russian barrage badly weakened its nine divisions, damaging Habsburg confidence and morale before the first Russian foot soldiers emerged from their nearby dugouts. Four corps of Kaledin's 8th Army quickly overran the 4th Army's forward positions, moving through numerous gaps in the barbed wire created by shelling. Habsburg units were slow to react, and often counterattacked only when it was too late. Many forward units, outflanked by advancing Russian regiments, became trapped in their well constructed entrenchments, unable to fall back to more defensible positions. The result was numerous mass surrenders, sometimes by whole Austro-Hungarian battalions and regiments. The 4th Army typically included a diverse mix of divisions, both ethnically and qualitatively; however, none of Joseph

⁴⁰G. Artl, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Südtiroloffensive* (Vienna, 1983), 183.; Peball,

"Führungsfragen," 422-30. *ÖUİK: IV*: 253-349. A good brief overview: G. Stockelle, "Die Südtiroler Offensive gegen Italien," *ÖMZ*, 1966.

⁴¹For a short but devastating account of Joseph Ferdinand's leadership: Stone, *Eastern Front*, 241-2.

Ferdinand's divisions stemmed the Russian tide. The 37th *Honvéd* Division, with its "especially carefully constructed" positions, performed really no better than the relatively poorly entrenched 2nd Division.⁴²

A total rout ensued; prolonged resistance to Kaledin's advancing army was nonexistent. In a six day battle, from June 4 to 9, the remnants of the 4th Army retreated thirty kilometres, losing even Luck, the original site of Joseph Ferdinand's headquarters. Leaders failed to manage a planned withdrawal, so there was really no system to the retreat, with soldiers simply trying to save themselves in the middle of the catastrophe. In some instances, artillerymen abandoned their guns: the ill-fated 2nd Division lost over half its artillery park in this manner. Little of the *k.u.k.* 4th Army survived the initial six day breakthrough; the army's nine divisions lost 82,000 men from an initial rifle strength of 110,000. Relatively few of the casualties lay dead on the plains of Volhynia; instead, the majority were in Russian captivity.⁴³ Brusilov had destroyed a Habsburg field army with one blow, and the Austro-Hungarian Army in the East appeared to be in total dissolution.

Although the 4th Army disaster represented the most inglorious annal in the *Ostfront's* fighting record, many other Austro-Hungarian armies and corps in the East fared little better in the face of Brusilov's offensive. All four of Brusilov's armies were winning impressive victories, overwhelming carefully constructed entrenchments; nowhere in the East were Austro-Hungarian troops able to hold their ground very long. A general retreat inevitably resulted.

The *k.u.k.* 7th Army's calamity in southeastern Galicia and Bukovina was perhaps the most shocking, for it had fought very well in the Strypa defensive battles of late 1915, was composed of previously reliable divisions (many of them Magyar and Croatian), enjoyed good ethnic relations, and had a fine commander in *Generaloberst* von Pflanze-Baltin. The Russian preparatory barrage was typically effective and forward positions were soon overwhelmed. Divisions with good fighting records rarely performed better than poor divisions, with the result that Pflanze-Baltin's army was soon in disorganized

⁴²R. Kiszling, "Die Brussilow-Offensive bei Luck-Olyka," *ÖMZ*, 1966, 298. The 4th Army's nine divisions were the Magyar-Croatian 7th, the mostly Magyar 70th *Honvéd*, the Polish-Magyar 2nd, the Slovak-Magyar 37th *Honvéd*, the Magyar-Romanian 41st *Honvéd*, the Czech-German 4th, the Ruthene 11th, the mostly German 13th *Schützen*, and the Magyar-Croatian 10th Cavalry Divisions. *ÖUIK: IV*: Beilage 2, 34-6.

⁴³Kiszling, "Die Brussilow-Offensive," *ÖMZ*, 1966, 298-302. KA, Nachlaß Nowak. B/726, Nr.1/III, 720-7. Perhaps significantly, none of the 4th Army's general officers were captured by the enemy, although many of them had lost their entire formations.

general retreat before the Russian 9th Army. Pflanzer-Baltin was soon speaking of his "ruinerte Armee," believing by mid June that he had lost 100,000 men.⁴⁴

When Brusilov began his great offensive, the *k.u.k.* 12th Infantry Division was under the command of the 7th Army. Hinke's division was fortunate, for it was located north of the Russian 7th Army's point of attack. Although the division's positions were shelled on June 4 and 5, including by some heavy guns, the 12th did not receive the initial heavy barrages inflicted on XIII Corps immediately to the south. The division's forward observers reported numerous signs of an impending enemy infantry assault, including continued entrenching, and pre-offensive celebrations in the nearby Russian trenches, loud affairs marked by much shouting and music.⁴⁵ Russian preparations, including troop movements, increasing artillery fires, and reconnaissance overflights, were observed by 100th Regiment forward companies on the division's northern flank on June 6, 7, 8 and 9; however, 12th Division casualties remained minimal, and the enemy would not yet leave his dugouts.⁴⁶

While the 12th Division was experiencing relative tranquility, XIII Corps to its south was being shattered by the Russian II Corps. Repeated assaults by three Russian divisions on June 6, 7, 8 and 9 pushed the three divisions of XIII Corps back ten to fifteen kilometres in four days with heavy losses. The once formidable Croatian 36th Division, occupying the city of Buczacz on the 12th Division's immediate southern flank, was forced to abandon the Strypa line and retreat more than six kilometres in two days; by the end of June 9, following successful attacks by the Russian 41st Division, the 12th Division's southern positions and rear area were badly exposed to possible Russian attempts to roll up and exploit their advance.

On June 10, in an attempt to save East Galicia, both VI and XIII Corps were removed from 7th Army command and placed under the German *Südarmee*, the only army enjoying any success in preventing Russian breakthroughs. It was hoped that superior German discipline and organization could halt further deterioration. On that day Russian infantry attacks began against 12th Division positions. The division's five regiments, under pressure from the enemy's XVI Corps and fearing flanking attacks to the south, retreated in a comparatively orderly manner from their well prepared primary and secondary defences as part of a general corps withdrawal; divisional headquarters at Przewłoka had to be abandoned. However, the division had succeeded in maintaining

⁴⁴Stone, *Eastern Front*, 251-4.

⁴⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. IR.100, Tagesmeldung, 5.6.16.; k.u.k. IR.57, Res.Nr.287/Adj, 6.6.16.

⁴⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. IR.100, Tagesmeldungen, 7., 8., 9.6.16.

contact with the 39th *Honvéd* Division on its northern flank; especially in retreat, it was vital that large gaps not be created between withdrawing units, to prevent easy and deadly enemy penetrations. By the evening of June 10, after an intense fifteen hour battle which sacrificed much of the rearguard, the 3rd Regiment, the division's new front line was established more than ten kilometres to the rear, two-thirds of the way to the Koropiec river, another tributary of the Dniestr.⁴⁷

The 12th Division's hastily prepared defences were centred on the town of Olesza. All available nearby German and Habsburg reserves were dispatched to Olesza, which was now the base of VI Corps' line of resistance. Among the units to arrive was the 5th *Landwehr* Regiment, a largely Italian formation from Trieste and Istria already bloodied with the 7th Army on June 6; its soldiers had been in constant retreat since and had not slept in four days.⁴⁸ The reinforced 12th Division was ordered by VI Corps to hold the town regardless of casualties. Or, as the command of the *Südarmee* expressed it, with typical *reichdeutsche* precision and determination, "Not a further step back!"⁴⁹

On June 11 and 12, the 12th Division, in concert with Division Oppeln (basically the reinforced German 48th Reserve Division, renamed for its commander, *Generalleutnant* von Oppeln-Bronikowski) battled with the Russian XVI Corps for control of the Olesza sector. Coordinated attacks by the two mostly fresh divisions began at 5 am on June 11 to preempt assaults by the Russian 41st and 47th Divisions facing Olesza. Intense combat at close quarters raged all day, marked by numerous battalion-sized attacks and counterattacks, with both sides absorbing heavy losses. The day's triumph was the taking of 1,500 Russian prisoners: XVI Corps was tired from several days of combat and did not fight with typical Russian tenacity. June 12 was much quieter, as both the Russian and Austro-German forces were exhausted from the previous day's combat; there was little action by either side except for occasional shelling. By the morning of June 13, the 12th Division's positions were unquestionably secure, at least for the moment, and Olesza had been held. Hinke's six regiments (including the 5th *Landwehr*), all considerably weakened, were in the line, with forward positions just east

⁴⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., "Situation am 10.6.16."; KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2263, 10.6.16.; KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITD Gefechts-Bericht, 9.--12.6.16.; Schachtel 48, k.u.k. IR.3 Gefechts-Bericht, 10.6.16.

⁴⁸KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 65, k.k. LIR.5, Res.Nr.4/65, "Gefechts-Bericht vom 6.6.--14.7.16.." 17.7.16.

⁴⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.610/25, 10.6.16.; KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2275, 12.6.16. Emphasis in the original.

of the town; the 3rd and 56th Regiments were occupying Olesza itself.⁵⁰ The Russians' advance had been stalled temporarily in VI Corps sector, a rarity in the East in early June, although achieved with considerable German assistance.

Still, the general condition of the Habsburg *Ostarmee* after little more than a week of combat was lamentable. By June 12, the *k.u.k.* 4th and 7th Armies were in a state of dissolution, and the Russians had captured a total of 193,000 officers and men, 216 guns, and 645 machine guns; even these appalling numbers were perhaps an underestimate.⁵¹ The Austro-Hungarian Army in the East was saved from total annihilation because, whatever tactical success they had won, Brusilov's armies found it difficult to exploit them. Russian divisions were worn out by the preparation and execution of the great push, their own casualties were considerable, and the problems of moving ponderous guns and supplies forward reemerged. In addition, Austria-Hungary's German ally again helped to prevent further catastrophe, providing badly needed administrative efficiency and battlefield ruthlessness, as well as reluctantly supplying several veteran divisions. The *Südarmee* staved off collapse in East Galicia, absorbing numerous demoralized Habsburg divisions. Despite nominal chains-of-command which preserved Habsburg dignity, the Prussian General Linsingen's Army Group in Volhynia and Northeastern Galicia assumed actual control of the *k.u.k.* 1st and 4th Armies, and even the 7th Army came under considerable German sway, von Seeckt being appointed Pflanzer-Baltin's chief-of-staff.⁵² At army and corps levels, the influx of numerous German divisions and regiments into nominally Habsburg formations further diluted Austro-Hungarian authority and pride.

The Habsburg Army, confronted with the worst catastrophe in its long history, faced up to the causes of the initial disaster. The destruction of apparently impregnable defences and the resulting debacle had easily determinable causes, such as Brusilov's excellent tactical insights, inspired and thorough Russian planning, outmoded Habsburg defences, and a corrosive Austro-Hungarian overconfidence. While *AOK* and the army's leaders were not completely blind to these factors, as usual it proved easier to fall back on the nationality issue to provide answers to embarrassing questions.

⁵⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.734, KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2275, 12.6.16.; k.u.k. IR.100, "Situation am 13.6., 8.30 vorm."; k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.165/1, 13.6.16.; *ÖUIK: IV*: 451-6. The division's infantry regiments averaged two strong battalions.

⁵¹Stone, *Eastern Front*, 254.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 254.

The suspect nationalities, as always, were the Czechs and Ruthenes. Although Czech and Ruthene soldiers did not offer prolonged resistance to Russian attacks, neither did any other nationality in the first days of the offensive. What was startling about the Habsburg disaster in early June was the sudden collapse of numerous divisions which had been considered fully reliable, both ethnically and tactically. Battle hardened German, Magyar, Croatian and Slovene units frequently demonstrated no more tenacity than questionable Czech, Ruthene, Romanian and Serbian ones. Even the elite Croatian 36th and 42nd *Honvéd* Divisions, prized for their fighting prowess, suffered ignominious collapses, with the latter losing more than 4,000 soldiers as prisoners in the opening engagements. Both divisions received sharp rebukes from their army and army group commanders.⁵³

The army's reaction to the destruction of the Viennese 13th *Landwehr* Division, part of the shattered 4th Army, proved illuminating. The overwhelmingly German division was essentially trapped in its own positions by the Russian advance. Consequently, most of the division was captured *en masse* in the first days of Brusilov's offensive. The 13th began the battle with four strong infantry regiments, a total rifle strength of 322 officers and 12,780 men. However, only 1,714 riflemen survived the battle: the 24th *Landwehr* Regiment actually had about a battalion left, but the remaining three "regiments" contained an average of 250 soldiers. And this was the strongest division in the shattered 4th Army. The 13th Division's June "catastrophe" was the subject of an official investigation in Vienna. The formal report, while critical of the division's preparations for battle, of course did not suggest that German troops were inherently unreliable.⁵⁴

The hardly less ignominious collapse that summer of the 1st Army's *k.u.k.* 25th Division, another largely German formation recruited from Vienna (and, not incidentally, a division praised by *AOK* for its effective handling of its Czech minority), similarly caused no concern in *AOK* or anywhere else about the combat performance of German units. Instead, the 25th Division's eviction from its positions was typically described as coming "after exceptionally intense resistance against superior enemy forces."⁵⁵ Thus the failures of German and Magyar units were portrayed by the army hierarchy as exceptions

⁵³R. Kizling, *Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalweg eines Südslawenvolkes* (Graz, 1956), 107.; *ÖUIK: IV: 422.*

⁵⁴KA, Sammlung Balaban, Schachtel 9, k.k. 13.LITDKmdo., Kriegsgliederung, 25.5.16.; Op.Nr.164/11. 12.6.16.; Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 65, k.k. Ldw.Dionsgericht in Wien, Dst.2834/16, 11.9.17.

⁵⁵C. Bardolff, *Soldat im alten Österreich: Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben* (Jena, 1938), 257. See also: E. Finke, *k.(u.)k. Hoch- und Deutschmeister: "222 Jahre für Kaiser und Reich"*(Graz, 1978), 286-8.

to a rule, or at least as heroic sacrifices; needless to say, such leniency was not displayed toward defeated Slav divisions, whose inadequate performance was inevitably attributed to cowardice and treason.

Conventional wisdom about the Habsburg Army's disastrous failure in the first stages of Brusilov's offensive quickly became enshrined in numerous historical works, both official and unofficial. An eminent Austrian military historian (and co-author of the Official History), writing a full half century after the embarrassing event, dismissed the destruction of the Ruthene 11th Division (part of 4th Army) with the comment, "Fighting against the Russians in the third year of the war was too much to demand of the East Galicians." However, the author conceded that the 11th Division had not always been unreliable in combat, and indeed performed well on the Italian front; in a moment of truth, he added that the division's fate was also attributable to a dearth of "energetic commanders."⁵⁶

Leadership indeed was at the heart of the matter. Never in the war had Habsburg generalship proved so uninspired, so slow to react to danger, or so blinded by overconfidence, as in the first weeks of June 1916. It cannot be denied that some Slav troops displayed defeatism once disaster threatened; however, nationality was far less important than the quality of Habsburg commanders in determining the success or failure of regiments and divisions. An examination of 7th Army losses in fierce combat in late June in Southeastern Galicia and Bukovina reveals that of five Slav divisions (two Czech, one Ruthene, one Croatian, and one Polish-Ruthene), relative losses (including prisoners) were lowest in the Czech divisions, and highest in the supposedly more solid Croatian and part-Polish divisions.⁵⁷ Nonetheless the myth of Habsburg failure caused not by ineptitude, but rather by treachery, prospered. It even detracted from the tactical achievements and innovations of Brusilov and his staff. Few in the West believed that anything could be learned from the Russians, who after all had managed merely to destroy what appeared in retrospect to be an already half-defeated, badly demoralized army.

The Germans, however, were not so easily deceived by appearances. Although the German Army retained a poor opinion of some Austro-Hungarian soldiers (principally

⁵⁶Kiszling, "Brusilov-Offensive," *ÖMZ*, 1966, 302. Kiszling, a wartime General Staff officer and confidant of Conrad, was considerably more honest than most Old Austrian soldier-historians, especially in his later years. See also: KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 12, k.u.k. 11.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.188/10, 12.7.16. The official (and frequently mendacious) divisional report on the disaster of June 4-9.

⁵⁷KA, Nachlaß Nowak, B/726, Nr.1/III, 773.

Czechs),⁵⁸ it was far more critical of Habsburg tactical and operational leadership. Only three days after the battle for Olesza, the staff of the *Südarmee* described with detail and accuracy the numerous tactical causes of the debacle. The report noted the particularly wide Habsburg unit frontages in many places, permitting Russian penetrations; moreover, since many positions were also inadequately protected by obstacles and wire in all directions, numerous avoidable encirclements resulted. The Germans criticized the widespread tendency of Habsburg batteries to expend their limited local ammunition reserves early in the Russian barrage, with minimal effect, thus leaving infantry without artillery support during later, more critical phases of the enemy breakthrough. The report also noted harshly the deleterious effects of deploying so many troops in the first defensive line, without leaving significant brigade and divisional reserves. Most of all, however, the staff of the *Südarmee* criticized the failings of Habsburg tactical and operational leadership, which it considered to be unprepared for the rigors of modern campaigning, particularly in times of adversity. Characteristically the Germans derided the tendency to execute orders belatedly and inadequately, even in times of crisis; the common practice of retreating in the face of reverses, rather than attempting to stand and fight, was especially castigated.⁵⁹ More rigorous and tactically astute battlefield leadership was clearly the remedy. And in this hour of the *k.u.k. Armee's* greatest crisis the German Army was able to supply both rigid discipline and tactical know-how to its ailing ally.

The field performance of Habsburg corps and divisions under German command in the summer of 1916 generally improved; at the very least, the transfusion of German experience saved the *Ostarmee* from further collapse. The 12th Division undoubtedly was assisted greatly in the Olesza battle by its ally's units and generalship. Hinke's division had been fortunate not to have suffered the intense Russian barrages which shattered so many Austro-Hungarian formations in the first week of June. The 12th also was spared the brunt of a full scale assault by fresh Russian troops; the enemy's XVI Corps had already suffered casualties against XIII Corps before confronting the 12th Division and Division Oppeln. The West Galician division was therefore still in relatively good fighting condition in mid- June, compared to the battered shells of so many other formations after two weeks of Brusilov's offensive.

⁵⁸In the summer of 1918, when Germany wanted its ally to dispatch a corps to the Western Front as a gesture of solidarity, Ludendorff asked AOK for "four good--not Czech--divisions." P. Fiala, *Die letzte Offensive Altösterreichs*, (Boppard-am-Rhein, 1968), 34.

⁵⁹KA/NFA. Fasz.734, KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.228^a, 15.6.16.

The 12th Division spent the latter half of June rebuilding its strength and constructing field works in anticipation of further enemy attacks. Although Brusilov's armies elsewhere continued their offensive, the *Südarmee* sector remained surprisingly quiet for two weeks, except for occasional brief artillery barrages. Both sides were too exhausted to continue major operations. The 12th Division had on its northern flank the veteran German 48th Reserve Division, now assigned to VI Corps; to the south was the badly shaken and understrength *k.u.k.* 36th Division. Opposing it was the Russian 41st Division, as well as elements of the 3rd Turkmenistan Rifle Division, both experienced units. The 12th Division's sector was very important, for it contained three major bridges across the Koropiec, including one in the town of Monasterzyska sturdy enough to support heavy artillery, which had to be held at all costs.⁶⁰

Hinke's headquarters were reestablished at the village of Szwejków, behind the Koropiec, protected by the redundant divisional cavalry, while Olesza remained the centre of the forward defensive position.⁶¹ Divisional pioneers and entrenchment units laboured hard to construct satisfactory field works, and by the last week of June had built an impressive system of four major regimental defensive positions in the front line.⁶² This primary belt was reinforced by a secondary reserve position, the *Langhans Stellung*, located well behind the forward edge of the battle area, before the village of Dobrowody. In a further attempt to prevent a repetition of recent tactical mistakes, the division kept one of its five regiments (the 5th *Landwehr* Regiment had since been reassigned to the 36th Division) out of the line as a general reserve; similarly, each brigade kept a half-battalion in reserve to counterattack enemy breakthroughs. The infantry was also ordered to protect the artillery at any price; conversely, the gunners were admonished never to retreat and abandon the infantry to its fate, regardless of tactical circumstances. Lastly, VI Corps and the 12th Division improved their reconnaissance, principally through greater use of airplane and balloon companies, to acquire better intelligence about enemy movements and artillery positions.⁶³ The 12th Division, like the army as a whole, had begun to learn the tactical lessons of Brusilov's offensive. Fortunately for the West

⁶⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.619/28, 619/27, 19.6.16.; Op.Nr.602/12, 20.6.16.

⁶¹KA/NFA, Fasz.734, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.166/1, 14.6.16.; Op.Nr.167/13, 15.6.16.; Op.Nr.168/22, 16.6.16.; k.u.k. 12.FABrigKmdo, "Stände der FA," 16.6.16.

⁶²KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.175/3, 23.6.16. These were the Steinsberg, Koburg, Preußen, and Daun *Stellungen*, ironically named after the divisional defensive positions overrun on June 10.

⁶³KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.173/5, 21.6.16.; Op.Nr.181/11, 29.6.16.; k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.626/18, 26.6.16.; KDSüdarmee, Stabsoffz. der Fliegertruppe, B.Nr.2387/Op., 23.6.16.

Galicians, the division's casualties had not been too great; by the end of June, after several infusions by replacement companies, the division was at almost full strength, totalling 725 officers and 25,267 soldiers on "ration strength," including numerous *Marsch* and service units. Divisional rifle strength was 14,900.⁶⁴ Only two infantry regiments, the 3rd and 57th, were considerably short of troops; however, the 56th Regiment had four battalions. The division had survived the first Russian blow quite well, and was prepared for further action.

It did not have long to wait. Brusilov's armies too had suffered heavy losses in June: 495,000 casualties, including 60,000 killed and an equal number missing in action.⁶⁵ Despite these losses, however, the Southwestern Front prepared for another major push, as follow-up offensives against German and Habsburg forces in the latter half of June had proved strategically indecisive. The main Russian effort was to be executed by the 8th and Guard Armies, but further south the 7th Army was also committed to battle in early July against the *Südarmee*. Three corps of the 7th Army were to participate in the offensive to take the industrial town of Monasterzyska⁶⁶ and its bridges across the Koropiec. The heaviest burden was borne by XVI Corps, which was given the task of splitting the seam of VI and XIII Corps, that is, between the *k.u.k.* 12th and 36th Divisions. Hinke's troops were about to receive the blow they had been largely spared in June.

On the night of July 3-4, the 12th extended its southern flank more than three kilometres, to assist the weak 36th Division. This proved a fortunate move, for the 36th was attacked on July 4, immediately losing some of its forward positions; by the end of the day the Croatian division had lost even its decreased frontage, being pushed back nearly ten kilometres. In contrast, Hinke's division experienced only minor enemy assaults, losing limited territory on its boundary with the defeated 36th Division. On the morning of July 5, the 12th Division was prepared for full scale battle. The northern half of the division's sector consisted of Colonel Schubert's 24th Brigade, three battalions

⁶⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.182/8, 30.6.16.; *ÖUIK: IV*: Beilage 25, 5. "Ration strength" (*Verpflegsstand*)--the number of soldiers officially carried on a units' rolls, excluding those missing due to illness, wounds, or leave--was invariably considerably higher than actual field strength; in infantry battalions the ration strength was often twice the number of effectives.

⁶⁵Stone, *Eastern Front*, 261.

⁶⁶Monasterzyska, a prewar army garrison town, contained one of the few factories in rural East Galicia, the *k.k. Tabakfabrik*, most of whose thousand workers had long since abandoned the town, like the other 4,000 residents.

strong, with a further half-battalion in reserve; the southern half was *Generalmajor* von Metz's 23rd Brigade, including more than six battalions, as well as two half-battalions in reserve. Hinke's headquarters at Szwejków was protected by two battalions of the 100th Regiment, the divisional reserve. In the event that Hinke's reserve were to prove insufficient, *General der Infanterie* von Arz had moved a regiment of the 1st Prussian Reserve Division to Monasterzyska to serve as VI Corps reserve and counterattack force.⁶⁷ The 12th Division's positions were threatened by the 36th's withdrawal, but Olesza, the anchor of VI Corps defences, had to be held regardless of cost.

The division's southernmost entrenchments, held by the 3rd Regiment, came under heavy Russian shelling early on July 5, followed by determined infantry assaults. Enemy losses in the defeat of the 36th Division had not been particularly heavy, and their attacks on July 5 were spirited. Although the Moravian regiment's machine guns and mortars inflicted numerous casualties on the Russians, Habsburg positions quickly became untenable, as enemy battalions infiltrated the division's exposed southern flank. The 3rd was forced to retreat, and the positions of the neighbouring 20th Regiment, just to the north, were thus undermined; soon elements of the 20th were forced to withdraw. By the end of July 5, more than half of the 23rd Brigade's companies had retired to the division's secondary defensive position, three kilometres to the west. Neither divisional nor corps reserves had been committed to battle, as the Russian offensive remained concentrated on a small part of the 12th's front: overall Habsburg casualties were not serious, with three regiments receiving only occasional shelling. The 56th Regiment at Olesza had not been attacked, and VI Corps defences were not severely damaged by the limited withdrawal.⁶⁸

In contrast to the previous day, July 6 was quiet on the 12th Division's front, with both sides recovering and regrouping in anticipation of further action. Hinke ordered the division's engineers to prepare a third defensive position, behind Monasterzyska but before divisional headquarters at Szwejków, to act as bastion in the event that the primary and secondary lines were entirely overrun. The staff of the *Südarmee* encouraged a last-ditch mentality, fearing total dissolution if a general retreat were to begin and emphasizing that its subordinate units were "to make absolutely impossible the enemy's advance one step further to the west." Similarly, all commanders were warned emphatically to follow their orders under all circumstances. They could expect to be held

⁶⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.185/13, 3.7.16.; k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.703/23, 4.7.16.; Op.Nr.705/31, 5.7.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD Kmdo., Op.Nr.186/8, 5.7.16.

⁶⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.187/26, 5.7.16.; k.u.k. 23.IBrig., Telegramm Nr.42, 7.6.16.

personally accountable for any unnecessary withdrawals. The Germans' confidence in the Habsburg *Ostarmee*, never firm, had been shattered irrevocably, and elements of *Generalleutnant* Zietlow's 1st Prussian Reserve Division, including the 3rd Reserve Regiment, were prepared to assist the 12th Division in its defence.⁶⁹

Army, corps, and divisional staffs all expected an imminent Russian attack to solidify and expand the enemy's gains of July 4-5; however, the offensive of July 7 proved stronger and more intense than anyone had anticipated. The infantry assault, well supported by accurate artillery, began not at dawn as predicted, but at 13.00 hours, with battles raging until well after dark. Most of the Russian II Corps was committed against the 12th Division, including units from four infantry divisions. The Russian regiments achieved considerable gains early in the attack, benefitting from efficiently coordinated artillery and infantry tactics. As was so often the case during the summer of 1916, the initial Russian waves were protected by their own guns, which inflicted brief but intense barrages on Habsburg forward positions. The shelling served to keep Austro-Hungarian heavy weapons mostly silent during the Russian infantry assault; because preplanned defensive fires were inadequate, all-important Habsburg artillery responsiveness was especially poor in the early, decisive phases of enemy offensives. Thus by the time the enemy barrage ceased, and Russian infantry were storming Habsburg forward positions, there was little the 12th Division's artillery could do to save the infantry, and the first defensive line collapsed. As a battalion commander of the 20th Regiment lamented, "When our own artillery first begins to respond, it is already too late."⁷⁰

Available Austro-Hungarian artillery support proved inaccurate, with many shells falling among the 12th Division's own troops; counterbattery fires to hinder the enemy's barrages were similarly ill-planned and ineffective. Brigade and divisional counterattacks, also insufficiently prepared, were of limited help in stemming the Russian tide. The 56th Regiment defending Olesza was not under direct pressure. The Russians attempted to surround the town rather than take it directly, which promised to be very costly. North of Olesza the Habsburg units were mostly holding their ground, despite Russian superiority in men and firepower: the 100th and 57th Regiments repulsed attacks by elements of the Russian 47th and 41st Divisions respectively, inflicting heavy

⁶⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. VI. KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.207/16, 7.7.16.; KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2572, 7.7.16.

⁷⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.189/14, 7.7.16.; Op.Nr.192/12, 12.7.16.

casualties with their surviving machine guns.⁷¹ South of the town the tactical situation was evolving in a much less favourable manner. The already weakened 20th and 3rd Regiments were assaulted by six regiments from the Russian 26th and 37th Divisions, respectively. The attack on the 20th Regiment was particularly tenacious, and the remnants of several Habsburg companies soon retreated in disorganized fashion. Further disaster was averted only by a rapid and decisive counterattack by the 3rd Prussian Reserve Regiment. Well planned, and coordinated with the guns of the 1st Prussian Reserve Division, the regiment's counterstroke was entirely successful, destroying most of two Russian regiments and regaining the ground lost by the 20th Regiment. Thus thrown off balance, the Russian II Corps began to recall its battalions. By late in the evening, the 12th Division's defences had been solidly reestablished, although by German, not Habsburg forces.⁷²

The main result of the July 7 battle was the decline of Hinke's authority and the thorough intermixing of German and Habsburg companies and battalions in the 12th Division's forward defences, as was increasingly common throughout the *Ostfront* during the summer. The surviving companies of the 20th Regiment were withdrawn to recuperate in the rear area as the divisional reserve, their places taken by the reinforced 3rd Prussian Reserve Regiment; indeed the Prussian unit occupied the largest sector in the 12th's defences, just south of Olesza. Therefore Hinke and his staff effectively lost control over much of their division. Habsburg officers even forfeited operational control of their artillery, as the 1st Reserve Division assumed *de facto* supervision of the 12th's batteries in the hope of ensuring more responsive and accurate fires. Like the Habsburg forces in the East generally, Hinke and his staff were in no position, tactically or politically, to refuse such German domination, for their survival depended increasingly on their ally's assistance at virtually all levels of command.⁷³

A further Russian offensive against the 12th Division was expected on July 9, but the divisions of II Corps had suffered considerable losses and required time to receive fresh troops, rations, and ammunition before renewing their attacks. The Russians used July 9, 10 and 11 to prepare for a major push to take Olesza and inflict crippling

⁷¹KA/NFA, Fasz.735, KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2617, 11.7.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.189/14, 7.7.16.

⁷²KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.189/9, 7.7.16.; KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2579, 8.7.16.

⁷³KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.190/13, 190/15, 8.7.16.; Op.Nr.191/13, 9.7.16.; KDSüdarmee, AOK, Ia.Nr.2585, 9.7.16.

casualties on VI Corps. Habsburg pilots and forward observers noted the preparations for the attack, which the 12th Division knew was coming anyway; numerous tactical details were provided by a deserter from the 20th Turkmen Regiment. Hinke and Arz gathered all available reserves, but they were not impressive: the 23rd and 24th Brigades each had a half-battalion, division kept only one battalion of the 100th Regiment in reserve, and VI Corps was holding the 59th Prussian Reserve Regiment in the rear as the corps counterattack force.⁷⁴

What Hinke's staff described as "doubtless the hardest defensive fight that the division has had to struggle through" began at 5.20 am on July 12 with an intense enemy barrage. As with all well prepared and executed Russian offensives that summer, the artillery plan relied upon heavy concentrations of guns, amply supplied with ammunition, firing on narrow frontages. Targets were carefully selected, and much damage was inflicted on Habsburg entrenchments and batteries, particularly near Olesza: as II Corps had failed to take the town by outflanking it, now the main blow was aimed directly at it. The *k.u.k.* 57th Regiment, defending the northern half of Olesza, suffered heavily at the hands of Russian guns, receiving 2,400 shells in two hours. The batteries of VI Corps were able to respond more effectively than previously, especially with the guns of the 1st Prussian Reserve Division, but the efficient Russian artillery nonetheless dominated the early phases of the battle for Olesza.⁷⁵

As so often in the past, assault waves from three Russian divisions (the 37th, 41st, and 3rd Turkmen), protected by their own guns, emerged from their dugouts, only a hundred metres from Habsburg positions, and quickly overwhelmed Austro-Hungarian forward trenches. The collapse of the 57th Regiment was decisive, for it cost the 12th Division Olesza; it was also apparently inexplicable. Certainly, the Polish soldiers had manifested no obvious signs of disaffection. Although the two battalions of the 57th were well entrenched in the northern half of the town, and had not yet experienced heavy casualties in the fighting before Monasterzyska, their ranks crumbled before the enemy. One Russian prisoner claimed that the shell-shocked regiment had posted no observers, with many soldiers simply sitting in their positions waiting to surrender to advancing Russian infantry; it is certain that the regiment lost seventeen machine guns, virtually its entire complement. As a divisional report indicated, however, the debacle was not

⁷⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.193/13, 12.7.16.; KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITD, Gefecht-Bericht 12.7.16.

⁷⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.736, Op.Nr.208/6, 26.7.16.; KA, Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITD., Gefecht-Bericht, 12.7.16.;

entirely inexplicable, and was rooted in poor leadership: the regimental commander, as well as both battalion commanders, had stayed too far in the rear, and were incapable of preventing collapse.⁷⁶

The failure of the 57th Regiment imperilled the entire division's defences, for the Russians quickly poured more than a regiment into the widening gap between the 57th and its neighbouring regiment to the south, the 56th. The enemy succeeded in cutting off both regiments in the rear, sending a battalion each north and south, effectively exploiting the penetration. Thus the 12th lost Olesza, and the 56th and 57th Regiments were shattered, losing "such terrible casualties...that they can hardly be counted."⁷⁷

Having lost the town, the anchor of its defences, Hinke's ailing division was about to be split in half, with both brigades overwhelmed by advancing Russian regiments. The situation was bleak as the divisional sappers prepared to blow the vital Koropiec bridges before they fell into enemy hands. Elements of the 59th Prussian Reserve Regiment had been committed early in the battle, and Habsburg brigade reserves similarly had entered the line, but more reinforcements were required urgently. Only rapid action by the staff of the 1st Prussian Reserve Division saved the West Galicians. Under the covering fire of their own divisional artillery, four Prussian infantry battalions arrived in the mid-afternoon of July 12 to crush the Russian penetration. The Prussian reservists arrived at the battle's decisive moment, with two battalions of the 1st Reserve Regiment destroying Russian forward companies in open combat. By the end of the day the Prussians, assisted by 12th Division battalions, had evicted the Russians from most of Olesza, and had restored much of Hinke's defensive line. However, the Germans were essentially commanding the divisional area, as German and Austro-Hungarian infantry units were now entirely intermixed in the front lines.⁷⁸

As July 13 began, it was obvious that the Russians had to be evicted from the rest of Olesza in order for the 12th Division's defences to be fully restored. The retaking of the northern part of the town proved the division's only moment of glory during the battle. Major Nitsche's composite battalion of the *k.u.k.* 20th Regiment, the divisional reserve, had seen only modest action the previous day. It was unusually strong, with five companies and two machine gun detachments (all that remained of the regiment), and was

⁷⁶Ibid.; KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.195/2, 713/17, 713/31, 13.7.16.

⁷⁷KA, Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Gefecht-Bericht, 12.7.16.; KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. 12.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.208/6, 26.7.16.

⁷⁸KA, Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Gefecht-Bericht, 12.7.16.; KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.194/12, 12.7.16.

led by a skilled commander. Nitsche led his battalion out of its trenches in the division's second position in mid-morning, following a brief supporting barrage which commenced at 9 am. The 20th repulsed a simultaneous Russian infantry attack, and pressed into the town, led from the front by Nitsche. The Polish battalion fought very effectively and bravely, demonstrating the determination of Austro-Hungarian soldiers when properly and energetically led, and by the end of the afternoon had cleared Olesza of Russian soldiers; the Russian effort to take and hold Olesza had ended in defeat. Despite numerous successes, the enemy had been decisively weakened by the previous day's fighting. The feat of Nitsche and his unit was so outstanding that it won high praise from the command of the *Südarmee*, which customarily found little praiseworthy in Habsburg efforts that summer.⁷⁹

Yet, despite the considerable success of Major Nitsche and his battalion, the survival of the 12th Division in the fight for Olesza was attributable mostly to Prussian expertise, discipline and determination. Indeed, by the end of July 13, Hinke's command had been largely absorbed into the 1st Prussian Reserve Division. The two divisional headquarters were even co-located. Few of Hinke's soldiers remained in forward positions and under his command. The 12th Division's first line was being held by five Austro-Hungarian and eight Prussian battalions. Even that was deceptive, however, for the 12th Field Artillery Brigade and the 100th Infantry Regiment (Hinke's strongest, with three battalions) were soon placed under the 1st Reserve Division for tactical, if not administrative, purposes. The 12th Division therefore hardly survived as a self-contained fighting organization. The understrength *k.u.k.* 3rd Regiment stayed in its trenches, but the remnants of the 20th, 56th and 57th Regiments, as well as the headquarters of the 23rd and 24th Brigades, were sent to the rear to rest and recuperate. Hinke's casualties in the July battle for Olesza amounted to more than half the division's assigned rifle strength. The victorious 20th Regiment still had over 600 men in an organized battalion, but the 56th had been reduced to two very understrength battalions, while the failed 57th was down to only 200 soldiers.⁸⁰ Although the 12th Division had many more battles to fight, the costly combat for Olesza had temporarily diminished its strength almost to the point of nonexistence.

⁷⁹KA, Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITD., Gefecht-Bericht, 13.7.16.; KA/NFA, Fasz.735, KDSüdarmee, Ia.Nr.2652, 14.7.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.195/14, 13.7.16.

⁸⁰KA, Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 13, k.u.k. 12.ITD, Gefecht-Bericht, 13.7.16.; KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.196/3, 196/5, 14.7.16.; Op.Nr.197/4, 15.7.16.

Fortunately for the West Galicians the fighting before Monasterzyska had also exhausted the enemy's II and XVI Corps, so the Olesza sector remained quiet except for occasional shelling for most of the rest of July. The *Südarmer* absorbed still more Habsburg units and assumed further operational control of allied formations. Colonel Landauer, commander of the Prussian 26th Field Artillery Brigade, was assigned the task of directly supervising all artillery units in the *Südarmer*, with the aim of improving Austro-Hungarian tactical gunnery methods.⁸¹ For more than a week after the conclusion of the Olesza battle, the majority of the 12th Division's battalions were actually German, while most Habsburg units recovered in the rear area, many of them engaged in the construction and improvement of secondary defensive positions. The nearby 36th Division of XIII Corps was likewise a Habsburg division in name only; its main defensive position was held by the 223rd Prussian Reserve Regiment, supplemented by a handful of depleted *k.u.k.* battalions.⁸² Such measures, while doubtless offensive to Austro-Hungarian pride, were vitally necessary until the weary divisions were ready to reenter the line.

Feldmarschalleutnant Hinke assigned the 20th Regiment, safe in the divisional rear echelon, the task of absorbing the division's new replacements and instructing them in combat skills; this was needed, as many recent *Ersatz* soldiers had proved deficient in even rudimentary marksmanship and tactics. Poor basic training had become a serious problem among replacements that was regularly criticized at all levels, not least by Conrad at *AOK* in Teschen. However, the desperate manpower shortfalls of the shattered regiments of the *Ostheer* in June and July resulted in many half-trained soldiers being dispatched to the front. The 57th Regiment's 23rd *Marschbatallion*, which started to arrive, one company at a time, at 12th Division headquarters late in July, illustrated the problem. First, the badly understrength 57th needed at least two fresh battalions to bring it anywhere near authorized strength, but the 23rd totalled fewer than 430 soldiers.⁸³ Worse, the battalion included but one regular officer (the major commanding), supplemented by only two reserve lieutenants and one reserve cadet. The majority of the battalion's soldiers were raw recruits, having received only eight weeks of decidedly inadequate training: many of the eighteen year-olds did not know how to fire their rifles properly. Nonetheless, as was the case in the entire Habsburg Army during the crisis of

⁸¹KA/NFA, Fasz.735, KDSüdarmer, Ia.Nr.2631, 15.7.16.; Fasz.736, KDSüdarmer, Ia.Nr.2705, 18.7.16.

⁸²KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.715/37, k.u.k. XIII.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.714/32, 16.7.16.

⁸³This was an exception, as most *Marschbatallione* still had over a thousand men.

1916, the 23rd *Marschbatallion* represented all that was available to feed the ever-hungry war machine, so it was sent into battle regardless.⁸⁴

In the last week of July the 12th Division was effectively reconstituted as a fighting formation, with its battalions reentering the line. The Prussian reservists returned to their 1st Division, and soon all five of Hinke's original regiments, including the 100th, were again occupying forward positions recently relinquished by the German 48th Reserve Division. However, the 12th was redeployed south of Olesza--the defence of the town was too important to be entrusted to the West Galicians, and became instead a Prussian responsibility; effective leadership and tactics counted more than the Poles' Russophobe sentiments. This was undoubtedly wise, for the forces at Hinke's disposal remained sadly understrength. The 3rd and 100th Regiments were each two battalions strong, but the 56th included only one battalion; the remnants of the 20th and 57th Regiments were combined in a composite Polish battalion. However, even the comparatively strong 3rd Regiment contained only seven companies for a total of 1,180 soldiers including recent replacements; both its battalion commanders were captains, and three companies had no officers at all. These weaknesses were somewhat counterbalanced in all regiments by relatively healthy numbers of machine guns, infantry guns, and mortars: the infantry, aware of their value on the battlefield, tended to maintain the prescribed numbers of crew-served weapons systems longer than official rifle strength. Thus understrength battalions often had more firepower than their rifle strength alone would indicate.⁸⁵ The fundamental deficiencies and inadequacies of the 12th Division, and especially its infantry, nonetheless remained very serious. Perhaps most ominous was the pervasive insecurity now plaguing all Habsburg formations in the East, an insecurity inflicted by Brusilov's successes and reinforced by the massive German assistance required merely to prevent further collapse. Austro-Hungarian forces would fight against the Russians with little confidence until the Tsarist armies disintegrated in 1917; Habsburg lack of confidence following Brusilov's victories proved as corrosive of combat performance and fighting spirit as the gross overconfidence so prevalent in the first half of 1916.

⁸⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.198/6, 16.7.16.; Op.Nr.206/14, 24.7.16.; k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.717/22, 17.7.16.; k.u.k. AOK, Op.Nr.27.670, 18.7.16.; Fasz.737, k.u.k. Ers.Baon. IR.57, Res.E.Nr.2500/VIII Adj., 18.8.16.

⁸⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.201/2, 201/3, 19.7.16.; k.u.k. IR.3, Op.Nr.209/5, 27.7.16.

Still, the 12th Division, like the Habsburg *Ostarmee* as a whole, began to absorb the tactical lessons of Brusilov's offensive. The High Command produced several significant reports detailing proper tactical organization and planning in light of recent Russian successes, with particular emphasis on infantry-artillery cooperation. The General Staff strongly criticized the continuing tendency of infantrymen and gunners to fight separate battles: "The artillery and the infantry form one combat arm, which must be constantly combined." It also noted the inability of many divisional commanders to develop coordinated tactical plans, calling this "a sign of personal weakness and insufficient responsibility." AOK further attacked the inadequacies of both offensive and defensive tactical planning in many divisions, which resulted in numerous unnecessary reverses. The absence of effective counterattacks was judged particularly harshly. *Feldmarschall* Archduke Friedrich, the titular army head, commented acidly, "Our enemy understands the application of the correct harmony between infantry action and artillery fire. I am waiting for the same on our side." Teschen criticized too the appalling casualties of the initial battles: "The energy of the attack comes not from our own heavy losses, but in the enemy's." Similarly, officers at all levels were exhorted to employ superior leadership, discipline and planning to prevent such "useless, irreplaceable losses" in the future. Tellingly, AOK made no mention of "political unreliability" (*politische Unverläßlichkeit*), or of any other hint of treasonous conduct, in these otherwise condemnatory reports.⁸⁶

The 12th Division received further tactical insights from a *Südarmer* Army Order (*Armeebefehl*) based on the field performance of subordinate units. Noting, "Withdrawals are by themselves not defeats," the German staff criticized disorganized retreats. Commanders were ordered to prevent the enemy from rolling up flanks, and always to have a coordinated infantry-artillery counterattack plan prepared. Invariably the lack of coordination of the infantry and the artillery received the sharpest criticisms. The Army Order commented, "In every defensive position the artillery is the strongest component," adding, "The relationship between the artillery and the infantry is always to be established and maintained." The role of the gunners in withdrawals was especially emphasized; in addition, the loss of a battery was to be preferred to the abandonment of battalions of infantry to their fate: "It is no shame to lose guns in battle, but rather to let down your infantry brethren." As always, the Germans directly criticized the frequent slackness of Austro-Hungarian tactical procedures, planning, and combat leadership. Once again, significantly enough, the *Südarmer* order did not mention the effects of

⁸⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.735, k.u.k. AOK Teschen, Op.Nr.26.833, 27.115, 7.7.16.

allegedly low morale or Slav defeatism. The shortcomings of Habsburg officership were apparently considered far more significant.⁸⁷

The tactical observations of Hinke and his divisional staff after the July fight for Olesza were similarly astute, noting the decisive effects of innovative Russian tactical planning, excellent infantry-artillery coordination, deadly infantry penetrations and rolling up of flanks, and of course the ineffectiveness of Austro-Hungarian countermeasures. Perhaps because the 12th was comprised mostly of generally reliable and strongly Russophobic Polish troops, the divisional staff made few attempts to blame its obvious shortcomings on political or ethnic issues. Hinke's sole comment on the matter, "Tough close and single combat is not in the character of our troops," was immediately modified by the admission, "our training also lacks the corresponding practice with bayonet fighting."⁸⁸ The commander and senior staff officers of the 12th Division were well aware that their regiments had been repeatedly outfought in June and July, and that this had little or nothing to do with wider political or ethnic concerns.

The West Galicians entered combat again in the last days of July, as the Russian 7th and 9th Armies attempted to push the *Südarmee* and the *k.u.k.* 3rd Army deeper into East Galicia. The 12th came under attack by its old foes, the II and XVI Corps, on July 28, beginning with barrages at 5.30 am which intensified throughout the day. Habsburg and German artillery now proved more effective at counterbattery work, thus reducing some of the Russians' firepower. Infantry assaults by soldiers of the 3rd Turkmen Rifle Division commenced at 14.30, continuing all afternoon and into the evening. The 12th Division was able to hold its first line of defence with its own units, reinforced by the 100th Regiment, the divisional reserve.⁸⁹ Further Russian infantry and artillery efforts during the night of July 28-29 could not dislodge Hinke's troops, although they inflicted losses on the 56th Regiment, mostly from shelling. However, the 12th Division's casualties were comparatively light in the battle, meaning that tactical efficiency had improved. Despite continuing problems with "friendly fire" losses, infantry-artillery coordination was better than earlier in July; the division's efforts were praised by the command of the *Südarmee*, which also noted its improved regimental and battalion-level leadership.⁹⁰

⁸⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.735, KDSüdarmee, A.Kdo.12., Op.Nr.98, "Armeebefehl!" 10.7.16.

⁸⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.208/6, 26.7.16.

⁸⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.210/1, 210/4, 210/5, 210/9, 28.7.16.

⁹⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. 12.FA.Brig.Kmdo., Op.Nr.211/5, 29.7.16.; KDSüdarmee, AOK, (Landauer), Br.B.Nr.39.Op., 1.8.16.; AOK, Ia.Nr.2882, 2.8.16.

The 12th Division's sector was essentially quiet for several days. As attacks had failed to pierce VI Corps defences, the Russian II Corps directed its efforts instead at the weaker *k.u.k.* XIII Corps, just south of the 12th. The 36th Division once again proved incapable of defending its sector for very long, and by August 8 its positions had been penetrated in several places, forcing XIII Corps to conduct what it emphasized was "a further voluntary withdrawal." By the evening of August 9 the 36th, like all of XIII Corps, had successfully retreated to its secondary defensive line, and the 12th was preparing to do the same, as its neighbour's withdrawal had once again exposed its southern flank to attack.⁹¹

Hinke's retreat was less fortunate, because the Russian II Corps, observing preparations for a general withdrawal, launched its 26th Division at the 12th Division's defences early on August 10. The result was bloody chaos. The 100th Regiment, covering the division's retreat, repulsed the 26th Division's assault on the summit of Hill 395, which dominated the battle area; however, a costly counterattack by the 100th's 5th Battalion failed to dislodge the enemy from the base of the hill. The weakened Habsburg regiment was then reinforced by the 223rd Prussian Reserve Regiment, the *Südarmer*'s reserve. By then it was too late, as the Russian 26th Division had exploited the 100th Regiment's failure, sending several battalions forward into the retreating *k.u.k.* 3rd and 56th Regiments. Only rapid intervention by the 1st Prussian Reserve Division saved the West Galicians from a rout; by midday on August 11, eight Imperial German battalions--virtually the 1st Division's entire infantry complement--had been committed to covering the 12th Division's retreat.⁹²

By August 12, the 12th Division's units, protected by their ally's soldiers, had established a temporary defensive line approximately ten kilometres behind their earlier positions, behind the Koropiec, in line with other *Südarmer* formations. A further retreat was necessary almost immediately, as neither German nor Habsburg divisions were having much success halting the advance of Shcherbatchev's 7th Army. The army-wide retreat of August 13-14 was at least properly executed, covered effectively by *Südarmer* batteries. However, once again the 12th Division's retreat had to be protected by Prussian regiments. German and Habsburg casualties were minimal, as the weakened II Corps was no longer capable of determined assaults. By late on August 14, Hinke's division's own

⁹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.736, k.u.k. VI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.808/25, 8.8.16.; Op.Nr.809/29, 9.8.16.; k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.222/7, 9.8.16.

⁹²KA/NFA, Fasz.737, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.223/3, 223/13, 10.8.16.; Op.Nr.224/11, 224/13, 11.8.16.

regiments were once again in the line, defending new positions ten kilometres further back, near the Dniestr river, more than thirty-five kilometres west of the division's positions in the first week of June.⁹³

At the end of August the 12th Division reentered combat, once again defending against a push by the Russian 7th Army. The division fought hard, with the 1st Prussian Reserve and the *k.u.k.* 36th Divisions on either flank⁹⁴; however, the West Galicians were beginning to show signs of serious war weariness: a Russian attack on August 31 cost the 12th over 900 casualties (the overwhelming majority of whom were from the 56th Regiment), of whom 778 were listed as "missing," i.e., in Russian captivity.⁹⁵ This was not "political unreliability," but an indication of the poor fighting condition and fragile morale of even the more battleworthy elements of the Habsburg *Ostarmee* by the end of the tumultuous summer. In the first week of September the 12th Division, with VI and XIII Corps, retreated yet again, nearly twenty kilometres further to the northwest, towards Lemberg. The East Galician front stabilized for the balance of the month. However, by the last week of September the 12th Division had left VI Corps and the *Südarmee*, headed from the plains of East Galicia for distant northeastern Transylvania, there to assist the beleaguered *k.u.k.* 7th Army in its defence of the vital Carpathian passes. The West Galicians' terrible summer had finally ended.⁹⁶

The 12th Division's frequently unflattering combat record in the summer of 1916 was typical in many ways of the fate of the Austro-Hungarian forces in Galicia and Volhynia at the hands of Brusilov and his armies. Indeed, Hinke's formation was more fortunate than most Habsburg divisions in the East, escaping the initial hammer blow in early June and thus retaining a semblance of efficiency well into the summer. Nevertheless, like the others, the 12th eventually required considerable and repeated Prussian assistance just to survive. The Austro-Hungarian war machine, recently so confident in its prowess against the Russians, had been soundly rattled by excellent planning and innovative tactics, and would never regain much self-confidence fighting the Tsar's forces.

⁹³KA/NFA, Fasz.737, k.u.k. 12.ITD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.225/21, 12.8.16.; Op.Nr.226/3, 13.8.16.; Op.Nr.227/14, 14.8.16.; k.u.k. IR.100, Op.Nr.226/39, 13.8.16.

⁹⁴To the 12th's north was also the Turkish XV Corps, a two division-strong formation dispatched to East Galicia as a gesture of alliance solidarity in the wake of the Brusilov catastrophe.

⁹⁵KA, Nachlaß Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr.1/III, 822.

⁹⁶*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38), *Band V: Das Kriegsjahr 1916/II* (1934), Beilage 19.

Habsburg feelings of inferiority, the direct result of the catastrophes of June and July, did not disappear until the Russian Army dissolved a year later. At best, the Austro-Hungarian Army lost its independence in the Eastern campaigns (as it had in 1915 in Serbia), being reliant on its ally's operational planning and direction at tactical as well as strategic levels; at worst, the *Ostarmee* had become nothing more than a subservient appendage of Berlin's war machine. Vienna's dependence on Berlin's military assistance at all levels had been increasing since the war's outbreak; thus Brusilov and his armies completed the Habsburg transformation from an allied to virtually a satellite army, at least on the Northeastern front.

The *k.u.k. Ostarmee* had survived, even if only as a shell. Brusilov's offensives had been slowed in August, but were not really halted until late September, by which point Habsburg and German armies had retreated deep into Volhynia and Galicia, abandoning Bukovina. On the *k.u.k.* 7th Army's front, the Russians again had reached the Carpathian passes. By the end of the summer, the Habsburg Army had lost over three-quarters of a million soldiers in the East, including 380,000 soldiers into Russian captivity. The once proud and confident Austro-Hungarian armies fighting Russia had been shattered, never to recover. The apparently competent field forces of early 1916 were gone for good, because in the third year of total war the Dual Monarchy could no longer replenish such catastrophic losses.

The Russians did not advance deeper into Habsburg territory because their own losses had been considerable, over half a million dead, wounded, and missing; it was exceptionally difficult for the creaking Russian war machine to make good such losses.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the Southwestern front's achievement had been remarkable: given the resources at his disposal, and for simple cost-effectiveness, Brusilov executed the most successful offensive of the First World War, using many tactical methods yet unseen or untried on the supposedly more tactically advanced Western front. Russian armies shattered some of the best divisions in the Habsburg Army, as well as many of the worst. Of course, the great push did not knock Austria-Hungary out of the war--Germany prevented that--but it came very close indeed. It certainly finished off the Austro-Hungarian *Ostarmee* as a first-class fighting organization.

⁹⁷Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 196. Stone, *Eastern Front*, 255-61.

Chapter V: *Die Bosniaken kommen!*¹
The 55th Infantry Division, 1917

Although Habsburg military performance and prestige declined notably on the Russian front in the latter half of 1916, campaigns on other fronts demonstrated something of the continued vitality and tenacity of the Austro-Hungarian Army. The brief war with Romania in late 1916 perhaps best proved its ability to fight successfully against apparently hopeless odds. A Romanian invasion of Transylvania had been a longstanding fear at AOK, for Hungary's southeastern frontier had been left virtually defenceless since the outbreak of war. The long Carpathian border was guarded by small numbers of Gendarmerie and *Landsturm* battalions, and the army had few reserve units to contribute if Romania invaded. Worse, Romania's paper strength was impressive, totalling 564,000 soldiers in twenty-six divisions, supported by 760 modern guns. A defence of Transylvania seemed impossible with the meager forces available, but every inch of Hungarian soil had to be defended due to intense political pressure from Budapest.²

Romania, inspired by Brusilov's successes and promised generous territorial concessions by the Entente, entered the war on August 27, 1916. Vienna's onetime ally committed the bulk of its forces, three field armies with thirteen-and-a-half infantry and four cavalry divisions, to the invasion of Transylvania, which commenced immediately. The initial Habsburg defence, led by *General der Infanterie* von Arz's 1st Army, proved an unexpected success, thanks not least to Romanian incompetence: Bucharest's divisions, while numerically strong, were untried, ill-trained, and often abominably led. Additionally, Habsburg units took advantage of the mountainous terrain and fought with unexpected tenacity despite being badly outnumbered. The *k.u.k.* 71st Division, a hodgepodge of Hungarian infantry, *Landsturm*, Gendarmerie and frontier guard battalions, repelled several Romanian invasions of its eastern Carpathian sector of some 280 kilometres.³

¹The title of the regimental march of the *k.u.k. Armee's* Bosnian-Herzegovinian units.

²*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38), *Band V: Das Kriegsjahr 1916/II*(1934), 232. G. Torrey, "The Rumanian Campaign of 1916: Its Impact on the Belligerents," *Slavic Review*, Vol.39, No.1, March 1980, 28. For a detailed description of the Romanian organization in 1916: G. Romanescu, *Istoria Infanteriei Române: II* (Bucharest, 1985), 62-77.

³R. Kiszling, "Der Krieg gegen Rumänien 1916," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, 1966, 467.

However, the defence of Transylvania quickly became a joint Habsburg-German undertaking as von Falkenhayn's 9th Army arrived to bolster Arz's forces; the Habsburg Army, weakened severely by the summer fighting in the Northeast, simply could not spare sufficient divisions, so as usual Berlin provided the missing units. The allied forces managed to launch a strategic counteroffensive against the reeling Romanian armies, and proceeded to invade Romania through the Carpathian passes. Further south, Mackensen's newly raised Danube Army, comprising German, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish formations, crossed into Romania from Bulgaria, sealing the fate of Romania's field armies. Mackensen's victorious soldiers entered Bucharest on December 7.⁴ In success as much as in failure, the Austro-Hungarian Army required considerable German assistance in the war's third year.

The Italian front remained an exception to the growing Habsburg reliance on its ally's military leadership and repeated reinforcements. On the Isonzo and in the Tyrol, the *k.u.k. Armee* had managed to retain its independence from Berlin's control; Habsburg forces remained successful in defence without German help, and Ludendorff had no desire to waste further precious military assets on his increasingly dependent Austro-Hungarian ally. Therefore on the Southwestern front the Habsburg Army remained self-reliant and correspondingly self-confident. Although the Russian front still absorbed the majority of the army's field units--at the beginning of 1917, there were forty-one Habsburg infantry divisions deployed in the East (along with eleven cavalry divisions), as against only sixteen in the Southwest, as well as a handful garrisoning the Balkans--the war with Italy was for most Austro-Hungarian senior officers (Conrad not the least) the "real" war, retaining an emotional significance which outweighed its actual military and political importance to the overall war effort.⁵

Habsburg forces continued to perform well on the Southwestern front despite daunting odds, and Borojević's 5th Army resisted with undulled determination on the Isonzo, as it had since May 1915. The Italians enjoyed limited success in the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo (August 4-16, 1916), when the enemy's 2nd and 3rd Armies finally succeeded in evicting Habsburg forces from their original positions. Borojević's divisions, outnumbered six-to-one in men and more than two-to-one in artillery, abandoned Görz on August 9, and the Doberdò plateau a day later. These losses, while psychologically significant, were militarily not very notable, as the *k.u.k.* 5th Army simply constructed a new line of defences a few kilometres east of the Isonzo, and Cadorna's divisions, having

⁴Ibid. 467. See also: *ÖUİK: V*: 223-360, 449-630.

⁵G. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, 1976), 206.

lost over 50,000 soldiers in less than a week, were too weak to exploit their tactical victories. The Italians launched three more major offensives on the Isonzo before 1916 ended, in the hope of repeating their limited success and perhaps achieving the long awaited strategic breakthrough. Yet the Seventh (September 14-17), Eighth (October 9-12) and Ninth (October 31-November 4) battles merely bled the 2nd and 3rd Armies further, winning nothing of any note for Cadorna's battered forces.⁶ The Italians enjoyed no more success in the first half of 1917. In the Tenth battle (May 12-June 5), Cadorna launched thirty-five reinforced divisions in three armies against Boroëvic's defences, well supported by French and British heavy guns brought from the Western front; the offensive achieved the minor gain of a less than two mile advance at the appalling cost of 157,000 casualties.⁷

As had been the case since the first Italian offensive against Boroëvic's army, Habsburg success was attributable not only to Austro-Hungarian determination and skill, but also to the Italians' besetting military incompetence. Although Italian infantry was tough, frequently fighting tenaciously in hopeless offensives, the enemy's generalship remained poor. By mid-1917, after two years of bloody combat experience, the Italian Army was still in many ways a tactically immature force, having revised its doctrine surprisingly little since the war began. These omissions had terrible consequences. A British military intelligence report of June 1917 explained clearly the reasons for Italy's continued tactical failures, despite considerable man- and firepower advantages. It noted the inadequate administration and leadership skills of higher Italian commands, as well as the often low quality of junior officers, "who are not in all cases sufficiently keen or hard-working." More seriously, the British report detailed the abysmal state of Italian infantry-artillery cooperation. Italian batteries were unresponsive to the infantry's needs, even in emergency situations; counterbattery fires were almost unknown; and infantry-artillery communications were primitive, relying solely on field telephones. The Italian Army to date had failed to revise its essentially prewar artillery doctrine, was poorly led and trained, and thus incapable of making effective use of its rather good human material, the rugged, uncomplaining Italian peasants who filled the ranks of the infantry.⁸

⁶ÖUIK: V: 21-107, 631-683. M. Farkas, "Doberdo: The Habsburg Army on the Italian Front, 1915-1916," in: B. Király, N. Dreisziger and A. Nofi, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985), 331-3.

⁷C. Falls, *The Battle of Caporetto* (Philadelphia, 1966), 16. For more detailed coverage: *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-38), *Band VI: Das Kriegsjahr 1917* (1936), 133-84.

⁸WO 106/1513, MO2 General Staff, War Office, 24 June 1917.

In contrast, the Habsburg Army in 1917, at least on the Southwestern front, remained a successful, first-rate fighting organization. The thirty Austro-Hungarian infantry divisions on the Isonzo, in Carinthia and in the Tyrol continued to hold the high ground and occupy well constructed defences. Unfortunately for the army, at the end of 1916 the Dual Monarchy lost its most valuable symbol of cohesion, Emperor-King Franz Joseph. The eighty-six year old monarch died on November 16, and with him perished much of both the myth and reality of the ancient Imperial-and-Royal way. For the army the passing of the old monarch was particularly momentous, as Franz Joseph had always considered himself *der Oberste Kriegsherr*, cherishing his special relationship with his soldiers. The monarch began his sixty-eight year reign in war and crisis, during the upheavals of 1848, and ended it in much the same condition. Despite the fact that Habsburg arms never really won a war during Franz Joseph's decades on the throne, he never wavered in his faith that Habsburg rule ultimately depended upon the army. When Franz Joseph became Emperor-King his armies, clad in white tunics and black shakos, armed with flintlocks, were fighting the Italians, among many others; he lived long enough to see his regiments, now wearing field gray battledress and steel helmets, armed with machine guns, fighting some of the same enemies.⁹ Following Franz Joseph's death in the middle of the greatest war in nine centuries of Habsburg rule, the army and the state lost their most valuable symbol of unity, and neither the old monarch's respect for tradition nor his reverence for the army could be easily recreated.

Unfortunately for Austria-Hungary and its army, the new Emperor-King, Karl I (Károly IV of Hungary) lacked his great-uncle's careful judgment and balanced temperament. Karl desperately wanted peace, even a separate peace if necessary, and sought any and all means to achieve it. This policy hardly improved relations with Austria-Hungary's powerful German ally. Domestically, Karl, a devout Catholic, performed "humanitarian" gestures which demonstrated his misunderstanding of basic issues and undermined the war effort. Among those gestures was the freeing of numerous political agitators, many of them radicals committed to the destruction of the Dual Monarchy. In 1917 he offended the army's leadership deeply by forbidding field punishment as well as execution, even in the combat zone; Karl moreover outlawed

⁹J.-C. Allmayer-Beck, "Das Heerwesen," in: F. Engel-Janosi, H. Rumpler, eds., *Probleme der franzisko-josephinischen Zeit 1848-1916* (Munich, 1967), 67,75.

duelling, one of the professional officer corps' most cherished anachronisms.¹⁰ The young, inexperienced Emperor-King thus showed his essential softness and lack of interest in difficult military matters: a monarch less temperamentally suited to lead Austria-Hungary and its army in a total war would have been difficult to imagine.

The army's problems in early 1917 were not primarily dynastic, however. The excessive and unprecedented cost of the war, both in human and material terms, had begun to pose serious difficulties for the Habsburg war effort. The manpower losses of the previous summer had been dire. At the beginning of the new year, of the 3,500,000 soldiers wearing Austro-Hungarian uniform, only 780,000 were actually at the front, the majority being absorbed in training and rear-area duties, including large numbers convalescing from wounds and illness. Since August 1914, over 577,000 Habsburg soldiers had fallen in battle, a million had died or been permanently disabled by wounds or sickness, and 1,344,000 were missing or in enemy captivity.¹¹ Thus nearly three million soldiers--including many of the best men of the monarchy--already had been lost to the war effort. Exceptional mobilization measures had kept the field army functioning. By early 1917, all reasonably fit men between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five were subject to *Landsturm* service, at least in rear areas, and *AOK* was considering the conscription of sixteen year-olds for home service, in order to free more soldiers for front line duty.¹²

The Austro-Hungarian war effort also began to suffer disturbing difficulties with the industrial and agricultural sectors of the civilian economy, whose productivity enabled the army to keep fighting. The enormous material needs of the military had been met relatively successfully in 1915 and 1916, as *AOK* and industry coordinated their activities by expanding the prewar Military Technical Committee; the result was the introduction of dozens of badly needed new weapons systems, especially field guns, in the war's second and third years. In a typical case, Habsburg arsenals produced 1,847 field pieces of all calibres from August 1914 to the end of 1915, but 1,428 in just the first

¹⁰Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 203-4. Karl also terminated all strategic bombing which might endanger civilians; he similarly prohibited the use of gas without prior imperial sanction, a rule which proved so ridiculous that army outrage forced its termination after a few months.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 206.

¹²*ÖUIK: VI:48.*

half of 1916. The development and production of infantry guns and mortars, both relatively inexpensive systems, were no less notable.¹³

Despite these impressive increases in output, Austria-Hungary was destined never to become a first-rank industrial power, and was unable to supply all of its own material needs. During 1916, when munitions factories were performing at their peak, artillery shell production never quite reached one million per month, when Germany was producing seven million. Even Russia was putting out a million rounds every week. Similarly, Habsburg plants managed to provide the army with an average of fifty-three heavy guns, forty-five heavy mortars, and 3,000 tons of barbed wire monthly; however, German factories were simultaneously producing 160 heavy guns, 5,500 heavy mortars, and 29,000 tons of barbed wire every month. As modernization at the front demanded increased output and new products, the Dual Monarchy's industrial sector, under intense pressure to surrender manpower to the front, began to fall farther behind. Almost half the army's steel helmets were imported from Germany, and virtually all those produced in the Habsburg realm were copies of German models. Textile factories even resorted to importing German cloth to provide frontline troops with new *feldgrau* uniforms.¹⁴

Still more damaging was the deteriorating condition of the Dual Monarchy's rolling stock. The rail system literally made the war possible, but there were increasingly few trains and cars available to meet the needs of both industry and the military. As early as August 1915, *AOK* had pointed to the lack of rolling stock as the primary cause of the late delivery of military goods; as the foremost scholar of the subject has observed, "The principal flaw in the monarchy's attempt to meet the wartime demands was not industrial output but the inability of the transport system to deliver the manufactured material." The rail crisis intensified from late 1916, undercutting many of the impressive increases in munitions and weapons output. Many field units received badly needed materiel late, as there were too few trains available to supply the army. There was no real solution, for the lack of skilled workers and raw materials prevented any significant rise in truck

¹³G. Hartcup, *The War of Invention: Scientific Developments, 1914-1918* (London, 1988), 36. *ÖUİK: IV*: 97.

¹⁴N. Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (London, 1975), 123. *ÖUİK: VI*: 67. G. Dirrheimer, "Der militärische Stahlhelm in Österreich," *Militaria Austriaca: Gesellschaft für österreichische Heereskunde*, 4, 1983, 25.

production. Annual truck output went from 300 in 1914 to 2,000 in 1917, but no higher.¹⁵

The deteriorating rail system worsened the monarchy's and the army's food problems. Declining agricultural output was a general difficulty, as the male peasantry was the backbone of the infantry, causing civilian malnutrition in Austria from late 1914, and in more pastoral Hungary a year later. Hunger became a military problem in 1916, growing worse in 1917, as the rail system's inadequacies delayed even the delivery of food to the army. Malnourishment had a particularly deleterious effect on survival rates for wounded and sick soldiers, falling from seventy-four percent in 1914 to just forty percent in 1917. The supply of food for healthy soldiers was hardly better. The daily meat ration for combat soldiers at the front had fallen to one ounce (versus nine ounces in the German Army), and it was of increasingly dubious quality. The army Quartermaster announced that the worms in the meat, though perhaps unsightly, were not dangerous to health.¹⁶ The confident and battle-ready army of early 1916, reborn following the *Karpathenwinter*, had been essentially destroyed, and the surviving elements of early 1917 were increasingly poorly supplied and nourished in comparison.

Still, the morale and combat performance of the field forces had not declined notably--on the Southwestern front at least. Habsburg regiments fighting the Italians preserved their determination in defence into the third year of war. Although the Italians made limited tactical progress in the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, *k.u.k.* 5th Army defences had been reestablished successfully, and the front was essentially stable, if by no means inactive.

Combat in the upper Alpine regions of Tyrol and Carinthia, as well as the mountains of the Littoral, remained fierce, dominated by intense artillery duels. To survive, Habsburg infantry in forward positions became virtual cavedwellers, spending much of their time in large *kavernen* blasted into the karst, some of which could accommodate entire battalions in a reasonable degree of comfort and safety from Italian heavy guns. Nonetheless, the dangers and difficulties posed by nature alone were very serious, particularly in the winter and early spring, when the threat of avalanches, easily triggered by shelling or mining, was omnipresent. The "white death," lethal for both

¹⁵J. Wegs, "Transportation: The Achilles' Heel of the Habsburg War Effort," in: R. Kann, B. Király, P. Fichtner, eds., *The Habsburg War Effort in World War I* (Boulder, 1977), 125-9.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 125-8. Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, 205.

Austro-Hungarian and Italian soldiers, inspired great fear, not least because whole battalions could be wiped out instantly.¹⁷

Transportation and supply methods which were routine on other fronts proved very difficult in the upper Alpine regions. The army constantly had to find engineering solutions to the considerable logistical problems posed by geography. This entailed constant innovations with rail and truck technology to deliver materiel, particularly heavy artillery, to high altitudes.¹⁸ More mundane, but no less vital, to the army was the endless struggle waged by construction engineer battalions to keep front line soldiers supplied with fresh water. Although the army's expertise in the construction of systems of water tanks, pipes, and pumping stations had improved with experience, the labour required to keep water flowing to men at high altitudes imposed a constant burden on the army on the Southwestern front; despite impressive technological advances, water supply remained a serious problem until the war's end.

Innovation in the Habsburg Army on the Italian front was not merely logistical, but also tactical. The army was able to draw upon its traditional expertise in mountain fighting, giving it an important advantage over the enemy; only Italian *Alpini* units, organized, trained and equipped to fight in the high Alps, could compare with Austro-Hungarian mountain brigades in terms of combat effectiveness.¹⁹ Furthermore, many Habsburg divisions fighting on the Southwestern front became *de facto* mountain formations, regardless of actual designation. The general performance of Habsburg formations was improved by the raising of specialist combat units in the Tyrol and on the Isonzo. High mountain companies (*Hochgebirgskompagnien*), comprised of veteran, fit soldiers, were trained and equipped to fight at high altitudes, where line infantry battalions normally could not reach; one company usually was attached to each mountain brigade. Additionally, the army formed mountain guide detachments (*Bergführerabteilungen*), including experienced soldiers familiar with local conditions, to

¹⁷ÖUİK: III: 367. Farkas, "Doberdo," 323-5.

¹⁸Among the monarchy's most successful engineers was the general director of the Daimler-Werke at Wiener Neustadt, Ferdinand Porsche, later famous for his automotive pioneering, who guided the design and construction of numerous special Alpine vehicles for heavy artillery transport. H. Lichem, *Gebirgskrieg 1915-1918* (3 Bände, Bozen, 1980-2), *Bd.III: Karnische und Julische Alpen*(1982), 179-84.

¹⁹When the Imperial German Army initially raised mountain brigades during the war, it turned to Habsburg staff officers for advice on tactical, organizational, and logistical issues, a rare exception to the general rule of Austro-Hungarian dependence on its ally's battlefield expertise. G. Hebert, *Das Alpenkorps: Aufbau, Organization und Einsatz einer Gebirgstruppe im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Boppard am Rhein, 1988), 117-8.

assist units with moving in the high Alps. By 1917, both types of specialist mountain units were widely deployed on the Southwestern front. The army also raised a special sapper battalion (the 61st) for gas warfare. The unique terrain and climatic conditions in the Alps made the widespread use of chemical munitions from canisters impracticable, as well as potentially quite hazardous for both sides, but gas nonetheless was used against the Italians from 1916 by *Sappeurspezialbatallion 61*.²⁰

The continued success of Habsburg arms against the Italians was doubtless a major factor contributing to the high morale of Austro-Hungarian forces in the Southwest. Victories, even defensive ones, improved the army's cohesion and fighting spirit. Although Cadorna's armies achieved limited tactical gains in the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo, Boroević's divisions quickly reestablished a solid defensive line, and the strategic defence was not threatened. The heavy Habsburg casualties in the Tyrol and on the Isonzo, amounting to 603,736 soldiers in 1916, were serious; however, only 32,269 officers and men actually fell in battle (6.3% of total losses), while 342,947 soldiers fell ill, representing a shocking 56.8% of all casualties.²¹

Nonetheless morale on the Southwestern front remained high into 1917, certainly far higher than on the Northeastern front. Disaffection and desertion hardly existed among the Habsburg forces fighting the Italians. Although German, Magyar and South Slav regiments tended to fight most effectively and reliably, no nationality experienced notable morale difficulties, even in the third year on the Isonzo; signs of disaffection began to appear among some Serbian soldiers fighting the Italians, but the situation was in no way comparable to the army's desertion problem in the East with Serbian units.²² A British intelligence report of July 1917 revealed much about the nature of the Austro-Hungarian Army's fighting spirit. The report noted no discernible deterioration in Habsburg morale since 1916 on any front, least of all on the Italian: "In the recent fighting on the Isonzo and in the Trentino they fought as well as at any period of the war." Observation of prisoners recently captured by the Italians revealed that soldiers from units of mixed nationalities tended to exhibit lower *esprit de corps* and poorer physical condition; however, the general British impression of the captured Habsburg soldiers was quite good with respect to physique and morale: prisoners from Magyar regiments "were well fed, well clothed and well equipped and made an excellent

²⁰ÖUIK: VI: 44, 51, 65n. Hartcup, *War of Invention*, 113.

²¹ÖUIK: VI: Beilage 2, Tabelle 1.

²²R. Spence, "The Yugoslav Role In the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1914-1918," *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985), 361-2.

impression." The report also advised caution about signs of disaffection, particularly many captured Austro-Hungarian soldiers' letters, noting that every army's "worst type of soldier" would write complainingly about conditions, adding, "It must be remembered that similar letters have been found on German prisoners since the first battle of Ypres in 1914."²³ The British report was substantially accurate, not least in its determination that general Habsburg Army morale was quite good on the Southwestern front, regardless of nationality, and despite the presence of perennially disaffected individuals, as in all armies in the field.

Like all armies in the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Army also had several infantry divisions which were widely recognized as élite formations, more tenacious and reliable than average divisions. Consistently loyal and skilled in both attack and defence, these divisions added to the army's overall combat power far out of proportion to their actual size. Two of the finest divisions were the 3rd *Edelweiß* Division, mostly recruited in the provinces of Upper Austria and Salzburg; and the 8th *Kaiserjäger* Division, comprised of regiments of *Tiroler Kaiserjäger*. These *deutschösterreich* formations were also the only divisions formally given titles as well as numbers, in recognition of their outstanding performance, particularly against the Italians. Almost as well known were the 6th Infantry and 22nd Rifle (*Schützen*)²⁴ Divisions, German-Austrian and Slovene in composition and raised in Styria, Carinthia and Krain as part of III Corps (Graz), known unofficially as the "Iron Corps" (*Eisernen Korps*). The Habsburg Army's newest élite division was the 55th, raised only in October 1917 and destined to play a significant role in the army's greatest offensive of the First World War.

Actually there had been a *k.u.k.* 55th Infantry Division since April 1915. The original formation was a diverse collection of war-raised *Landwehr* and *Honvéd* battalions, supplemented by *Marsch* and *Landsturm* units. It fought solely on the Northeastern front, participating in most of the major campaigns of 1915 and 1916; the division's reputation was for steadiness rather than dash. By 1917 the 55th included three *Honvéd* and one *k.u.k.* infantry regiments, a mixture of Magyar and Croatian troops, with

²³WO 106/1513, C17/477, "Evidence of war-weariness and desire for a separate peace in Austria-Hungary," General Staff, War Office, 7 July 17.

²⁴As part of an army-wide renaming policy instituted in December 1916, *k.k.* *Landwehr* infantry regiments and divisions were retitled Rifle (*Schützen*) units; similarly, the three regiments of *k.k.* *Landeschützen* were renamed *Kaiserschützenregimenter*, and the 4th and 27th *Landwehr* Regiments were granted the title of Mountain Rifle (*Gebirgsschützen*) Regiments. Additionally, all artillery and cavalry divisions (i.e., battalions) were retitled half-regiments (*Halb-Regimenter*). KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k. AOK, Op.Nr.44.804, 16.12.16.

most of Hungary's minorities being represented in the its ranks as well. However, on October 10, 1917, as part of an army-wide rationalisation of divisional numberings, the 55th Division became the 155th *Honvéd* Division, and a new *k.u.k.* 55th Division was formed on the Isonzo.²⁵

The creation of a new 55th Division in fact involved the raising of no new regiments. Instead, the new division derived most of its assets, including two-thirds of its infantry, all its artillery, and many support units, from the *k.u.k.* 93rd Infantry Division, a war-raised formation, and a veteran of much fighting on the Southwestern front; the 93rd was disbanded when the new 55th was formed.²⁶ The 55th Division's commander was *Generalmajor* Felix Prinz zu Schwarzenberg, an experienced field commander and scion of one of Austria's oldest noble families. The Schwarzenbergs had served the Habsburgs in the army and the civil service for centuries, frequently with considerable distinction. The family was one of the great ancient Bohemian magnate clans, neither German nor Czech, but distinctly *böhmisch* in the old, national sense (Prince Felix spoke both German and Czech). The fifty year-old *Generalmajor* Schwarzenberg had enjoyed a successful career in the Emperor-King's service, beginning as a nineteen year-old *einjährig Freiwilliger* in the Bohemian 14th Dragoons, a decidedly aristocratic regiment. Although he had passed the *Kriegsschule* and had served on corps-level staffs, the majority of Schwarzenberg's career had been spent with field units, mostly with his own regiment, which he had risen to command in 1913.

Schwarzenberg's war record was distinguished, beginning with a brigade command in the Serbian campaign of 1914, where he proved himself a capable leader of soldiers even in supremely difficult circumstances. From 1915 he commanded units on the Isonzo, including the polyglot 12th Mountain Brigade of the 48th Division; eventually he rose to command the division itself. He was consistently courageous in the face of the enemy, as well as a wise tactician well versed in Alpine warfare. Quite popular with the troops, the well born major general was by virtue of his temperament and experience an excellent choice to lead the new 55th Division in the campaign which was about to begin.²⁷

²⁵KA, Sammlung Balaban, Schachtel 15, k.u.k. 55.ITDKmdo., Kriegsgliederung, 28.4.15.; k.u.k. AOK, 45.439, 27.9.17.; KA/NFA, k.u.k. 55.ITDKmdo., Op.Nr.244/1, 1.9.17.

²⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k. 10.ArmeeKmdo., Op.Nr.3737, 2.10.17.

²⁷KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart.3117, Felix Prinz zu Schwarzenberg.; NFA, Fasz.3072, k.u.k. 55.IDKmdo., Offizierstandliste, 31.12.17.

Schwarzenberg's division included some of the Habsburg Army's most reliable elements; additionally, all his regiments were veterans of numerous campaigns against the Italians. One of his three infantry regiments was the *k.u.k.* 7th, a Carinthian one dating to 1691. The four-battalion-strong unit was one of the finest in the *k.u.k. Armee*, motivated by an excellent *esprit de corps*; known to the Italians as the "brown devils," the Carinthian soldiers of the 7th were among the most tenacious fighters the Dual Monarchy produced.²⁸ Their strong regimental pride was reinforced by a sense of racial superiority: Carinthia, a German frontier province bordering on large Italian and Slovene populations, was among the most intensely *deutschnational* regions of Austria, and its soldiers manifested a considerable dislike and contempt for the Italians, the invaders of Carinthia in 1915. Like most German-speaking Habsburg soldiers, the *Khevenhüller* invariably referred to the enemy as *Katzelmacher*--"cat eaters."²⁹

No less motivated by regimental and racial pride, and no less experienced in Alpine warfare, were Schwarzenberg's remaining two infantry units, the 2nd and 4th Bosnian-Herzegovinian Regiments. Although the army's Bosnian-Herzegovinian units spoke a common tongue, Serbo-Croat, like their homeland they were divided on cultural and religious lines into Croatian, Serbian, and Muslim elements. Despite this fragmentation, and the tension which inevitably resulted, the Bosnians and Herzegovinians--known collectively to the army as the *Bosniaken*--proved themselves during the First World War to be among the Dual Monarchy's most loyal and determined soldiers, particularly on the Southwestern front. Against the Italians the *Bosniaken* consistently fought with a resolution and ferocity unparalleled in the rest of the army.

Although the *Bosniaken* enjoyed excellent *esprit de corps*, their proud regiments were actually quite young. The Turkish territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina was taken over by the Dual Monarchy only in 1878, following an invasion by several Habsburg divisions. Resistance to Austro-Hungarian troops was considerably more determined than had been anticipated, particularly on the part of Bosnia's Muslim population.³⁰ The

²⁸Lichem, *Gebirgskrieg*, 122. The 7th was known in the Habsburg Army as "*Die Khevenhüller*," after *Feldmarschall* Ludwig Graf Khevenhüller, one of the greatest Habsburg generals of the 18th century; such regimental nicknames based on the *Regiments-Inhaber* were very common.

²⁹A. Krauß, *Das Wunder von Karfreit: im besonderen der Durchbruch bei Flitsch und die Bezwingung des Tagliamento* (Munich, 1926), 33. The author here recounts his overhearing two soldiers of the 7th using the term most contemptuously on the eve of the great offensive.

³⁰Foreign Minister Count Gyula Andrassy had unfortunately observed that "a squadron of hussars and a mounted band" would be the only *k.u.k.* forces required to occupy and pacify the provinces. R. Donia, "The

army had to contend with a serious rebellion in 1882, which was put down in four months by a counterinsurgency campaign noted for its innovative tactics and perceptive leadership.³¹ However, the Habsburg Army, like the British Indian Army with its regiments of Gurkhas and Sikhs, and the French and Spanish colonial armies with their respective Moroccan *Tirailleurs* and *Regulares*, quickly proceeded to turn its ardent native foes into some of its most reliable soldiers.

Although Bosnia-Hercegovina was not legally annexed to the Dual Monarchy until 1908, the army began recruiting paramilitary units for domestic service in 1879, almost immediately following the initial pacification of the two provinces.³² The recruitment of *Bosniaken* increased, with four full battalions joining the order of battle of the *k.u.k. Armee* in 1885. Four more battalions were raised in 1889, followed by an additional four in 1892; in 1894 the twelve battalions were grouped into four Bosnian-Hercegovinian Infantry Regiments.³³

The four regiments were recruited regionally, lending them distinct ethnic characteristics. The 1st Regiment (Sarajevo) was about two-fifths each Serbian and Muslim, supplemented by one-fifth Croatian soldiers; the 2nd (Banja Luka) was majority Serbian; the 3rd (Tuzla) was majority Muslim, with the remainder being largely Serbian; while the Hercegovinian 4th (Mostar) was predominantly Croatian, with a substantial Muslim minority. Despite these ethnic divisions, as well as the units' shaky beginnings, the *Bosniaken* soon became admired for their efficiency and loyalty. Almost immediately after their formation, the four regiments were dispersed to different garrisons, each normally leaving only one battalion in the home recruiting district. The four regiments were dispatched respectively to Vienna, Graz, Budapest, and Trieste. This was done not

Habsburg Imperial Army in the Occupation of Bosnia-Hercegovina," in: B. Király, G. Stokes, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XVII: Insurrections, Wars, and the Eastern Crisis in the 1870's* (New York, 1983), 122.

³¹An overview of the invasion: "Pulverfaß Balkan: Bosnien-Herzegovina, Teil 1," *Militaria Austriaca*, 1992/Folge 11. For details on the 1882 rebellion: *Ibid.*, "Teil 2," Folge 12. See also: C. Jelavich, "The Revolt in Bosnia-Hercegovina 1881-82," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 31, 1953.

³²Formal military service commenced in 1882, when the first companies of Bosnian-Hercegovinian soldiers joined the army; the introduction of conscription in the provinces was premature, however, resulting in the revolt of 1882.

³³W. Schachinger, *Die Bosniaken kommen! Elitetruppe in der k.u.k. Armee 1879-1918* (Graz, 1989), 26-9.

merely to keep the regiments away from the political tensions of Bosnia-Hercegovina, but more importantly because these essentially colonial units had no interest in the domestic politics of the Dual Monarchy. Obedient and perfectly willing to confront agitators of any nationality, the *Bosniaken* were ideal garrison troops in politically tense cities such as Vienna, Graz, and Budapest. As the monarchy was plagued by numerous nationalist demonstrations and riots in its last decades, the Bosnian-Hercegovinian regiments soon proved their worth. The most serious incident involving the *Bosniaken* occurred in Graz in November 1897, during German nationalist protests following the passing of the Badeni language law.³⁴ Detachments of the Graz-based 2nd Bosnian-Hercegovinian Regiment were deployed in the streets to keep order. Confronted by rioting university students and unable to retreat, one detachment commander ordered his *Bosniaken* to open fire, killing one protestor. The nationalist *Burschenschaften* soon led protests against the loyal Bosnians, calling them "black-yellow Muslim mercenaries," and "stupid dogs."³⁵ Needless to say, the Bosnians' reliability was not affected by these or any other protests.

The loyalty of the *Bosniaken* to the Habsburg throne was grounded in the traditional emphasis on martial values prevalent in Bosnia-Hercegovina (and particularly among the Muslims), but also in gratitude for the genuine achievements of Habsburg rule in the provinces since 1878. Like many colonial governments, the "enlightened autocracy" which governed Bosnia-Hercegovina enacted notable reforms, improving bureaucratic efficiency, bringing genuine security by ending centuries of banditry, and, most importantly, mandating absolute interconfessional equality and freedom of worship. The Croats and Muslims were somewhat more favoured by the Habsburg authorities than the majority Serbs (43.4% of the population in 1910, versus 32.3% Muslim and 22.9% Croatian), but all groups benefitted culturally and economically from Habsburg colonialism. The signs of progress were evident, including the beginnings of industrialization, large scale public works, especially road and rail construction (mostly

³⁴This law, which mandated bilingualism in the Bohemian civil service, was hated by the monarchy's German nationalists, not least because few German bureaucrats spoke Czech, while all their Czech counterparts already knew German.

³⁵"Stupid dogs." (*blöde Hunde*) was a play on the title of the regiment, b.h.IR.2. Ibid., 49. R. Spence, "Die Bosniaken kommen!: The Bosnian-Hercegovinian Formations of the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1914-1918," in: R. Spence, L. Nelson, eds., *Scholar, Patriot, Mentor: Historical Essays in Honor of Dimitrije Djordjevic* (New York, 1992), 302-3. B. Sutter, *Die badenischen Sprachenverordnungen von 1897* (2 Bände, Graz, 1965). 2. Band, 190-9, 319-24.

by the army), and the impact of public health measures. Between 1885 and 1910, the provinces' population grew by forty-two percent, while mortality fell by forty percent.³⁶

Nonetheless there was resentment of Habsburg rule among many of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Serbs, not primarily for political or ethnic reasons, but rather for a particular economic one. Despite the numerous reforms enacted by Austro-Hungarian bureaucrats, land reform was not attempted: the Ottoman law of 1857 was actually kept in effect. This rewarded the predominantly Muslim landlords for their continued loyalty. However, as three-quarters of the impoverished peasants (known as *kmets*) were Serbs, the injustices of land tenure inevitably assumed an ethnic coloration for the *kmets*. These Serbian resentments were much enhanced in the decade before 1914 by intense nationalist propaganda emanating from Belgrade. In contrast, the provinces' Croats were strongly loyal to the Habsburg throne, gaining greatly from improvements in schooling. One result of this was that the better educated Bosnian and Herzegovinian Croats supplied the majority of the *Bosniaken's* officers and non-commissioned officers. Muslims, too, became increasingly loyal to Austro-Hungarian rule, particularly following 1909 reforms which enhanced the power of the Muslim political and economic elites. Additionally, Croats and Muslims of all classes came to fear Serbian expansionism in the years before the war, thereby producing greater determination to preserve the existing--that is, Habsburg--status quo.³⁷

The *k.u.k. Armee* was careful to maintain religious and cultural traditions in its Bosnian-Herzegovinian regiments, with special consideration for the Muslims' privileged position in the provinces. Thus the *Bosniaken* uniform included prominent symbols of the Ottoman heritage, including the red fez and Turkish-style trousers, worn by all soldiers, whether Serbian, Croatian, or Muslim. Equally importantly, while the Habsburg Army had long had Catholic and Orthodox chaplains, and included them in *Bosniaken* regiments, the army added two *Militär-Imams* as well, in response to Muslim petitioning; the high command of the overwhelmingly Catholic army ensured that Islam was rigidly adhered to, so as not to offend the Muslim population. Indeed, as an eminent historian

³⁶C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918* (London, 1968), 740-7.; K. Wessely, "Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung von Bosnien-Herzegovina," *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918* (6 Bände, Vienna, 1973-1989), *Bd. I: Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung* (1973), 529-30. D. Djordjevic, "Die Serben," *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Bd. III: Die Völker des Reiches (1. Teilband)*, (Vienna, 1980), 764. P. Sugar, *Industrialization of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1878-1918* (Seattle, 1963), 48-9, 57, 71-2.

³⁷Wessely, "Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung," 565. Macartney, *Habsburg Empire*, 745. See particularly: R. Donia, *Islam under the Double Eagle: The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1878-1914* (New York, 1981).

has noted, "Muslim recruits in barracks were made to keep to observances of their faith with a strictness unknown in those areas where the writ of the Sultan really ran, and often unwelcome to themselves."³⁸ The Dual Monarchy thereby maintained the loyalty of its Muslim conscripts, recently the army's fierce opponents.

The war's outbreak demonstrated clearly the willingness of Bosnian and Hercegovinian Muslims and Croats to fight under Habsburg colours. The enthusiasm of the Muslims was particularly striking, with thousands of volunteers joining the *Schützkorps*, a *k.u.k.* paramilitary formation formed to combat Serbian irregulars; some 10,000 Muslim volunteers later served in occupied Serbia, where they fought the *komitadji* with the same ruthlessness and vigor they had demonstrated in their home provinces. The reliability of Serbs in *Bosniaken* regiments was in doubt from the outset, and several battalions had their Serbian soldiers removed before leaving their depots for the Serbian front. Yet this was by no means always the case: Serbs from Western Bosnia--further from the sources of pan-Serbian propaganda--were considered more loyal, and some Serbian soldiers actually requested to be left with their units "so as not to stain their soldierly honour."³⁹

Despite the loyalty of many Serbs in *Bosniaken* regiments, however, it cannot be denied that Serbian soldiers were much more likely to desert than their Croatian or Muslim comrades-in-arms, especially on the Serbian and Russian fronts. Therefore the army gradually removed Serbian soldiers from field battalions, reducing their total number by forty percent, so that no Bosnian-Hercegovinian regiment still had a Serbian majority. By 1917, the *Bosniaken* training battalions had been removed from Bosnia-Hercegovina, to keep soldiers away from the political ferment of their home provinces. The declining numbers of Serbian recruits were made good by the increased sacrifices of Croats and particularly Muslims. Indeed, although Serbs were forty-three percent of the provinces' population, they comprised only twenty-three percent of the dead: three Muslim and two Croatian soldiers gave their lives for every fallen Serb.⁴⁰

³⁸Donia, *Islam under the Double Eagle*, 101. Macartney, *Habsburg Empire*, 746.

³⁹H. Kerchnawe, *Die Militärverwaltung in den von den österreichisch-ungarischen Truppen besetzten Gebieten* (Vienna, 1928), 99. Spence, "Die Bosniaken kommen," 303-4. R. Kiszling, *Die Höhe Führung der Heere Habsburg im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna, 1968), 20.

⁴⁰KA, Nachlaß Robert Nowak, B/726, Nr. 1, "Die Klammer des Reiches: Das Verhalten der elf Nationalitäten der k.u.k. Wehrmacht, 1914-1918," Bd.I, 333-6, Bd.II, 579-81, 591-2. Spence, "Die Bosniaken kommen," 300-6, 310-1. W. Winkler, *Die Totenverluste der öst.-ung. Monarchie nach Nationalitäten* (Vienna, 1919), 7, 34-6.

These ethnic disparities had little impact on the combat record of the *Bosniaken*, which was second to none in the Habsburg Army. The Bosnians and Hercegovinians had never before fought for the Dual Monarchy, but they quickly won a hard-earned reputation for tenacity, and were used frequently as shock troops in both attack and counterattack. *Bosniaken* regiments were not normally deployed together in brigades; indeed, battalions of the same regiment frequently served on entirely different fronts. Instead, Bosnian-Hercegovinian units were used regularly as stiffeners for weak brigades and divisions, a role they fulfilled on the Northeastern front from early 1915. Their performance on the Southwestern front was without equal, both defensively and offensively: even the Serbs often fought with enthusiasm. Raised in mountainous terrain, and imbued with a hatred for the Italians no less intense than the Carinthians', the *Bosniaken* were arguably the finest troops on the Isonzo; they were certainly the Habsburg soldiers most feared by the enemy.⁴¹

The army rapidly expanded its Bosnian-Hercegovinian formations to meet the needs of total war. From seventeen battalions in 1914,⁴² the army initially increased its *Bosniaken* units by raising new battalions for existing regiments. However, new units were also formed, so that by the beginning of 1917 there were five large regiments and eight *Feldjäger* battalions, for a total of thirty-seven combat battalions, in addition to numerous second-line and rear echelon battalions; before the end of the war three more Bosnian-Hercegovinian regiments would be raised.⁴³

The 55th Division was fortunate, for its 2nd and 4th *Bosniaken* Regiments were disciplined units with outstanding fighting records; it was also an exception to the general army rule of not concentrating Bosnian-Hercegovinian units in one formation. Schwarzenberg's 55th was thus the closest thing to a *Bosniaken-Division* during the war. The 2nd Bosnian Regiment was in fact the most decorated Austro-Hungarian regiment of the war, its soldiers winning forty-two Gold Medals for Bravery (the equivalent of the Victoria Cross or Congressional Medal of Honor); the second most decorated regiment was the *k.u.k.* 7th, with thirty-six "Goldenen." The exploits of the *Zweier Bosniaken* were legendary. Having spent most of the war on the Southwestern front, the regiment

⁴¹KA, Nachlaß Nowak, B/726, Nr. I/II, 475, 501.; Spence, "The Yugoslav Role," 361. Spence, "Die Bosniaken kommen," 306-8. R. Kiszling, *Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalweg eines Südslawenvolkes* (Graz, 1956), 101-3.

⁴²Four line battalions per regiment, plus a *b.h. Feldjägerbatallion* raised in 1903.

⁴³Schachinger, *Die Bosniaken kommen*, 73-77. F. Franek, "Die Entwicklung der öst.-ung. Wehrmacht in den ersten zwei Kriegsjahren," *Ergänzungsheft 2 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1933), 23.

had bested the Italians numerous times, but never more decisively than on Monte Meletta in the Asiago region in early June 1916, when the regiment stormed the summit, defeating four crack *Alpini* battalions, and then repulsing repeated counterattacks on three flanks. The 2nd Regiment lost half its soldiers in the fight, but emerged victorious, receiving numerous decorations and citations. The war record of the 4th *Bosniaken* was hardly less exalted. The Hercegovinians had spent most of the war fighting the Italians, and had won fame by their successful assault in August 1917 on Rombon mountain in the upper Isonzo valley, while serving with the 93rd Division. In the costly attack, two battalions of the 4th evicted seven *Alpini* battalions from the summit.⁴⁴ Therefore in October 1917 *Generalmajor* Schwarzenberg's newly formed 55th Division was preparing to enter battle for the first time, but its soldiers, veterans of three of the finest regiments in the Habsburg Army, were hardly novices.

Schwarzenberg's staff and senior commanders were also experienced soldiers, as well as proven leaders. His two brigade commanders, Colonels *Freiherr* von Zeidler-Daublebsky and *Graf* von Zedtwitz, leading the 26th Mountain and 38th Infantry Brigades, respectively, had both served with distinction on the Southwestern front; similarly, Colonel von Steiring, the divisional artillery commander, had been the 93rd Division's successful chief gunner on the Isonzo. Schwarzenberg's chief-of-staff, Major Rudolf Lukanc, was a very competent staff officer, who spoke Serbo-Croat fluently; this was valuable, for Schwarzenberg did not. The regimental and battalion commanders were veteran combat soldiers, most of whom had served with their regiments for some time and spoke the languages of their men.⁴⁵

The tactical organization of the 55th Division also reflected the experiences of more than three years of total war, and particularly twenty-nine months on the Southwestern front. The division was constituted as an Alpine formation, even though only one of its two maneuver brigades was officially a mountain unit. In addition to the division's eleven line infantry battalions,⁴⁶ there were also two high mountain companies (the 8th and 11th). Not needing cavalry in the Alps, the 55th was assigned only a mounted platoon of Schwarzenberg's own 14th Dragoons for delivering dispatches. The

⁴⁴KA, Gefecht-Berichte, Schachtel 58, bh.IR.2, Op.Nr.6/4, 12.6.16. Schachinger, *Die Bosniaken kommen*, 123-33, 354-5. Spence, "Die Bosniaken kommen," 307-8. Lichem, *Gebirgskrieg*, 264-5. Refer particularly to: *Das bosnisch-herzegovinische Infanterie-Regiment Nr.2 im Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918* (Vienna, 1969).

⁴⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.3068, k.u.k. 55.IDKmdo., Offizierstandliste, 31.12.17.; bh.IR.4, Offizierstandliste, 25.11.17.; bh.IR.2, E.Nr.80/St., 31.10.17.; k.u.k.IR.7, II.Feldbaon., Offizierstandliste, Res.Nr.730/1, 25.11.17.

⁴⁶The *Zweier Bosniaken* included only three battalions, against four each for IR.7 and bh.IR.4.

more substantial engineering tasks were performed by the two assigned sapper companies. Perhaps most impressive was the division's artillery, grouped in the overstrength 93rd Field Artillery Brigade (which kept its old number despite the previous division's disbandment). The 55th's artillery totalled twenty-seven field and two *Minenwerfer* batteries drawn from more than six different gunner regiments, some 114 field and twenty-six heavy cannons, supplemented by nine light positional guns. The majority of the batteries were from the 3rd and 16th Mountain and 43rd Field Artillery Regiments. Most of the artillery came from the 93rd Division, and was well acquainted with Alpine gunnery techniques, including the difficult technique of placing guns at high altitudes.⁴⁷

No less prepared for Schwarzenberg's division's first battle was the 55th Assault Battalion (*Sturmbatallion*), the only unit actually raised with the new division. The 55th *Sturmbatallion* consisted of the substantially reinforced former *Sturmhalbbatallion* 93, which dated from early 1917. Assault units were raised in the first months of the year on orders from *AOK*, in the hope of improving the combat efficiency of Habsburg units, particularly in the attack. Like the German Army High Command, and indeed partly inspired by their ally's experimentation, the Austro-Hungarian High Command determined that innovative infantry tactics would yield outstanding results, above all in the vital initial phases of an assault. Advanced tactics which integrated new and portable direct and indirect fire systems and permitted considerable operational flexibility would be able to achieve decisive penetrations in enemy lines, especially if the assault units were efficiently trained and energetically led. To experiment with new assault tactics and their implementation, *AOK* approved the formation of *Sturmbatallione* as independent units, one per infantry division; cavalry divisions were each authorized a *Sturmhalbregiment*, and independent infantry and mountain brigades were each ordered to raise a *Sturmhalbbatallion*.⁴⁸

Significantly, although assault battalions were independent commands, they were not considered permanent additions to the order of battle, but rather were to serve as tactical test units for the benefit of the whole army, with the intention of eventually

⁴⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k. 55.ITKmdo., E.Nr.68, Kriegsgliederung, 21.10.17.; 14.Armee, AOK, Ia.Art.geheim.Nr.950/17, "Gliederung der Art. der Gruppe Flitsch (k.u.k. I.KorpsKmdo)." 20.10.17.

⁴⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.3067, AOK, Bef.Op.Nr.43.785, 4.9.17.; Op.Nr.111.247, 31.8.17. In practice, due to shortages of men and equipment, many Habsburg divisions did not complete the formation of their assault battalions until 1918; for a concise overview of the development of German assault units: B. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (New York, 1989).

transforming the doctrine and organization of line battalions as well. As the High Command noted, "Training in assault tactics must become the common property of the whole infantry." In a similar vein, AOK emphasized the provisional, instructional nature of the *Sturmbatallione* by adding, "The assault battalion is not to be regarded as a special formation, but merely as a school for assault training."⁴⁹

The assault battalions, although provisional units, were established in early and mid-1917 throughout the army on all fronts, sharing a common tactical doctrine and a largely standard organization. As stipulated by AOK, *Sturmbatallione* contained a flexible number of assault companies, one per infantry regiment in the division; similarly, the number of platoons per assault company depended upon the number of battalions in the parent regiment. Thus, as divisional organization varied in field practice, *Sturmbatallione* could have anywhere from three to five assault companies, each with two to five platoons, although four of each was the norm.⁵⁰ However, the essential details of assault battalion and company orders of battle were uniform throughout the army. The assault platoon had a fixed organization based around the assault section (*Sturmtrupp*), a unit of eight soldiers under a non-commissioned officer. The eight other ranks included two rifle grenadiers, one hand grenadier, two soldiers to protect the rifle grenadiers, two observers, and two reserve soldiers; all were armed with the shortened carbine version of the Mannlicher service rifle. The *Sturmtrupp* was the smallest maneuver unit, and the basic building block of the assault battalion; each platoon had four sections and a small headquarters. The assault company, typically with four platoons and a headquarters, at full strength came to five officers and 173 men.⁵¹

The firepower of the assault companies was enhanced considerably by several fire support and specialist detachments. Chief among these was the battalion machine gun company, which included not only the standard four (and sometimes eight) M.7/12 Schwarzlose weapons, but light machine guns as well. Each assault company thus received from the machine gun company a platoon of four Schwarzlose *Hand-Maschinegewehren*, lighter, portable versions of the standard army machine gun, without the carriage and protective shield; although still quite heavy, the light Schwarzlose could be fired prone, and offered the *Sturmbatallione* a more tactically flexible weapon to

⁴⁹Ibid.; k.u.k. Quartiermeister Abt. Nr.9, Q.Op.Nr.29.021, 12.10.17

⁵⁰The assault companies bore the numbers of their parent regiments; hence *Sturmbatallion 55's* three companies were known as *Sturmkompanien 7*, bh 2 and bh 4.

⁵¹KA/NFA, Fasz.3067, k.u.k. AOK, Bef.Op.Nr.43.785, "Organization der Sturmtruppen," 4.9.17.; k.u.k. 55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr.246/3, "Grundaufgaben für das Zusammenwirken der Inf. und St.Truppen," 24.9.17.

accompany assault detachments in mobile battles. The battalion also included an infantry gun platoon, armed with a pair of M.15 37 mm weapons to provide portable direct fire support to forward elements. Additionally, the battalion fire support detachment included at full strength a half dozen 90 mm *Minenwerfer*, six light mortars (*Granatwerfer*), and six light illumination mortars as well, representing a considerable amount of portable firepower at the disposal of the *Sturmbatallion* commander. Further integral combat support units included a fifty-strong sapper platoon to assist with field demolition, a flamethrower platoon armed with a half dozen portable weapons, and a signal detachment to permit effective communication among assault companies. The *Sturmbatallion* also included a small headquarters of six officers and thirty-one other ranks.⁵² The battalion in fact contained the firepower of a line infantry regiment, particularly with respect to indirect fire systems. The inclusion of fire support and specialist detachments at battalion rather than regimental level was one of the genuine innovations of the assault battalion concept, for such decentralization permitted far more flexible and responsive action in the face of stiff enemy resistance, notably in the all-important first phase of the attack.

No less revolutionary was the tactical doctrine of the *Sturmbatallion*. Most significantly, the smallest independent command and maneuver element was no longer the company (as in 1914), or even the platoon (as in 1915-17), but rather the *Sturmtrupp* of nine men. This was possible because wartime weapons innovations offered the section an unprecedented degree of integral firepower. The *Sturmtrupp* was intended to fight reasonably independently, relying on battalion level fire support only when necessary. The section was trained to close with enemy positions, so that hand and rifle grenades could be used to silence them; it was also instructed to rely on flanking, not frontal, attacks, to roll up rapidly and exploit successful penetrations, and to be prepared to repel immediate enemy counterattacks. What the *Sturmtrupp* could not destroy quickly, it was to bypass, leaving it for the heavier weapons of the assault company and battalion: maintaining forward momentum in the offensive was valued more highly than a parade square advance. Lastly, the *Sturmbatallion* was ordered to reinforce success, never failure; well entrenched enemy positions were to be left for the rest of the division, following behind. It was more important that the assault troopers move forward, deeper into enemy defences, creating disorder and chaos.⁵³

Obviously such an advanced, indeed revolutionary, tactical vision required excellent human material and thorough training to be realized on the battlefield.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

Therefore divisions in the field were ordered to surrender their best soldiers to the nascent *Sturmbatallione*. Candidates for the new units were to be under twenty-five years of age, strong, healthy, well trained, preferably combat veterans, and ideally all volunteers. Officers and non-commissioned officers, who would bear such heavy burdens of responsibility under the new doctrine, had to be volunteers, and also "young, nimble, strong, and adventurous." While the demand for regiments to give their best soldiers to the new battalions inevitably was met with resistance in some quarters, in general the *Sturmbatallione* succeeded in gaining many of the army's finest soldiers to serve in their ranks.⁵⁴

The training scheme devised for the assault units was by far the army's most intense and innovative of the war. All *Sturmbatallione* recruits, already trained infantrymen, were given four to six weeks specialist training in small unit assault tactics, including a high degree of realism in exercises. Junior officers and non-commissioned officers, who under the new doctrine were granted an unprecedented degree of operational independence, received further training before assuming command in the field. In addition, many Austro-Hungarian assault battalions received detailed training and advice from more experienced Imperial German *Stosstruppen*, the pioneers of much assault doctrine. Although shortages of manpower and materiel meant that many divisions' assault battalions required several months to be ready for battle, the impact of the *Sturmbatallione* on the Habsburg Army's tactical understanding of the modern, machine-dominated battlefield was considerable. The new doctrine's emphasis on substituting firepower for manpower at the lowest levels, decentralizing leadership and the control of heavy weaponry, and focusing on the section as the basic tactical unit, presaged a revolution in infantry doctrine. And in Austro-Hungarian divisions like the 55th, whose *Bosniaken-Carinthian Sturmbatallion* was combat-ready by October 1917, the impact of innovative tactical thinking soon would be felt on the battlefield. The well trained and self-confident assault troopers of the Southwestern front, the *k.u.k. Armee's* new élite, were prepared to lead the ancient army in the greatest victory in its long history.⁵⁵

The Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, better known as the Battle of Caporetto, was the only one of the dozen engagements fought on the Isonzo to be initiated by the Austro-

⁵⁴KA/NFA, k.u.k. 55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr. 246/3, 24.9.17.

⁵⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.3067, k.u.k. AOK, Bef.Op.Nr.43.785, 4.9.17.; Op.Nr.44356, 30.8.17.; k.u.k. 55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr.246/3, 30.9.17. To encourage *esprit de corps*, the new battalions were authorized to wear a metal *Sturmtrupp* badge on the right breast of the field tunic.

Hungarians. Its origins lay in the inability and unwillingness of the Habsburg Army to fight an endless war of attrition on the Southwestern front. Although the Italians consistently failed to achieve strategic breakthroughs in the Isonzo valley, and always suffered higher losses than they inflicted, by the second half of 1917 the cost of defending against Cadorna's armies had grown unacceptably high for Borojević's forces.

The Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo, which began August 18, illustrated the grim prospects for the Austro-Hungarian Army in the face of repeated enemy blows. The thirteen corps of Cadorna's 2nd and 3rd Armies, nearly six hundred rifle battalions strong and heavily reinforced by artillery, assaulted the positions of Borojević's *Isonzoarmee*⁵⁶ all along the Isonzo front and succeeded in penetrating Austro-Hungarian defences, particularly on the mountainous upper Isonzo. Outnumbered more than two-to-one in men and munitions and weary from many months of attrition, Borojević's divisions began to fall back. The Italian 2nd Army in particular made impressive gains, wresting the strategic Bainsizza plateau on the upper Isonzo from the *k.u.k.* XXIV Corps. The cost to Cadorna's forces, 166,000 casualties with 40,000 killed in battle, was very high for an advance which never exceeded seven kilometres; this was hardly Cadorna's long-awaited breakthrough. As ever, casualties and logistical and communications problems prevented Italian divisions from exploiting their tactical gains. Nevertheless the *Isonzoarmee* suffered heavy losses of 110,000 including 10,000 confirmed dead. The loss of the Bainsizza plateau was the most important withdrawal in the Southwest since the fall of Görz the previous year, furthering morale problems in Borojević's tired army.⁵⁷ *AOK* immediately determined that Austro-Hungarian divisions on the Isonzo could not withstand another blow from the enemy's 2nd and 3rd Armies. As a senior Habsburg general noted, "20,000 unwounded prisoners were the sign that no soldiers could be abused endlessly in such a fashion."⁵⁸ After twenty-seven months' defending on the Isonzo against eleven major enemy offensives, Borojević's divisions had begun to demonstrate war weariness.

Heavy losses of men and materiel were serious enough concerns for *AOK*, as after three years of total war the army could no longer afford battles of attrition. The evidently flagging morale of the forces in the Southwest posed even graver difficulties. To prevent further deterioration in the *Isonzoarmee*, the High Command decided to preempt an anticipated Italian follow-on offensive, which it feared might exploit the gains of late

⁵⁶As the *k.u.k.* 5th Army was retitled in May 1917.

⁵⁷*ÖUİK: VI: 431-87.; Beilage 19.*

⁵⁸Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 12.

August. The only available method to prevent the enemy from advancing toward Trieste was to strike a preemptive blow at Italian forces on the Isonzo. Thus for the first time in seventeen months, and for only the second time in the war, Habsburg forces were ordered to launch a strategic offensive against Italy.

Strategic planning commenced in the second week of September, based around a major blow on the upper Isonzo, assisted by supporting offensives on the lower Isonzo and out of the Tyrol. The Habsburg Army rapidly marshalled all available reserves of units, men, and munitions; the collapse of the Russian Army in the late summer of 1917 following a failed offensive in East Galicia permitted AOK to transport several veteran divisions to the Southwest. The Italians would be facing the majority of Austria-Hungary's combat power, the equivalent of more than forty divisions, for the first time. Ludendorff, fearing a Habsburg strategic debacle in the event of another Italian push on the Isonzo, put aside his normal lack of interest in the Italian front and reluctantly released several divisions and much materiel to his ally for the offensive. The *Schwerpunkt* of the offensive was to be the German 14th Army, comprising five *k.u.k.* and seven German divisions. In support on the lower Isonzo were the twenty-three Austro-Hungarian divisions of *Generaloberst* Boroević's 1st and 2nd Isonzo Armies. Further west, in the Tyrol, was *Heeresgruppe* Conrad, including the *k.u.k.* 10th and 11th Armies, 150 battalions of crack Alpine troops strong.⁵⁹

Corps and divisional commanders were given initial orders for the offensive in the third week of September, and began to ready their units for battle immediately. No formation had a greater task before it than the *k.u.k.* I Corps, and in no formation on the Southwestern front was there more intense preparation for the coming push. The corps, led by *General der Infanterie* Alfred Krauß, was one of four corps (two *k.u.k.*, two German) of the German 14th Army, under the command of the Prussian General von Below. Although the Germans were typically the senior and more confident partner in the Berlin-Vienna alliance, von Below assigned the most important and difficult task in the coming offensive to the *k.u.k.* I Corps. The Austro-Hungarians were ordered to breach Italian defences in the most mountainous region of the upper Isonzo, between two peaks--Rombon, 2,208 metres high, and Krn, 2,244 metres high. The area had been regularly fought over since mid-1915, to little effect save heavy losses for both sides.

⁵⁹*ÖUIK: VI: Beilage 23. Feldmarschall* Conrad was demoted to army group command in the spring of 1917, after a series of disagreements with the new monarch; he was succeeded at AOK by *General der Infanterie* *Arz von Straußenburg*.

The Italians, even their élite *Alpini*, had found it impossible to advance more than a few hundred metres past the steep, cold mountains.

Krauß was determined to succeed where the enemy had repeatedly failed. He had proven himself a very capable tactician, administrator, and leader of men during the war, particularly on the Russian front. His relative inexperience in mountain warfare was compensated for by the skill of the units under his command: the Tyrolean-Lower Austrian 3rd (*Edelweiß*), the Tyrolean-Styrian 22nd *Schützen*, and the *Bosniaken-Carinthian* 55th Divisions, all élite formations recruited from the Dual Monarchy's "martial races," veterans of Alpine combat on the Isonzo, supplemented by seven assault battalions of the crack German *Jägerdivision*.⁶⁰

On September 17 the corps commander and his staff were informed by *AOK* of the decision to launch an offensive, and frenetic activity began at once. The corps' operational and tactical preparation, involving the movement of over forty rifle battalions and nearly a hundred batteries as well as thousands of tons of ammunition and materiel through high Alpine terrain, promised to be an unprecedented logistical undertaking; Krauß later frankly described the preparation for the attack as "for us the hardest and bitterest time of the entire operation."⁶¹ The corps commander's first task was the acquisition of sufficient firepower to achieve the vital initial penetration of the enemy's defences. As so often in the attritional warfare of 1914 to 1918, especially as all armies had exhausted their manpower reserves, weight of shell was of unequal value. As Krauß bluntly stated, "The extent of blood that our infantry would have to shed to achieve victory depended in indirect proportion on the amount of artillery."⁶² The more artillery he had, the fewer infantrymen Krauß would have to sacrifice to achieve a breakthrough. Therefore Krauß demanded 500 guns to execute a successful assault. In the end, I Corps was allocated 433 artillery pieces, including 328 field and mountain pieces, eighty-five medium and heavy guns, and twenty super-heavy guns and mortars. Although *AOK* stripped other fronts of their artillery reserves, there were no more heavy batteries to spare. In addition, I Corps received nine heavy *Minenwerfer* batteries, for a total of thirty-two 17 cm and sixteen 24 cm weapons.⁶³

⁶⁰Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 35-6.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 16.

⁶²*Ibid.* Krauß considered obtaining enough heavy artillery to be "the most important preparation."

⁶³*Ibid.*, 16-7, 35-6.; KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, AOK 14, Ia.Art. geheim. Nr.950/17, 20.10.17, "Gliederung der Art. der Gp. Flitsch (k.u.k. I KKmdo.)."

No less important than acquiring sufficient batteries was the stocking of generous shell reserves, particularly for the heavy guns. By scouring depots on the quiet Transylvanian and Russian fronts, as well as hinterland arsenals, the forces on the Isonzo were supplied with considerable ammunition stocks. For the initial push, the divisions of I Corps were granted a thousand rounds per field and mountain gun, 500 per medium gun, 800 per heavy howitzer, and 200 for each super-heavy piece.⁶⁴

The most labourious task confronting I Corps before the offensive was the positioning and placement of its artillery in Alpine terrain. This proved especially difficult because the nearest railhead was thirty kilometres behind the front line. The only available routes were poor roads through mountains, some of them nearly 1,900 metres high. Colonel von Steiring, 55th Division artillery commander, was granted absolute authority in ensuring that his guns were in place in time for the assault. AOK provided the 55th Division particularly lavish logistical assistance, as its mission was so vital. To supplement its normal complement of transport units, Schwarzenberg's division received two additional pack animal detachments of 150 animals each, and three motor transport units, each with seventy trucks. The division's 93rd Field Artillery Brigade was assigned two *Landsturm* labour battalions, 1,200 men in all, to help with the movement of guns and munitions to the battle area. The placement of heavy and super-heavy batteries proved an arduous task, even with the 55th Division's abnormally large number of transport and construction units. To avoid enemy observation, weapons of 15 cm calibre and greater were moved only at night, over mountains, in some cases to within a half kilometre of Italian forward positions. No artillery movement was ever detected by the enemy, despite nightly shelling by Italian illumination mortars.⁶⁵

As the scheduled start day of October 22 approached, the remainder of the division's combat units were moved into staging areas. The relocation of the 55th's eleven line infantry battalions was executed between October 16 and 22, at the rate of one or two battalions per day to avoid compromising operational secrecy. The division went to great lengths to preserve strict march discipline, with *Gendarmerie* and horsed

⁶⁴Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 18. KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.55.ID, Op.Nr.2210/8, 22.10.17.

⁶⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.I.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.226/15, 21.10.17.; T.Res,Nr.551/93, 10.10.17.; F. Glingenbrunner, "Intendanz im Gebirgskriege: B) Das I. Korps in den Alpen im Jahre 1917," *Ergänzungsheft 8 zum Werke ÖUIK*, (Vienna, 1933), 19-25. Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 18-9. H. Flaischen, *Die württembergischen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (2 Bände, Stuttgart, 1920), *Bd.2: Die württembergische Gebirgs-Artillerie 1915-1918*, 131-2.

dragoon detachments placed along the assigned mountain routes to maintain security and proper rates of movement.⁶⁶

The element of surprise was maintained also by more modern and innovative methods. Signal intelligence, still in its infancy, had nonetheless become an important asset by 1917 in any operation. Field detachments of the *k.u.k. Nachrichtendienst* performed invaluable service in the weeks leading up to the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo. Corps- and army-level signal intercept and security units both constantly monitored Italian transmissions and enforced strict communications security (including banning all but emergency field telephone use) on Austro-Hungarian formations in the battle area. The *Nachrichtendienst* also disguised the Habsburg buildup on the upper Isonzo through the sending of false radio messages for deception purposes. Thus the signallers and cryptanalysts gained an accurate assessment of the enemy's dispositions through signal intercepts while keeping the 14th Army's massive troop movements hidden from hearing as well as sight.⁶⁷

A further wartime innovation which proved vital to the success of the offensive and its preparation was the widespread involvement of the Austro-Hungarian air service in all operations. By late 1917, Habsburg aviators had acquitted themselves very well, becoming an integral element in combat. As an *AOK* report noted after the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo, the army air service was no longer performing as a service branch, but rather as a combat arm.⁶⁸ During the First World War the Dual Monarchy's aviation industry and the *k.u.k. Luftfahrtruppen* never in fact achieved first-rank status; indeed, Austria-Hungary produced only about 5,000 aircraft from 1914 to 1918, little more than one-tenth Germany's output.⁶⁹ Much like the army as a whole, the air service found itself fighting on too many fronts to regularly marshal sufficient strength against any one enemy; the maximum effort for the Caporetto offensive was a rare exception. Nonetheless, by late 1917 the Habsburg air service was efficient and manned by veteran personnel. For once it gathered the majority of its aircraft and units to engage the Italians on the Isonzo.

⁶⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.55.ID, Op.Nr.124/1, 14.10.17.; Op.Nr.153, 18.10.17.; k.u.k.I.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.226/13, 14.10.17, "Abmarsch v. Truppen."

⁶⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, AOK 14, Abt.Akonach Nr.III/488 geh., 12.10.17.; k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr.146, 18.10.17. M. Ronge, *Kriegs- und Industrie Spionage*, (Vienna, 1930), 306-7.

⁶⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.3067, k.u.k.AOK, Op.Geh.Nr.350, 1.9.17.

⁶⁹L. Kennett, *The First Air War 1914-1918* (New York, 1991), 176. The author characterizes Austria-Hungary's attempt as, "a gallant but futile effort to achieve self-sufficiency in the air."

Given the importance of its role in the offensive, I Corps naturally received a generous allotment of aviation units, a total of four air companies (*Fliegerkompanie--FliK*), augmented by an German squadron. The *k.u.k.* units included two divisional, one fighter, and one long range reconnaissance companies, each with approximately a dozen aircraft.⁷⁰ The fighter company and the German squadron were retained as corps-level assets during the battle, but the remaining aircraft were assigned directly to the divisions from October 22. The 55th received *Flik 39 D*, a divisional company equipped with observation and light fighter craft. The company, flying under Schwarzenberg's operational control, was assigned several important tasks in the two weeks before the offensive, including artillery observation, radio interception, general reconnaissance, and the protection of divisional airspace; the last was a particularly high priority mission, as Italian overflights had to be prevented both to protect the division from air attack and to preserve the element of surprise. The company performed all these tasks efficiently, rendering sterling service for the 93rd Field Artillery Brigade by locating Italian artillery for counterbattery fires in the first hours of the offensive.⁷¹

The excellent intelligence about enemy dispositions provided by *Flik 39 D* was incorporated into the all-important artillery fire plan. The division's impressive complement of guns and shells would only be useful if it had confirmed targets to destroy. Colonel von Steiring co-located his artillery headquarters with Schwarzenberg's to ensure constant coordination of the combat arms. The artillery plan devised by the 93rd reflected what Habsburg gunners had learned in more than three years of total war. The barrage was to begin at 2 am with gas shelling, particularly against Italian batteries; for this purpose the 55th was assigned a company of *Sappeurspezialbatallion 61* to assist in the employment of chemical agents, including a new, highly lethal, combination of chlorine and phosgene⁷². The use of poisonous gas in mountainous terrain was invariably precarious because of the unpredictability of wind patterns and abnormal temperature variance. Nonetheless gas shelling was considered necessary to paralyse Italian batteries

⁷⁰Divisional aviation companies were general purpose reconnaissance units, with secondary light bombing and fighter capabilities, whereas fighter and long range reconnaissance companies specialized in the latter missions..

⁷¹KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.I.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.215/10, Nr.6 Fl.Op., 12.10.17.; AOK 14, Abt.If.Nr.805 Op., 22.10.17.; k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr.169, 21.10.17. R. Cavigioli, *L'aviazione austro-ungarica sulla fronte italiane 1915-1918* (Milan, 1934), 62-4, 328.

⁷²I Corps was also assigned an Imperial German special *Minenwerfer* gas detachment, *Pionier Battalion 35*, which was equipped with new rifled projectors for greater accuracy.

and forward defences. By 4.30 am the division's gunners were to have finished their gas shelling. Conventional barrages against enemy forward entrenchments were to commence at 6.30, followed by *Minenwerfer* barrages from 7 am. These would continue until 9 am, when the division's infantry would leave their positions, led by its *Sturmbatallion*. Following a half hour artillery ceasefire, the most difficult artillery task would begin, the direct support of advancing infantry. Forward observers were assigned to each infantry battalion to ensure proper coordination of rolling barrages. While this would be difficult due to the primitive communications of 1917, the 93rd Brigade was confident that it could both shatter Italian defences before the infantry attacked, and support the foot soldiers in their advance on the first day.⁷³

The other vital combat arm, the infantry, prepared for battle just as intensely as the artillery. In the second and third weeks of October, the 55th's line battalions were brought up to establishment, so that by the eve of the offensive the division possessed a rifle strength of 346 officers and 8,122 sergeants and other ranks, an average of 770 per battalion. In addition, the division included a *Sturmbatallion* of 511 effectives, 362 high mountain specialists in two companies, and a provisional *Marschbatallion* of 555 infantrymen to replace losses on the first day of the offensive.⁷⁴ The 26th Mountain and 38th Brigades were each assigned four or five rifle battalions, a company each of assault troops, high mountain guides, and sappers, as well as several mountain batteries in direct fire support. The two remaining infantry battalions were kept in divisional reserve, along with the majority of the division's guns.⁷⁵

As the Habsburg infantry of late 1917, in this case the Bosnians and Carinthians of the 55th Division, prepared to fight the greatest offensive in the history of the *k.u.k. Armee*, not merely its training and organization had been altered by the war, but also its physical appearance. As directed by Schwarzenberg's staff, every *feldgrau*-clad 55th foot soldier was ordered to carry a steel helmet, a gas mask, hand grenades, and ammunition for his section's light machine gun. Similarly, every platoon and company was ordered to bring flares, light pistols, and signal wire; and each battalion was instructed to carry extra

⁷³KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr.21, 17.10.17.; AOK 14, Ia./Art.Nr.605.17, Armeebefehl, 13.10.17.; k.u.k.I.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.233/4, 21.10.17.

⁷⁴Official, or "ration," strengths, were naturally much higher, in some cases more than 1,000 men per battalion.

⁷⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., E.Nr.68, 21.10.17.; Op.Nr.1710/7, 17.10.17.; k.u.k.St.Baon.55, E.Nr.68, Kampfstandmeldung, 5.10.17.

ammunition for its infantry guns, *Minenwerfer*, and illumination mortars.⁷⁶ The veteran *Frontkämpfer* of Caporetto, burdened with all the materiel of modern warfare, was thus as removed from his rifle-and-bayonet comrade of the war's first year as he was from his forebears in 1866 or 1848.

Only a few days before the offensive was scheduled to begin, weather-induced transport and logistical delays forced a postponement from October 22 until October 24. The battle plans of I Corps and the 55th Division were not altered by the delay, however; the plans were considered valid up to October 30. Schwarzenberg's division's orders for the first day were to destroy the reinforced Italian 43rd Infantry Division of the enemy's IV Corps, dug in on the upper Isonzo. The 55th was then to advance southwest into the Isonzo valley in the direction of the town of Karfreit, where it would cross the river. Although the cold, fast flowing Isonzo was at most a metre deep at Karfreit, permitting infantry fordings despite an occasionally strong current, there was also a stone bridge in the town where artillery could cross. The division brought forward engineer bridging units in the event the bridge was destroyed by the retreating enemy. Once across the Isonzo, the 55th expected to confront elements of the Italian 34th Division, the IV Corps reserve. However, there were few enemy operational reserves beyond the 34th, so a successful initial penetration and exploitation on the offensive's first days could quickly yield strategic results.⁷⁷

In the predawn hours of October 24, following weeks of preparation, every company of I Corps was read a message from Krauß, in the soldiers' own languages, which epitomized the determination for victory of the corps commander, his veteran fighters, and indeed of the entire Habsburg Army: "Soldiers of the I Corps! For the second time in this war we are going on the attack against Italy! For you this phrase counts: No calm and no rest until the Italians are crushed. Forward with God!"⁷⁸ With this message the 55th Division set about implementing its battle plan.

The 93rd Artillery Brigade's guns opened up at 2 am on schedule, with gas shells crippling Italian attempts to return fire. Many Italian soldiers found their French gas masks useless against the new chemical agents, and were killed or rendered unfit for combat. However, an unexpected snowstorm and heavy fog blanketed much of I Corps throughout the morning of October 24. Although other formations of the 14th Army

⁷⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Op.Nr.164, 22.10.17.;Op.Nr.154, 19.10.17.

⁷⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.I.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.223/4, 15.10.17.; AOK 14, Ia.Pi.Nr.122/I, 11.10.17.
Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 20-1.

⁷⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.3086, k.u.k.I.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.227/8, 15.10.17.

advanced according to schedule, capturing 30,000 Italian prisoners on the first day, both the 55th and the 22nd *Schützen* to its north were hampered in their efforts to achieve their objectives. The Bosnian 38th Brigade, attempting to evict the Italian 43rd Division from 2,000 metre peaks during the snowstorm, was unable to make significant progress on October 24. Even the legendary *Zweier Bosniaken* failed to take their first day objectives. Still, the regiment's 4th Battalion acquitted itself magnificently in repulsing an Italian night counterattack, capturing an entire enemy battalion. Nonetheless, the inclement weather made the offensive's first day less than a success for Schwarzenberg and his soldiers. Indeed, only the 4th Battalion of the 7th Regiment actually secured all of its assigned objectives for October 24.⁷⁹

Undaunted, Krauß ordered the 55th to attack even more energetically towards Karfreit on the morning of October 25. The snowfall had ceased, and the heavy fog had lifted, so the Bosnians and Carinthians advanced at dawn opposed only by the enemy. The Italian 43rd Division had suffered badly at the hands of the 55th's artillery, had exhausted itself in futile counterattacks on the first day, and was thus incapable of determined resistance on October 25. The 55th Division's attack was led by the 7th Regiment, which used its *Sturmkompanie* to penetrate the enemy wire. Effective coordination of assault platoons, machine gun fire, and divisional artillery encircled and destroyed Italian forward positions, and two battalions of the Carinthians soon followed the stormtroopers. The attack cost the "brown devils" only 146 casualties, mostly to Italian artillery. Italian resistance was already weakening. By mid-morning forward companies of both the 26th and 38th Brigades had descended from the high peaks into the Isonzo valley, and the 43rd Division began to dissolve. Karfreit soon fell; by the end of the day Schwarzenberg's troops had established a secure bridgehead on the western bank of the Isonzo. The Bosnians and Carinthians were now on Italian territory. The 55th, like the other formations of I Corps, found itself inundated with Italian prisoners from the 43rd and 34th Divisions. Once the enemy's initial defences had been penetrated, morale started to collapse. Weakened by heavy casualties incurred during the Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo, the Italian 2nd Army, and particularly IV Corps, had lost the will to defend its positions to the last man; indeed, many enemy units surrendered enthusiastically. A platoon of the 22nd Division's 1st *Kaiserschützen* Regiment, fighting on the northern flank of Schwarzenberg's troops, captured an entire entrenched enemy company on October 25 without a shot being fired. Some 140 Italians came out of their mountaintop

⁷⁹Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 40. *Das bosnisch-herzegovinische Infanterie-Regiment Nr.2 im Weltkrieg*, 52-3. KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 3, IR 7, Ing. L. Poppeier, 6.5.81, 3.

trenches crying, "*Eviva l'Austria, la guerra è finita*"; one enemy officer was so relieved to be out of the war that he kissed the hand of the Habsburg platoon commander.⁸⁰ Such incidents became increasingly common in late October, as the Italian 2nd Army melted away before Krauß's advancing divisions.

On October 26, the 55th Division was kept in the rear area as I Corps reserve. Schwarzenberg's men needed a brief rest before they could continue their advance. The division collected itself in the town of Bergogna, some fifteen kilometres west of its start line on October 24, surrounded by burgeoning prisoner of war encampments. While the 55th rested, Krauß's 3rd and 22nd Divisions continued their advance southwest into Friulia towards the Tagliamento river. The Italian 2nd and 3rd Armies, reeling from numerous blows, were incapable of offering prolonged resistance anywhere east of the Tagliamento. Borojević's 1st and 2nd Isonzo Armies had already recaptured Görz and Doberdò and were advancing rapidly towards Venetia. Army Group Conrad began to strike southeast out of the Tyrol, forcing the Italian 1st Army to retreat as well. The Habsburg Army already stood everywhere on Italian territory, far ahead of expectations. The city of Udine soon fell without much of a fight, as the Italians abandoned Friulia and Austro-Hungarian divisions advanced deeper into the Northeastern Italian heartland.

Late on October 27, Krauß ordered the 55th to follow the advancing 22nd Division towards the Tagliamento. By reaching the river, I Corps would cut off what remained of the retreating Italian 2nd and 3rd Armies. It was imperative that Habsburg forces reach the river before the enemy had the opportunity to blow all the bridges. On the morning of October 28, the Bosnians and Carinthians marched rapidly towards the bridgehead at Cornino, the surviving main artery across the Tagliamento. Although Italian resistance was rarely stiff or prolonged, the marching pace of up to forty-five kilometres daily was exceptionally arduous. The advancing infantry regularly outpaced its supporting artillery and logistical columns, causing ammunition and other supply problems. Regardless, Schwarzenberg's lead companies reached the Tagliamento late on October 29, found the bridge intact, and readied themselves for a contested crossing.⁸¹

At Cornino the river was nearly a kilometre wide and apparently unfordable. There was also a large island in the Tagliamento at Cornino, Colle Clapat, which was connected by two wide bridges to each bank. The 55th unit chosen for the initial assault

⁸⁰KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 3, k.u.k.IR.7, Gefechts-Bericht, 25.10.17.; Schachtel 65, k.k.KSchR.1, "Skizze über die Besitznahme des Monte Stol am 25. Oktober 1917."

⁸¹KA/NFA, Fasz.3088, AOK 14, Abt.Id.Nr.1280.op., 20.12.17. Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 57-8. *Das bos.-herz. IR. Nr.2 im Weltkrieg*, 53.

was Captain Redl's 4th Battalion of the 4th Bosnian-Herzegovinian Regiment. *Generalmajor* Schwarzenberg wanted to lead the assault personally, but was dissuaded by his chief of staff. Although the Herzegovinians were exhausted from the long marches to the Tagliamento, the veteran battalion responded enthusiastically to the chance to decide the campaign's outcome; for the breaching of the Tagliamento line would force a general Italian retreat to the Piave, more than fifty kilometres further west. For this reason the defenders of Colle Clapat, two companies of the 33rd Regiment supported by sixteen machine guns, were equally determined to defend as long as possible.

Captain Redl led his battalion's 15th Company forward at 4 am on October 31, under the cover of darkness and rain and heavy machine gun fire. Tenacious enemy resistance prevented a predawn victory, but by mid-morning the 33rd Regiment was losing ground to Redl's 15th and reinforcing 16th Companies. The flat, marshy island offered little natural cover and losses were heavy on both sides. An Italian counterattack by reserve elements of the 33rd Regiment was repulsed, including a probe by armoured cars, which the Herzegovinians destroyed at close quarters with machine gun fire and hand grenades. The *Bosniaken* also found a small ford on the enemy's flank and rushed reinforcements into the fray, turning the tide of the engagement. By the end of October 31, Redl's tired troops had secured Colle Clapat, in the process capturing most of the 33rd Regiment--more than 1,500 enemy soldiers, thirty-one machine guns and six field artillery pieces. Although the Herzegovinian battalion had suffered heavy casualties in two companies, a further advance to the west bank of the Tagliamento was halted only by the blowing of the second bridge by retreating Italian sappers.⁸²

The following two days both sides prepared for the Habsburg crossing attempt. The remnants of the 33rd Regiment were reinforced and ordered to hold their ground on the Tagliamento's west bank at any cost. Schwarzenberg dispatched a company each of sappers and construction engineers to assist Redl's battalion in reaching the west bank. The three-battalion-strong 2nd Bosnian-Herzegovinian Regiment was also moved forward to exploit Redl's success in the next assault. The 55th, having lost only 1,655 casualties since October 24 (only 157 of which were killed in action, many of them at Colle Clapat), was in excellent fighting condition. At 6 am on November 2, supported by machine gun and artillery fire, the 55th Division engineers began to construct a temporary bridge over the collapsed span. They were soon followed by two *Sturm* platoons and the 13th and 14th Companies of Redl's battalion. Through sheer courage and determination the lead companies forced their way across the unstable bridge against withering enemy fire to the

⁸²Krauß, *Wunder von Karfreit*, 57-62. Schachinger, *Die Bosniaken kommen!*, 190-7. ÖUIK: VI: 595-8.

west bank by noon, taking heavy casualties in the process. In the afternoon the remaining companies of the battalion also crossed, followed in the evening by the 4th Battalion of the *Zweier Bosniaken*. During the night the Bosnians and Hercegovinians advanced through the town of Cornino, capturing one house at a time. The enemy's 33rd Regiment and supporting units started to surrender as Habsburg reinforcements entered the fray, surrounding the town and taking nearby hills. By the early dawn hours of November 3, Cornino had fallen to the 55th Division, an entire enemy regiment of 2,500 men had been captured, and the *k.u.k. Armee* had secured a more than kilometre-deep bridgehead on the west bank of the Tagliamento. The remainder of Schwarzenberg's division soon followed to exploit the victory at Cornino.⁸³

The success of Captain Redl and his *Bosniaken* proved to be the decisive *Schwerpunkt* of the entire offensive. As Emperor-King Karl said to the young captain when presenting him with the army's highest decoration, the Order of Maria Theresia, "You gave our offensive a fresh momentum." Unable to hold the Tagliamento line, Cadorna's 2nd and 3rd Armies began a disorderly strategic retreat towards the Piave. Many Italian soldiers proved entirely unwilling to offer further resistance to advancing Habsburg forces, and went happily into captivity in battalion- and regiment-sized increments; many others simply chose to desert--*il ritorno a casa*--during the chaos of the general retreat. Many captured Italian officers exhibited shock and disappointment at the performance of their army. An infantryman of the *k.u.k.* 29th Division reported observing two imprisoned enemy officers crying when they learned of the fall of Görz and Doberdò, bought at such cost in Italian blood. Perhaps more typical were feeble attempts to maintain national and personal dignity in the face of catastrophe. An officer cadet of the 55th Division's 7th Regiment, leading an eight man forward detachment ahead of his battalion, accepted the surrender of a fully armed battalion of over 500 Italians at Livenza, thirty kilometres west of Cornino, on November 4. The other ranks were cheered by the end of their war, exclaiming "*Mama mia*" while being led into captivity. The major commanding the enemy battalion, however, did not want to be captured by a mere officer cadet and eight men, so required some haggling to save face. In the end the battalion was disarmed and marched eastward like hundreds of other Italian units and subunits captured whole in the weeks following the initial breakthrough at Karfreit.⁸⁴

⁸³KA/NFA, Fasz.3073, k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Feldpost 220, 3.11.17. Schachinger, *Die Bosniaken kommen!*, 197-208. *Das bos.-herz. IR Nr.2 im Weltkrieg*, 53-4. *ÖUIK: VI*: 605-7, Beilage 29.

⁸⁴G. Rochat & G. Massobrio, *Breve storia dell'Esercito Italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin, 1978), 183-9. K. Bergmann, *Am Niemandslande: Fronterleben bei einem sudetendeutschen Regiment* (Reichenberg, 1930), 323.

By November 10, the 55th Division had reached the upper Piave and the edge of the Alps, taking the city of Belluno the next day. The enemy could not be permitted any time to consolidate defences, so I Corps continued marching forward. Schwarzenberg's troops followed the Piave thirty-five kilometres south to the city of Feltre, at the edge of the highlands between the Brenta and the Piave, north of the city of Bassano. The division's mission was the clearing of the highlands of Italian units. The mountains, all more than a thousand metres high, were garrisoned by crack *Alpini* battalions, among the few remaining reliable Italian units. Opposing the 55th's advance were detachments of di Robilant's 4th Army, rushed to the area and not yet defeated in battle. The first objective for the Habsburg formation was Monte Tomatico, a 1,600 metre-high peak immediately south of Feltre, held by the entrenched 7th *Alpini* Regiment. The *k.u.k.* 7th Regiment readied elements of two battalions for an assault on November 14. The *Khevenhüller* were tired from almost three weeks of fighting and route marching, and were poorly supported by divisional artillery due to shell shortages. Still, a composite battalion of 800 Carinthians went forward, up the steep, barren slopes of snowy Monte Tomatico without artillery support, and was soon halted by machine gun fire. Rapid counterattacks pushed the Carinthians back and quickly nullified the minimal Habsburg gains. The regiment was immediately ordered to undertake two more direct assaults on the peak, which it executed without success. Four hundred survivors returned, all ammunition expended. In the *melée*, many wounded Carinthians had to be left behind (they were, atypically, cared for excellently by the *Alpini*). Monte Tomatico soon acquired an evil reputation for the soldiers of the veteran 7th, who called it "our mountain of death." The following day the same Carinthian battalion was ordered to assault the 7th *Alpini*'s positions yet again. The battalion commander, in agreement with his company commanders, refused to lead his men up Tomatico without assurances of adequate ammunition and artillery support. These were denied, the commander was relieved, and the attack proceeded regardless, without success, but with considerable casualties.⁸⁵

The 55th Division succeeded in taking Monte Tomatico the next day, marshalling three battalions and several mountain batteries with sufficient ammunition. After an intense struggle, the Austro-Hungarians captured 500 survivors of the battered 7th *Alpini*.

KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 3, k.u.k.IR.7, Poppmeier, 4-5. The officer cadet and his "brown devils" celebrated their bloodless triumph with a three-day drunk in a nearby castle, where they appropriated an Italian general's stock of vintage wines.

⁸⁵ÖUIK: VI: 661-2. KA, Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 3, k.u.k.IR.7, Poppmeier, 5-6.

Schwarzenberg's division enjoyed greater success in other attacks in the third week of November. On November 18, the 2nd Bosnian-Herzegovinian Regiment, leading the division's advance, cleared Monte Cornella, overlooking the Piave, of two reinforced *Alpini* battalions. The division incurred further casualties evicting Italian units from neighbouring Monte Grappa. The Bosnians of the 38th Brigade made repeated night attacks up the snowy 1,776 metre-high peak, destroying most of the Italian 17th Division in the process. By the end of November, having evicted Italian units from the highlands, the victorious 55th Division stood at the edge of the North Italian plain. Its month-long leading role in the great offensive had cost Schwarzenberg's formation 2,269 casualties, including 171 confirmed dead and 367 missing and presumed dead, many of them in the 7th Regiment. These losses (the equivalent of a lost battalion per infantry regiment), while certainly not crippling, indeed light compared to most battles of the First World War, nonetheless had cost the crack Carinthians, Bosnians, and Herzegovinians many of their best officers, sergeants, and veteran soldiers.⁸⁶ The division, like all Habsburg formations in the Southwest in late November, needed a rest from the long marches and intense engagements of the glorious late autumn of 1917.

The cost to the Habsburg Army had been trifling, however, compared to the magnitude of its victory. The five armies of the Southwestern front lost approximately 70,000 soldiers to death, wounds, illness and capture from October 24 to December 1. In contrast, Italian losses can be best estimated at 800,000. A small minority of enemy casualties were killed or even wounded; in excess of 300,000 were in Austro-Hungarian captivity, and some 350,000 more had simply deserted, headed for home. Essentially the entire Italian 2nd and 3rd Armies had disappeared. The equivalent of nearly fifteen defunct enemy divisions were officially disbanded by late November. Many more Italian divisions existed in name only. Cadorna's armies had also lost half of their heavy weapons, including 3,150 guns and howitzers, 1,732 mortars, and over 3,000 machine guns.⁸⁷ The magnitude of the disaster which befell the Italian Army in October and November 1917 surpassed even the Habsburg catastrophe of June-July 1916 in Galicia. Cadorna rushed 300,000 ill-trained replacements and weary convalescents in December to save the remnants of his armies. Five British and six French divisions, well equipped and veterans of considerable fighting, were shipped immediately from the Western front to Northern Italy to stave off complete collapse.

⁸⁶ÖUIK: VI: 662-5. KA/NFA, Fasz.3073, k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Feldpost 220, 8.12.17. *Das bos.-herz. IR.Nr.2 im Weltkrieg*, 57-8.

⁸⁷Rochat & Massobrio, *Breve storia*, 189. ÖUIK: : 712-3.

December witnessed further combat, without decisive results for either side. The *k.u.k. Armee* was too tired to advance further, and the humiliated and desperate Italians were determined not to yield a further acre of Italian territory. The 55th Division and several other Habsburg formations fighting in the Asiago region wrested strategic Monte Asolone from Italian troops in the third week of December, following several days and nights of intense close quarter, even hand-to-hand, combat. The Alpine winter conditions inflicted heavy losses to frostbite and hypothermia, so that the 55th Division's December casualties of 5,000 men, although heavier than October and November combined, included more than 2,500 lost to illness and inclement conditions. Only 337 Carinthians and *Bosniaken* were actually killed in battle in the last month of 1917, almost all of them at Monte Asolone.⁸⁸

As 1917 ended, Schwarzenberg and his division stood deep in Italian territory, alongside forty-four other Austro-Hungarian divisions. The *k.u.k. Armee* had achieved the great blow against the Italians long dreamed of by Conrad and numerous other Habsburg generals. The Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo--the "Caporetto miracle" (*Das Wunder von Karfreit, A Caporettói csoda*) in popular parlance--was the finest moment of the war for Habsburg arms. It was certainly the most effective offensive in Western Europe during the entire war. The much maligned Imperial-and-Royal Army, badly bruised by more than three years of total war, had inflicted a strategically decisive defeat against its sole surviving enemy, nearly knocking Italy out of the war entirely. Serbia and Romania, troublesome opponents, had long since been eliminated; even the once-lethal Russian steamroller had finally collapsed under its own ponderous weight. Only Italy remained, and it had just been crushed in battle, losing significant territory in the process. That the great offensive was not exploited further, to achieve a strategically decisive victory, can be attributed to Austria-Hungary's war weariness. The cost of a total war on three major fronts had proved enormous in both men and materiel; by late 1917 the Dual Monarchy's war machine was incapable of transforming the Caporetto triumph into a war-winning effort.

German assistance had been important in achieving the victory, of course, but the overwhelming majority of combat power involved in the "miracle" had been Austro-Hungarian. The decisive effort had been made by Krauß and his élite mountain divisions, especially the 55th. The Habsburg Army, a longtime pioneer in Alpine warfare, had illustrated its tactical competence in the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo and the successor battles which brought *k.u.k.* divisions deep into Venetia. Its gunners had mastered the

⁸⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.3073, k.u.k.55.IDKmdo., Res.Op.212, 1.1.18.

techniques of modern warfare, and its infantry had applied considerable tactical innovation. Like all major armies of the First World War, the Habsburg Army had learned to operate as a combined-arms force. After months and years of painful education on several fronts, the Austro-Hungarian Army had evolved into a tactically and operationally mature fighting machine. As Krauß, Schwarzenberg and their soldiers had demonstrated, given good leadership, proper training, and sufficient logistical and fire support, the multinational army could be as lethal as any in the world.

Indeed, the much-feared nationality issue did not appear at all during the great push. Unit morale and cohesion, typically better in the Southwest than on other fronts, and always reinforced by victory, were excellent in late 1917, regardless of nationality. German-Austrians, Bosnians, Slovenes, Croats, and Hungarians fought with determination and tenacity, as they always had against the Italians. Croatian troops of the 7th Mountain Brigade actually volunteered for assault missions during the campaign. Even ethnically and politically suspect divisions which had failed on other fronts fought effectively, sometimes most courageously, when dispatched to the Isonzo to participate in the Caporetto offensive.⁸⁹ Czech, Ruthene, Romanian, even Serbian regiments experienced none of the problems which *AOK* had come to anticipate. The troubled 4th Division's Czech 88th and 99th Regiments, both of which had suffered grave desertion and disaffection problems on the Russian front since 1915, fought excellently against the Italians.⁹⁰ The South Moravian 99th, fighting for the first time in the Southwest, performed most heroically in the vicious combat on Monte Asolone, repeatedly storming entrenched Italian hill positions.⁹¹ The success in the Southwest in late 1917 demonstrated decisively that the nationality issue was not the Achilles' heel of the Imperial-and-Royal Army, particularly on the Italian front. In a cause perceived to be just and honourable, against a widely hated enemy, all nationalities of the Dual Monarchy could be relied upon to fight without morale problems and resulting ineffectiveness. As the Habsburg Army ended 1917, its triumphal year, it could look forward to continuing a one-front, popular war against a nearly defeated enemy.

⁸⁹The sometimes troubled 12th, 17th and 21st Divisions all fought successfully in the Caporetto offensive as part of von Wurm's 1st Isonzo Army.

⁹⁰Several divisions which experienced collapses in East Galicia in the summer of 1916 fought effectively in the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, among them the 4th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 41st.; additionally, many regiments and battalions which proved unreliable in the East fought very well in the great Southwestern offensive.

⁹¹E. Bauer, *Der Löwe vom Isonzo: Feldmarschall Svetozar Boroević de Bojna* (Graz, 1985), 77. Falls, *Battle of Caporetto*, 137, 141. *ÖUfK: VI: 664-5*.

Chapter VI: Austria is in your Camp: The 29th Infantry Division, 1918

The future of the Dual Monarchy and its army seemed brighter at the beginning of 1918 than at any point since the outbreak of war. Austria-Hungary, which started the First World War with inadequate military potential compared to its adversaries, had survived more than four years of total war. Costly battles of attrition had worn down the Habsburg Army, but the often strategically indecisive campaigns in Galicia and on the Isonzo had in a sense begun to pay off: Russia, Serbia and Romania had been knocked out of the war entirely, and the Italian Army, recently shattered at Caporetto, was in its apparent death throes.

The Austro-Hungarian Army had forty-four divisions deployed against the Italians, including all the army's élite formations. Habsburg forces were deep inside northeastern Italy, on the Piave, holding defensible positions. In contrast, the Italian Army was desperately weak, having lost three-quarters of a million men to battle and desertion; few enemy field formations had even half their required allotments of men and materiel. Indeed, Italy had removed eleven divisions from the order of battle entirely in the aftermath of Caporetto; eleven British and French divisions had been dispatched from the Western Front to prevent complete collapse. The remaining thirty-seven Austro-Hungarian divisions were deployed in now-dormant theaters: twenty-three in the Northeast, a dozen in Romania, and two in the Balkans. These divisions, frequently understrength, were serving more as occupation forces than as combat formations.¹

Offsetting such encouraging developments, however, were many grave problems.² None was more serious than the increasing lack of soldiers. Ironically, casualty rates had actually been falling since the beginning of the war. The four-and-a-half months of hostilities in 1914 had cost the army 1,325,000 men, including 145,000 confirmed killed in battle; 1915, the year of the *Karpathenwinter*, cost an additional 2,162,000 soldiers, among them 182,000 known dead; the disasters of 1916 took an additional 1,753,000 men from the army, including 93,000 confirmed killed in action; and

¹A. Nofi, "Comparative Divisional Strengths during World War I: East Central European Belligerents and Theaters," in: B. Király, N. Dreisziger, A. Nofi, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. XIX: East Central European Society in World War I* (New York, 1985), 268-9.

²After the British debacle at Third Ypres, as well as Nivelle's catastrophic Chemin-des-Dames "Victory Offensive" and resulting near collapse of the French Army, the strategic position of the German Army in the West--its only remaining front--seemed as secure as the Habsburg position in Italy.

the more successful year 1917 cost 1,481,000 casualties, including 67,000 known dead. Although the army's overall loss rate had been declining (as had the ratio of men fallen in battle to other causes), the total casualties by 1918 had been enormous: 6,721,000 officers and men, including 487,000 known killed in action (the actual figure was far higher), 1,786,000 wounded in battle, 1,607,000 captured and missing, and a staggering 2,829,000 seriously sick.³ Thus of the 8,420,000 men called to the colours by the end of 1917, 4,010,000 had been lost to the army permanently, including 780,000 dead, a half million invalided from the service, and over 1.6 million taken prisoner.⁴ Despite the declining overall losses, especially those killed in the field, the unavoidable reality was that the Habsburg Army had dwindling manpower reserves. By 1918, Austria-Hungary had already called over seventy percent of available men--that is, those between sixteen and sixty years of age healthy enough to fight at the front--to the colours.

An additional drain on the Austro-Hungarian Army's frontline strength was the prodigious growth of the rear echelon, which plagued all belligerent armies during the First World War. *Die Etappe*, which included training and replacement depots, convalescent units, as well as ever-growing support echelons, had expanded enormously since 1914 to meet the unprecedented manpower and materiel needs of total war. Thus of the 4,912,000⁵ Habsburg soldiers of all kinds in uniform on January 1, 1918, 1,661,000--one-third--were garrisoned in home (*Heimat*) districts, safe from the combat zone. However, even among the 3,251,000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers constituting the *Armee im Felde*, less than a million were actually combat soldiers.⁶

By the last year of the war, repeated comb-outs of rear area units and industry could produce only limited numbers of men for the war machine. Nearly all the fit and able men had long before been dispatched to the front. The use of volunteer "female assistant helpers" (*weibliche Hilfskräfte*) for service and administrative duties, of whom there were some 90,000 at the beginning of 1918, did relatively little to ameliorate the shortage of fighting men. Increased use of prisoners of war for labour duty similarly was only of limited assistance in increasing the number of Austro-Hungarian soldiers in the

³*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg* (7 Bände, Vienna, 1930-8), *Band VII: Das Kriegsjahr 1918* (1938), 46, Beilage 2, Tabelle 1. The percentage of sick, less than a quarter of overall losses in 1914, had risen to almost sixty-nine percent by 1917.

⁴R. Plaschka, H. Haselsteiner, A. Suppan, *Innere Front: Militärassistentz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918* (2 Bände, Vienna, 1974), *I. Band*, 44.

⁵Fallen from a wartime peak of 5.2 million soldiers in mid-1917.

⁶*OUIK: VII: Beilage 2, Tabelle 2.3.*

front line.⁷ Like all armies in the last year of World War One, the Habsburg Army was desperately short of foot soldiers. The infantry, only 38.7% of the army's overall strength by 1918, nonetheless accounted for between 94.4 and 96.7% of its casualties. The pool of available infantry replacements had begun to dry up. By January 1918, Austria-Hungary could dispatch only 100,000 replacements to the field army monthly, versus 250,000 in earlier years; *Marschbatallione* totalled on average only 500 soldiers, compared to 1,000 or more previously.⁸ Worse, many of the replacement soldiers were convalescents returning to the front, not fresh men. The fresh troops were typically very young or quite old, and frequently in poor physical condition; few of the new recruits were adequately trained. Therefore infantry divisions, regiments and battalions in the line, often at half strength, had to function with ever fewer men. The only apparent solution to the grave manpower crisis in the new year was the promise of over a half million Habsburg soldiers soon to be returning from Russian captivity. This would in time prove to be a mixed blessing, but it appeared to be the Austro-Hungarian Army's only hope of maintaining its field forces.

No less alarmingly for the Habsburg war effort, industrial and agricultural output had begun to decline sharply. The poor condition of the transportation system and the increasing shortages of raw materials, coupled with the loss of many industrial workers to the army, took their toll on the Dual Monarchy. The production of weaponry and munitions, which peaked in the first half of 1917, declined precipitously in the first half of 1918. For example, Habsburg arsenals provided the army with 2,285 artillery pieces in the first six months of 1917, but only 1,296 in the first six months of the following year. The output of other vital war materiel exhibited a similar pattern of decline: artillery shell production fell by nearly half (750,000 as opposed to 1,476,000 rounds a month), while rifle manufacture declined by almost eighty percent (617,000 rifles in the first half of 1917 compared to only 130,000 in the first half of 1918).⁹ Even the supply of uniforms and accoutrements had become inadequate, so that many frontline units were lacking not only weaponry, but adequate equipment as well.

The Dual Monarchy and its army were also increasingly short of food because of the Allied blockade and the conscripting of so many peasants into the army. By 1918 the

⁷Ibid., Tabelle 3.; 40-3.

⁸*ÖUIK: VII*: 40-3, 48-9. In toto the Habsburg Army raised thirty-nine series of *Marschbatallione* during the war, one battalion per infantry regiment.

⁹Ibid., Beilage 2, Tabelle 10. R. Plaschka, "The Army and Internal Conflict in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1918," *War and Society: Vol. XIX*, 343.

soldier's daily ration had fallen to 300 grams of flour for combat troops, and 200 for rear area troops, and meat was nearly nonexistent. Fodder for horses was also scarce. The horse, the army's basic tactical tractor, vital for all operations in all theatres, was available in ever smaller numbers: 459,000 by mid-1918, compared to nearly a million in 1916.

The army's inadequate rations only worsened the already serious impact of disease. The number of troops withdrawn from the front due to illness had been rising gradually since the beginning of the war, from 722,000 in the first twelve months to 1,000,000 in the fourth year. Cholera and malaria, prevalent in Italy and the Balkans, were particularly lethal, the latter being especially feared for its ability to cripple formations in a very short period of time: in one instance, the *k.u.k.* 47th Infantry Division, garrisoned in Albania in 1918, quickly lost 10,000 soldiers--virtually its entire strength--to malaria, of whom a quarter died. The food crisis during the winter of 1917-18 was severe for the Dual Monarchy, particularly in its Austrian half, and in late January *AOK* ordered twenty-four infantry battalions from the Balkan front into the Hungarian countryside to assist with food requisitioning, a duty which eventually would absorb large numbers of troops.¹⁰

Life on the home front was materially hardly better than in the combat zone. Workers' rations, 165 grams of bread *per diem* in January 1918, were even more meagre than at the front; there was much dissatisfaction with war-induced inflation and taxation; and the population was simply growing tired of the war, as in all belligerent countries.¹¹ In the third week of January civilian frustrations exploded in a series of strikes across the monarchy. The strikes were basically antiwar in character, although some were overtly Bolshevik or nationalist, or both. The dynasty and the army were frightened by the strikes, which seemed to threaten internal collapse. Emperor-King Karl appealed to the army for assistance, and rapid actions under the codenames "Mogul" and "Revolver" brought seven divisions of loyal troops from the front to put down strikes in German Austria and Bohemia. Karl appointed Prince Alois Schönburg-Hartenstein as commander of the troops in the rear areas in anticipation of a military government under the prince.¹² Fortunately the strikers quickly ceased activity in most areas, order was soon restored in

¹⁰*ÖUk*: VII: 47,89. H. Haselsteiner, "The Habsburg Empire in World War I: The Mobilization of Food Supplies," *War and Society*: Vol. XIX, 96.

¹¹See, R. Sieder, "Behind the Lines: Working-Class Family Life in Wartime Vienna," in: R. Wall, J. Winter, eds., *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1988).

¹²G. Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, 1976), 211. Plaschka, "Army and Internal Conflict," 340-2.

the Dual Monarchy with very little bloodshed, and the army was not called upon to take power. Nevertheless, this effective use of combat troops to aid the civil power was merely the beginning of a mission which would absorb increasing numbers of units as the war unwound.

The rank and file, of course, was far from immune to civilian ideas and pressures, so it was perhaps inevitable that the strikes would spread to the armed forces. Indeed, the threat of mass nationalist and socialist uprisings in the ranks, although failing to materialize during the first four years of the war, remained a major concern for many Austro-Hungarian generals. The first incident was a mutiny at Cattaro, a major Dalmatian naval base, on February 1, 1918. Some 4,000 sailors, many of them Italians and Croats (the navy, recruiting heavily from Istria and Dalmatia, was disproportionately Italian, Croatian and Slovene), revolted over their poor rations and living conditions. *Generaloberst* Sarkotić, Habsburg commander in Bosnia-Hercegovina-Dalmatia, acted decisively, ordering reliable army and naval units to impose order, bloodlessly if possible. After loyal companies of Germans, Czechs and Bosnians had restored military authority within two days, the mutineers returned to their posts without incident. The Cattaro revolt had little to do with nationalist agitation; rather, it was a sailors' mutiny similar to those in the German and Russian navies of the period, inspired by shipboard discipline and abysmal living conditions.¹³ Nonetheless the incident frightened the high command, which feared it was the precursor to wider nationalist mutinies in the armed forces. Although Cattaro was a social, not ethnic, protest--and a mild one, at that--it ushered in rear area unrest which would plague the Habsburg Army later in 1918.

Still, the vast majority of the army's field formations remained reassuringly loyal as the new year began, despite Austria-Hungary's increasing material deprivation. The victories of 1917, particularly the epic blow against Italy, restored vitality and pride to the much battered *k.u.k. Armee*, bringing morale to levels unseen since spring 1916. One of the army's better formations was the 29th Infantry Division, recruited from North Bohemia, a veteran of many terrible battles. The division was engaged against Serbia in 1914 briefly, but successfully. The 29th spent the next three years on the Northeastern front, where it participated in all the major campaigns and acquitted itself well even in the Galician catastrophe of mid-1916. The North Bohemians were dispatched to the Southwest in October 1917 to participate in the Caporetto offensive, in which as a part of the 2nd Isonzo Army they drove the Italians from their positions on the lower Isonzo. In early 1918 the 29th was deep inside Italy as part of Boroevic's unified Isonzo Army.

¹³R. Plaschka, *Cattaro-Prag: Revolte und Revolution*(Graz, 1963), 92-4, 170, 189-90.

Assigned to Prince Schönburg-Hartenstein's IV Corps, the division stood on the Piave line in the Oderzo region, less than forty kilometres from the Adriatic coast.

The 29th was one of the relatively few Habsburg divisions still to have a distinct ethnic and regional character as late as 1918. While other formations had had their national composition diluted by heavy casualties and wartime reorganizations, the 29th remained an essentially *deutschböhmisch* division. Headquartered in peacetime in Theresienstadt as part of the North Bohemian IX Corps (Josephstadt), the division was still more than three-quarters German in composition. Its units, recruited in the heavily industrialized towns and cities of the mountainous northern fringe of Bohemia, had proved themselves loyal and tenacious in battle. The 29th's four infantry regiments reflected faithfully the ethnic makeup of their home regions: Theresienstadt's 42nd, almost ninety percent German; Jičín's 74th, the division's only regiment with a bare Czech majority; Komotau's 92nd, the more than three-quarters German *Heimatregiment* of the Erzgebirge; and Turnau's 94th, overwhelmingly German.¹⁴ The division's artillery, engineer, and service units were similarly more than three-quarters German in national composition.

The Habsburg Army's *deutschböhmisch* regiments had proven among the most reliable of the Dual Monarchy's units during the First World War. Nowhere in Austria-Hungary did national, indeed racial, pride burn more brightly than in the German districts of Bohemia. The Teutonic fringe of Northern and Western Bohemia, what would later be popularly known as the Sudetenland, had developed an early regional consciousness, after centuries of German settlement in the Czech lands. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, this distinctly *böhmisch* identity had been transformed into race-centered German nationalism. Political radicalism and *völkisch* mysticism combined in the factories of North Bohemia, the Dual Monarchy's most industrialized region, where German workers felt increasingly threatened by Czech economic competition. The result was the German Workers' Party, formed in 1904 at Trautenau, a forerunner of Hitler's National Socialists. In the decade before the First World War, *deutschnational* ideologies grew increasingly popular and virulent in Bohemia, becoming a major political force as well as a significant obstruction to parliamentary rule in the *Reichsrat* in Vienna.¹⁵

¹⁴M. EhnI, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht nach Aufbau, Gliederung, Friedensgarnison, Einteilung und nationaler Zusammensetzung im Sommer 1914," *Ergänzungsheft 9 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1934), 25,30,33. J. Lucas, *Fighting Troops of the Austro-Hungarian Army 1868-1914* (New York, 1987), 46-9.

¹⁵A solid explanation of these tendencies is: A. Whiteside, "Nationaler Sozialismus in Österreich vor 1918," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, IX, 1961.

Admittedly, the ultimate loyalty of many of the *Deutschböhmern* to the Habsburg throne was doubtful, given that the ultimate aim of the nationalists was union with the *Wilhelmine Reich*. Indeed, in a sense Bohemia's German nationalists were a "magnetizable" minority, just like the monarchy's Serbs, Romanians, and Italians. However, Franz Joseph's *deutschböhmisch* subjects responded to the war with an enthusiasm they maintained throughout the struggle. Fighting against Slav enemies such as Russia and Serbia, a cause which repelled many of their Czech neighbours, invigorated German-Bohemian soldiers, anxious to defend *Deutschtum*. They fought with equal determination against the hated Italians in defence of German Alpine territory. No less important a motivator, however, was the Vienna-Berlin alliance. Waging war alongside Germany proved a very popular cause among the Germans of North Bohemia. By 1918 Emperor-King Karl's *deutschböhmisch* soldiers, including the veteran *Frontkämpfer* of the 29th Division, frequently were inspired to fight for the German alliance as much as for the Dual Monarchy. Hence the German-Bohemians fought with unparalleled determination in the Imperial-and-Royal Army, sacrificing themselves in huge numbers on all fronts. Purely German areas of Bohemia had among the highest wartime loss rates in Austria-Hungary, considerably higher than in purely Czech areas of Bohemia.¹⁶ Regardless of whether their primary motivation was racial or dynastic, the Habsburg Army's German-Bohemian soldiers were among the monarchy's most reliable and tenacious fighters, and the 29th Division had proven itself through four years of total war to be the army's most consistently successful and loyal *deutschböhmisch* formation.¹⁷

During the first half of 1918, all was quiet on the Southwestern front as the Italian Army attempted to recover from the Caporetto disaster. Habsburg formations on the Piave, including the 29th Division, enjoyed a well deserved rest. The division spent the spring of the war's last year absorbing the few available replacements, preparing solid defences, and implementing a new divisional organization. Since early 1915 *AOK* had desired a comprehensive reordering of army combat units in light of wartime tactical evolution and the need for greater organizational uniformity and efficiency. The High

¹⁶W. Winkler, *Die Totenverluste der öst.-ung. Monarchie nach Nationalitäten* (Vienna, 1919), 7-9. The *deutschböhmisch* rate was 34.5/1,000, compared to a Austrian average of 26.7, a German-Austrian rate of 29.1, and a Czech-Bohemian rate of 26.7. The highest rate was in German areas of Southern Moravia, which registered a loss of forty-four per thousand residents.

¹⁷The Germans in fact considered the *Deutschböhmern* more reliable than other German-Austrians. E. Keleher, "Emperor Karl and the Sixtus Affair: Politico-Nationalist Repercussions in the Reich German and Austro-German Camps, and the Disintegration of Habsburg Austria," *East European Quarterly*, XXVI, No.2, June 1992, 168-74.

Command appreciated the terrible cost of the army's unpreparedness in 1914, and in the late autumn of 1917 sought to ensure the army's readiness in the postwar period; such optimism was hardly unrealistic in the heady days of victory after Caporetto, when the eventual triumph of the Central Powers seemed assured. At the strategic level, borrowing from the early lessons learned in Galicia, the "Conrad Plan" mandated a peacetime strength of 546,000 army troops, *k.u.k.*, *k.k.* and *k.u.*, organized into twenty corps districts,¹⁸ for a total of sixty infantry divisions (forty-one *k.u.k.*, ten *Landwehr* and nine *Honvéd*). and seven cavalry divisions (five *k.u.k.* and one each *k.k.* and *k.u.*). The plan, the army's final reorganization, intended that Habsburg forces should never again be outnumbered and outgunned as in 1914.¹⁹

The 1917 plan also imposed considerable immediate changes in army organization, particularly at the divisional level. Each of the sixty-five infantry divisions on active service at the beginning of 1918 was to contain four infantry regiments, each of three battalions; the *k.u.k. Armee* thus retained the "square" two-brigade infantry division it had at the war's outset.²⁰ However, as many regiments had raised fourth and even fifth battalions in 1915, there was an excess of battalions per regiment. Therefore, in the interest of rationalization, the Habsburg Army formed thirty-five new *k.u.k.* infantry regiments in the spring of 1918 without forming any new battalions, building them instead from the superfluous battalions of existing regiments.²¹ Consequently in its last phases the *k.u.k. Armee* included 150 infantry regiments (138 line, four *Tiroler Kaiserjäger*, and eight Bosnian-Hercegovinian) and forty-two rifle battalions (thirty-two *Feldjäger*, four Bosnian-Hercegovinian, and six *Grenzjäger* for service on the Dual Monarchy's Balkan frontier). Infantry regiments of the *Landwehr/Honvéd* had not raised additional battalions, so were basically unaffected by the reorganization; there were forty *k.k.*²² and forty-three *k.u.* infantry regiments in the last year of the war. The final

¹⁸The four new districts, XVII through XX, were to be headquartered in Győr, Pilsen, Brünn and Salzburg. It is perhaps relevant that two of the four new corps were to be recruited in predominantly Czech districts.

¹⁹J.-C. Allmayer-Beck, "Heeresreorganization vor 50 Jahren," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* (henceforth *ÖMZ*), Sonderheft/1967, 18-20, 22-3. R. Kizling, *Die Höhe Führung der Heere Habsburg im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna, 1968), 205-6.

²⁰Unlike the German Army, which adopted the more flexible "triangular" three regiment division during the war, an advance copied by most armies during the interwar period.

²¹In fact, the reorganization actually reduced the number of active *k.u.k.* infantry battalions from 524 to 492.

²²Including thirty-five *Schützen*, two *Gebirgsschützen* and three *Kaiserschützen* Regiments.

reorganization also required each infantry division to have a *Sturmbatallion*, for a total of sixty-five.²³

Divisional artillery was greatly recast by the army reorganization. Under the plan, each infantry division was to contain a large field artillery brigade²⁴ consisting of two field artillery regiments (the retitled *Feldkanonen-* and *Feldhaubitzenregimenter*), one with seven howitzer batteries, the other containing four cannon batteries; a heavy field artillery regiment of two heavy cannon and two heavy howitzer batteries; a mountain artillery detachment (*Gebirgsartillerieabteilung*) of one light howitzer and two light cannon batteries for close support of the infantry; a battery of *Flak* for air defence; and a battery of heavy *Minenwerfer* to provide short range indirect fire support. Above divisional level, the former fortress artillery was retitled mobile heavy artillery.²⁵

By 1918, the Habsburg artillery had been nearly entirely reequipped since the war's outbreak. Field artillery batteries, the most numerous in the artillery park, contained large numbers of several new pieces, including 8 cm M.17 and M.18 field guns, and 10 cm M.14 field howitzers. Heavy field batteries had been substantially outfitted with newer models such as M.14 and M.15 15 cm howitzers, and the long range 10.4 cm M.14 and 15 cm M.15 guns. Mountain batteries, too, had been supplied with wartime designs such as M.15 7.5 cm light guns and 10 cm M.16 light howitzers. More modern specialist pieces like the M.16 and M.18 *Minenwerfer*, 20 cm and 14 cm weapons respectively, were increasingly prevalent in the field, as were entirely new classes of artillery such as the 8 cm M.14 anti-aircraft gun, a modified field piece.²⁶ Austro-Hungarian arsenals, and particularly Bohemia's excellent Škoda works, had managed to keep the army supplied with advanced, reliable artillery designs; Austro-Hungarian guns, especially mountain pieces, were renowned for their accuracy and portability. The *k.u.k. Armee* now had the modern artillery it needed to implement the many tactical lessons of the war, including long range counterbattery work, effective barrages, and general infantry-artillery cooperation. By the war's last year, unlike in 1914, Habsburg gunners were as well equipped as any artillerists in the world.

²³Allmayer-Beck, "Heeresreorganization," 23-4. *ÖUIK: VII: Beilage 1, Tabelle 4,5*. The postwar cavalry was to be substantially reduced, with each infantry division retaining a mounted squadron for scouting missions.

²⁴From February 1918, to achieve uniformity, all divisional support and service units--including the artillery brigade and regiments, as well as sapper, signals, and logistic battalions and companies--were to take the divisional number.

²⁵Allmayer-Beck, "Heeresreorganization," 23-4. Kiszling, *Höhe Führung*, 205. *ÖUIK: VII: Beilage 1, Tabelle 7*.

²⁶See, E. Gabriel, "Die wichtigsten Waffen der öst.-ung. Armee 1918," *ÖMZ*, 1968.

The final reorganization also affected the army's combat support branches. Engineering assets, previously detached from corps-level sapper and pioneer battalions to infantry divisions in the field, were combined in a divisional sapper battalion of three (later four) companies. Each infantry division was to contain sufficient combat engineers to meet its immediate tactical needs. Additionally, each infantry division was to receive its own *Fliegerkompagnie*, for local reconnaissance and artillery spotting missions; each corps was to be allotted a *Fliegerbatallion* as well. However, a growing shortage of aircraft and pilots prevented the full implementation of the aviation plan before the armistice.²⁷

The army's last tactical reorganization reflected the numerous battlefield lessons learned by Habsburg forces during countless months of modern attritional warfare on several fronts. The artillery-heavy division mandated by the plan, well augmented by assault and sapper battalions, was intended to achieve tactical breakthroughs; although organizationally streamlined, it was not really configured for mobile warfare. Nonetheless, the new divisional organization did reflect notable tactical maturity for Habsburg arms, as it placed emphasis on combined air-ground operations at the divisional level, and demonstrated a complex understanding of the diverse nature of artillery fire missions (hence the inclusion of mountain, heavy mortar, and anti-aircraft batteries in the divisional artillery brigade).

The 29th Division, typically for formations in the field, implemented the new divisional organization as rapidly as possible, given widespread shortages of men and materiel. According to the new twelve battalion organization, the 29th, like nearly all divisions, had a surplus of infantry units. The division therefore created two new infantry regiments from its excess battalions: the 121st from battalions of the 74th and 94th Regiments, and the 137th from the 42nd and 92nd Regiments. The division's veteran 42nd and 74th were dispatched to the Tyrol in mid-April, where they joined the 52nd Division, serving with the 11th Army. Within three weeks the 121st and 137th Regiments, built around the officer and non commissioned cadres of experienced units, were combat ready.²⁸

²⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.AOK/Chef des Generalstabes, Op.Nr.152.879, 11.5.18. Allmayer-Beck,

"Heeresreorganization," 25-7. J. Morrow, *The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921* (Washington, 1993), 330-2. O. Kostrba-Skalicky, "Die Luftstreitkräfte Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Heereskunde-Kriegsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen siebenzig Jahre danach* (Vienna, 1988),

140-2. In practice, few *Fliks* had more than half their allotted ten or dozen combat-ready aircraft.

²⁸K. Novotny, *Die 29.ID in der Juni-Plaveschlacht 1918* (Reichenberg, 1929), 29-30.

The 29th Field Artillery Brigade also experienced the brief bureaucratic chaos of renumbering and recasting of the order of battle during the spring reorganization. The newly configured division's lavishly equipped artillery totalled 179 field pieces. The 29th and 129th Field Artillery Regiments included forty-eight prewar 8 cm field guns, but also sixty-six modern 10 cm howitzers. The 29th Heavy Field Regiment added twenty-four modern 15 cm howitzers and eight modern 10.4 cm guns, as well as four obsolete 15 cm howitzers. The oversized 29th Mountain Artillery Detachment, equipped with all up-to-date weaponry, contributed sixteen 7.5 cm light guns and eight 10 cm light howitzers to the artillery park. Lastly, the 29th Division included two heavy *Minenwerfer* batteries, totalling four 30 cm mortars.²⁹ The veteran North Bohemian artillery brigade was typical of Habsburg units in the war's last year, being equipped predominantly, but not exclusively, with modern guns, howitzers and mortars.

The 29th Division's remaining combat, combat support and service units in the first half of 1918 conformed to the pattern for other infantry divisions in the field. The division included a *Sturmbatallion*, a mounted squadron (from the 1st *k.k. reitende Schützen* Regiment, the retitled 1st *Landwehr* Lancers), a signal company, a medical column, a motorized transport group, and a supply group. The 29th's only deviations from the prescribed table of organization were the addition of a fourth (construction) company to the sapper battalion, and the absence of an aviation company.³⁰

In addition to being well equipped, the 29th was also a well led formation. The two brigade commanders, *Generalmajor* Majewski and Novotny, leading the 57th and 58th Brigades, respectively, were experienced field officers with long records of service with the division. As the summer began, the 29th received a new divisional commander. Fifty-three year old *Feldmarschalleutnant* Otto Ritter von Berndt was an ideal choice to lead the North Bohemians into their final battles. Berndt, like so many *k.u.k.* career officers, was a product of the German diaspora within the Dual Monarchy.³¹ He was, in fact, himself a *Deutschböhmer* from the Gablonz district, within the 29th Division's recruiting area. Unlike most career officers, Berndt did not have a strong family military

²⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.29.FA.Brig.Kmdo., Op.Nr. 573, 1.6.18.

³⁰O. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf und Ende der 29.ID: Meine Erinnerungen aus der Zeit des Zusammenbruches* (Reichenberg, 1928), 11. *ÖUIK: VII: Beilage 1, Tabelle 8.* KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, Kmdo. der Isonzoarmee (KISA), Op.Nr.1840/10, 27.5.18.

³¹Sons of the German communities in Bohemia, Galicia and Hungary--the *Volksdeutsche* of later decades--opted for Habsburg Army careers in numbers far out of proportion to their actual population in Austria-Hungary, much like the Ulster Protestants in the British officer corps.

tradition; rather, his father was a wealthy North Bohemian industrialist. Berndt's army service began typically, as a nineteen year old *einjährig Freiwilliger*. Like many officer aspirants from prosperous families, Berndt opted for a commission in the cavalry, in his case the Bohemian *k.u.k.* 1st Dragoons. After he converted his reserve commission to a regular one, his career progressed successfully, albeit rather conventionally, including attendance at the *Kriegsschule*. However, at age thirty Berndt's career prospects began to improve considerably upon joining the General Staff's prestigious *Operationsbüro*. He proceeded next to the Inspectorate of Cavalry Troops, another desirable staff posting for a mid-rank officer with an eye on eventual promotion to general officer rank. He returned to field units in 1909, as the commander of the 5th Dragoons. In 1914, shortly before the war's outbreak, Berndt was appointed to lead the 13th Cavalry Brigade. In late August he was given command of the 4th Cavalry Division, which he led effectively in Galicia, where he would spend most of the war. Berndt also proved himself an able wartime staff officer, serving from late 1916 as *Generalstabschef* of Archduke Joseph Ferdinand's ill-fated 4th Army, recently shattered by Brusilov's offensive. Following further field command, leading the provisional division-sized Cavalry Corps Berndt (more an infantry than cavalry formation, despite the title), he proceeded to the Southwestern front in the late spring of 1918, to assume command of the 29th Division. Berndt, a German-Bohemian as much as a loyal Habsburg officer, was an excellent choice to lead his homeland's division in its last struggles.³²

The 29th Division, garrisoned on the Piave, was at a safe distance from the commotions which disturbed the Austro-Hungarian Army during the late spring of 1918. The essence of the problem was the impact of the *Heimkehrer*, former Habsburg prisoners of war repatriated from Russia following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. There were 517,000 returnees by the beginning of the summer, nearly 700,000 before the war's end.³³ Conditions in Russian prison camps had been poor to abysmal, and both the

³²KA, Qualifikationsliste, Kart. 169, Otto Ritter v. Berndt. Unlike most Germans from Bohemia, Berndt actually could get by in Czech, a valuable asset when commanding Bohemian units. A convinced German nationalist, he later served as a general officer in the *Wehrmacht*, dying in Vienna at the age of ninety-two, one of the last surviving Habsburg generals.

³³The precise number of Austro-Hungarian soldiers captured by the Russians during the war has remained difficult to determine. The Russians claimed to have captured 1,737,000 *k.u.k.* troops, but some estimates have ranged as high as 2.1 million. In any case, as many as 25% of captives died in the appalling conditions in Russian POW camps (a rate five times higher than the losses sustained in the much-criticized German camps). R. Speed, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York, 1990), 108-9.; A.

Imperial Russian authorities and their Bolshevik successors had proselytized among their Austro-Hungarian captives; the former propagandized among "Entente" prisoners (Serbs, Romanians and Italians), as well as "brother Slavs,"³⁴ while the latter added a Communist element to the indoctrination. Although few Habsburg prisoners returned to the Dual Monarchy convinced radicals of any kind--most were merely happy to be home alive--there was a dedicated cadre among the *Heimkehrer* determined to agitate upon their return to Austria-Hungary.³⁵

Upon repatriation, the army dispatched physically fit *Heimkehrer* to their unit depots for retraining, to be followed by reassignment to field formations. Army authorities promised the returnees both leave and back pay before assigning them to *Ersatz* units. Habsburg military bureaucracy, plagued by all-too-typical *k.u.k. Schlamperei*, proved inadequate to the task, so that many returnees were sent to regimental depots with neither leave nor back pay. Mutiny was the predictable result. The revolts, which occurred in May and June at unit depots throughout the Dual Monarchy, affected many units of diverse nationalities. Czech, Slovak, and Serbian soldiers proved disproportionately susceptible to mutiny, but Ruthene, Slovene, Polish, Romanian and Croatian soldiers also rebelled. In most cases, the mutineers quickly returned to their posts, particularly when confronted by military authorities, rarely with bloodshed; the wartime practice of territorial dislocation of many *Ersatz* units, although politically unpopular, did prevent the mutinies from spreading among the civilian population. In one of the best known incidents, five hundred recently repatriated soldiers

Krammer, "Soviet Propaganda among German and Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War in Russia, 1917-1921," in: S. Williamson, P. Pastor, eds. *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. V: Essays on World War I: Origins and Prisoners of War*, (New York, 1983), 241. Plaschka, et.al. *Innere Front: I*, 45.

³⁴Russian authorities treated "Entente" prisoners considerably better than German and Magyar ones, thereby exacerbating ethnic tensions; as a leading scholar of the subject has observed of Russia, "The government treated prisoners as potential recruits in an ethno-political struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire rather than as disarmed enemies, for whom the war was over." Speed, *Prisoners*, 109. See also pp. 107-22, as well as P. Pastor, "Hungarian POWs in Russia during Revolution and Civil War."; G. Davis, "The Life of Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1921."; and J. Kalvoda, "Czech and Slovak Prisoners of War in Russia during the War and Revolution," *War and Society in East Central Europe: Vol. V*.

³⁵Among the *Heimkehrer* were many future Central European Communist notables, the best known of them Corporal Josip Broz of the 25th *Honvéd* Regiment, later famous by his nom-de-guerre, Tito. Future Hungarian Communist leaders Béla Kun, Imre Nagy and Matyás Rákosi were also converted to the Marxist-Leninist faith in Russian captivity.

of the mostly Czech 7th *Jäger* Battalion revolted at their garrison at Rumburg in Styria. Loyal German troops of Salzburg's 59th Regiment quickly put down the rebellion. The worst incident involved more than five hundred *Heimkehrer* of the *Ersatz* battalion of the mostly Slovak 71st Regiment, who took up arms against Habsburg authorities while garrisoned at Kragujevac in occupied Serbia. As at Rumburg, the mutiny was suppressed by loyal troops, although machine guns and artillery had to be used, resulting in the deaths of seventeen mutineers.³⁶

None of the unit mutinies was explicitly nationalist in origin. Although claims of ethnic discrimination and persecution were included in lists of mutineers' complaints, dissatisfaction with material conditions was a far more important cause. Soldiers recently repatriated from Russia were in many cases unwilling to reenter combat without extended leaves and financial settlements, to which they justifiably felt they were entitled. In a typical case, the Czech riflemen who revolted at Rumburg complained most of all about their back pay for their time in Russia, which they wanted before they would return to the front: the majority were revolting against the slackness of bureaucracy, not against the Dual Monarchy itself.³⁷ The mutinies of May and June reflected numerous material and social, rather than nationalist, complaints among *Heimkehrer*. Significantly, all the mutinies involved troops in the rear areas, not combat units at the front, and the revolts were put down with relative ease by frontline units. Most importantly, the mutinies were caused by a lack of energetic and tactful leadership in replacement units. As the army's official report noted pointedly, "The blame falls in the first place on the officers."³⁸ Due to the prolonged high casualty rates among field officers, the quality of unit leadership undoubtedly had declined considerably. There was little the army could do, except reinforce the concept of discipline.

January's civilian strikes, combined with the late spring's military uprisings, led to the establishment of permanent military security battalions (*ständige Assistenzbatallione*). The High Command ordered the raising of these units to aid civil authority in the event of further unrest, military or civilian. The support battalions were raised from the depots of

³⁶K. Pichlik, "Das Ende der öst.-ung. Armee," *Österreichische Osthefte*, 5/Sept. 1963, 358-9. R. Plaschka,

"Contradicting Ideologies: The Pressure of Ideological Conflicts in the Austro-Hungarian Army of World War I," in: R. Kann, B. Király, P. Fichtner, eds., *The Habsburg Empire in World War I* (Boulder, 1977), 106.

³⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.IV.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.1869, 7.6.18. Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Break-Up of the Habsburg Empire: A Study in National and Social Revolution* (London, 1961), 143.

³⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.AOK/Chef des Generalstabes, Op.Nr.106.968, 28.5.18.

existing units, with German, Magyar, Croatian and particularly Bosnian soldiers being favoured by the high command for their political reliability. To prevent collaboration with the local population, "foreign" *Assistenz* units were used; thus Bohemia was garrisoned largely with German, Magyar and Romanian soldiers, while Inner Austria was garrisoned mostly by Bosnian and Magyar troops.³⁹ These units proved very successful at preventing and suppressing destabilization on the home front, allowing the Dual Monarchy to survive the domestic chaos of 1918 until late October; as the leading scholar on the subject observed, "Even during the final phase of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the support units in the interior of the country fully met the expectations of the leadership." The only difficulty with the army's internal security apparatus was the perennially inadequate number of troops to meet the needs of both the fighting front and the rear area. From early April the interior of Austria-Hungary was garrisoned by the equivalent of seven complete divisions, drawn from the understrength occupation forces in the Balkans and the East. The War Ministry requested more units in May, and seventy additional *Assistenz* battalions in July. Such demands could not be met, as there simply were not enough battalions and soldiers in the Habsburg Army. To the end of the war, *AOK* and the *k.u.k. Kriegsministerium* argued over unit deployments, the former emphasizing the needs of field formations, the latter being more concerned with the threat of revolt and revolution at home.⁴⁰

The army was additionally called upon to provide increasing assistance to the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture in the requisitioning of foodstuffs, desperately needed in the cities. Despite the hopes of many in Vienna and Budapest, the German and Austro-Hungarian occupation of Ukraine in early 1918 did not deliver the anticipated amounts of crops. Famine in the Dual Monarchy seemed a possibility. The establishment of an Army Food Council (*Armee Ernährungsrat*) did little to ameliorate the situation. Thus in March Prince Lajos Windischgrätz, Budapest's Minister of Agriculture, requested 50,000 additional troops to help with requisitioning to prevent further hardship in the cities. *AOK* ordered three *Honvéd* divisions and a number of smaller units into the Hungarian hinterland, putting large sections of Hungary under military occupation.⁴¹

³⁹Plaschka, et.al., *Innere Front: II*, 27-30, 111-16, 353-4. Plaschka, "Army and Internal Conflict," 349. In a typical example, Prague was sent an *Ersatz* support battalion of the Transylvanian *k.u.k.* 2nd Infantry Regiment, whose Magyar, German and Romanian soldiers were not Slavs, and certainly not in sympathy with the civilian population.

⁴⁰Plaschka, "Army and Internal Conflict," 343-4.

⁴¹Haselsteiner, "Mobilization," 97. Plaschka, et.al., *Innere Front: I*, 44-57.

This further drain on the army's emaciated manpower reserves only worsened conditions at the front . Equally significantly, the huge military requisitioning effort served to alienate many peasants, who heretofore had been mostly loyal subjects of the Dual Monarchy, as well as the backbone of its infantry.

In the spring of 1918, confronted by material and psychological crises on the home front, the Austro-Hungarian Army sought above all else to maintain the fighting spirit of the army in the field. AOK was sufficiently unsettled by disturbances in the hinterland, and concerned enough about the effect of Entente propaganda, to begin a campaign of explicit political indoctrination of the troops to prevent further difficulties. The return of the *Heimkehrer*, propagandized by the enemy, was a source of much anxiety for field commanders; as *Feldmarschalleutnant* Berndt noted of the returnees, even in his own first-rate division, "Their utterly terrible impact on the morale of the troops was to be feared." The prestige of the dynasty and its army and the support of the church, traditional sources of *k.u.k.* strength, were deemed insufficient to maintain fighting spirit, so on March 20 the army established the Enemy Propaganda Defence Organization (*Feindpropaganda-Abwehr-Stelle--FAST*) to combat Bolshevik and nationalist subversion. The organization's program of "patriotic instruction" (*vaterländische Unterricht*), much like the German Army's propaganda methods of the last year of the war, was developed with the assistance of black-yellow politicians and academics, with the aim of evoking greater loyalty to the dynasty and the army.⁴² The lectures, journals, pamphlets, placards and even films produced by *FAST* focussed on several broad themes and topics: political ideas ("Why is it better to live in a great power?"), domestic issues ("The Political Structure of the Monarchy"), war-related concepts ("Why are we fighting?"), social themes ("What does War bring the Peasant?"), family issues ("War and Women" and "The Care of Soldiers and their Families"), portrayals of the enemy ("Italy--its Rise, Character, and Symptoms of Decay"), and, of course, visions of the postwar future ("Democracy and Freedom").⁴³ While this propaganda effort may have ameliorated the army's condition somewhat, it remains doubtful whether its long-term effects were very great. Austria-Hungary's dwindling supply of men, machines and food, the essential military problem, could not be overcome by words. Indeed, many generals were

⁴²Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 33. M. Farkas, "Die politische Erziehungsarbeit in der Armee am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges," in: R. Plaschka, K. Mack, eds., *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches: Zusammenbruch und Neuorientierung im Donauraum* (Vienna, 1970), 266-7.

⁴³Plaschka, "Contradicting Ideologies," 113-4. For a detailed contemporary explanation: A. Schager, *Vaterländische Vorträge für Soldaten* (Vienna, 1918).

pessimistic about the campaign's effectiveness. As *Generaloberst* von Wurm, commander of the Isonzo Army, commented, "The beautiful words of the patriotic lessons could not convince anyone, for an empty stomach and revolutionary ideas supercede stronger arguments."⁴⁴

By the war's last spring, increasing numbers of Austro-Hungarian soldiers, dissatisfied with the declining conditions of wartime service, were deserting. Many returning prisoners of war, as well as a fair number of other soldiers, chose to leave the army rather than stage revolts inside it. There were probably 100,000 deserters by the summer's end, 35,000 of them in Galicia alone. Some of them formed bands of armed thugs and thieves. Known as the "green cadres," these groups were particularly strong in the mountainous forests of Croatia and Bosnia. Some bands were politically motivated, espousing nationalist or Bolshevik creeds, or both; however, the appeal of violence and banditry was apparently a more frequent motivation. Although most bands were small, some were comparatively large, often well equipped with machine guns and sometimes even with artillery. The army proved incapable of eliminating the "green cadres," as there were too few troops available in the hinterland to do more than harass armed deserters. In some areas bands of deserters were a serious threat to Habsburg authority: when Karl visited Sofia and Constantinople in May, special security precautions had to be taken as the monarch's train moved across the Balkan countryside.⁴⁵

On the whole, though, the fighting condition of the Habsburg Army in the spring of 1918 was adequate for defensive purposes. The tranquility on all fronts during the first half of the year permitted field units a chance to rest and absorb what few replacements were available. The Piave line remained strong, subjected to only very limited raids from Italian forces; during the entire month of May, the 29th Division suffered only forty-four battle casualties (including only ten dead). The months of inactivity had given the division ample time to flesh out its units. By the end of the month the division's four infantry regiments averaged a rifle strength of nearly 2,350 officers and men,

⁴⁴Farkas, "Die politische Erziehungsarbeit," 269.

⁴⁵E. Bauer, *Der letzte Paladin des Reiches: Generaloberst Stefan Freiherr Sarkotić von Lovcen* (Graz, 1988), 139-43. I. Banac, "'Emperor Karl has become a Comitadji': The Croatian Disturbances of Autumn 1918," *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol.70, No.2, April 1992, 284-8. Plaschka, et.al., *Innere Front: II*, 63-5, 81-9. Pichlík, "Das Ende," 360. R. Spence, "The Yugoslav Role in the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1914-1918," *War and Society: Vol.XIX*, 362. Rothenberg, *Army*, 214.

supplemented by almost 600 *Sturmtruppen*. The division's combat support and service units were similarly strong.⁴⁶

Although the army's combat power in Italy was sufficient to defend its strong positions on the Piave and Asiago plateau, the Southwestern front was not prepared for offensive action. However, secret diplomacy soon forced the Habsburg Army to undertake its final offensive. Karl had been negotiating covertly with representatives of the Entente via his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus of Parma, an officer in the Belgian Army, in the hope of concluding a separate peace.⁴⁷ Unfortunately this attempt at peacemaking, like so many actions of the young Emperor-King, was naive, ill-conceived, and doomed to failure. Worse, his covert activities were discovered by Berlin. Austria-Hungary was vitally dependent on Germany for strategic security as well as a great deal of war materiel. Although the Habsburg realm was gradually being dragged down with the Hohenzollerns to final defeat, breaking the alliance so late in the war was an impossibility.⁴⁸

Karl quickly repented for his sins against his ally by concluding a series of agreements with the *Oberste Heeresleitung* on May 13 at Spa. Karl tied his empire to Germany more closely than ever before. Austria-Hungary was now theoretically joined with Germany in all matters of military, political and economic cooperation: Karl essentially signed away the sovereignty of his realm, submitting to the authority of a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*.

By mid-1918, as the German "Peace Offensive" was faltering, the Central Powers were heading toward defeat in a matter of months, and the Vienna-Berlin accords had limited political or economic meaning. Far more damaging for the Dual Monarchy and its army were the military promises which Karl gave the Germans in May. He committed his tired army to a major offensive against Italy as soon as possible. It was an unnecessary gesture which the Habsburg Army was too weak to complete successfully.⁴⁹ Austria-Hungary's forces in Italy were strong enough hold their geographically and

⁴⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1713, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.155/11, 31.5.18.; Op.Nr.156/14. 1.6.18.

⁴⁷Refer to: R. Kann, *Die Sixtusaffäre und die geheimen Friedensverhandlungen Österreich-Ungarns im ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1966).

⁴⁸The revelation of Karl's peace attempt behind his ally's back was poorly received by most German-Austrians, particularly the politically powerful *Deutschböhmer*.

⁴⁹Rothenberg, *Army*, 212. Karl also committed the army to sending a corps of two (later four) well equipped divisions to the Western Front to fight alongside the Germans, a political rather than military gesture. For this and other follies: F. Franek, "K. und k. Truppen im Westen," *Militärische Wissenschaftlichen Mitteilungen*, 1931.

militarily strong defences for several more months, but a major offensive would be nothing less than suicidal. As the preeminent scholar of the subject expressed the problem concisely, "Austria-Hungary was no longer capable of a war-decisive (*kriegsentscheidene*) operation."⁵⁰

The prospect of an offensive against the Italians horrified many senior Habsburg generals. Significantly enough, the highest ranking opponent was *Feldmarschall* Boroevic, commander of one of the Southwestern front's two army groups, and the *k.u.k. Armee's* most experienced and successful general fighting the Italians. Boroevic believed that the war would be lost before the end of the year, even without the offensive, and that the army must conserve its waning strength for the coming domestic tumult. He was willing to agree to a limited offensive, albeit reluctantly, but was adamantly opposed to a general two-pronged push on both the Piave and Tyrolean fronts. This concept, based on Conrad's prewar planning, was precisely what Karl's concessions to Berlin promised. Boroević, ever loyal to his Emperor-King, in the end had no real choice but to go along with the operation which would destroy the last remaining Habsburg army in the field.⁵¹

The attack plan committed virtually the entire frontline strength of the Habsburg Army to the offensive, a total of fifty-three divisions plus an additional ten in reserve. *Heeresgruppe* Conrad's 10th and 11th Armies in Tyrol and on the Asiago plateau contained more than twenty-eight infantry divisions, including most of the army's élite formations, in ten corps; *Heeresgruppe* Boroević's 6th and Isonzo Armies on the Piave included eighteen divisions in six corps, with the remaining divisions held in reserve. Despite the impressive numbers, the combat readiness of the Habsburg forces left a great deal to be desired. The paper strength of the *Armee im Felde* was 2,818,000, but the actual frontline strength was only 946,000. The deteriorating industrial, agricultural and transportation sectors of the Dual Monarchy meant that the troops were short of virtually everything. Many of the divisions on the Piave and in the Tyrol were mere shells; most infantry divisions contained between 5,000 and 8,000 combat soldiers, and cavalry divisions usually had half as many. One-third of field artillery batteries had no draught horses, and there was no fuel for tractors; ammunition too was increasingly scarce. Shortages of spare parts crippled or damaged worn out equipment. The soldiers themselves were badly malnourished. As the daily combat ration was so meagre, the

⁵⁰P. Fiala, *Die letzte Offensive Altösterreichs: Führungsprobleme und Führerverantwortlichkeit bei der öst.-ung. Offensive in Venetien, Juni 1918* (Boppard am Rhein, 1967), 121.

⁵¹E. Bauer, *Der Löwe vom Isonzo: Feldmarschall Svetozar Boroević de Bojna* (Graz, 1985), 79-82. P. Fiala, "Die letzte Offensive gegen Italien," *ÖMZ*, 1968, 397-8.

average body weight for an Austro-Hungarian frontline soldier had fallen to fifty-five kilograms. Clothing and accoutrements were in equally short supply, and such "luxuries" as underwear and decent boots were but a memory in most combat units.⁵²

The 29th Division, although somewhat stronger in men and materiel than most formations, nonetheless was hardly ready to take the offensive. The grave shortage of draught horses and shells severely limited the effectiveness of the powerful 29th Field Artillery Brigade. The troops' clothing and footwear were in poor condition, but there were few replacements. Fresh troops, too, were increasingly rare; the four *Marsch* companies arriving at the division in early June, with a paper strength of only four officers and 298 men, brought only 166 soldiers, an average of barely forty per company: the remainder were on leave. The soldiers' main complaint, typically, was the poor quality of their rations. Infantrymen were fortunate to receive 200 grams of meat per week; otherwise they subsisted on small portions of cornbread and occasional boiled vegetables. The lack of coffee was the North Bohemians' major gripe, the roasted corn *Ersatzkaffee* being universally detested.⁵³ Nonetheless the soldiers of the 29th, like virtually all Austro-Hungarian troops in Italy in June 1918, were still willing to fight.

The strategic decision for the offensive was soon followed by tactical preparations. *Generaloberst* von Wurm's Isonzo Army, four corps (IV, VII, XVI, XXIII) and more than fourteen divisions strong, supported by 1,770 guns, was assigned the mission of penetrating the defences of the nine division-strong Italian 3rd Army, dug in on the lower Piave before Venice, from Papadopoli island to the Adriatic. The Habsburg operational scheme included a sophisticated artillery fire plan, beginning with *Minenwerfer* fires at 3 am on the morning of the offensive, followed by a general barrage of gas shells to prevent enemy counterbattery shelling. The Isonzo Army intended to launch the assault elements of its four corps across the Piave at 7.30 am, with mountain batteries attached to forward battalions for direct support. Divisional artillery would commence rolling barrages after the initial penetration was achieved, jumping forward 200 metres every four minutes to provide advancing infantry units with constant supporting fires. The detailed artillery fire plan, based on the tactical lessons of the previous four years of fighting, was made possible by the effective use of army aviation. Although Habsburg fighter and observation companies operated at well below authorized strengths of aircraft and pilots,

⁵²ÖUİK: VII: Beilage 11. Fiala, *letzte Offensive*, 19, 78-80. Rothenberg, *Army*, 213. I. Deák, "The Habsburg Army in the First and Last Days of World War I: A Comparative Analysis," *War and Society: Vol. XLIX*, 309.

⁵³KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.Div.-Ausb.-Gruppe 29, Op.Nr.325, 13.6.18. Novotny, *29.ID*, 15.

they were still experienced and effective forces. Austro-Hungarian air units collected impressive photo and visual reconnaissance in the days and weeks before the offensive, supplying divisions with detailed information about Italian dispositions, and particularly the all-important locations of enemy forward batteries. Air units also protected the movement of Habsburg forces and their supplies toward the Piave from Italian air observation and attack. Most innovatively, air-ground cooperation was formalized with the addition of a two-man air signals detachment to each infantry battalion, able to communicate with aircraft via signal flares. Effective tactical support of the infantry by fighters and light bombers had heretofore been problematical and haphazard due to poor communications and a lack of coherent doctrine. Air-ground cooperation was now formalized, in time for the Habsburg army's last offensive.⁵⁴

In preparation for the offensive, IV Corps was reinforced by numerous engineering units, including the equivalent of four battalions of sappers and construction troops, as well as five bridging companies, one of which was assigned to the 29th Division. Assault units of the Isonzo Army practised the intricacies of a forced nighttime river crossing on May 30 on the Tagliamento; the exercise, although arduous for the units involved, proved that engineer and infantry battalions were capable of effective cooperation in the dark. The 29th Division, like all assault formations, planned to cross the Piave on prefabricated bridges, with a forward element consisting of three infantry regiments, the divisional *Sturmbatallion*, two mountain batteries, numerous light mortars, a signal platoon, and a small pack animal column. The division's fourth infantry regiment, engineer companies and field artillery batteries, as well as numerous service and support units, were to follow once an initial bridgehead had been secured.⁵⁵

In the two weeks before the offensive, the 29th gradually moved its combat and supply echelons toward the banks of the Piave, a few companies at a time, always under the cover of darkness. In the interest of maintaining surprise, construction units attempted to camouflage divisional depots, and the division's *Feldgendarmarie* detachment rigidly enforced march discipline on the roads leading to the river. The commanders of all units were held responsible for the conduct of their men during the buildup. The months of relative tranquility on the Southwestern front meant that the 29th, although increasingly short of fresh men, rations, clothing, munitions, and transport,

⁵⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, KISA, Op.Nr.10964, 4.6.18.; Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 16. k.u.k.17.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.1700/215, 11.6.18.

⁵⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.IV.K.Kmdo., T.Nr.2792, 1.6.18.; Op.Nr.1842/22, 31.5.18.; KISA, Gstababt., Op.Nr.2900/23, 3.6.18.; Op.Nr.7046, 10.6.18.

was nevertheless well rested and self-confident. Austria-Hungary's soldiers, although tired of the war like all combatants, wanted to inflict a final defeat on the hated Italians, their last remaining enemy. As the German General von Cramon, chief liaison officer to the Habsburg Army, observed, "The troops' offensive spirit, confirmed to me on all sides, was the best. Officers and men burned, as in the first months of the war, to compete against the Eyeties."⁵⁶ This was especially true of the soldiers of the 29th Division, whose desire for final victory was matched by racial hatred of the enemy.

Despite its élite reputation and relative combat readiness, the North Bohemian division was not assigned an assault mission on the first day of the offensive, June 15. Instead it was placed east of Oderzo as IV Corps reserve, poised to exploit the advances of the corps' 64th and 70th *Honvéd* Divisions, which assaulted the Piave line on the first day. The 29th Field Artillery Brigade, however, was placed under the 70th Division's operational control during the breakthrough, to bring every available gun to bear on enemy positions.⁵⁷

Italian defences proved stronger than anticipated, and few Habsburg formations made notable progress on June 15; despite the fact that all of the *Isonzoarmee's* nine attacking divisions reached the Piave's west bank, only the 10th and 24th advanced more than two kilometres into enemy territory. The next day the 64th and 70th *Honvéd* Divisions remained stalled on the west bank of the Piave, although elements of VII and XXIII Corps, further to the south, made slow headway. Habsburg casualties were heavier than anticipated, as Italian units fought with unexpected determination; enemy machine gun positions, well dug in and occupying high ground overlooking the river valley, proved particularly difficult for Austro-Hungarian infantry to overcome. The Caporetto catastrophe, rather than spelling the end of what remained of Italy's field forces, had instead inspired Diaz's divisions to unprecedented efforts in defence of Italian soil. With Habsburg armies deep in Northeast Italy, the war was no longer a bloody, futile attempt to wrest *Italia irridenta* from Vienna's control, but rather a crusade to defend Italian soil from the invader. Thus the Italian 3rd Army, rebuilt entirely since the disasters of

⁵⁶KA/NFA, k.u.k.IV.K.Kmdo., Op.Nr.1800/18, 31.5.18. Novotny, 29.ID., 18. It cannot be doubted, however, that some of the troops' offensive ardor was inspired by hopes of plundering the more generously provisioned Italian positions. See: Gefechts-Berichte, Schachtel 16, k.u.k.6.Armee-Kmdo., Op.Nr.710/64, 21.5.18.

⁵⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.IV.K.Kmdo., Op.Nr.1921/17zu, 17.6.18.

October and November, resisted the attacks of the *Isonzoarmee* with courage and determination.⁵⁸

On June 17, the three divisions of von Schariczer's VII Corps, immediately south of IV Corps, advanced further into enemy territory; the leading elements of the *k.u.k.* 9th Cavalry Division (fighting dismounted) were four kilometres west of the Piave by nightfall. The 64th and 70th *Honvéd* Divisions made no real progress, however, against the defences of the enemy's XI Corps. As the likelihood of a corps breakthrough dwindled late on June 17, Isonzo Army command transferred the still uncommitted 29th Division to the operational control of the neighbouring VII Corps, which needed reinforcements and seemed to be on the verge of an operational breakthrough.⁵⁹

The next day, as VII and XXIII Corps consolidated their gains and penetrated a few hundred metres deeper into Italian defences, the 29th Division prepared to join the offensive in earnest. The division crossed bridges over the Piave the night of June 18-19 at Ponte-di-Piave, led by *Generalmajor* Novotny's 58th Brigade, the division's assault element, composed of eight infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron, three mountain batteries and two sapper companies. The remaining four infantry battalions crossed later that night with *Generalmajor* Majewski's 57th Brigade. Upon reaching the Piave's west bank, the division entered the line between VII Corps' mostly Slovak 14th Infantry and German-Slovene 44th *Schützen* Divisions. A VII Corps offensive to break out toward Treviso, planned for 9 am, was postponed two hours. The 29th Division attacked the positions of the Italian 11th Division at midday, following a brief preparatory barrage. The fresh division, assaulting with all four infantry regiments and reinforced by the 44th Division's crack 2nd *Gebirgsschützen* Regiment, failed to advance. Heavy Italian shelling, which Habsburg batteries could not silence due to a lack of ammunition, inflicted losses on forward companies and paralyzed the division's progress.⁶⁰

On the morning of June 20 the 29th Division attempted to move forward again, without artillery support, which was unavailable due to persistent shell shortages and overwhelming Italian artillery superiority. The North Bohemians' assaults were met with

⁵⁸The Italian *Comando Supremo* had a total of fifty-six infantry divisions at its disposal (including three British, two French, and one Czecho-Slovak), of which thirty-seven were at the front and nineteen were held in reserve; the Italians also had 7,043 guns and 2,406 mortars to resist the Austro-Hungarian offensive. *The Battle of the Piave (June 15-23, 1918)* (translation of official *Comando Supremo* account) (London, 1919), 42-3.

⁵⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.VII.K.Kmdo., Op.Nr.169/12, 18.6.18.

⁶⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k. Gruppenkmdo.FML Urbarz, Op.Nr.18/W-50, 18.6.18.; k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.170/2, 19.6.18.; Op.Nr.170/18, 20.6.18. Novotny, 29.ID., 30.

counterattacks by the enemy's 37th Division, a fresh reserve formation. Although the 29th lost little ground to the Italians (unlike the other divisions of VII Corps), it absorbed heavy casualties on June 20. The 92nd Regiment lost virtually its entire *Sturmkompanie* during a *melée* in the village of La Callaltella. By the end of the day's savage fighting the veteran 92nd had been reduced to an effective strength of four companies with barely 700 officers and men; the regiment's 3rd Battalion lost all but ninety soldiers. A few hundred metres south, in a failed attempt to seize the village of La Tale, the 121st Regiment was mauled, losing over 300 men including its commander, Colonel Polli, killed at the head of his newly raised unit.⁶¹

By the morning of June 21, Isonzo Army command realized plainly that the offensive had stalled without achieving more than limited tactical gains, and that the threat of a general Italian counteroffensive was very real, indeed increasing. The army's power of resistance to a determined Italian assault had been greatly weakened by recent losses of men and materiel. Ammunition shortages continued to worsen, leaving the infantry without adequate artillery support in the face of continuous Italian barrages. Machine gun ammunition reserves too were dwindling. Even rifle ammunition was becoming scarce, with infantry divisions reporting a reserve of only 110 rounds per rifleman. Worst of all, Austro-Hungarian formations were vulnerable to enemy air attack, as air superiority quickly evaporated once the Italians, British and French had concentrated their squadrons on the lower Piave. The Habsburg Army's air arm, like all other branches, was plagued by increasing shortages of equipment and trained personnel. Despite heroic efforts to protect formations on the ground, the *k.u.k. Luftstreitkräfte* on the Piave were unable to provide adequate defences against enemy ground attack squadrons. The cost of air attacks on frontline units was bad enough, particularly with respect to morale; the toll on rear echelon units was devastating, as supply depots and columns were bombed and strafed incessantly during daylight hours. Eighty percent of Austro-Hungarian bridging across the Piave was destroyed by enemy air and artillery attacks.⁶²

After six days of the offensive, Habsburg positions were growing more precarious by the hour. Fearing a debacle, especially with the threat of tanks looming, Isonzo Army command reluctantly ordered a withdrawal to the east bank of the Piave late on June 21.

⁶¹K. Bergmann, *Am Niemandlande: Fronterleben bei einem sudetendeutschen Regimente* (Reichenberg, 1930).

381. Novotny, *29.ID.*, 66-72.

⁶²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1707, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.172/17, 21.6.18. Novotny, *29.ID.*, 93-5. Bergmann, *Am Niemandlande*, 380-3.

The order was received by VII Corps staff shortly after dusk, which dispatched it to its divisions immediately.⁶³ The retreat was not immediate, however, as the Italians could not be permitted to transform the river crossing into a strategic rout. An army-level withdrawal also represented a considerable logistical undertaking, requiring twenty-four hours of arduous engineering preparations. Thus Austro-Hungarian divisions on the river's west bank continued to resist Italian probes during the night of June 21-22 and the following day, as construction units readied the remaining bridges and ferries for the retreat. The majority of the 29th Division was relieved in the early evening of June 22, leaving one battalion behind as a covering force. Elements of the division began crossing at 10.45 pm, organized in three groups. The more cumbersome service and logistical units crossed first, followed by the artillery, and lastly by the infantry, led by Novotny's 58th Brigade. Some 3,460 29th Division soldiers made the crossing by ferry, while the majority reached the east bank via the Salgreda bridge. By 4 am on June 23, the last units of the division's covering force had reached the Piave's east bank.⁶⁴

The ill-fated Piave offensive at least ended positively, with the army proving its ability to execute a strategic retreat under fire, one of the most difficult of military tasks. But there could be no doubt that the army's last offensive had been a catastrophe. The *k.u.k. Armee* had suffered serious losses of men and equipment which could not be replaced. The divisions of the Isonzo Army, weak numerically and in firepower before June 15, were now incapable of any offensive action; even their defensive potential seemed questionable. The 29th Division, having spent only four days in combat, had been less bloodied than many formations, but its losses were still considerable. The offensive cost the North Bohemian division 2,261 officers and men, thirty percent of its rifle strength, including 260 confirmed killed, 1,458 wounded, and 543 missing. The 92nd and 121st Regiments took the heaviest casualties, the latter suffering particularly heavily in its first battle, losing nearly 900 officers and men, as well as many crew-served weapons.⁶⁵

⁶³KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, KISA, Op.Nr.2900/195, 21.6.18.; k.u.k.VII.K.Kmdo., Op.Nr.172/4, 21.6.18.

⁶⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.VII.K.Kmdo., T.Nr.2036, 22.6.18.; k.u.k.Gruppenkmdo.FML.Urbarz., Op.Nr.22/VI-4, 22.6.18. Novotny, *29.ID.*, 87.

⁶⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.176/13, 25.6.18.; k.u.k.IR.121, Op.Nr.177/4, 26.6.18.; k.u.k.IR.137., Op.Nr.624/Adj., 24.6.18. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 12.

Despite the evident tactical improvement of the Austro-Hungarian Army by mid-1918, the army had failed in its last offensive.⁶⁶ Ever-worsening shortages of weapons and ammunition had crippled the army's efforts. Like the German Army in its "Peace Offensive," the Habsburg forces could no longer hope to stage a strategic offensive against a numerically stronger enemy still capable of fighting *Materielschlachten*. The Italian Army had staged an impressive recovery since Caporetto, thanks largely to French and British assistance, and its troops had resisted the Austro-Hungarians with unanticipated grit. Although Habsburg divisions fought with courage and determination, the offensive was really doomed before the first batteries opened fire. In the end, the fighting men of the Dual Monarchy proved more durable than their homeland's ability to wage modern industrially-based, machine-oriented war, and the excellent performance of Austro-Hungarian soldiers of all nationalities had been to no avail.

As had so often been the case on the Southwestern front, the army suffered no difficulties from "unreliable" nationalities during the doomed offensive: *Feldmarschall* Borojevic's statement that "brave soldiers of all our peoples conducted themselves with heroic courage and endurance," was no exaggeration. All the ethnic groups of the Dual Monarchy were represented in the Isonzo Army, including many supposedly suspect Czechs, Romanians, Ruthenes, Italians and Serbs. Yet the ultimate failure of the forces on the Piave had nothing to do with disloyalty; certainly the 29th Division had no complaints about its Czech soldiers, one-quarter of the formation's strength. Despite the overreaction of the High Command in 1914 after the Čer defeat, given effective leadership Czech troops could be relied upon to fight well, even in the war's last offensive. Habsburg infantrymen of all nationalities fought the Italians effectively, frequently without artillery support, while being constantly shelled and bombed by the enemy. As General von Cramon, a frequently harsh critic of Habsburg arms, noted of the Piave offensive, "In truth this army deserved a better fate."⁶⁷

The fate of the Habsburg Army in the Southwest in the aftermath of the Piave offensive was certainly unenviable. The 29th Divisional headquarters observed optimistically in the last week of June, "The state of the troops' morale is excellent. Their physical condition, considering the heavy fighting and sacrifices, must also be considered good." Although the 29th was an élite formation, this evaluation certainly reflected the

⁶⁶A veteran British officer observed, "The Austrians at this point showed considerable tactical ability and initiative, and were quick to develop their tactical success." G. Barnett, *With the 48th Division in Italy* (London, 1923), 73.

⁶⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.Heeresgruppekmdo.FM.v.Borojevic, Op.Nr.623/6, 23.6.18. Novotny, 29.ID., 98-102.

wishful thinking of the staff more than any actual conditions in fighting units. The 5,154 surviving riflemen of the North Bohemian division were tired and hungry, and certainly aware of the essential hopelessness of their cause following the failed Piave offensive. Austria-Hungary's last army in the field had been ruined on the Piave, and there was nothing to do but wait for the coming Italian general offensive. As a veteran infantry soldier of the division commented in his memoir, "War weariness was there. Patriotism had been smothered in blood. Only an iron awareness of duty still drew the border between a well-ordered mind and insanity."⁶⁸ The fighting men of the 29th Division were prepared to do their duty, to resist the enemy's advance, but any sense of optimism had been left, like so many comrades, on the west bank of the Piave.

The Habsburg Army at all levels was profoundly shaken by the effects of the debacle on the Piave. *AOK* was well aware that the chronic shortages of trained replacements, weaponry of all classes, munitions, uniforms, rations, horses, trucks, rolling stock, and virtually everything else required to wage modern war could not be filled. An Italian "victory offensive" was inevitable, considering the improvement in the Entente's strategic position since the spring, and by July it was evident that Germany would be too weak to provide any assistance. The Habsburg Army would have to stand on its own against its last remaining enemy, a prospect which worried the senior generals. There was a need to apportion blame for the Piave debacle. The actual cause of the misfortune was not poor staff work, and certainly not inadequate determination on the soldiers' part, but rather the decision to undertake the offensive in the first place. Of course Karl could not be held officially responsible. The dynasty required a general to sacrifice, someone like Benedek in 1866. As it happened, the commission to assess responsibility did not meet until December 1918, by which time the Dual Monarchy had disappeared along with its army, and the entire issue was at best academic. Naturally, Hungarian parliamentarians in Budapest in July wasted no time making hysterical accusations, citing "the criminally thoughtless leadership of Austrian generals" for the misfortune in Italy, demanding the establishment of a separate Hungarian army, the longstanding aim of Hungary's many ardent nationalists.⁶⁹ The Habsburg frontline soldiers of all nationalities were too concerned with survival to pay much attention to political wranglings at home, and continued to do their duty, as they had since August 1914.

⁶⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1707, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.176/13, 25.6.18. Bergmann, *Am Niemandslande*, 388.

⁶⁹Fiala, *Die letzte Offensive*, 136-41. "Die letzte Offensive," 404.

During the four months of relative tranquility which passed on the Piave from the last week of June to the last week of October, the remnants of the Habsburg forces in the Southwest prepared to defend their positions against a major Italian offensive. Isonzo Army intelligence anticipated that the coming enemy push would be well supported by prodigious quantities of artillery and aviation, including experienced French and British heavy batteries and attack squadrons. Realizing the depleted condition of all Austro-Hungarian frontline divisions, *AOK* believed that a prolonged defence of the Piave line would prove impossible; operational planning therefore focussed on a brief static holding action, followed by a withdrawal to the Tagliamento. Mobile tactics were hardly new to the Isonzo Army, which had triumphed during the Caporetto offensive; however, mobile defence was a relatively new concept, and combat formations required tactics and training to meet the new battlefield realities.

The preparations of the 29th Division and the Habsburg Army in the Southwest for a mobile defence reflected the hard-learned tactical lessons of the entire war. Isonzo Army command envisioned a defensive scheme reflecting late war German Army doctrine: a main line of resistance, based upon machine gun positions, thinly held but supported well by presighted artillery fires; and a secondary line, dedicated to brief, intense counterattacks against enemy penetrations. These plans required a high degree of cooperation between infantry and artillery, as well as between ground and air units. Divisions such as the 29th had proved adept at combined arms and ground-air integration during the Piave offensive, but the demands of mobile warfare were more complex than managing a breakthrough attack. Signals problems loomed large in the minds of divisional and corps planners, particularly in light of the army's growing shortage of radios and field telephones. As a last resort, the infantry would have to rely on flares and signal flags to communicate with its supporting air and artillery units, but this seemed an inadequate solution at best.⁷⁰

An even greater problem confronting the Habsburg Army on the Piave was the new threat of enemy tanks. The terrain and conditions on the Balkan, Northeastern and Southwestern fronts had heretofore precluded the use of armoured units, so the army had no experience with either tank or anti-tank tactics. The supply of limited numbers of British and French tanks to the Italian Army during the summer of 1918 created a panic in Isonzo Army headquarters, particularly after the German Army suffered its "black day" at Amiens on August 8, partially at the hands of Britain's Royal Tank Corps. The Austro-

⁷⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k. 29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.275/8, 17.10.18.; k.u.k.XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr. 282, 245/20, 1.10.18.; Fasz.1711, k.u.k.AOK, Chef des GS, Tel.Nr.49999-1, 20.9.18.

Hungarian fear of enemy armour was especially acute because Habsburg forces had no tanks of their own, and few effective anti-tank weapons in their arsenal. The Isonzo Army's rapidly assembled anti-tank doctrine, borrowing heavily from Imperial German experience, emphasized passive defence, such as tank traps and anti-tank mines, as well as active measures like the use of 13 mm anti-tank rifles and field guns firing over open sights to kill enemy armour. However, anti-tank mines, rifles and armour-piercing shells were in short supply, like virtually everything else, and Isonzo Army frontline formations like the 29th Division were forced to dig numerous anti-tank ditches across roads, in the hope of delaying advancing enemy tanks. The Austro-Hungarians' only chance at stopping an Italian armoured thrust seemed to lie with bridges: the numerous spans across the Piave, Tagliamento and other rivers were too weak to support British and French heavy tanks.⁷¹

The division expected to cover its inevitable retreat with large quantities of smoke, to prevent Italian air and artillery observers from inflicting heavy losses on withdrawing units. Smoke delivery systems included a wide array of weapons, from hand grenades to many calibres of artillery shell to new phosphorous landmines. By October the North Bohemians' strategic retreat was well planned, with great care being given particularly to the details of evacuating the division's considerable service echelons, without whom any prolonged defence was impossible. The 29th needed to hold its positions on the Piave as long as necessary to permit an orderly withdrawal across Venetia to the Tagliamento, and therefore deployed three of its four infantry regiments in the forward area, under the headquarters of the 58th Brigade. The counterattack force held further back, the 57th Brigade, was allotted only one regiment, directly supported by a mountain battery and a reinforced divisional machine gun company. Each infantry regiment was strengthened in late September by the permanent attachment of its *Sturmkompanie*, but each of the brigades was able to maintain a reserve of only a weak sixty-man rifle company, and the divisional reserve consisted of three such companies.⁷² In the final analysis, the fate of the *Isonzoarmee*, indeed of the entire Habsburg realm, depended on the quantity and

⁷¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, KISA, Op.Nr.3281, 11.10.18.; k.u.k.AOK, "Merkblatt für Tankbekämpfung," 4.10.18.; k.u.k.XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.100/524, 5.10.18.; k.u.k.58.IBrig.Kmdo., Op.Nr.1008/12, 9.10.18. Isonzo Army command was surprisingly well informed about the tactical implications of the German debacle at Amiens, among other places; refer to: Fasz.1712, KISA, Op.Nr.3197, "Erfahrungen der Deutschen an der Westfront," 26.9.18.

⁷²KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k.XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.289, 3.10.18.; Fasz.1711, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.263/14, 4.10.18.; k.u.k.58.IBrig.Kmdo., Op.Nr.265/12, 22.9.18.

quality of the men of all nationalities who filled the understrength rifle companies of the last Habsburg army in the field.

No army can be sustained without a continuous stream of fresh soldiers, but by the war's last season both the quantity and quality of Austro-Hungarian replacements were seriously deficient. The shortage of manpower, acute since the beginning of 1918, was approaching a critical condition by the summer's end; the Dual Monarchy's reserves of men were already exhausted, and numbers continued to fall due to desertion. Even more ominously, the level of training of replacements arriving at the front was lower than ever. The months of turmoil in the rear areas, including agitation in *Ersatz* depots and the use of many unit cadres as *Assistenz* companies, had distracted training units from their vital task of preparing soldiers for combat. Many new recruits in *Marschbatallione* were inadequately trained in the most elementary tactical skills. Regiments in the line frequently received teenaged conscripts incapable of even firing their rifles accurately.⁷³

Divisions and regiments at the front therefore urgently needed to provide enhanced training for arriving replacements to compensate for the growing problems of their own *Ersatz* cadres in the hinterland. On AOK orders issued in late September, every division was to form a divisional training group (*DAG*)⁷⁴ comprising four infantry regimental groups (*RAGs*), each of two *Marsch* companies devoted to tactical training. The newly appointed commander of *DAG.29* was the decorated veteran Major Hans Stark of the 94th Regiment.⁷⁵ The establishment of divisional training establishments to provide realistic battle drill for arriving soldiers represented a well intentioned attempt to remedy the increasing deficiencies of the military bureaucracy on the home front; it also offered more practical and effective training in battlefield survival skills than the instruction offered in rear area depots. Yet this recasting of the army's training scheme came too late in the war to prove its benefits, or to notably improve the condition of the army in the field.

By the last year of fighting, every belligerent army had experienced its share of indiscipline, caused primarily by a universal war weariness. Political agitation, resentment of poor conditions of service, dislike of rear echelons and civilians, and of course an awareness of the terribly brief life expectancy of combat infantrymen all

⁷³KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, KISA, Op.Nr.2700/758, 14.9.18.

⁷⁴*Divisions-Ausbildungs-Gruppe*

⁷⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, KISA, Q.Nr.Res.53.431, 1.10.18.; zu Op.Nr.2700/896, 12.10.18. Each corps in the Isonzo Army raised its own training group, commanded by a colonel, and the overall commander of *Isonzoarmee* training was the experienced *Feldmarschalleutnant* Karl Steiger.

contributed to the soldiers' occasional unwillingness to submit fully to military discipline; the root cause, however, was the seemingly endless nature of the costliest war in history. To combat this the belligerent armies of the First World War could do little. Nonetheless the Habsburg Army in its last months, frightened by rear area agitation and the prospect of a collapse at the front, attempted to improve combat discipline and morale by forming field penal units. These disciplinary platoons (*Disziplinarzüge*), raised by divisional headquarters, were assembled from "problem" soldiers of all nationalities sentenced to a minimum of three months. Rather than sending undisciplined soldiers to the hinterland for punishment (where the military justice system was seriously strained, and the soldiers might get the opportunity to desert anyway), the 29th Division for instance was able to use its troublemakers for construction tasks in the divisional rear areas. The war against the much feared "internal enemy," declared by *AOK* in August 1914 and pursued with unceasing fervour into the war's fifth year, continued unabated up to the final collapse.⁷⁶

Nonetheless the Austro-Hungarian Army's gravest difficulties as the summer turned to autumn had nothing to do with rebellious and insubordinate soldiers, but rather centered on the rapidly dwindling material ability of the Dual Monarchy to stay in the war. As a late August *AOK* report on material conditions in the field noted, "the war has taken on the character of nothing less than an economic struggle for existence," one which Austria-Hungary was losing. The increasing shortages of weapons, munitions, transport, and other vital war materiel have already been noted. By the last months of fighting, the army was running out of virtually everything required to sustain a force in the field, from the most modern weaponry to the most mundane items of clothing. The *k.u.k. Armee* could no longer even keep its fighting men in shoes: existing stocks of mountain shoes were grossly inadequate, even on the Alpine front; and in the first half of 1918 the Dual Monarchy produced only one-and-a-half pairs of shoes of all types per soldier in uniform, nowhere near enough to replace those worn out. All items of clothing were in short supply, and in frontline units underwear and socks were rare commodities. Field laundry units had been almost forced to shut down due to a lack of soap.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, k.u.k.AOK., Chef des GS, Op.Nr.111.984, 14.9.18.; k.u.k. XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.166/9, 6.10.18.; Fasz.1712, KISA, Op.Nr.2861/13, 17.9.18.; k.u.k.AOK., Op.Nr.105.000, 12.4.18.

⁷⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, k.u.k.AOK., Q.Nr.119.083, "Darstellung der materiellen Lage der Armee im Felde," 18.8.18, Beilagen 1-5, 8-10,13-15.

Habsburg Army in its last campaign was thus clothed in tattered, dirty, ill-fitting field gray uniforms, entirely different from the smartly dressed regiments of 1914.⁷⁸

More detrimental to fighting power was the impending collapse of the army's medical system. The numbers of trained medical personnel declined ominously due to casualties and disease during the last two years of the war: there were 7,392 doctors serving with the *Armee im Felde* at the beginning of 1917, but only 5,399 a year later, and only 4,872 by the end of April; by the onset of autumn the total had fallen to half the early 1917 figure. It was no longer possible to provide a doctor for each infantry battalion and field artillery and cavalry regiment, as prescribed in army regulations. The supply of medical instruments and medicines declined similarly, and a widespread shortage of ambulances worsened the problems of casualty evacuation. When compounded with grossly inadequate nutrition and the unsanitary conditions of frontline service, the health of fighting men continued to decline, and the army medical services were unable to lessen the impact of disease.⁷⁹

The 29th Division, like all formations on the Southwestern front, lost increasing numbers of men every month, mostly to malaria. The Piave line remained essentially quiet as autumn began, excepting occasional Italian barrages; the division, anxious to conserve its men and munitions, rarely responded, and dispatched fewer patrols than in previous months. During the tranquil month of September, the 29th lost 996 men, but only six soldiers died at the hands of the enemy. Fully 973 of the casualties (including all forty-three officer losses) were due to illness; all 154 of the losses sustained by the 121st Regiment during the month were attributable to sickness, overwhelmingly to malaria. Illness, much more than the enemy, was eroding the strength of the *Isonzoarmee*. At the beginning of July, after the disaster on the Piave, the 29th Division could muster a ration strength of 16,753 officers and men, and an actual rifle strength of 7,394. However, three peaceful months of disease and a lack of replacements had reduced the division to only 4,905 riflemen. None of the four infantry regiments could muster even 1,400 effectives, and one (the 94th) had been reduced to only 841 officers and men in the fighting line.⁸⁰

⁷⁸In the last year of the war, the only distinguishing insignia on the soldier's fieldgray uniform (excepting rank devices on the collar) was the regimental number worn in drab colour on the side of the *kappi*.

⁷⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, k.u.k.AOK., Q.Nr.119.083, "Darstellung der materiellen Lage der Armee im Felde," 18.8.18., Beilage 16. "Sanitätswesen."

⁸⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1714, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.186/12, "Stände 1.Juli."; Op.Nr.277/33, "Stände 1.Okt."; Op.Nr.277/34, "Verluste 1.-30.Sept." *Regiments-Geschichte des IR. Nr.42 1674-1918* (Leitmeritz, 1933), 975. By October the division's ration strength had actually increased to 19,057 because of the addition of numerous

By October, the army's losses of men to noncombat causes had outpaced even the army's material decline. Infantry battalions which lost half their manpower strength tended to maintain an impressive degree of firepower; the proportion of soldiers to weapons decreased, but line units maintained their crew-served weapons--light and heavy machine guns and light mortars--which served as the basis of the defence. The division's dozen rifle battalions mustered a hundred heavy and 112 light machine guns as well as sixteen infantry guns, very nearly the authorized strength. The oversized 29th Field Artillery Brigade also suffered losses to malaria, but it managed to keep ninety guns and howitzers of various calibres functional. The provision of ammunition for these weapons was another matter. Combining divisional and corps ammunition depots, the 29th could count upon enough munitions for only four days of heavy fighting in the coming battle: three hand grenades per rifleman, 280 rounds per rifle, 7,600 per machine gun, 4,000 per light machine gun, and 400 per infantry gun; and between 960 shells for every field gun and only 160 for each heavy mortar and howitzer.⁸¹

The shortages of men, equipment and munitions also crippled the army aviation service. As with so much else in the Austro-Hungarian war effort, by the autumn of 1918 the theory and the effective practice of air support had diverged decisively and irrevocably. Despite considerable advances in air-ground doctrine, so that the army had impressive mechanisms of direct air support of infantry and artillery units, at least in theory, the actual combat capability of air units was disappearing. Short of engines, airframes, weapons and pilots, frontline *Fliks* were rarely able to muster more than half their paper strength. Acts of God sometimes shut down weakened squadrons entirely: the 29th Division lost its assigned air company, *Flik 62-K*, for several days in late September due to a freak storm.⁸²

The High Command, well aware of the weaknesses of the fighting forces, was equally concerned with internal questions. As political and social turmoil enveloped large regions of the Dual Monarchy, and a repeat of the January strikes seemed only a matter of time, *AOK* was determined to preserve the unity and effectiveness of the *k.u.k. Armee*, the last bastion of black-yellow loyalty and the only hope for the dynasty's

supporting units (among them three aviation units, four additional engineer companies, and supplemental service units); however, the paper strength had increasingly little to do with actual rifle strength.

⁸¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1695, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.272/16, 1.10.18.; Fasz.1714, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.273/30, 30.9.18.; k.u.k.29.FA.Brig., Op.Nr.1001/2, 2.10.18. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 17-8.

⁸²KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, Kmdo. der Armeeflieger der ISA, Op.Nr.1001/11, 2.10.18.; Fasz.1711, k.u.k.XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.140/221, 22.9.18.; Op.Nr.140/223-a, 25.9.18.

survival. Thus in mid-August Chief of the General Staff Arz informed his senior counterparts, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, that Austria-Hungary had to leave the war by the end of 1918, and that the divisions in Northeast Italy would be required on the home front. As Arz expressed it bluntly, "The army will be required for the maintenance of order and to help resolve different internal political questions."⁸³ The preservation of the ancient Habsburg realm and dynasty far outweighed the need to keep the Italians at bay. By the end of the war's last summer, Austria's German allies were too absorbed with their own impending collapse to take much notice.⁸⁴

Feldmarschall Boroević, the old veteran of so many battles on the Southwestern front, was more concerned with the fate of his soldiers in the trenches, and characteristically less optimistic than his superiors in Vienna. He knew that an Italian general offensive was inevitable, and that the Isonzo Army had little hope of maintaining a prolonged resistance. Boroević, however, had no doubt that the dynasty would survive, and that the soldiers' sacrifices would therefore be justified. On October 17, the tired marshal exhorted his soldiers on the Piave to defend vigorously with these powerful words explaining the army's mission: "This must be known by every single soldier. Our honour and the salvation of our fatherland demand that we preserve the foundations of an honourable peace."⁸⁵

By the time Boroević's message reached the many units which comprised his army group, the process of disintegration had already begun, and the ancient Habsburg dynasty and realm were starting to dissolve. The large numbers of combat troops in the hinterland (a total of eight line battalions, 207 companies, and nineteen *Feldassistentz* battalions, particularly heavily concentrated in the Czech lands and the Vienna area) although a

⁸³Pichlik, "Das Ende der öst.-ung. Armee," 360-1. Even during the impending collapse, the Habsburg Army's penchant for anachronistic unreality did not disappear entirely: the Isonzo Army formed a sabre course for new officers (!) on October 7; it of course did not continue through to its intended completion date of December 14, 1918. KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, KISA, Op.Nr.2700/744, 19.9.18.

⁸⁴The Germans were, of course, neither a disinterested nor an uninterested party in the impending collapse of their Austro-Hungarian ally; refer to: J. Kofalka, "Germany's attitude to the national disintegration of Cisleithania," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.4, No.2, April 1969.

⁸⁵KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, KISA, Op.Nr.3500/12, 17.10.18. Arz also was pessimistic about the prospects for a successful defence in Venetia: on October 5 he ordered *General der Infanterie* Victor Weber von Webenau to form an armistice commission in Trient, in preparation for the impending need to sue for peace. R.W. Hanks, "Vae Victis! The Austro-Hungarian Armeecoberkommando and the Armistice of Villa Giusti," *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol.XIV, 1978, 96-7.

drain on the Dual Monarchy's emptying manpower pool, had thus far proved successful at preventing revolution on the home front.⁸⁶ An abortive coup by Czech nationalists in Prague on October 14 was quickly and easily put down by the local garrison of twenty-seven field and twenty-four *Assistenz* companies; no Czech soldiers at the front revolted in sympathy.⁸⁷ The beginning of the Dual Monarchy's collapse was brought on not by the actions of nationalist agitators, much less by military disloyalty, but rather by disastrous political decisions made in Vienna.

Emperor-King Karl, desperate for peace since assuming the throne, and aware that the war was lost, appealed unsuccessfully for peace with the Entente on September 14 and again on October 4. In a last ditch attempt to placate internal and external foes, Karl unexpectedly issued an imperial manifesto on October 16 which proclaimed Austria a federal state with complete self-government for the nationalities.⁸⁸ This did little but cause general confusion and undermine the remaining legitimacy of Habsburg rule. Ardent nationalists were preparing to leave Austria-Hungary anyway, and the Allies were certainly not going to cease hostilities now that ultimate victory was finally in sight. The Ottoman Empire cracked under Entente pressure in September. More seriously for Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria left the war on September 15. British, French and Serbian divisions which had been trapped at Salonika for most of the war finally advanced into Bulgaria and Serbia, threatening South Hungary. There were virtually no Habsburg forces available to delay them, much less stop them. The Central Powers' war was ending rapidly, for by October the German Army in France and Belgium was retreating eastward in a disorderly and hopeless fashion under intense Allied pressure.

The army was left particularly confused by Karl's announcement. The monarch seemed to have dissolved Austria-Hungary, and *AOK*, facing an imminent Italian "victory offensive," did not know what to do. The Hungarian government, deciding its own fate as Hungary had been excluded from the imperial manifesto, began to take steps toward independence, the lost dream of 1848. All over the Dual Monarchy, nationalists stepped

⁸⁶Plaschka, et.al., *Innere Front:II*, 111-8. KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, k.u.k.AOK, Q.Nr.119.083, "Darstellung der materiellen Lage der Armee im Felde," 18.8.18, Beilage 11.12. There were also 170 *Landsturmetappenbatallione* and 28,000 field gendarmes garrisoning occupied Poland, Ukraine, Serbia, Romania, Albania and Montenegro.

⁸⁷Plaschka, *Cattaro-Prag*, 195-205. The High Command nonetheless continued to fear a soldiers' revolt, and *Militärkommando Prag* regularly warned Isonzo Army headquarters of imminent Slav rebellions on the Piave. KA/NFA, Fasz.1711, KISA, Op.Nr.3300, 26.9.18.

⁸⁸Refer to: H. Rumpler, *Das Völkermanifest Kaiser Karls vom 16. Oktober 1918: Letzter Versuch zur Rettung des Habsburgerreiches* (Munich, 1966).

forward to begin assembling provisional national governments in Prague, Cracow, Zagreb, Laibach, and even Vienna; some Habsburg Romanians and Serbs prepared to join their conationals among the Entente. What this all meant for the *k.u.k. Armee* no one seemed to know.

Major events in the hinterland could not be kept from the soldiers in the field very long, despite the High Command's best efforts. Individual Austro-Hungarian soldiers began to leave the Southwestern front soon after the October 16 manifesto, headed for home. Some Magyar troops began to march eastward toward now-independent Hungary on October 22. Nonetheless they went as individuals or in small groups, not as units. Most of the deserters were from rear area units or formations held in reserve; very few abandoned the frontline. The first mutinies on the Southwestern front occurred the next day, October 23. Three divisions held in strategic reserve in the Belluno area (the 21st *Schützen*, 42nd *Honvéd* and 55th of *Heeresgruppe* Boroević's *Armeegruppe* Belluno) experienced serious problems that day. Two Croatian regiments of the 42nd Division refused to reenter the line. Czech soldiers of three 21st Division regiments also refused to return to the front; some Czech infantrymen of the 25th *Schützen* Regiment opened fire on nearby Magyar troops. Even two veteran battalions of the 55th Division's crack 4th *Bosniaken* revolted, and had to be disarmed by comrades-in-arms of the Carinthian 7th Regiment. These initial mutinies reflected an omnipresent war weariness, exacerbated by the imperial manifesto. The traditionally loyal *Bosniaken* wanted to leave the war because Karl had "forgotten" them: the October 16 manifesto made no mention of their homeland, Bosnia-Hercegovina. The mutinies had not yet reached the frontline, but without central authority in Vienna the staying power of the field army was increasingly in doubt.⁸⁹

The 29th Division, more than forty kilometres south of the Belluno mutinies, remained essentially unaffected by civilian and rear area disturbances. The North Bohemian soldiers' unquestionably low morale was attributable in large part to the appalling conditions of service. Desperately hungry, dressed in tattered field gray, and ravaged by malaria, the soldiers of the 29th simply wanted the war to end so that they could return home. Nonetheless Berndt's men were almost without exception willing to hold out to the end. Even the division's Czech troops--one quarter of overall strength--

⁸⁹ÖUIK: VII: 629-31. Plaschka, et.al., *Innere Front: II*, 142-3. R. Kizling, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch der öst.-ung. Monarchie 1918," *ÖMZ*, 1968, 405-6. R. Kizling, *Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalweg eines Südslawenvolkes* (Graz, 1956), 119.

remained loyal; the abortive October 14 coup in Prague had no noticeable impact on the division's Czech soldiery.⁹⁰

Dug in on the Piave across from Papadopoli Island, on the northern flank of XVI Corps, the riflemen of the 29th Division awaited the coming Italian offensive. The division received its last replacements of the war on October 23, a *Marsch* company of the 74th Regiment. Dramatizing the collapse of the war economy and the military bureaucracy, the half-strength company, filled with half-trained teenaged recruits, arrived at divisional headquarters without a single round of ammunition.⁹¹

The next morning the Habsburg Army on the Southwestern front experienced its first frontline mutiny of the entire war. Two neighbouring Hungarian divisions of the 11th Army holding the line in the Asiago region abandoned their positions and headed for home. Soldiers of North Hungary's Magyar-Slovak 27th and Transylvania's Magyar-Romanian 38th *Honvéd* Divisions mutinied, simply leaving their trenches and walking to the East, leaving a considerable gap in the Austro-Hungarian front.⁹² Units of many other nationalities would soon follow the Hungarians' example. Worse yet, the mutiny of the 27th and 38th Divisions coincided with the beginning of the enemy's long awaited "victory offensive," the largest Italian effort of the war.

The Italian Army had been entirely reconstructed since the Caporetto disaster of exactly one year before, its regiments rebuilt, its command revitalized, and its logistics reordered. The Italians' success at repulsing the June Piave offensive gave the new army increased self-confidence. Months of planning and training for the assault on the east bank of the Piave, enhanced by considerable British and French technical and tactical assistance, brought the Italian Army to unprecedented levels of battle readiness for the coming offensive. Most importantly, and very much unlike their Habsburg adversaries, Italian formations were well supplied with weapons and munitions, properly fed and equipped, and up to establishment. Thus each Italian infantry division, on paper roughly equal in strength to its Austro-Hungarian counterpart, in fact contained considerably more combat power.⁹³

⁹⁰Bergmann, *Am Niemandslande*, 389-94.

⁹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k.IR.121, Res.Nr.1430 Adj., 23.10.18.

⁹²H. Kerchnawe, *Der Zusammenbruch der öst.-ung. Wehrmacht im Herbst 1918* (Munich, 1921), 95-6. Kiszling, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch," 406.

⁹³KA/NFA, Fasz.1695, KISA, Op.Nr.X/6095, Op.Nr.6836, "Evidenz-Gruppe 'Feind'," 1.10.18. The Italian infantry division, circa 1918, included four infantry regiments (each of three battalions), a total of eighteen machine gun companies, a sapper battalion, a heavy mortar battery, and a field artillery regiment of six batteries.

The Entente forces available for the offensive were very impressive, amounting to fifty-seven divisions (including three British, two French, and one Czecho-Slovak), supported by 4,750 guns. The air dimension, too, was unprecedentedly large, at least on the Italian front, totalling 569 available aircraft (including sixty-one British and twenty-three French), among them 240 fighters, fifty-six bombers and 245 reconnaissance machines. Entente superiority, both on the ground and in the air, was total.⁹⁴

On the morning of October 24 the adversary across the Piave and Papadopoli Island facing the 29th Divisions was actually not Italian, but rather British. The Italian 10th Army (actually under the command of Lord Cavan) included two corps, the Italian XI and the British XIV. The latter had been dispatched in the aftermath of Caporetto as part of an Allied Expeditionary Force including two British corps and five divisions; one British corps headquarters and three divisions had remained in Italy after March 1918.⁹⁵ The British XIV Corps included two experienced, well equipped infantry divisions, the 7th and the 23rd. The former was a mixture of prewar regular battalions, whereas the latter was comprised of New Army units from Yorkshire and Northumberland; however, both formations had fought in France from 1915 to 1917, and on the Italian front for the past year, and were efficient, veteran divisions. The 7th and 23rd were certainly better trained, equipped and led than any Italian divisions. The XIV Corps, typically of the British Army in the last year of the war, was lavishly supported by the Royal Artillery. For the October 24 offensive, the corps had at its disposal nineteen field and mountain batteries, thirty-seven heavy batteries, and twenty-seven mortar batteries, all with a full complement of guns and ammunition.⁹⁶

Across the Piave the *k.u.k.* XVI Corps had little hope of holding off the British for very long. Berndt's 29th Division faced the 23rd Division, while a few kilometres south the mostly Magyar *k.u.k.* 7th Division opposed the British 7th Division. The XVI Corps' only reserve was the German-Austrian *k.k.* 201st *Landsturm* Brigade. Like the 29th Division, the 7th Division and the 201st Brigade were tired, hungry, under strength

The Italians finally began to update their tactical doctrines, inspired principally by Austro-Hungarian successes with assault units; see: G. Rochat, *Gli arditi della grande guerra: Origini, battaglie e miti* (Milan, 1981), 23-7.

⁹⁴R. Caviglioli, *L'aviazione austro-ungarica sulla fronte italiane 1915-1918* (Milan, 1934), 25.

⁹⁵J. Edmonds, *History of the Great War: Military Operations, Italy 1915-1919* (London, 1949), 88-104, 404.

France dispatched two corps with six divisions in November 1917, half of which remained in Italy until the war's end.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 287, 399-401.

formations incapable of prolonged combat. Once the Piave line was breached, the XVI Corps would have no choice but to retreat to the Tagliamento as quickly as possible.⁹⁷

The British attack began in the early morning of October 24 with a tremendous artillery barrage which inflicted heavy losses on forward elements of the 29th and 7th Divisions, as well as Habsburg batteries behind the front line. The British shelling, heavier and more accurate than anything the Italian Army had ever achieved, commenced without previous registration (as at Cambrai in 1917), killing and wounding many XVI Corps soldiers in exposed positions. The first British objective was the capture of Papadopoli island. The uninhabited island, six kilometres long and two across at its widest point, was held by forward detachments of both the 29th and 7th Divisions. The Habsburg formations held two series of relatively shallow trenches running from the northwest to the southeast of the island. Papadopoli was flat, sandy and marshy, crisscrossed by numerous small streams, offering little natural cover. Preliminary British shelling weakened the Habsburg defences, so by midday on October 24, XVI Corps was retreating eastward off the island. Austro-Hungarian resistance was determined but brief because of ammunition shortages. The loss of the island seriously weakened the Austro-Hungarian line, as well as the 29th and 7th Divisions. The British captured 3,600 prisoners and fifty-four machine guns on Papadopoli island, most of them from the Magyar division.⁹⁸

Early on October 25, *Feldmarschalleutnant* Berndt decided to attempt a counterattack to retake Papadopoli, or at least to stall the British advance. All four of the 29th Division's regiments participated in the assault, led by their *Sturmtruppen* and supported by all available batteries. The attempt soon faltered, however, in the face of massive British firepower superiority. Machine guns quickly shattered Habsburg infantry attacks, the Royal Artillery silenced Austro-Hungarian batteries across the Piave, and Royal Air Force fighters strafed the North Bohemians' rear areas. The 29th Division's

⁹⁷ÖUİK: VII: Beilagen 31; 32, 17-21. The boundaries of the British XIV and the *k.u.k.* XVI Corps corresponded almost exactly.

⁹⁸KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, k.u.k. 58. I. Brig. Kmdo., Op. Nr. 1027/1, 27. 10. 18. Edmonds, *History*, 288-94. E.C. Crowe, *The Defeat of Austria as seen by the 7th Division* (London, 1919), 23-31. One British officer observed of the brief Habsburg shelling that, "like most Austrian barrages it was deadly accurate." Some 300 of the prisoners captured on October 24 were from the 29th Division's 137th Regiment.

last attack gained nothing, and only weakened the formation's already rapidly dwindling supply of men and munitions.⁹⁹

By October 26 the fate of the Habsburg dynasty and its army had already been decided, not on the Piave, but in Vienna, Budapest, and numerous other cities throughout the Dual Monarchy. In general the enemy's "victory offensive" was so far a major disappointment to the Italian High Command. The first three days of the push produced few impressive advances, and unexpectedly heavy casualties. Although *Arditi* units fought effectively, most Italian divisions attacked ineptly, with poor coordination between infantry and artillery; the offensive seemed to be evolving into a costly battle of attrition like those that had raged so long on the Isonzo. Habsburg divisions in most cases continued to resist effectively, even if hopelessly, with the meagre fighting power at their disposal. But the centres of black-yellow legitimacy began to dissolve without a serious threat as national councils started to assert their new-found authority. Naturally some tired *Frontkämpfer*, confused by events on the home front and wanting out of the war, simply deserted. Formations of all nationalities experienced mutinies, whole platoons, companies, in some cases even battalions and regiments opting out of the war and heading home. Still, many divisions continued to fight on, regardless of national composition. In truth, there were numerous examples of both dereliction of duty and heroic sacrifice among all national groups. Among the regiments praised by *AOK* for their early performance in resisting the enemy were German, Magyar, Polish, Romanian, and Croatian units. Effective officers proved able to keep their men fighting, regardless of nationality; the problem was one of leadership, not ethnicity, as it had been since August 1914 and the first battles against Serbia.¹⁰⁰

Feldmarschalleutnant Berndt was one of the effective leaders who proved capable of keeping his division in the field and ready for battle. In recognition of his leadership ability, he was appointed commander of XVI Corps, now known as *Gruppe* Berndt, its 7th and 29th Divisions and 201st Brigade reinforced by the majority Czech 26th *Schützen* Division. He was in command when the next Entente blow fell. In the late evening of October 26, all along the front, Italian, British and French divisions renewed their offensive. The British XIV Corps in particular made notable progress against *Gruppe*

⁹⁹KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.k.26.SchD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.283/5-VI 2380/B-Art., 26.10.18. The British 7th Division described the 29th's attack as "well-timed and vigorously carried out."--Crowe, *Defeat*, 38-9.

¹⁰⁰KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.99, 28.10.18.; J. Gooch, "Italy during the First World War," in: A. Millett and W. Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness* (3 Vols., Boston, 1988), *Vol.I: The First World War*, 179-80. Kerchnawe, *Zusammenbruch*, 95-8, 119-20.

Berndt. The Yorkshiremen of the 23rd Division, initially delayed by Austro-Hungarian machine gun and mortar fire, assaulted the Piave's east bank early in the morning, generously supported by the Royal Artillery, and the 29th Division's line soon gave way.¹⁰¹ On the division's right flank the 57th Brigade tried unsuccessfully to hold its ground, inflicting heavy losses on the lead battalion of the British 68th Brigade.¹⁰² As the 92nd and 137th Regiments abandoned the village of San Michele, a gap opened between the 29th and the neighbouring, faltering 7th Division.

As night approached, the 57th Brigade launched a counterattack near the village of Tezze, on a tributary of the Piave, in an attempt to narrow the gap between the two *k.u.k.* divisions. The attack was barely supported by artillery (the 29th's batteries were running out of shells), and British artillery and mortar fire broke up several Habsburg assaults. Elements of the 201st *Landsturm* Brigade were committed to assist the North Bohemians, but to no avail. By the end of the evening, the right flank of the 29th Division had been pushed four kilometres back from the Piave's banks, and one of its brigades had been shattered: the 57th's 92nd and 137th Regiments could muster between them only six officers and 448 riflemen.¹⁰³

As October 28 began, Berndt had no choice but to withdraw his division and his corps to the Tagliamento, to establish a new defensive line. The 29th Division's first objective was to retreat to the Livenza River, some fifteen kilometres east; securing the Livenza line would give the division time to reach the Tagliamento in a more orderly manner. Berndt no longer had the 7th Division under his control. It had suffered badly on Papadopoli island, and its remnants were scattered, with many soldiers headed for home. *Gruppe* Berndt still contained the 26th *Schützen* Division and the 201st *Landsturm* Brigade in addition to the 29th. These three formations were tired and weak--together they constituted less than a complete division--but they remained in good order and willing to fight, even if only in retreat.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹The 29th Division's countermeasures late on October 26 included using its searchlight battery to illuminate British units preparing to cross the Piave from Papadopoli, which worked until the Austro-Hungarians were blinded by an Italian searchlight battery which crossed beams. H.R. Sandilands, *The 23rd Division 1914-1919* (London, 1925), 307.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 309-10. In the British battalion, the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers, every officer above subaltern became a casualty, including the lieutenant-colonel commanding, who was killed on the right bank of the Piave.

¹⁰³KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, k.u.k.57.1.Brig.Kmdo., Op.Nr.1028/1, 28.10.18. *ÖUIK: VII: Beilage* 33.

¹⁰⁴KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.302/5-d, 29.10.18.

Elsewhere on the Southwestern front the condition of the retreating Habsburg Army was less orderly. Most of the Isonzo Army was still in the field, under its own commanders, but numerous Austro-Hungarian divisions in the Belluno and Asiago regions were dissolving, even without enemy pressure. Everywhere, however, many Habsburg units of all nationalities continued to resist, and the Entente advance was still proceeding slowly; the retreat had not yet deteriorated into a rout. The High Command was nonetheless fully aware that an armistice had to be achieved immediately, if the Habsburg dynasty and realm were to be saved from complete internal collapse. On October 28, Arz instructed General Weber to contact the Italians immediately. As *AOK* informed the unfortunate Weber, "Every stipulation would be acceptable that does not infringe upon the honour of the army or constitute an outright capitulation." But the High Command's overture was already too late.¹⁰⁵

The 29th Division spent October 29 in retreat towards the Livenza. The 26th *Schützen* Division covered the 29th's retreat, fighting a series of vicious melées against the British throughout the day. Habsburg counterattacks failed, costing the 26th over 2,600 men, including 524 killed, but they bought valuable time for the rest of *Gruppe* Berndt to reach the Livenza. Sappers and pioneers attempted to slow the enemy advance by blowing bridges, destroying water pumps, and felling trees across roads. The North Bohemians were retreating faster than the British could pursue them. Enemy cavalry and armoured cars were a major concern, but the most serious threat facing the division was air attack. RAF fighters and bombers, uncontested by the now nonexistent *k.u.k. Luftstreitkräfte*, freely strafed and bombed roads filled with retreating Austro-Hungarian units. In this manner the 29th lost much of its artillery and transport. Ironically the merciless air attacks actually slowed the Entente offensive: many roads were so clogged with abandoned vehicles, wagons and guns, and dead horses and men, that British forward units had to halt and clear them before resuming their advance.¹⁰⁶

The next day the division continued its retreat to the Livenza, and by midday 29th service units began crossing at the town of Brugnera, where Berndt established a temporary headquarters. The retreat was covered by machine guns and artillery protecting the infantry. Machine guns were effective at delaying advancing British cavalry, and pack mountain guns firing over open sights proved capable of stopping enemy armoured cars as well as cavalry and bicycle patrols. The infantry continued its

¹⁰⁵Hanks, "Vae Victis," 99-100.

¹⁰⁶KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k.XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.1029/34, 29.10.18., k.k.26.SchD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.305/7, 31.10.18 Bergmann, *Am Niemandlande*, 407. Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 350.

march eastward, frequently under air attack, and by the end of the day the 92nd, 121st and 137th Regiments had reached the east bank of the Livenza.¹⁰⁷

As the last day of October began, the 29th Division was readying itself to continue its retreat to the Tagliamento. The anticipated halt at the Livenza to allow the troops to rest and to consolidate the defence had evaporated with the Dual Monarchy. While the infantry, artillery, and service units continued their march out of Venetia, the divisional machine gun company, supported by a battery of mountain guns, was left in Brugnera to delay the British and give the sappers time to blow the bridge over the Livenza. The deep and swift 300 metre-wide river could not be forded, so the destruction of the bridge before reconnaissance patrols of the British 7th Division arrived late on October 31 bought the 29th a few more hours.

The division could muster a rifle strength of only ninety officers and 1,285 men--one-and-a-half battalions--supported by twenty-nine heavy and thirty-seven light machine guns. The 29th Field Artillery Brigade had been reduced to less than thirty guns and howitzers. Similarly the 26th Division and 201st Brigade were down to 2,668 and 1,830 riflemen, respectively. *Gruppe* Berndt thus contained the rifle strength of a brigade. His battlegroup was still in the field, however, and Berndt was determined to get his men home in coherent, orderly units, not as a rabble. As he told his soldiers, "More important than the retreat and the saving of equipment...is the need to keep the army always alert and ready." His soldiers apparently agreed, or at least remained willing to follow orders. They were concerned with doing their duty and getting home, not the current chaos overwhelming their homeland. In one of Berndt's mixed regiments, "The Czechs as much as the Germans protested against the raising of the issue of the future political system." Few others in the Dual Monarchy were able to put aside the national question in the tumultuous days of late October.¹⁰⁸

Isonzo Army command was also busy on the last day of October. *Feldmarschall* Borojevic was attempting to save the Isonzo Army, the strongest element in his army group, by bringing it across the Tagliamento intact; its divisions would be required to

¹⁰⁷KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.303/6, 303/18; Gruppenkmdo. Majewski, Op.Nr.1080/1, 30.10.18.

¹⁰⁸KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.304/6, 1031/10. 31.10.18.; k.k.26.SchD.Kmdo., Op.Nr.303/48, 30.10.18.; k.u.k.XIV.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.1029/34, 29.10.18.; Fasz.1714, k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.303/1, 31.10.18. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 77-8. *Regiments-Geschichte des IR.Nr.42*, 991. *IR.94 im Weltkriege* (Reichenberg, 1929.),766. Crowe, *Defeat*, 88-9.

reimpose order in Vienna. Borojević, in far away Venetia, was not aware how far the situation had deteriorated in the Hofburg and across the Dual Monarchy.

In the last week of October the process of dissolution, begun in mid-month, followed its logical course. Throughout Austria-Hungary local nationalists were taking power with little or no resistance from Habsburg authorities, who in many cases had disappeared. Local nationalists declared sovereignty in Bohemia and Galicia on October 28, and in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia a day later. On October 29 the Budapest garrison agreed to support Mihály Károlyi's provisional government, which promptly took Hungary out of the war. Two days later, Béla Linder, the new Hungarian war minister, ordered Hungarian troops under *k.u.k.* authority to lay down their arms and come home. The Dual Monarchy, the last manifestation of the ancient Habsburg realm, had effectively disappeared in a matter of days.

Army garrisons all over Austria-Hungary, often out of contact with Vienna, were declaring their support for new leaderships. On October 26, the Budapest garrison totalled 70,000 soldiers; by October 31, nothing remained. As the commander of the Budapest Military District said, "There was not a single soldier which one could have used in a suppression of the movement." With the Habsburg realm shattered, soldiers began to follow new leaders, flags, and nations.¹⁰⁹

At AOK, Arz tried to delay the total collapse of the state and army, but there was little he and his staff could do. On October 29, the Chief of the General Staff was informed that the 3rd *Edelweiß* Division, perhaps the army's finest division, an élite formation of loyal Alpine Germans, had refused to reenter the line; Arz knew that the cause was lost, and he informed Karl that the Italians could not be stopped. After several days of delay, on October 31 the Italians agreed to let Weber's armistice mission cross their lines, but the fighting raged on, and the Entente continued to advance. In the last hours of October, as Arz tried to get Austria-Hungary out of the war, and after the Emperor-King had effectively abdicated, *Feldmarschall* Borojević was planning to save the dynasty. He had to abandon his headquarters in Udine for fear of attacks by armed Italian civilians. The old Croatian soldier took his staff and headed for the safer hills of

¹⁰⁹K. Pichlík, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch der Mittelmächte im Jahre 1918," *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches*, 260-2. Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Break-Up of the Habsburg Empire* (London, 1961), 240-5. M. Farkas, *Az első világháború és a forradalmak képei* (Budapest, 1977), 420-5. T. Hetés, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch und Ungarn," *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches*, 295-6.

Carinthia, where he set about preparing to restore collapsing Habsburg authority, as Radetzky had seventy years before.¹¹⁰

For Berndt and his men, as November began Allied strafing and shelling remained a more serious concern than the collapse of the home front. The 29th Division and *Gruppe* Berndt marched toward the Tagliamento bridges as quickly as possible during November 1. The Austro-Hungarians were mostly outrunning British and Italian forward detachments, thanks to the destructive work of sappers; they could not so easily escape from Entente air attacks, and divisional columns were strafed and bombed repeatedly during the day. Despite the inevitable losses and delays, the North Bohemians had reached the river by nightfall, and did not pause to rest. Divisional units raced across the spans over the Tagliamento under the cover of darkness. The last riflemen crossed to the east bank at 2 am on November 2, and the last service wagons crossed by 3.30 am. The soldiers were exhausted, having marched fifty kilometres under enemy attack in thirty-six hours. The 29th Division had outrun the enemy and had been saved from captivity by Berndt's energetic leadership; his men would be able to return home.¹¹¹

Berndt permitted his tired and hungry regiments a brief rest on November 2 before resuming their march to the East. His message to his soldiers about the days ahead was typically blunt: "We still have long marches through the mountains before us." He ordered his units to abandon all but a very small number of horses, an unnecessary burden through the Alps. Unit commanders were instructed to streamline their organizations and supply columns, and to bring home only what was truly necessary: weapons, munitions, and supplies, in that order. As Berndt explained lucidly, the 29th Division had to retain its discipline, structure, and weaponry in the coming days to achieve its new mission, "the reestablishment of the wickedly disturbed order at home."¹¹²

While Berndt was rallying his regiments, *General* Weber and his armistice commission, meeting with Italian representatives at Villa Giusti, were trying to achieve an end to the fighting. Late on November 1, the Italian delegation provided an informal statement of Entente terms: an immediate cessation of hostilities, complete and immediate Habsburg demobilization, prompt evacuation of all Italian territory (plus the South Tyrol), Entente occupation rights in Austria-Hungary, and a right of passage for Entente troops through the Dual Monarchy. The terms were those of a complete surrender, not an

¹¹⁰Bauer, *Der Löwe vom Isonzo*, 126. Kiszling, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch," 407. Hanks, "Vae Victis," 101-2.

¹¹¹KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, Gruppe Berndt, Op.Nr.1101/4, 1101/5, 1.11.18.;Op.Nr.1102/1, 2.11.18.

¹¹²KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, Gruppe Berndt, Op.Nr.1102/4, 2.11.18.

armistice. Karl, although desperate to end the war, refused to accept the Italian *diktat*. On November 2, the Italians delivered Weber an ultimatum, demanding an acceptance of their terms by November 3. If the Habsburg realm were to be saved, peace with Italy had to be achieved at once, and *AOK* reluctantly agreed to accept the enemy's terms. At 11.30 pm on 2 November, Karl stepped down as commander-in-chief of the *k.u.k. Armee*, leaving Arz to sign the humiliating armistice (as Benedek had done for Franz Joseph in 1866). The Italians were informed of the acceptance of their terms, and Arz ordered Austro-Hungarian units on the Southwestern front to cease fighting at 3 pm on November 3. The Habsburgs' last war thus officially ended.¹¹³

The war had not yet ended for hundreds of thousands of Habsburg soldiers facing the advancing Entente. Many commanders, particularly in the Isonzo Army, had managed to preserve some of their divisions, and wanted to bring their formations home in good order. Berndt was by no means defeatist, as he expressed in his order of November 3 that military operations must progress. At three in the afternoon, there were no Entente units near the 29th Division, and the North Bohemians resumed their march back to their homeland. Berndt and his staff were already more concerned about the Slovenes than the Entente. The division had no real idea what was going on to the East, and was prepared to encounter armed resistance beyond the Isonzo. Any retreat would take the division through Laibach, seat of the new Slovene national council. Berndt was determined to get his men home in time to restore domestic order, and was fully prepared to fight his way back to Bohemia, if necessary; that was why he had ordered his soldiers so strictly to keep their weapons.¹¹⁴

Most Habsburg soldiers on the Southwestern front were not as fortunate as those serving in *Gruppe Berndt*. In mid-afternoon on November 3, dozens of Austro-Hungarian brigades and divisions all along the front laid down their arms, as ordered by *AOK*. The Italians did not cease their advance, however, and proceeded to round up entire regiments as captives, a clear violation of the armistice terms. The Italian High Command perfidiously claimed that it required twenty-four extra hours to inform all its formations to cease fighting; of course the Austro-Hungarians had not been informed of this. Unarmed Habsburg units were rounded up *en masse*, easily in most cases, and dispatched to Italian prisoner of war camps. By the time the Italians actually stopped their advance on November 4, 360,000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers, a total of nineteen

¹¹³Hanks, "Vae Victis," 103-8.

¹¹⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, Gruppe Berndt, Op.Nr.1103/1, 3.11.18.; k.u.k.29.ID.Kmdo., Op.Nr.1103/20, 3.11.18.; k.u.k.XVI.KorpsKmdo., Op.Nr.1102/36, 2.11.18.

divisions, 184 battalions, and many support units, had been taken into enemy captivity. Among the lost units were the headquarters of four corps, ten divisions, and twenty-one brigades, complete with their staffs and general officers. Every nationality was represented among the prisoners. There were 108,000 German Austrians, 83,000 Czechs and Slovaks, 61,000 South Slavs, 40,000 Poles, 32,000 Ukrainians, 25,000 Romanians, and even 7,000 Italians in Habsburg uniform; ironically, "the great majority of the last prisoners of war were 'Allies of the Entente'." Sadly, more than 30,000 of these last captives would die in Italian captivity due to poor treatment, disease and malnutrition.¹¹⁵

While the Italians rounded up the remnants of the *k.u.k. Südwestfront*, Emperor-King Karl prepared to end centuries Habsburg rule through abdication. He was, in fact, merely formalizing his realm's dissolution, the logical culmination of the process he had helped to begin. The military collapse was by now so total that *AOK* became concerned about the safety of Karl and his family. When Empress-Queen Zita asked Arz how many troops would be available to protect her husband, the Chief of the General Staff reluctantly, but truthfully, responded, "Not a single battalion, Majesty." The High Command was forced to collect cadet companies from the Military Academy at Wiener Neustadt and the artillery school at Traiskirchen to guard Schönbrunn from revolutionary mobs.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵E. Ratzenhofer. "Der Waffenstillstand von Villa Giusti und die Gefangnahme Hunderttausender." *Ergänzungsheft 2 zum Werke ÖUIK* (Vienna, 1931), 49-50. Hanks. "Vae Victis," 109-14. L. Sondhaus. *In the Service of the Emperor: Italians in the Austrian Armed Forces 1814-1918*, (New York, 1990), 115. *ÖUIK: VII: 758*. The 7,000 captured Italians indicates that Italian soldiers of the *k.u.k. Armee* served on the Southwestern front until the war's end, although usually in rear echelons rather than combat units. For the full terms of the armistice: *ÖUIK: VII: Anlageheft, "Waffenstillstands- und Friedensverträge."* Among the general officer prisoners was Prince Felix Schwarzenberg, who was captured along with most of his 55th Division on November 3; he survived and returned home in August 1919. P. Broucek (ed.), *Ein General im Zwielight: Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaises von Horstenau* (2 Bände, Vienna, 1980), *Bd.I*, 435. Some Habsburg senior officers ended the war in happier circumstances. *Generalmajor* Dom Miguel, Duke of Bragança, the seventy-two year-old commander of the 6th Cavalry Division, so impressed his British captors (he was visibly pleased to be in British rather than Italian hands) that after a dinner in his honour he was dispatched to the Italian High Command in a staff car!-- Barnett, *With the 48th Division*, 143-4.

¹¹⁶I. Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918* (New York, 1990), 91. Broucek, *Ein General im Zwielight: I: 517*.

There was, however, a force prepared to protect the Imperial-and-Royal family and ready to restore the Habsburg monarchy. *Feldmarschall* Boroević and his staff¹¹⁷ were waiting in Klagenfurt for the order to arrive from Vienna calling them to bring the Isonzo Army to the *Kaiserstadt* to impose order. Boroević had attempted to preserve the Isonzo Army, with some success, so that it could be used to save the Dual Monarchy from complete collapse. The divisions of the *Isonzoarmee* represented the last significant force under *k.u.k.* authority, depleted and tired but still loyal to Boroević and the dynasty. They were certainly stronger than the forces of civil unrest on the home front. The ghosts of Radetzky, Windischgrätz and Jellačić were alive in the hearts of Boroević and many other Habsburg generals. As in 1848, the monarchy had collapsed entirely, Hungary and many other crownlands were in revolt, the Emperor was preparing to leave Vienna. And as seventy years before, only the ancient multinational army remained steadfastly loyal, the only guarantor of Habsburg survival. Again, a black-yellow army in Northern Italy was waiting to restore the House of Habsburg.

Boroević repeatedly cabled his monarch in Vienna, informing him that the Isonzo Army was ready to march on Vienna at the Emperor-King's order. But Karl never responded; from the beginning not a strong willed leader, by early November he had lost any desire to use force to preserve his family's empire. The Isonzo Army would never be used to restore the dynasty and the realm; Boroević would never be a new Radetzky. The collapse in 1918 was more total than seven decades before, and the foreign threat was far greater. Most importantly, Boroević was unprepared to be either independent or insubordinate, like the heroes of 1848 who acted without (and in some cases against) imperial dictates to save the House of Habsburg. The old field marshal waited for several days in Klagenfurt for an imperial response which never arrived. By November 9, the dynasty, the monarchy, and its army belonged to history, and Boroević reluctantly disbanded his headquarters.¹¹⁸

As the staff of *Heeresgruppe* Boroević was waiting in Klagenfurt for orders from Vienna, *Gruppe* Berndt continued to march eastward toward the frontier of the former Dual Monarchy. During November 4, the 29th Division managed to outpace advancing Entente patrols, although Italian cavalry and bicycle-mounted *Bersaglieri* were often

¹¹⁷Among Boroević's loyal entourage was his trusted Chief of Staff, Colonel Theodor Körner, future President of the Austrian Republic.

¹¹⁸Bauer, *Der Löwe vom Isonzo*, 126-9. Kiszling, "Der militärische Zusammenbruch," 408. Boroević, a Croat, soon found himself without a country: the new Yugoslavia had no place for the old *kaisertreu* field marshal. Boroević died penniless in Klagenfurt in 1920, barely outliving the dynasty and army he had spent his life serving.

within a half kilometre of the division's rear guard. That day the division's 42nd Regiment fired the North Bohemians' last shots of the war during a brief encounter with an Italian cavalry patrol.¹¹⁹ The next two days the division, having reached former Austrian soil, continued its march towards Laibach, across numerous battlefields, never far ahead of the Italians. The 29th's journey through recently Habsburg territory was often unpleasant, even dangerous. In Görz, the small city on the Isonzo so bloodily contested during 1915 and 1916, many Italian natives taunted the retreating Germans and Czechs. More seriously, Slovene deserters from the 2nd *Gebirgsschützen* Regiment sniped at Berndt's men, their former comrades-in-arms, as they headed through the Isonzo valley.¹²⁰

Berndt and his staff, no longer able to keep ahead of the enemy, met with Italian officers on November 7 to arrange the surrender of war materiel according to the terms of the armistice. The 29th handed over its artillery and other heavy weaponry, leaving all soldiers with their personal weapons, the officers with their horses, and the rudimentary service units with enough wagons and horses to carry essential food and medicine. The soldiers still needed their rifles, according to Berndt, to protect themselves from thieves, bandits, and perhaps Yugoslav units attempting to prevent their return home.¹²¹

Berndt was anxious to prevent hostilities with Yugoslavia, and he and his staff met with representatives of the Yugoslav National Council at Görz, where he explained that his men simply wanted to return home, emphasizing that his units were in good order and represented no threat to Slovene sovereignty. Berndt reiterated these points in a letter to Dr. Pogačnik's provisional government in Laibach, in which he requested the right of passage for his soldiers. Throughout November the Slovene lands were inundated by retreating Austro-Hungarian soldiers, returning home to demobilize; in two weeks more than 800,000 Habsburg soldiers passed through Slovenia. Considering the unstable political climate, the journey across the Slovene lands was surprisingly tranquil. The 29th Division experienced no serious disturbances during its march to Laibach.¹²²

¹¹⁹KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, k.k.201.Ldst.I.Brig., Op.Nr.1104/6, 4.11.18. *Regiments-Geschichte des IR.Nr.42*, 995.

These may have been the last shots fired by the Habsburg Army at the enemy, although this honour is naturally claimed by a variety of regiments.

¹²⁰KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, Gruppe Berndt, Op.Nr.1005/4, 5.11.18. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 110-11.

¹²¹KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, Gruppe Berndt, Op.Nr.1106/7, 6.11.18.; Op.Nr.1107/3, 7.11.18.

¹²²KA/NFA, Fasz. 1712, Gruppe Berndt, Op.Nr.1106/1, 6.11.18.; Op.Nr.1108/4, 8.11.18. E. Steinböck, *Die Kämpfe um Radkersburg und im steirischen Grenzraum 1919* (Vienna, 1983), 1-5. Other units were not so fortunate. In one of the worst incidents, a November 10 argument between Graz police and returning Ukrainian

The division reached the Slovene capital on November 9, giving the tired soldiers their first rest from marching in several days. Berndt soon realized that the Dual Monarchy no longer existed, and communication from Boroevic's disbanding headquarters made clear that an imperial restoration was no longer being considered. Berndt's only remaining task was to get his weary soldiers home. The 29th Division remained intact, with an overall strength of 695 officers and 6,578 other ranks. However, fewer than half of the survivors were from infantry units. Like the Habsburg Army as a whole, the division's multinational character persisted to the end. Among the combatants who reached Laibach, there were 2,310 Germans, 571 Czechs, 103 Magyars, and 290 other Slavs, mostly Poles. The large numbers of Czechs and other supposedly unreliable minorities indicated the power of effective leadership and comradeship forged in battle, even during the greatest hardships; as one soldier recalled, "Our Czech comrades also stayed with us obediently. We stuck together in ancient loyalty." Even an explicitly *deutschnational* regimental history declared, perhaps reluctantly, "To be fair to the honour of our Czech officers and soldiers, it must be admitted that they remained loyal to their units at all times."¹²³

Getting the troops home proved to be no simple task. There were so many units attempting to leave Laibach by train that the 29th was forced to wait several days to obtain transport; even though on average thirty-two trains were departing Ljubljana every day, there were considerably more demobilizing soldiers than places in cars. On November 12 the first 29th Division units began to board trains for the long, slow ride home. At least they no longer had to march. Upon reaching the territory of the newly declared Austrian republic, Berndt's units stopped at Bruck an der Mur, where Czech, Polish and Magyar comrades boarded separate trains to carry them to their new homelands. Berndt and his staff, travelling with many of the Sudeten Germans who made up his command, reached Vienna on November 16. Realizing the extent of the collapse, Berndt quickly reboarded the train, and headed for his North Bohemian home, now in the newly declared Czechoslovakia. He reached it the next day, delivered a final speech to

and Czech troops led to a firefight in the train station, complete with machine guns, leaving eight dead. The 29th Division suffered its last fatality the same day, when Captain Kreibich of the 137th Regiment was killed in a freak accident by a falling power line.

¹²³KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, KISA, Op.Nr.3509/4, 9.10.18. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 117-20. Bergmann, *Am Niemandlande*, 414. *Regiments-Geschichte des IR.Nr.42*, 1002.

his soldiers, praising their efforts, and went home. Otto Berndt's long war had finally ended.¹²⁴

While *Feldmarschalleutnant* Berndt was demobilizing the *k.u.k.* 29th Division, its last contingents were still journeying home. The 94th Regiment was the last element of *Gruppe* Berndt to leave Laibach, departing the Slovene capital November 15. Its long five-day ride took the remnants of the veteran *vier-und-neunziger* through Marburg, Graz, Linz, the Bavarian cities of Passau and Regensburg, the Bohemian border town of Eger, the Saxon capital, Dresden, and finally home to the Sudetenland, reaching Reichenberg, the now defunct divisional depot, at three in the afternoon on November 20. Sudeten home guards, the short-lived *Volkswehr*, quickly confiscated the regiment's horses and weapons.

Like all the hard-fighting Habsburg regiments which survived the First World War, the 94th received no final review, no Imperial-and-Royal march-past to commemorate its achievements, not even a telegram from Vienna thanking it for its service. Many veteran divisions and regiments marched home in good order, arriving to find disorder and chaos, receiving only the thanks and praise of the commanding officers who had led them through the costliest, bloodiest war ever seen. The 94th was fortunate, for Berndt had saved his division from captivity, and had gotten his weary soldiers back to North Bohemia. Yet fewer than two hundred soldiers of the 94th made it back to Reichenberg. The regiment's 1st Battalion, once a thousand strong, was represented by six officers, two sergeants, and thirty-eight other ranks; only two soldiers from its 1st Company came home. The proud 94th, which had seen so much fighting in the hills of Serbia, the peaks of the Carpathians, the plains of Galicia, and the valleys of Venetia, whose soldiers had forded the Danube, the Dunajec, the San, the Strypa, the Isonzo, the Piave and the Tagliamento, received kind words from its last commander and demobilized. The North Bohemians, like so many Austro-Hungarian soldiers of all nationalities, had done their duty to the last.¹²⁵

¹²⁴KA/NFA, Fasz.1712, KISA, Op.Nr.3509/7, 9.11.18.; *Gruppe* Berndt, Op.Nr.1110/2, 11.11.18.; Op.Nr.1112/6, 12.11.18. Berndt, *Letzter Kampf*, 119-20. *Regiments-Geschichte des IR.Nr.42*, 1002.

¹²⁵*IR.94 im Weltkriege*, 803-21. The 29th Division was by no means the last Habsburg force under arms.

Armeegruppe Pflanzler-Baltin, garrisoned in distant Albania, only received word of the final defeat November 5. It took the force several weeks to march back from the Balkans. The last units of the *k.u.k. Ostarmee* in Ukraine only boarded demobilization trains in Kiev on January 5, 1919. Thus, in a perhaps fitting tribute to the army, the black-yellow standard of the Habsburgs flew for the last time not over a regal palace in Vienna or Budapest, but over distant, remote garrisons.

Conclusion

Austria-Hungary's last war was a rollercoaster affair. In the opening battles of the First World War, the Habsburg Army, inadequately prepared for war, suffered a series of reverses and defeats which destroyed the prewar army and came close to knocking out the Dual Monarchy. The Galician campaign of 1914 crippled the standing army and decimated the army's cadres, especially the professional officer corps. Of the other major belligerents, only France suffered equivalent losses at the outset, in the Battle of the Frontiers. Also like France, Austria-Hungary expended what little remained of its standing army in a series of futile offensives in early 1915. The *Karpathenwinter* cost the army more than 600,000 casualties and spelled the end of the army's prewar regiments and trained unit leadership. By the spring of 1915 the war appeared all but lost. Yet the army fought on. But the army that soldiered on until late October 1918 was an improvised, war-raised force of teenage recruits and middle-aged reservists, led at the unit level by reservists and newly commissioned ensigns. The wartime army, after a brief respite in the East in the first half of 1916, endured the calamities of mid-1916, principally the destruction of the *k.u.k. Ostarmee* by Brusilov's summer offensives. The Habsburg Army, at least in the East, never really recovered from the Galician losses of 1916. Yet the army rebounded, enjoying successes on several fronts, including the Balkan, Transylvanian, and particularly the Italian, where the spectacular Caporetto offensive of October 1917 proved the apogee of the Austro-Hungarian war effort. In the end, the army outlived all its adversaries, save the Italians, and survived as long as its much vaunted German ally. Considering its poor condition in 1914 and the horrible blows it suffered at the outset, the army's longevity appears remarkable. To reiterate the question raised in the Introduction, why did the army fight as well as it did for as long as it did?

There were two principal factors underlying the Austro-Hungarians' unexpected staying power. First, their German ally rendered invaluable service, notably in the East in the spring of 1915 and the summer of 1916, but also on the Serbian and Romanian fronts in 1915 and 1916, respectively. The Germans provided badly needed strategic direction and sometimes urgently required tactical lessons and discipline. The Prussians saved the *k.u.k. Ostarmee* from total defeat on more than one occasion, and rendered invaluable assistance in crushing Serbia and Romania. Without the Germans, Austria-Hungary could not have withstood the Russian onslaughts of 1915 and 1916, much less defeat Serbia and Romania.

The Austro-Hungarians were rarely thereafter the masters of their own destiny, since there was no choice but to submit to German operational control, particularly in the East. From mid-1916, the *k.u.k. Ostarmee* fought more as a German satellite than an ally. The price of Austria-Hungary's strategic dependence on Germany only became evident in 1918, when Berlin's defeat hastened Vienna's demise. Secondly, the entry of Italy into the war in the spring of 1915, which ought to have finished off the ailing monarchy, instead gave Austria-Hungary and its army new life and a genuinely popular cause. The Habsburg Army was fortunate to be fighting a defensive war against Italy--always a great advantage during the First World War--in which it quite literally held the high ground. The victories on the Southwestern front, particularly on the Isonzo, were the result of excellent geographical and topographical advantages, good leadership, and sheer courage; they gave the army badly needed triumphs without German assistance, triumphs which increased solidarity in the ranks and simplified the army's military and ethnic difficulties.

At the tactical level, the army improved considerably during the war. Like all belligerent armies, in 1914 it had little appreciation for the lethality of the modern battlefield, and had to improvise tactical responses to the devastating impact of machine guns and artillery. The siege-like requirements of the First World War's static, attritional warfare eluded all armies for years, and the Austro-Hungarian was no exception. The army adjusted with success to machine warfare. The Habsburg Army's solution to the war's tactical dilemmas resembled a poor man's version of German wartime tactical innovation. The artillery learned to fight a combined arms battle with the infantry, and grew responsive to the infantry's tactical needs; it became proficient at long range indirect shelling, artillery reconnaissance, counterbattery fire, and rolling barrages. The Habsburg infantry, like the German, learned to decentralize the control of machine weapons (machine guns, mortars, infantry guns) from the regiment to the battalion and even the company, and to allow considerable tactical flexibility at the company and platoon levels. Austro-Hungarian *Sturmtruppen*, like their German counterparts, illustrated the considerable tactical lessons the army learned during more than four years of total war. The increase in size and effectiveness of the army's technical arms, including the combat engineers and army aviation, similarly showed its tactical maturity by the war's end. Lastly, the army's longstanding expertise in Alpine warfare was enhanced during the war, principally on the Southwestern front. Throughout the war, the Austro-Hungarian Army retained its position as the

world's most tactically skilled army in mountain fighting. Tactical innovation proved insufficient to save the army from final defeat, but the army's doctrinal progress was nonetheless impressive.

In comparative terms, the Habsburg Army's wartime tactical performance was worthy of praise. Tactical learning, while not on a par with the Germans or the French, was sufficient to keep the army in the war. Although never as tactically astute and progressive as their German allies--unquestionably the most tactically advanced army of the war--the Austro-Hungarians were nonetheless as advanced as several major armies, and superior to some. They remained consistently ahead of the Italians, and were more tactically wise than the British Army before 1917. Although the army was on the whole inferior to the French, it was equal in artillery doctrine, and more advanced in infantry tactics. The Austro-Hungarians were often as good as the Russians, except for the terrible tactical failings laid bare during the Brusilov offensive; from mid-1916 the Habsburg Army in the East, militarily and psychologically defeated, was tactically stagnant. Nonetheless, Habsburg tactical prowess was revealed in the Caporetto victory. The October 1917 offensive against Italy and the advances which followed were an Austro-Hungarian version of the German "Michael" offensive of spring 1918. Habsburg forces delivered tactical and operational success on an unprecedented scale, but like their allies proved incapable of exploiting their triumph to achieve a strategic victory. Still, the tactical performance at Caporetto was Austria-Hungary's highpoint in the war, after which the prospect of victory slowly dimmed.

At the divisional level, the army performed adequately in most cases, and sometimes better than that. No divisions experienced mutinies before the last week of October 1918; before the final defeat, the Austro-Hungarian Army never suffered divisional collapses like those which paralyzed the French Army after Nivelle's failed 1917 Chemin-des-Dames offensive. The divisional collapses which plagued the *k.u.k. Armee* in East Galicia in the summer of 1916 were more to be compared with the calamities which befell the Italians in October and November 1917, and the British 5th Army in March 1918. Although numerous Habsburg divisions performed ineffectively against the Russians, many divisions proved competent and reliable; against the Italians all divisions could be relied upon to fight well. The many solid Habsburg formations like the 17th and 29th Infantry Divisions were the backbone of the army throughout the war. The handful of élite divisions, including the 55th as well as the 3rd *Edelweiß* and 8th

Kaiserjäger, performed consistently against all enemies, and were worth far more to the war effort than their mere numbers suggest.

Still, the war was lost. The causes of the ultimate defeat were complex and existed at several levels. At the High Command level, the army was dogged by frequently poor decisions made by Conrad at *AOK*. The Chief of Staff's planning in Galicia in August 1914 was unrealistic and doomed the army to a series of costly defeats. Worse, Conrad's Carpathian offensives of early 1915 achieved nothing save the destruction of dozens of Habsburg divisions. Conrad and his staff, living far from the realities of combat in their comfortable quarters at Teschen, offered indifferent--and sometimes calamitous--strategic leadership. Conrad's replacement, Arz von Straußenburg, proved no more responsible and capable than his predecessor. The disastrous Piave offensive in June 1918, undertaken at Germany's insistence, finished off the last Habsburg army in the field.

At the operational level, Habsburg leadership was comparable to that in most belligerent armies. Austria-Hungary produced its share of talented generals who understood the tactical needs of the First World War, Borojevic foremost among them, and the army's operational leadership was up to the standards set in other armies, particularly on the Italian front. Divisional command, too, was usually in the hands of prewar General Staff-trained officers. Most of the products of the General Staff system were intelligent, competent officers who performed well when war came. As in all armies, the test of war weeded out many incompetent divisional commanders. Brigade and regimental commanders were promoted to replace them, and those who survived were as capable as any army's divisional commanders during the war. For every Przyborski who failed to lead his formation effectively, there was a Podhajský, Schwarzenberg or Berndt ready to take his place.

At lower levels in the command structure, however, the Habsburg Army was somewhat less fortunate. The terrible casualties suffered in the opening campaigns, particularly among junior officers, deprived the army of the majority of its prewar trained platoon, company and battalion commanders. The army remained short of officers throughout the war. The few prewar regular officers who survived Galicia, Serbia and the *Karpathenwinter* unscathed were quickly promoted to staff duty and higher commands. The officers who actually led the wartime army at the company and battalion levels were therefore overwhelmingly reservists or war service ensigns and lieutenants. Reserve captains and

lieutenants¹ rarely had the professional competence and training of the regulars, and many teenaged officer cadets and ensigns--like their British counterparts at the Somme--were seriously deficient in tactical knowledge. The appallingly high junior officer casualty rates meant that officer cadet training was greatly abbreviated during the war; the army chose to rely upon inadequately trained junior officers to lead its infantry units in battle.

The Austro-Hungarian Army could have solved some of its junior officer difficulties by promoting sergeants from the ranks, but chose instead to retain rigid class barriers even under the pressures of total war. The army, like its German ally, limited officer selection mainly to the bourgeoisie; during the war, the *einjährig Freiwilliger* system continued, albeit in expedited form, so that a reserve commission was not available to the peasants and workers who made up the vast majority of the army. Many platoons were actually led by sergeants, but the army maintained prewar social barriers in all branches, including the air service, leading to widespread resentment. Sergeant pilots who became aces and thus highly decorated celebrities were nonetheless not commissioned.² Although the prewar Habsburg noncommissioned officer corps was not particularly large, promoting veteran sergeants to ensign rank would have greatly ameliorated the army's language problem as well as its officer shortage. Reserve and war-commissioned officers, mostly Germans and Magyars, rarely knew the languages of their Slav or Romanian soldiers, and had no time to learn them. Sergeants, usually of the same ethnic group as a regiment's other ranks, were invaluable in helping junior officers communicate with their men; no doubt they could have been even more effective had they been made officers themselves.

Far more harmful to the Austro-Hungarian war effort was the Dual Monarchy's economic and industrial inability to sustain a modern war. Austria-Hungary never became a first rank industrial power, and the Allied blockade only worsened the situation. It never provided its army with the steady supply of

¹No reserve officer rose above the rank of captain during the First World War.

²O. Kostrba-Skalicky, "Die Luftstreitkräfte Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Heereskunde-Kriegsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen siebenzig Jahre danach* (Vienna, 1988), 145-6.

Only one NCO ace, Sergeant Joseph Kiss, was promoted to ensign, and then only posthumously. Sergeant Julius Arigi, Austria-Hungary's second-highest scoring ace and the most decorated NCO pilot, was never commissioned by the army. (However, like all ex-Habsburg NCO pilots decorated with the *Goldene Tapferkeitsmedaille*, Arigi was made a captain in Hitler's *Luftwaffe* in 1939.)

equipment it needed to fight on equal terms against its many enemies. The army, poorly equipped in 1914, only received modern artillery in the latter half of the war, and Austro-Hungarian war industries proved incapable of supplying the army with enough of the numerous types of weapons--rifles, machine guns, grenades, mortars, guns, howitzers, engineering supplies, and the like--required to fight a modern war. Austria-Hungary was unable to produce anything like a sufficient number of military aircraft, and never developed a tank; even rifle ammunition and artillery shell output was frequently inadequate. Industrially, as in so many other areas, Austria-Hungary became partly dependent upon Germany to fight the war. German help was required to keep the army supplied with weaponry, ammunition, and everything else needed by a modern army, including clothing.³ In fact, by 1918 the Dual Monarchy was facing grave industrial (and also agricultural) deterioration and the collapse of several sectors of the wartime economy, including the all-important transportation system. It was this pervasive material weakness which more than any other factor undermined the war effort.

The ethnic factor was much less important. Despite the claims of numerous Habsburg senior officers and many nationalists, ethnic disharmony was not really a major cause of the Austro-Hungarian collapse. Not a single battlefield defeat was attributable to nationalist causes. That said, the campaigns against Serbia and Russia were never popular among Czech, Serbian, and Ruthene soldiers; the Czechs of the 21st Division were hardly enthusiastic to fight the Serbs, and exhibited even less desire to take on the Russians. Although nationalist tension existed in the ranks throughout the war, and some ethnic groups consistently failed to get along--Czech and Romanian soldiers rarely coexisted harmoniously with their Magyar comrades-in-arms--on the whole the wartime army exhibited a remarkable degree of cohesion. As in the 17th Division in 1915, mutual antagonism between Magyar and Romanian soldiers proved a constant irritant, but by no means a grave impediment to operational effectiveness. The army was evidently far less plagued by nationalist tensions than the home front. The General Staff and some ethnic groups, particularly Czechs, got off on the wrong foot in 1914--the case of the 21st Division being the first example of High Command retribution against an allegedly disloyal ethnic group--but the army thereafter generally remained tactful in its dealings with its multinational soldiers.

³Large quantities of *feldgrau* cloth were imported from Germany, as were many of the *k.u.k.Armees*' steel helmets.

Although the regimental language system and the delicate ethnic balancing of the prewar army died in Galicia and the Carpathians, the army functioned passably well despite its remarkable diversity. On the Southwestern front, the nationality question hardly existed at all, and all nationalities could be relied upon to fight effectively. The army was until the end a very ethnically diverse institution, leading to uniquely Habsburg inefficiencies and difficulties. The nationality question never disappeared entirely in the wartime army--on the Russian front it was at times a serious concern--yet its overall significance has been consistently overestimated as a factor in the army's defeat. In general, Austro-Hungarian fighting prowess was undermined much more by purely military shortcomings than by ethnically-motivated disloyalty.

The heart of the matter was leadership. The underlying cause of the army's battlefield reverses was ineffective leadership at the unit level, not ethnic disharmony. Battalion and company commanders, often ignorant of their soldiers' mother tongues and tactically unskilled, were frequently incapable of leading their polyglot units effectively in battle. In Serbia in 1914, the Carpathians in 1914-15 and Galicia in 1916, the army's failures were much more the product of inadequate and uninspired leadership than any form of treason or disloyalty. The fate of the politically reliable 12th Division in East Galicia in mid-1916 illustrated the importance of leadership, as opposed to ethnicity, in determining battlefield success--or failure. Ultimately, the army's regiments were only as effective as the officers commanding them. As the army's repeated successes on the Isonzo demonstrated, given adequate leadership, proper weapons and supplies, and a cause perceived to be just, Austro-Hungarian soldiers of all nationalities could be expected to fight as vigorously as any soldiers in the First World War. Berndt's energetic command of his 29th Division in late 1918 showed that leadership was the decisive factor; as total defeat loomed and the Dual Monarchy was disintegrating, the 29th's soldiers--one-quarter of them Czechs--remained loyal even in the last week of the war. Even against the Russians, the nationality issue was by no means insoluble, given sufficient leadership and discipline at the unit level. To be sure, the army had its share of disaffected soldiers, alienated by the military bureaucracy and the poor chances of surviving the war unscathed; Svejk's tale is by no means entirely hyperbole. Yet every army in the First World War had "problem" groups and formations, and suffered periodic morale difficulties; even the German Army was able to do little with its Alsatians. The Habsburg

Army, composed of ten major nationalities, was forced to function differently from the other, national European armies, but in the end it stayed the course.

In 1914, the Habsburg dynasty and Austria-Hungary's military and political leaders opted for the sword, committing the Dual Monarchy to a fight to the finish with Serbia. It rapidly became a total war for which Austria-Hungary was woefully unprepared. The *k.u.k. Armee* was soon fighting on three major fronts; that it survived as long as it did reflects considerable credit on its soldiers of all nationalities. Yet in the final analysis, the soldiers' great sacrifices were to no avail. The ancient Habsburg realm collapsed in late 1918, this time for good. Despite the heroic efforts of Boroevic and a many other black-yellow soldiers, history did not repeat itself; no new Radetzky emerged to save Austria from dissolution. The pressures of more than four years of total war had weakened the Dual Monarchy and its political and military institutions to the breaking point. In the end, Austria-Hungary's collapse in late 1918 was the result of military defeat. Although the army had vanquished all its adversaries save Italy by the last year of the war, Germany's rapid decline in the summer and autumn of 1918 doomed the Habsburg realm. In the war's last year the strategic balance of forces shifted decisively in favour of the Allies, and no Austro-Hungarian battlefield effort could change this reality. Despite the army's terrible sacrifices in Galicia, the Balkans, Transylvania, and the Isonzo, in the end, the war was lost. Conrad, filled with premonitions of impending war and catastrophe, had written privately shortly before Franz Ferdinand's assassination, "It will be a hopeless struggle, but nevertheless it must be because such an ancient monarchy and such an ancient army cannot perish ingloriously."⁴ The Chief-of-Staff's visions were proved correct; the Dual Monarchy and its army did not survive the First World War. As Conrad had predicted, the ancient army of the Habsburgs waged a hopeless struggle, perishing with glory. The overwhelming majority of Habsburg soldiers fought with determination and bravery. Certainly they had persevered far longer than anyone in 1914--including the generals--had considered they might. The multinational army, the least prepared for war of all Europe's major armies, offered unprecedented sacrifices against a host of well armed enemies. Its experience of total war was among the worst in Europe; its 5,000,000 casualties were comparable to France's terrible losses. The army's high level leadership was often poor, the Dual Monarchy failed to supply its troops properly, and there was little

⁴G. Conrad von Hötzendorf, *Mein Leben mit Conrad von Hötzendorf* (Vienna, 1931), 325.

hope of ultimate victory. Yet the common soldiers of the multinational army endured, fighting for their Emperor-King and the honour of their regiments. Austria-Hungary's last war was the Habsburgs' greatest conflict, with the some of the most triumphant victories and worst defeats in the dynasty's long history. Soldiers of all nationalities lived up to the great reputations of Prince Eugene, the Archduke Charles and *Vater* Radetzky. They fought and died on hundreds of battlefields, from the shores of the Adriatic to the Black Sea, from the Tyrolean Alps to the peaks of the Transylvanian frontier, from the plains of Volhynia to the hills of Albania. In the end, of course, the Dual Monarchy collapsed, and Central Europe was launched into a chaos which has not yet ended. The officers and men of the Imperial-and-Royal Army had done everything they could, and far more than anticipated, to prevent the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Their now-forgotten sacrifices in a lost cause--triumphs at Valjevo, Gorlice, Doberdò, the Strypa, Caporetto and on the Tagliamento, as well as defeats at Čer, Sztropkó, the Dukla Pass, Łuck, and on the Piave--were enormous. By their great sacrifices, the soldiers of the wartime army proved themselves to be the last true "Austrians," the last remaining defenders of the ancient Habsburg monarchy.

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Qualifikationsliste:

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FML Karl Gelb von Siegesstern

FML Alfred Edler von Hinke

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**Appendix I:
Austro-Hungarian Army Order of Battle, July 1914¹**

I. Korps (Cracow)

5. ID. (Olmütz)

- 9. IBrig. (Olmütz) IR. 54(4), 93(3)²
- 10. IBrig. (Troppau) IR. 1(3), 13(4)
- FKR. 2, 3

12. ID. (Cracow)

- 23. IBrig. (Cracow) IR. 3(2), 56(4), 100(3)
- 24. IBrig. (Tarnów) IR. 20(3), 57(3)
- FKR. 1

46. LID. (Cracow)

- 91. LIBrig. (Cracow) LIR. 16(3), 31(2), 32(3)
- 92. LIBrig. (Olmütz) LIR. 13(3), 15(3)
- LFKD. 46, LFHD. 46

7. KD. (Cracow)

- 11. KBrig. (Cracow) DR. 10, UR.2
- 20. KBrig. (Cracow) DR. 12, UR.3
- rt.AD. 1

Corps Troops

- 2. LKBrig. (Cracow) LUR. 2, 4
- 1. FABrig. (Cracow) FHR. 1, sHD. 1
- 2. FsABrig (Cracow) FsAR. 2(2), FsAB. 9
- SB. 1
- TrainDiv. 1

II. Korps (Vienna)

4. ID. (Brünn)

- 7. IBrig. (Znaim) IR. 12(2), 99(4)
- 8. IBrig. (Brünn) IR. 3(1), 8(3), 49(3)
- FKR. 5

25. ID. (Vienna)

- 49. IBrig. (Vienna) IR. 84(3), bh. 1(3), FJB. 25
- 50. IBrig. (Vienna) IR. 4(3), 44(2), bh. FJB
- FKR. 4

49. ID. (Vienna)

¹M. EhnI, "Die öst.-ung. Landmacht nach Aufbau, Gliederung, Friedensgarnison, Einteilung und nationaler Zusammensetzung im Sommer 1914," *Ergänzungsheft 9 zum Werke ÖUIK*. (Vienna, 1934). 96-103.

²The number in parenthesis is the number of battalions of the regiment in garrison.

- 97. IBrig. (Vienna) IR. 67(3), 82(3)
- 98. IBrig. (Vienna) IR. 16(3), 29(3), 39(3)
- FKR. 6

13. LID. (Vienna)

- 25. LIBrig. (Vienna) LIR. 1(3), 24(3)
- 26. LIBrig. (Brünn) LIR. 14(3), 25(3)
- LFKD. 13, LFHD. 13

3. KD. (Vienna)

- 10. KBrig. (Vienna) DR. 3, UR. 7
- 17. KBrig. (Vienna) HR. 1, UR. 4
- rt.AD. 2

Corps Troops

- 2. FABrig. (Vienna) FHR. 2, sHD. 2
- 1. FsABrig. (Vienna) FsAR. 1(2), 6(2)
- LUR. 5
- Transport Brigade (Vienna)³
- SB. 2
- PB. 8, 9
- Bridging Battalion

III. Korps (Graz)

6. ID. (Graz)

- 11. IBrig. (Graz) IR. 7(4), bh. 2(3), FJB. 31
- 12. IBrig. (Klagenfurt) IR. 17(4), FJB. 5, 8, 9, 17, 19
- FKR. 9

28. ID. (Laibach)

- 55. IBrig. (Trieste) IR. 32(3), 87(4), 97(1), bh. 4(3), FJB. 24
- 56. IBrig. (Görz) IR. 27(4), 47(4), FJB. 11, 20, 29
- 94. IBrig. (Tolmein) IR. 19(3), FJB. 7
- FKR. 7, 8

22. LID. (Graz)

- 43. LIBrig. (Graz) LIR. 3(3), 26(3), 31(1)
- 44. LIBrig. (Pola) LIR. 4(3), 5(3), 27(3)
- LFKD. 22, LFHD. 22

Corps troops

- 3. KBrig. (Marburg) DR. 5, HR. 6, 16
- 3. FABrig. (Graz) GbAR. 3, FHR. 3, sHD. 3
- 4. FsABrig. (Pola) FsAR. 4(3), FsAB. 3, 8, 10
- SB. 3, 6
- TrainDiv. 3

³Including the Railway Regiment, the Telegraph Regiment, and the air and automobile services.

IV. Korps (Budapest)

31. ID. (Budapest)

61. IBrig. (Budapest) IR. 32(1), 52(1), 69(3)

62. IBrig. (Budapest) IR. 44(1), bh. 3(3)
FKR. 10

32. ID. (Budapest)

63. IBrig. (Budapest) IR. 23(4), 38(1), 70(2)

64. IBrig. (Budapest) IR. 6(3), 68(1), 86(3)
FKR. 11

40. HID. (Budapest)

79. HIBrig. (Budapest) HIR. 29(3), 30(3)

80. HIBrig. (Pécs) HIR. 6(3), 19(4)
HFKR. 1

41. HID. (Budapest)

81. HIBrig. (Budapest) HIR. 1(3), 17(3)

82. HIBrig. (Veszprém) HIR. 20(3), 31(3)
FKR. 12

10. KD. (Budapest)

4. KBrig. (Budapest) HR. 8, 10, 13
rt.AD. 4

5. HKD. (Budapest)

19. HKBrig. (Budapest) HHR. 1, 4, 8

20. HKBrig. (Zalaegerszeg) HHR. 6, 7, 10

Corps troops

4. FABrig. (Budapest) FHR. 4, sHD. 4
PB. 4

TrainDiv. 4

V. Korps (Pozsony)

14. ID. (Pozsony)

27. IBrig. (Pozsony) IR. 71(4), 72(3)

28. IBrig. (Sopron) IR. 48(3), 76(3)
FKR. 13, 14

33. ID. (Komárom)

65. IBrig. (Győr) IR. 19(1), 26(4)

66. IBrig. (Komárom) IR. 12(1), 83(4)
FKR. 15

37. HID. (Pozsony)

73. HIBrig. (Pozsony) HIR. 13(3), 18(3)

74. HIBrig. (Nyitra) HIR. 14(3), 15(3)
HFKR. 4, 7

2. KD. (Pozsony)

16. KBrig. (Pozsony) HR. 3, 5, UR. 5
rt.AD. 5

Corps troops

5. FABrig. (Pozsony) FHR. 5, sHD. 5
SB. 5
PB. 5
TrainDiv. 5

VI. Korps (Kassa)

15. ID. (Miskolc)

29. IBrig. (Ungvár) IR. 5(3), 66(3)
30. IBrig. (Miskolc) IR. 60(3), 65(4)
FKR. 17, 18

27. ID. (Kassa)

53. IBrig. (Kassa) IR. 25(3), 34(3)
54. IBrig. (Eperjes) IR. 67(1), 85(3)
FKR. 16

39. HID. (Kassa)

77. HIBrig. (Kassa) HIR. 9(3), 11(3)
78. HIBrig. (Miskolc) HIR. 10(3), 16(3)
HFKR. 3

Corps troops

6. KBrig. (Miskolc) HR. 14, 15
6. FABrig. (Kassa) FHR. 6, sHD. 6
TrainDiv. 6

VII. Korps (Temesvár)

17. ID. (Nagyvárad)

33. IBrig. (Nagyvárad) IR. 37(1), 39(1), 101(3)
34. IBrig. (Arad) IR. 33(3), 46(3)
FKR. 19

34. ID. (Temesvár)

67. IBrig. (Temesvár) IR. 29(1), IR. 61(1), 96(3)
68. IBrig. (Fehértemplom) IR. 43(4), FJB. 23, 28
FKR. 20

20. HID. (Nagyvárad)

39. HIBrig. (Nagyvárad) HIR. 3(3), 4(3)
40. HIBrig. (Szatmár-Németi) HIR. 12(3), 32(3)
FKR. 21

23. HID. (Szeged)

45. HIBrig. (Szeged) HIR. 2(3), 5(3)
46. HIBrig. (Lugos) HIR. 7(3), 8(3)

HFKR. 8

1. KD. (Temesvár)

7. KBrig. (Temesvár) HR. 7, 12

Corps troops

7. FABrig. (Temesvár) FHR. 7, sHD. 7

PB. 7

TrainDiv. 7

VII. Korps (Prague)

9. ID. (Prague)

17. IBrig. (Prague) IR. 91(3), 102(3)

18. IBrig. (Prague) IR. 28(1), 73(4)

FKR. 23

19. ID. (Pilsen)

37. IBrig. (Pilsen) IR. 11(4), 35(3)

38. IBrig. (Budweis) IR. 75(1), 88(4)

FKR. 22, 24

21. LID. (Prague)

41. LIBrig. (Pilsen) LIR. 6(3), 7(3)

42. LIBrig. (Prague) LIR. 8(3), 28(3), 29(3)

LFKD. 21, LFHD. 21

Corps troops

1. KBrig. (Prague) DR. 13, 14

8. FABrig. (Prague) FHR. 8, sHD. 8

TrainDiv. 8

IX. Korps (Leitmeritz)

10. ID. (Josephstadt)

19. IBrig. (Josephstadt) IR. 36(1), 98(3)

20. IBrig. (Königgrätz) IR. 18(3), 21(3)

FKR. 25, 27

29. ID. (Theresienstadt)

57. IBrig. (Theresienstadt) IR. 42(3), 92(3)

58. IBrig. (Reichenberg) IR. 74(3), 94(4)

FKR. 26

26. LID. (Leitmeritz)

51. LIBrig. (Hohenmauth) LIR. 11(3), 12(3), 30(3)

52. LIBrig. (Leitmeritz) LIR. 9(3), 10(3)

LFKD. 26, LFHD. 26

Corps troops

9. KBrig. (Pardubitz) DR. 1, 11, rt.AD.9

9. FABrig. (Leitmeritz) FHR. 9, sHD. 9

TrainDiv. 9

X. Korps (Przemyśl)

2. ID. (Jaroslau)

- 3. IBrig. (Rzeszów) IR. 40(4)
- 4. IBrig. (Jaroslau) IR. 89(4), 90(3)
- FKR. 29, 30

24. ID. (Przemyśl)

- 47. IBrig. (Przemyśl) IR. 9(4), 45(3)
- 48. IBrig. (Przemyśl) IR. 10(3), 77(3)
- FKR. 28

45. LID. (Przemyśl)

- 89. LIBrig. (Przemyśl) LIR. 18(3), 33(3)
- 90. LIBrig. (Jaroslau) LIR. 17(3), 34(3)
- LFKD. 43, LFHD. 45

6. KD. (Jaroslau)

- 5. KBrig. (Jaroslau) DR. 6, 8
- 14. KBrig. (Rzeszów) HR. 11, UR. 6
- rt.AD. 10

Corps troops

- 10. FABrig. (Przemyśl) FHR. 10, sHD. 10
- FsAR. 3(2)
- SB. 10
- PB. 10
- TrainDiv. 10

XI. Korps (Lemberg)

11. ID. (Lemberg)

- 21. IBrig. (Lemberg) IR. 15(4), 55(4)
- 22. IBrig. (Lemberg) IR. 58(3), 95(4), FJB. 32
- FKR. 32

30. ID. (Lemberg)

- 59. IBrig. (Czernowitz) IR. 24(3), 41(4)
- 60. IBrig. (Lemberg) IR. 30(3), 80(3)
- FKR. 31, 33

43. LID. (Czernowitz)

- 85. LIBrig. (Lemberg) LIR. 19(3), 35(3)
- 86. LIBrig. (Czernowitz) LIR. 20(3), 22(3), 36(3)
- LFKD. 43, LFHD. 43

4. KD. (Lemberg)

- 18. KBrig. (Złoczów) DR. 9, UR. 13
- 21. KBrig. (Lemberg) DR. 15, UR. 1

rt.AD. 11

8. KD. (Stanislau)

13. KBrig. (Stanislau) DR. 7, UR. 8

15. KBrig. (Tarnopol) DR. 2, UR. 11

rt.AD. 6

Corps troops

3. LKBrig. (Lemberg) LUR. 1, 3

11. FABrig. (Lemberg) FHR. 11, sHD. 11

SB. 11

TrainDiv. 11

XII. Korps (Nagyszeben)

16. ID. (Nagyszeben)

31. IBrig. (Brassó) IR. 2(4), 82(1)

32. IBrig. (Nagyszeben) IR. 31(3), 64(3)

FKR. 36

35. ID. (Kolozsvár)

69. IBrig. (Fehértemplom) IR. 50(3), 51(3)

70. IBrig. (Kolozsvár) IR. 62(3), 63(3)

FKR. 34, 35

38. HID. (Kolozsvár)

75. HIBrig. (Kolozsvár) HIR. 21(3), 22(3)

76. HIBrig. (Nagyszeben) HIR. 23(3), 24(3)

HFKR. 2

Corps troops

12. KBrig. (Nagyszeben) HR. 2, 4

12. FABrig. (Nagyszeben) FHR. 12, sHD. 12

SB. 12

TrainDiv. 12

XIII. Korps (Zagreb)

7. ID. (Osijek)

13. IBrig. (Osijek) IR. 52(2), 78(4)

14. IBrig. (Semlin) IR. 38(2), 68(3), 70(1), FJB. 21

FKR. 38, 39

36. ID. (Zagreb)

71. IBrig. (Fiume) IR. 37(2), 79(4)

72. IBrig. (Zagreb) IR. 16(1), 53(3), 96(1), 97(3)

FKR. 37

42. HID. (Zagreb)

83. HIBrig. (Zagreb) HIR. 25(3), 26(3)

84. HIBrig. (Osijek) HIR. 27(3), 28(3)

HFKR. 6

Corps troops

- 6. KBrig. (Zagreb) HR. 9, UR. 12
- 13. FABrig. (Zagreb) FHR. 13, sHD. 13
- SB. 13
- TrainDiv. 13

XIV. Korps (Innsbruck)

3. ID. (Linz)

- 5. IBrig. (Innsbruck) IR. 28(3), 59(4), FJB. 12
- 6. IBrig. (Salzburg) IR. 14(4), 75(3), FJB. 4, 30
- FKR. 40, 42

8. ID. (Bozen)

- 15. IBrig. (Bozen) TKJR. 2(4), FJB. 10, 13
- 16. IBrig. (Trient) FJB. 1, 14, 16, 18, 22
- 96. IBrig. (Rovereto) TKJR. 3(4)
- 121. IBrig. (Trient) TKJR. 1(4), 4(3), FJB. 27
- 122. IBrig. (Bruneck) IR. 36(3), FJB. 2, 6
- FKR. 41

44. LID. (Innsbruck)

- 87. LIBrig. (Linz) LIR. 2(3), 21(3)
- 38. LschBrig. (Bozen) LschR. I(4), II(3), III(4)
- LFKD. 44, LFHD. 44

Corps troops

- 1. LKBrig. (Wels) LUR. 5, 6, rt.TLschD.
- 14. FABrig. (Linz) FHR. 14, sHD. 14
- 1. GbABrig. (Brixen) GbAR. 8, 14
- 3. FsABrig. (Trient) FsAB. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7
- DR. 4
- SB. 8, 9, 14
- PB. 2
- TrainDiv. 14

XV. Korps (Sarajevo)

1. ID. (Sarajevo)

- 7. GbBrig. (Višegrad) IR. 5(1), 25(1), 34(1), 66(1), 85(1), 86(1)
- 8. GbBrig. (Foča) IR. 24(1), 35(1), 53(1), 58(1), 95(1)
- 9. GbBrig. (Sarajevo) IR. 12(1), 49(1), 74(1), 84(1)
- GbAR. 11

48. ID. (Sarajevo)

- 10. GbBrig. (Sarajevo) IR. 48(1), 62(1), 90(1), 92(1), bh. 1(1),
- UR. 12(1).

12. GbBrig. (Banja Luka) IR. 3(1), 45(1), 57(1), 93(1), 100(1),
bh. 2(1)

GbAR. 6

Corps troops

11. GbBrig. (Tuzla) IR. 10(1), 20(1), 21(1), 60(1), 77(1), bh. 3(1),
HR. 9(1)

2. GbABrig. (Sarajevo) GbAR. 10, 12

5. FsABrig. (Sarajevo) FsAB. 2

SB. 7

TrainDiv. 15

XVI. Korps (Ragusa)

18. ID. (Mostar)

1. GbBrig. (Mostar) IR. 1(1), 4(1), 51(1), 63(1), 102(1), UR. 5(1)

2. GbBrig. (Trebinje) IR. 8(1), 64(1), 70(1), 76(1), 101(1)

3. GbBrig. (Nevesinje) IR. 18(1), 30(1), 42(1), 46(1), 80(1), 96(1)

6. GbBrig. (Bileća) IR. 6(1), 37(1), 38(1), 44(1), 50(1), 81(1)

13. GbBrig. (Mostar) IR. 22(3), bh. 4(1)

GbAR. 4

47. ID. (Castelnuovo)

4. GbBrig. (Ragusa) IR. 52(1), 69(1), LIR. 37(3)

14. GbBrig. (Teodo) IR. 33(1), 61(1), 72(1), 91(1), 98(1)

Corps troops

5. GbBrig. (Spalato) IR. 22(1), 31(1), LIR. 23(2)

3. GbABrig. (Mostar) GbAR. 7, 13

rt.DLschD

Train Div. 16

Abbreviations

bh *bosnisch-herzegowinische* (Bosnian-Herzegovinian)

DR *Dragonenregiment* (Dragoons regiment)

FHR *Feldhaubitzenregiment* (Field howitzer regiment)

FJB *Feldjägerbatallion* (Rifle battalion)

FKR *Feldkanonenregiment* (Field gun regiment)

FsAB *Festungsartilleriebatallion* (Fortress artillery battalion)

FsABrig *Festungsartilleriebrigade* (Fortress artillery brigade)

FsAR *Festungsartillerieregiment* (Fortress artillery regiment)

GbABrig *Gebirgsartilleriebrigade* (Mountain artillery brigade)

GbAR *Gebirgsartillerieregiment* (Mountain artillery regiment)
 GbBrig *Gebirgsbrigade* (Mountain brigade)
 HFKR *Honvédfeldkanonenregiment* (*Honvéd* field gun regiment)
 HIBrig *Honvédinfanteriebrigade* (*Honvéd* infantry brigade)
 HID *Honvédinfanteriedivision* (*Honvéd* infantry division)
 HIR *Honvédinfanterieregiment* (*Honvéd* infantry regiment)
 HHR *Honvédhusarenregiment* (*Honvéd* Hussars regiment)
 HKBrig *Honvédkavalleriebrigade* (*Honvéd* cavalry brigade)
 HR *Husarenregiment* (Hussars regiment)
 IBrig *Infanteriebrigade* (Infantry brigade)
 ID *Infanteriedivision* (Infantry division)
 IR *Infanterieregiment* (Infantry regiment)
 KBrig *Kavalleriebrigade* (Cavalry brigade)
 KD *Kavalleriedivision* (Cavalry division)
 LFHD *Landwehrfeldhaubitzendivision* (*Landwehr* field howitzer battalion)
 LFKD *Landwehrfeldkanonendivision* (*Landwehr* field gun battalion)
 LIBrig *Landwehrintfanteriebrigade* (*Landwehr* infantry brigade)
 LID *Landwehrintfanteriedivision* (*Landwehr* infantry division)
 LIR *Landwehrintfanterieregiment* (*Landwehr* infantry regiment)
 LKBrig *Landwehrkavalleriebrigade* (*Landwehr* cavalry brigade)
 LschBrig *Landesschützenbrigade* (*Landwehr* Tyrolean rifle brigade)
 LschR *Landesschützenregiment* (*Landwehr* Tyrolean rifle regiment)
 LUR *Landwehrulanenregiment* (*Landwehr* Lancers regiment)
 PB *Pionierbattalion* (Pioneer battalion)
 rt.AD *reitende Artilleriedivision* (Horse artillery battalion)
 rt.DLschD *reitende Dalmatiner Landesschützendivision* (Mounted Dalmatian rifle battalion.)
 rt.TLschD *reitende Tiroler Landesschützendivision* (Mounted Tyrolean rifle battalion)
 SB *Sappeurbattalion* (Sapper battalion)
 sHD *schwere Haubitzendivision* (Heavy howitzer battalion)
 TKJR *Tiroler Kaiserjägerregiment* (Tyrolean Imperial Rifles regiment)
 TrainDiv *Traindivision* (Corps supply battalion)
 UR *Ulanenregiment* (Lancers regiment)

**Appendix II:
Placenames¹**

<u>1867-1918</u>	<u>post-1918</u>
Bozen (<i>G</i>)	Bolzano (<i>I</i>)
Brassó (<i>M</i>)	Sibiu (<i>R</i>)
Brixen (<i>G</i>)	Bressanone (<i>I</i>)
Brünn (<i>G</i>)	Brno (<i>C</i>)
Budweis (<i>G</i>)	České Budějovice (<i>C</i>)
Czernowitz (<i>G</i>)	Černivtsy (<i>U</i>), Černaui (<i>R</i>)
Eger (<i>G</i>)	Cheb (<i>C</i>)
Eperjes (<i>M</i>)	Prešov (<i>Slk</i>)
Fiume (<i>I</i>)	Rijeka (<i>S-C</i>)
Görz (<i>G</i>)	Gorizia (<i>I</i>), Gorica (<i>Sle</i>)
Jaroslau (<i>G</i>)	Jarostaw (<i>P</i>)
Jungbunzlau (<i>G</i>)	Mladá Boleslav (<i>C</i>)
Karfreit (<i>G</i>)	Kobarid (<i>Sle</i>)
Kassa (<i>M</i>)	Košice (<i>Slk</i>)
Kolozsvár (<i>M</i>)	Cluj (<i>R</i>)
Königgrätz (<i>G</i>)	Hradec Králové (<i>C</i>)
Kremsier (<i>G</i>)	Kroměříž (<i>C</i>)
Laibach (<i>G</i>)	Ljubljana (<i>Sle</i>)
Leitmeritz (<i>G</i>)	Litoměřice (<i>C</i>)
Lemberg (<i>G</i>)	Lwów (<i>P</i>), L'viv (<i>U</i>)
Marburg (<i>G</i>)	Maribor (<i>Sle</i>)
Monasterzyska (<i>P</i>)	Monastyrska (<i>U</i>)
Munkács (<i>M</i>)	Munkačiv (<i>U</i>)
Nagyvárad (<i>M</i>)	Oradea Mare (<i>R</i>)
Neusandez (<i>G</i>)	Nowy Sącz (<i>P</i>)
Olmütz (<i>G</i>)	Olomouc (<i>C</i>)
Pardubitz (<i>G</i>)	Pardubice (<i>C</i>)
Pilsen (<i>G</i>)	Płzeň (<i>C</i>)
Pola (<i>I</i>)	Pula (<i>S-C</i>)
Pozsony (<i>M</i>)	Bratislava (<i>Slk</i>)
Ragusa (<i>I</i>)	Dubrovnik (<i>S-C</i>)
Reichenberg (<i>G</i>)	Liberec (<i>C</i>)
Spalato (<i>I</i>)	Split (<i>S-C</i>)
Stanislau (<i>G</i>)	Stanisławów (<i>P</i>), Stanyslaviv (<i>U</i>)
Szabadka (<i>M</i>)	Subotica (<i>S-C</i>)

¹Guide to languages: *G*--German, *M*--Magyar, *C*--Czech, *P*--Polish, *S-C*--Serbo-Croat, *Slk*--Slovak, *Sle*--Slovene, *R*--Romanian, *U*--Ukrainian, *I*--Italian

Szatmár-Németi (M)
Sztropkó (M)
Temesvár (M)
Teschen (G)
Theresienstadt (G)
Trient (G)
Troppau (G)
Újvidek (M)
Ungvár (M)
Zara (I)
Znaim (G)

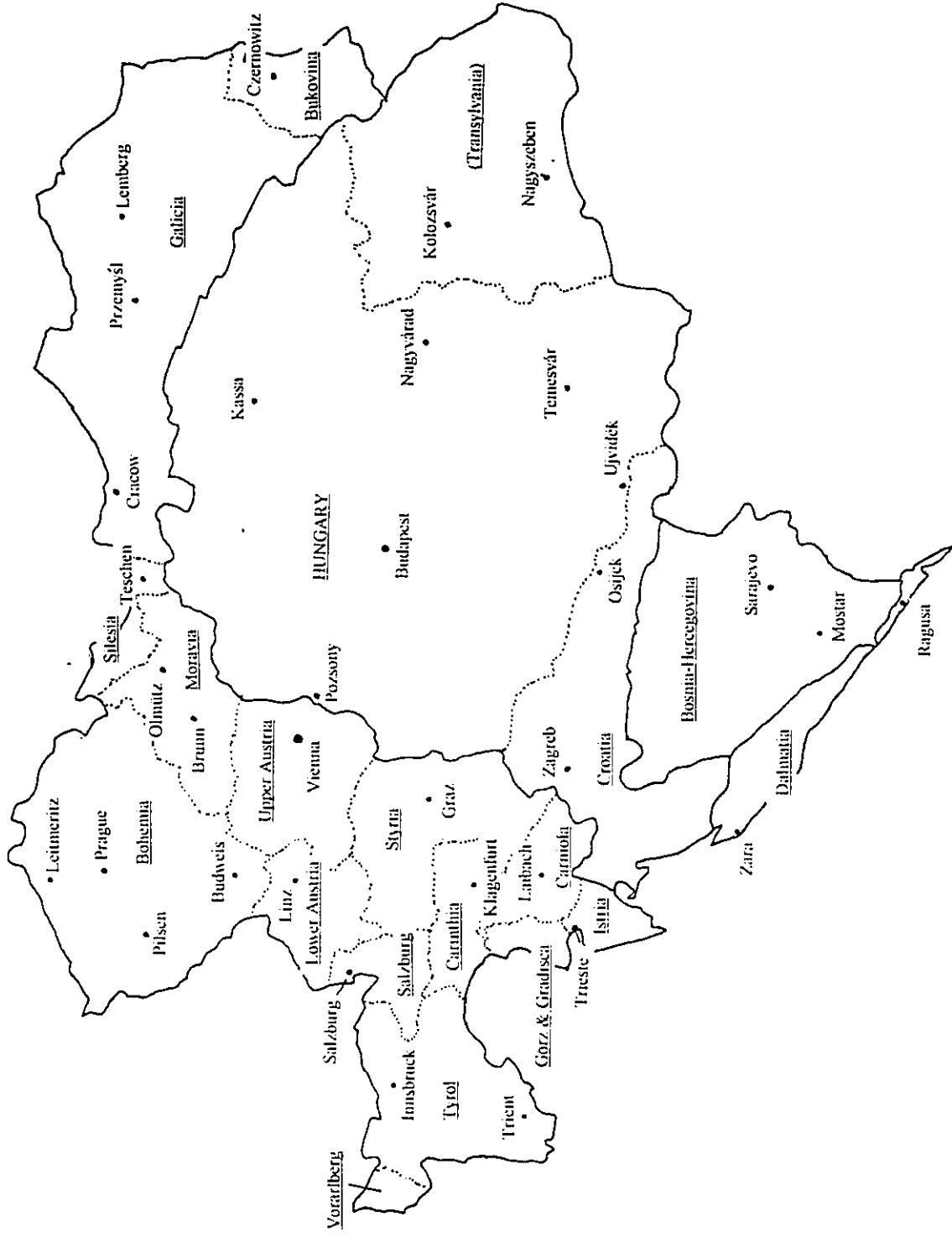
Satu Mare (R)
Stropkov (Slk)
Timișoara (R)
Těšín (G), Cieszyn (P)
Terezín (C)
Trento (I)
Ostrava (C)
Novi Sad (S-C)
Užhorod (U)
Zadar (S-C)
Znojmo (C)

In addition, many placenames in Hungary were known to the *k.u.k. Armee* by their German names:

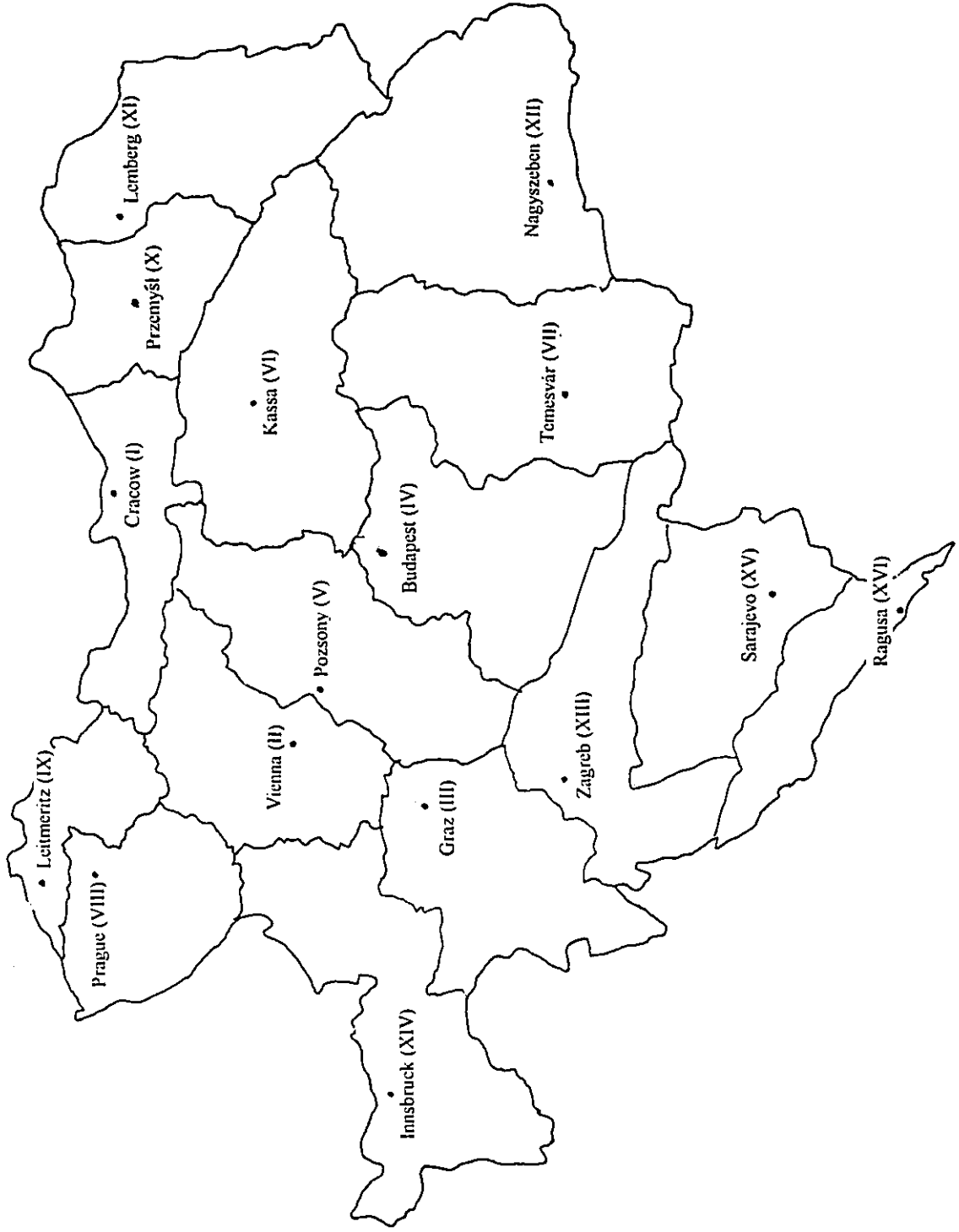
Magyar
Brassó
Győr
Kassa
Kolozsvár
Komárom
Nagyszeben
Nagyvárad
Osijek (S-C)
Pécs
Pozsony
Sopron
Szabadka
Székesfehérvár
Szombathely
Újvidek
Zagreb (S-C)

German
Kronstadt
Raab
Kaschau
Klausenburg
Komorn
Hermannstadt
Großwardein
Esseg
Fünfkirchen
Preßburg
Ödenburg
Maria Theresiopel
Stuhlweißenburg
Steinamanger
Neusatz
Agram

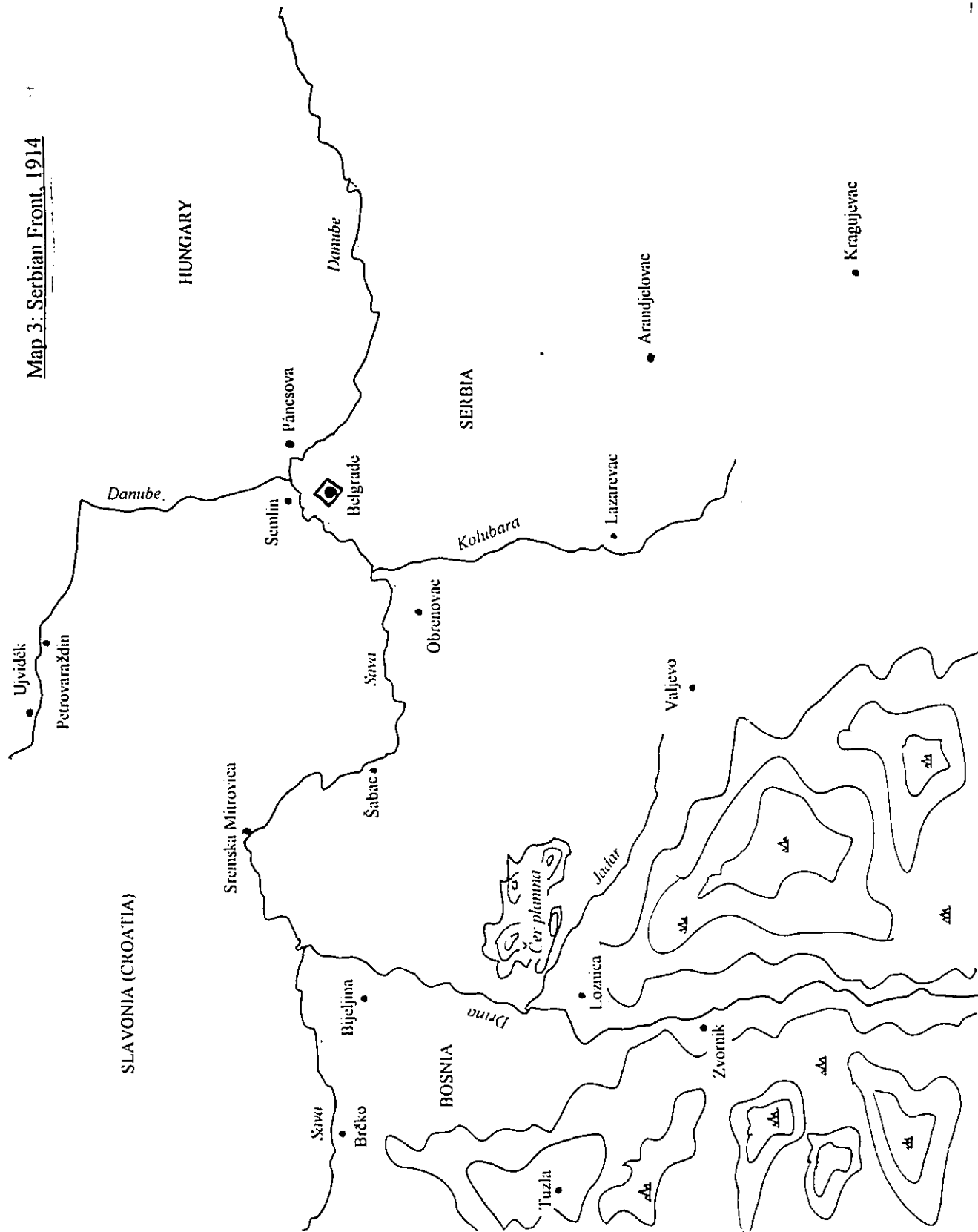
Map I: Austria-Hungary, 1914



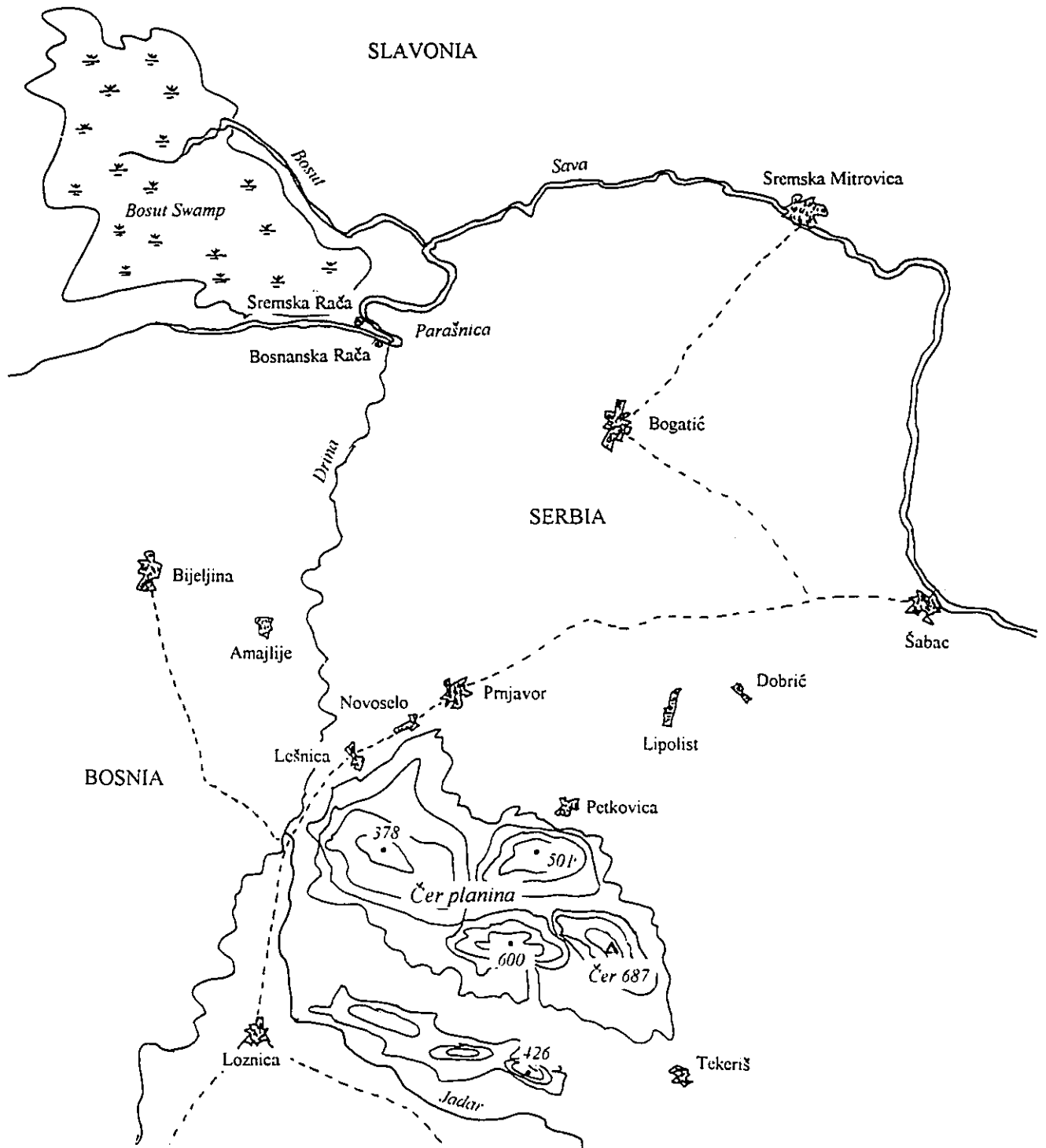
Map 2: Austro-Hungarian Corps Districts, 1914



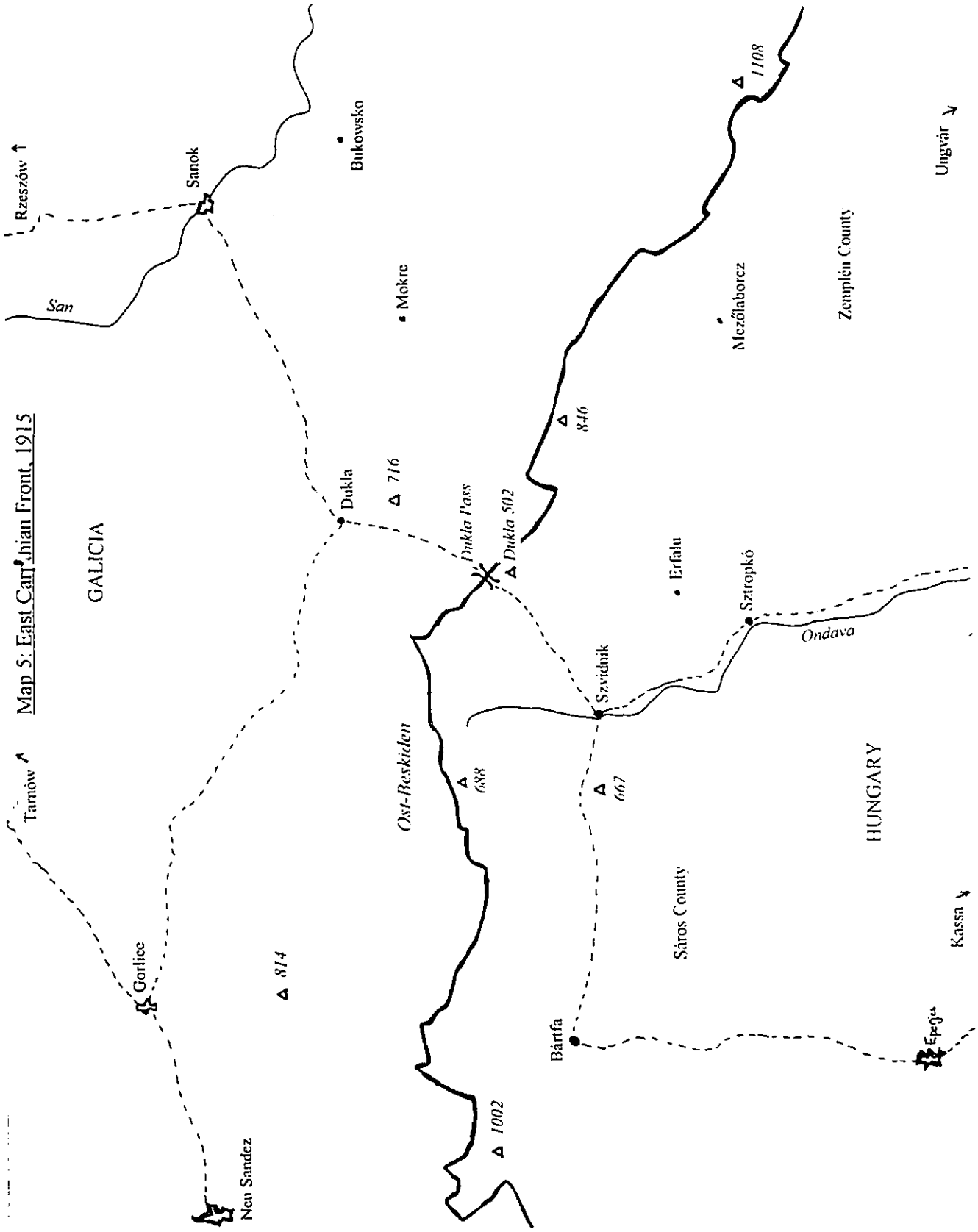
Map 3: Serbian Front, 1914



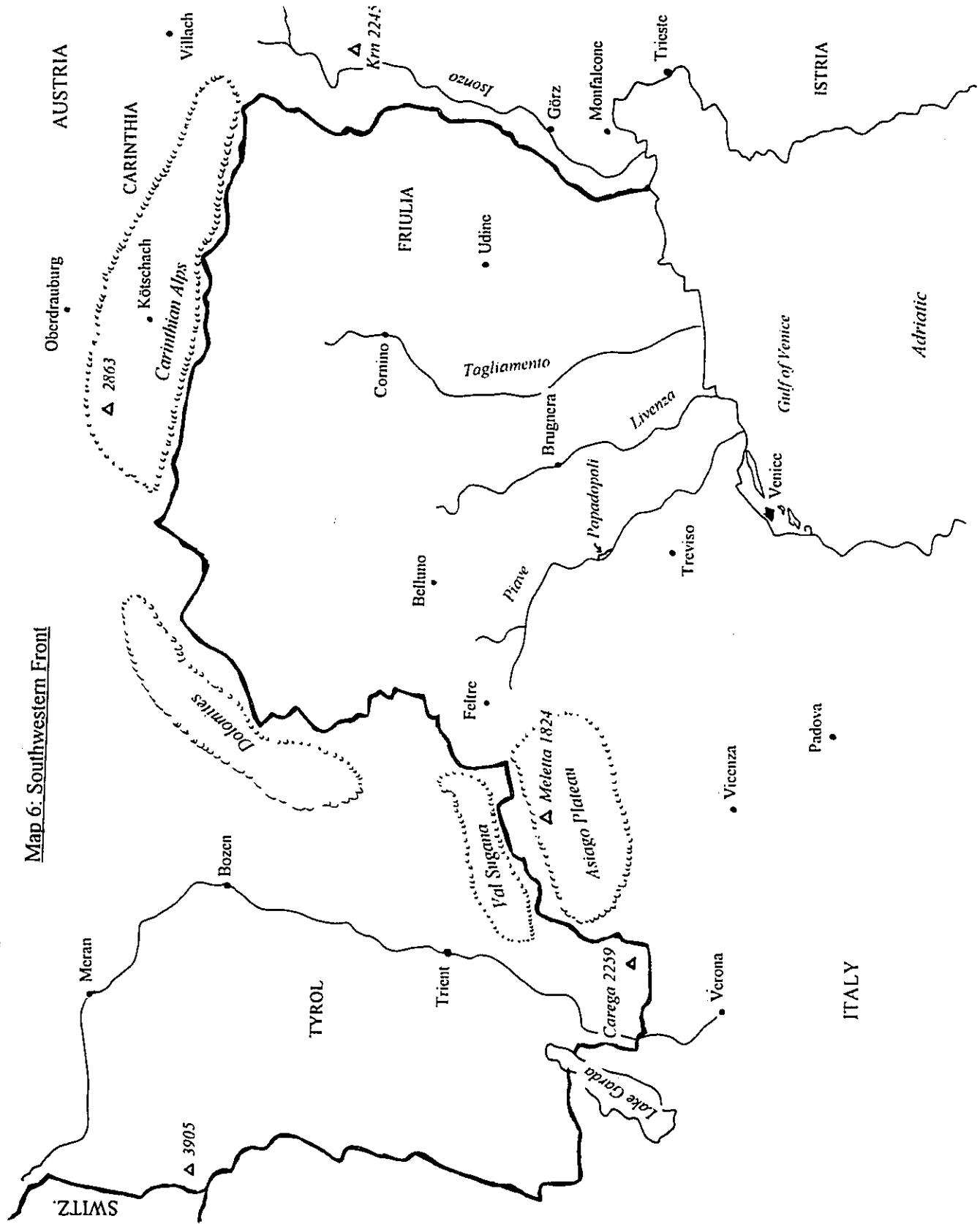
Map 4: Drina-Sava Triangle

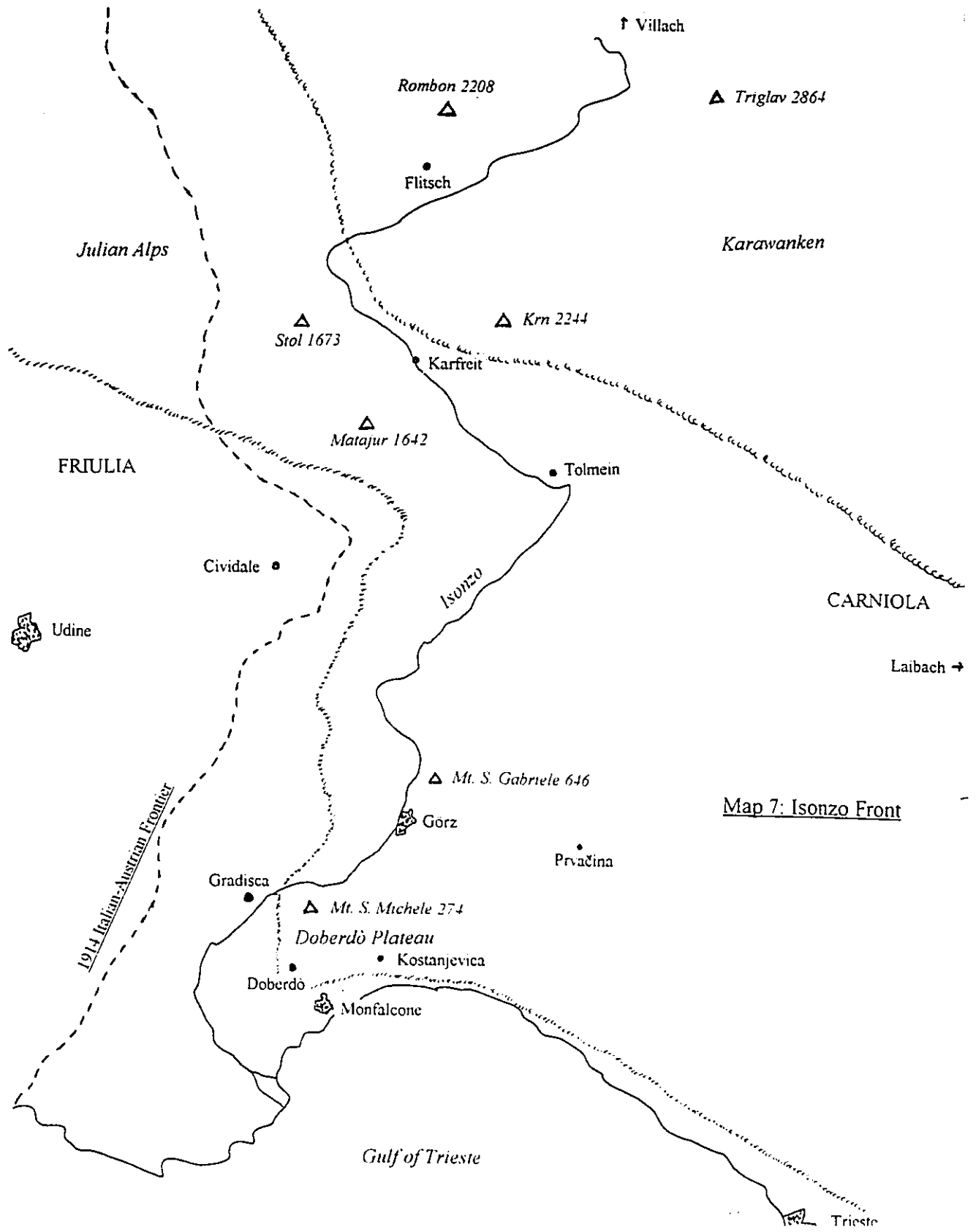


Map 5: East Carpathian Front, 1915



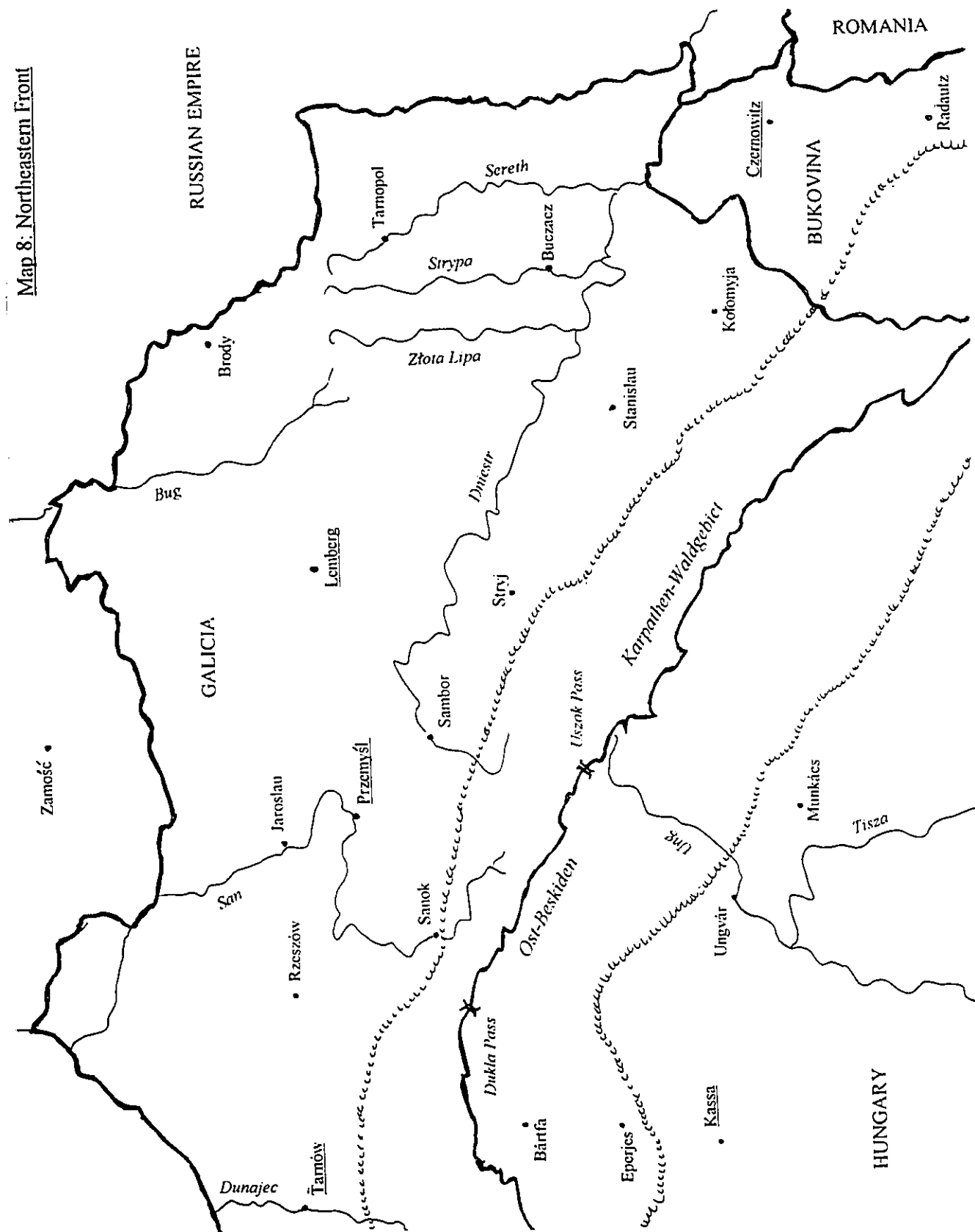
Map 6: Southwestern Front

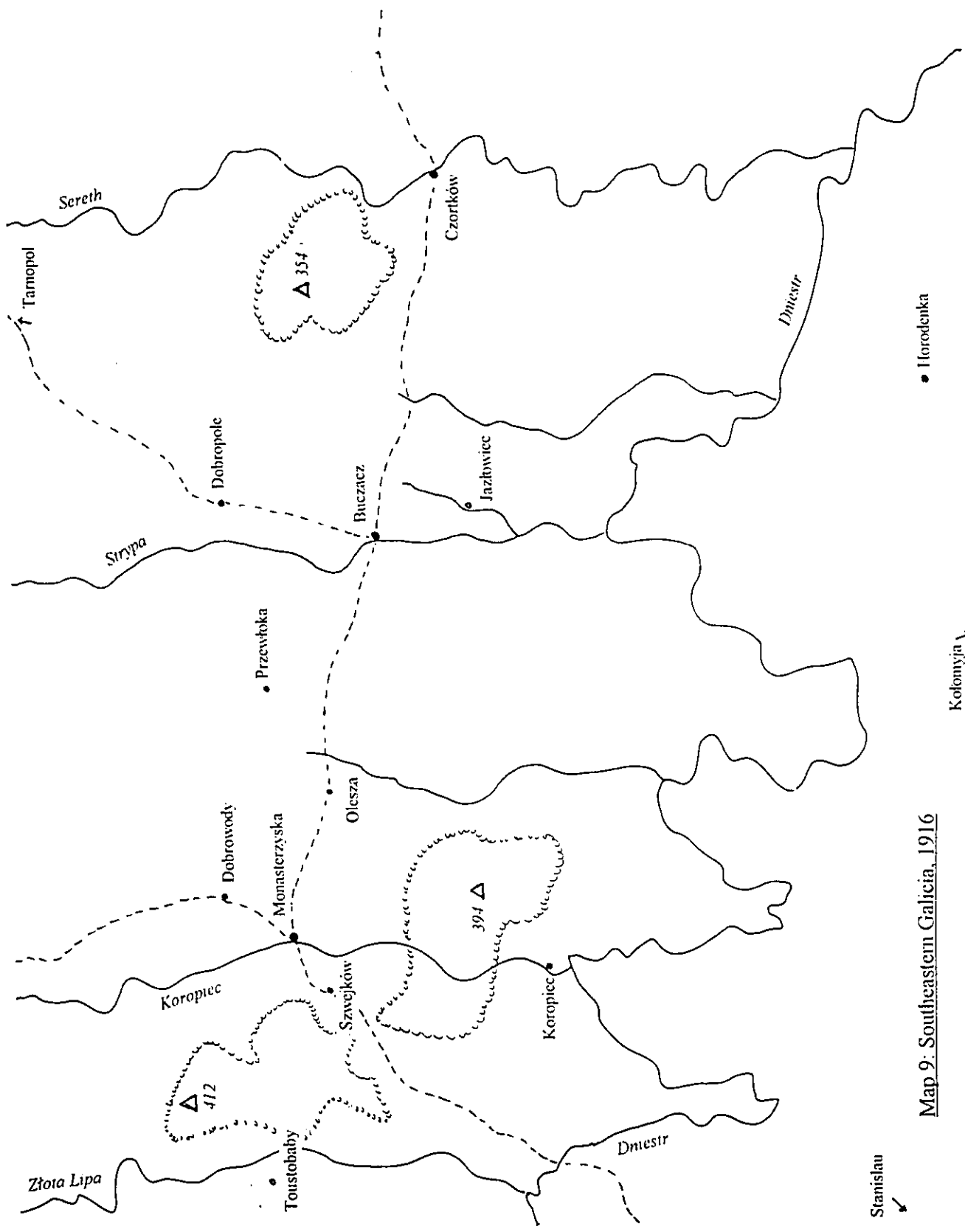




Map 7: Isonzo Front

Map 8. Northeastern Front





Map 9: Southeastern Galicia, 1916

Stanislaw ↙

Kolomyja ↘